

The Son of Man:

Exploring Christ's Identity Through Ezekiel, Daniel, and New Testament Christology

In Tribute to Michael S. Heiser

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August 29, 2024

TRIBUTE

Here's a small tribute to Michael Heiser. As I prepare to teach a class on Christology, I've chosen to address a common argument against Christ's divinity—a topic profoundly shaped by Michael's insights. As an apologist, I frequently engage in these discussions, but this one holds particular significance. Michael had strong feelings about apologists and debates, and though we couldn't all be scholars like him, his work continues to inspire me. I miss him deeply—his unique ability to think outside the box while staying grounded in orthodoxy was unparalleled.

ABSTRACT

The identity of Jesus Christ as expressed through His titles— “*Son of Man,*” “*Son of God,*” “*Son of David,*” and “*Only Begotten Son*”—forms the cornerstone of Christian theology and apologetics. These titles reveal His divine nature, humanity, and messianic mission, addressing objections often raised by skeptics, including the claim that Jesus never directly said, “*I am God.*”

This paper explores the theological and apologetic significance of these titles, emphasizing Jesus’ strategic use of “*Son of Man*” to affirm both His humanity and divinity, as foretold in Daniel 7:13-14. It examines how His actions, teachings, and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies explicitly reveal His deity, even without the phrase “*I am God.*” By drawing on typological insights from Genesis 22, the prophetic significance of the “*Son of Man,*” and New Testament Christology, this study demonstrates that Jesus’ identity aligns with the God of Scripture, affirming His eternal relationship within the Trinity and His role as the Savior of the world.

I. INTRODUCTION

The title “*Son of Man*” is a central theme in both biblical theology and Christian apologetics. It is a phrase loaded with prophetic, messianic, and divine significance. While skeptics often question why Jesus did not explicitly declare, “*I am God*,” the Gospels present a profound strategy in His choice of self-identification. This paper examines the theological depth behind the titles attributed to Jesus—“*Son of Man*,” “*Son of God*,” “*Son of David*,” and “*Only Begotten Son*”—and how they collectively reveal His unique nature and mission. Through the exploration of Old Testament prophecy, Second Temple Jewish expectations, and New Testament fulfillment, this study argues that Jesus’ titles affirm His identity as both fully human and fully divine.

The title “*Son of Man*” is rooted in the prophetic vision of Daniel 7:13-14,¹ where it represents a heavenly figure endowed with authority, dominion, and glory. This usage contrasts with its application in Ezekiel, where the term emphasizes human frailty. Jesus’ adoption of this title integrates both dimensions: His identification with humanity and His claim to divine authority. Further, the typology in Genesis 22 highlights the foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice made by God the Father, who provided His only Son as the Lamb of God. Theologically, the titles “*Son of God*” and “*Only Begotten Son*” reflect Jesus’ eternal relationship within the Trinity and His role as the Savior of the world. Finally, the title “*Son of David*” ties Jesus to the messianic promises of the Davidic covenant, affirming Him as the rightful heir to the throne and the eternal King.

¹ Daniel 7:13–14, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

This paper contends that Jesus' refusal to utter the phrase "*I am God*" was a deliberate choice aligned with first-century Jewish monotheism and His mission. Instead, He communicated His divinity through His teachings, actions, and fulfillment of prophecy, offering a clear and undeniable claim to be the God of Israel. By examining these titles, this study aims to provide a robust defense of Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the divine Son of God, and the eternal King.

II. JESUS, SON OF WHO?

Jesus is uniquely referred to as the "*only begotten Son*" in Scripture, a title that highlights His eternal relationship with the Father and distinguishes Him from all creation. The doctrine of eternal Sonship affirms that Jesus has always existed as the Son within the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit.² This section examines the theological implications of the title "*Son of God*," the typology of Isaac in Genesis 22, and Jesus' role in fulfilling the promises of the Davidic Covenant.

The Only Begotten Son

The term "*only begotten*" (*monogenes*) appears in John 3:16 and emphasizes Jesus' unique and unparalleled nature as the Son of God. This does not imply that Jesus was created but rather underscores His singular relationship with the Father. Hebrews 1:3 declares that Jesus is "*the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature*," affirming His divine essence.³ This concept is further reinforced in John 1:14,

² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 267.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 46.

which states, *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*⁴ These verses affirm Jesus’ eternal Sonship, underscoring His unchanging nature as the second Person of the Trinity (Hebrews 13:8).

The Typology of Isaac

Genesis 22 serves as a profound foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice made by God the Father. Just as Abraham was commanded to offer his *“only son,”* Isaac, God provided His *“only begotten Son”* as a substitutionary sacrifice for humanity. Abraham’s faith in God’s promise, even to the point of believing Isaac would be resurrected, mirrors the Father’s offering of Christ, who was raised on the third day (Hebrews 11:17-19).⁵ This typology underscores the depth of God’s love, as stated in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”*.

The Son of David

Genesis 22 serves as a profound foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice made by God the Father. Abraham was commanded to offer his *“only son,”* Isaac, whom he loved, as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. This narrative parallels God’s provision of His *“only begotten Son”* as a substitutionary sacrifice for humanity. Just as Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, Jesus carried His cross to Golgotha, embodying obedience and submission to the Father’s will.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 127.

⁵ Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 310.

Abraham's faith in God's promise, even to the point of believing Isaac could be resurrected, mirrors the resurrection of Christ. Hebrews 11:17-19 states, "*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.*" This typology illustrates the substitutionary atonement of Christ, as Abraham's son was spared, and a ram was provided in his place—a picture of Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

The Son of David

The title "*Son of David*" connects Jesus to the messianic promises of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:12–16. This covenant promised an eternal kingdom through David's lineage, a promise fulfilled in Jesus, who is both David's descendant and Lord. Matthew 1:1 begins with the genealogy of Jesus, emphasizing His descent from David, while Romans 1:3–4 declares that Jesus "*was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.*"⁶

Jesus' legal and royal claim as the Messiah is further emphasized in His teachings. In Matthew 22:41–45, Jesus challenges the Pharisees by asking how the Messiah can be both David's son and his Lord, referencing Psalm 110:1.⁷ This dual identity as David's descendant and sovereign Lord points to Jesus' divine and human natures, affirming Him as the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 56.

⁷ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 331.

III. THE USAGE OF “*SON OF MAN*” IN EZEKIEL

The term “*Son of Man*” (*ben adam*) appears prominently in the Book of Ezekiel, where it is used 93 times as a direct address to the prophet. This usage provides a foundational understanding of the title and its theological implications, particularly in its emphasis on human frailty, prophetic responsibility, and the relationship between God and His chosen servant.

Ezekiel’s Context

Ezekiel’s ministry took place during the Babylonian exile, a time of national crisis and theological reflection for Israel. The repeated use of “*Son of Man*” serves to underscore the prophet’s position as a mediator between God and His people. The term *ben adam* draws attention to Ezekiel’s role as a human agent through whom God communicates divine judgment and restoration.⁸ The emphasis on Ezekiel’s humanity is crucial, as it establishes his solidarity with the exiled community, while also underscoring the divine origin of his message.

Ezekiel is called to be a “*watchman*” for Israel (Ezekiel 3:17), charged with delivering God’s message of judgment and hope to a rebellious nation.⁹ The term “*Son of Man*” underscores Ezekiel’s role as a human intermediary, reminding him and the people of their frailty and dependence on God’s sovereignty.

Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry occurred during the Babylonian exile, a period of immense national crisis for Israel. The exile not only marked the loss of the Promised

⁸ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

Land and the Temple but also raised profound questions about God’s faithfulness to His covenant. Within this context, God’s repeated use of “*Son of Man*” to address Ezekiel highlights the prophet’s humanity and solidarity with the people he represents.

Ezekiel is called to be a “*watchman*” for Israel (Ezekiel 3:17), charged with delivering God’s message of judgment and hope to a rebellious nation. The term “*Son of Man*” underscores Ezekiel’s role as a human intermediary, reminding him and the people of their frailty and dependence on God’s sovereignty.

Theological Implications

Theologically, “*Son of Man*” in Ezekiel emphasizes human mortality and the prophetic call to obedience. This usage aligns with the broader Old Testament understanding of humanity’s transient nature, as seen in Psalm 8:4: “*What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*”¹⁰ The phrase highlights the contrast between God’s omnipotence and human weakness, a theme central to Ezekiel’s mission.

Ezekiel’s frequent address as “*Son of Man*” also points to the prophetic tradition’s emphasis on human responsibility to respond to God’s call.¹¹ As Ezekiel delivers messages of both judgment and restoration, the title serves as a constant reminder of his identity as a human instrument of divine revelation.

¹⁰ John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 136.

¹¹ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, 212.

Pre-Christian Interpretations

In pre-Christian Jewish thought, the title “*Son of Man*” as used in Ezekiel did not carry messianic connotations. Instead, it remained a term highlighting the prophet’s humanity and his role as a mediator between God and Israel.¹² This literal understanding of the phrase set the stage for its later, more exalted usage in Daniel 7, where the “*Son of Man*” is portrayed as a divine and eschatological figure.

The transition from Ezekiel’s use of “*Son of Man*” to its apocalyptic application in Daniel reflects the evolving theological and eschatological expectations within Second Temple Judaism. While Ezekiel’s usage is grounded in human frailty and prophetic responsibility, Daniel’s vision introduces a figure with divine authority and eternal dominion.¹³

Conclusion

The title “*Son of Man*” in Ezekiel serves as a profound reminder of human mortality, the prophetic call to obedience, and the contrast between divine omnipotence and human frailty. While its usage in Ezekiel lacks the messianic and divine overtones later seen in Daniel, it establishes a foundation for understanding the title’s development and eventual fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

¹² James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 81.

¹³ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 105.

IV. THE USAGE OF “*SON OF MAN*” IN DANIEL

The Book of Daniel presents a distinct and pivotal usage of “*Son of Man*” in a vision recorded in Daniel 7:13-14. Unlike the use in Ezekiel, here the term is associated with a figure of eschatological significance, who comes “*with the clouds of heaven*” and is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom. This “*Son of Man*” is not merely human but bears divine attributes, bridging the gap between humanity and the divine in a way that foreshadows later Christological developments.

Daniel’s Vision

In Daniel 7, the prophet describes a night vision in which four great beasts, representing oppressive empires, rise from the sea. Following their downfall, Daniel sees “*one like a son of man*” coming with the clouds of heaven. This figure is presented before the Ancient of Days and is granted everlasting dominion, in stark contrast to the temporal power of the beasts.¹⁴ The “*Son of Man*” here represents the holy ones of the Most High (Daniel 7:18), symbolizing the ultimate triumph of God’s people over their enemies.¹⁵

Apocalyptic Implications

The “*Son of Man*” in Daniel is a figure of divine judgment and authority, embodying both human and divine characteristics. This usage introduces an eschatological dimension to the term, positioning the “*Son of Man*” as a messianic figure who inaugurates the kingdom of God. The imagery of coming with the clouds of heaven

¹⁴ John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 299.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 301.

is particularly significant, as it links the “*Son of Man*” with divine theophanies in the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 13:21, Psalm 104:3), suggesting a role that transcends mere humanity.¹⁶

Pre-Christian Interpretations

Jewish apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period, such as the *Book of Enoch* and *4 Ezra*, expands upon Daniel’s “*Son of Man*” figure, further developing the concept into a pre-existent, heavenly redeemer. These interpretations reflect a growing expectation of a messianic deliverer who would restore Israel and bring about the final judgment.¹⁷ The *Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 37-71), in particular, identifies the “*Son of Man*” with the Messiah, who executes divine judgment on the wicked and vindicates the righteous.¹⁸

The Shift from Ezekiel to Daniel

The transition in the use of the term “*Son of Man*” from Ezekiel to Daniel marks a significant development in the Hebrew Bible. In Ezekiel, the term emphasizes human frailty and the prophet’s role as a mediator between God and His people. The focus is on Ezekiel’s humanity and mortality, underscoring the contrast between the divine and the human. However, in Daniel, the “*Son of Man*” takes on a different, more exalted meaning.¹⁹ Here, the term is used to describe a figure with divine authority, who is

¹⁶ Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 133.

¹⁷ Michael E. Stone, *4 Ezra: A Commentary on the Fourth Book of Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 42.

¹⁸ George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 82.

¹⁹ John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 356.

presented “*with the clouds of heaven*” and is granted dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

This shift is not explicitly discussed in ancient Jewish texts or early church writings, but it reflects the differing contexts and theological needs of each book. Ezekiel’s context, centered around the Babylonian exile, required a term that emphasized human limitation and prophetic duty. In contrast, Daniel’s apocalyptic setting, which anticipates the ultimate triumph of God’s kingdom, demanded a figure who could bridge the gap between the human and the divine.

Michael Heiser, in *The Unseen Realm* (2015, p. 267), suggests that this shift aligns with the evolving eschatological expectations within Jewish thought during the Second Temple period. As Jewish thought increasingly focused on the coming of a messianic redeemer, the “*Son of Man*” in Daniel became a symbol for this figure, representing not only humanity but also embodying divine authority.²⁰ Heiser’s analysis underscores the theological progression from a term rooted in human frailty to one signifying a heavenly figure who would play a central role in God’s redemptive plan.

V. THE USAGE OF “*SON OF MAN*” IN DANIEL

The Book of Daniel provides a pivotal and transformative usage of the title “*Son of Man*,” marking a significant departure from the term’s association with human frailty in Ezekiel. In Daniel 7:13-14, the “*Son of Man*” emerges as an eschatological figure endowed with divine authority, glory, and an everlasting kingdom. This vision serves as a

²⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 267.

cornerstone for understanding the title's theological significance and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Daniel's Vision

Daniel's vision in Daniel 7:13–14 occurs within a broader apocalyptic context. The prophet describes a series of four beasts arising from the sea, symbolizing oppressive earthly empires. Following the destruction of these empires, Daniel sees “*one like a son of man*” coming with the clouds of heaven. This figure is presented before the Ancient of Days and is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will never be destroyed.²¹

The imagery of “*coming with the clouds of heaven*” carries profound theological implications. In the Old Testament, clouds often symbolize theophany—God's direct intervention and presence (Exodus 13:21; Psalm 104:3).²² By associating the “*Son of Man*” with this imagery, Daniel's vision links the figure with divine authority and power, distinguishing him from the human prophets who bore the same title.

Apocalyptic Implications

The “*Son of Man*” in Daniel 7 is not merely a human figure but one who transcends humanity. He is described as receiving worship and eternal dominion, characteristics traditionally ascribed to God alone.²³ This portrayal introduces an eschatological dimension, presenting the “*Son of Man*” as a messianic figure who inaugurates God's eternal kingdom.

²¹ John J. Collins, *Daniel*, 300.

²² Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan*, 134.

²³ John Goldingay, *Daniel*, 356.

The vision also contrasts the transient and oppressive rule of earthly empires with the eternal and righteous reign of the “*Son of Man*.” This juxtaposition reflects a central theme in apocalyptic literature: the ultimate triumph of God’s sovereignty over the forces of chaos and evil.²⁴

Pre-Christian Interpretations

In Second Temple Jewish literature, the “*Son of Man*” figure in Daniel 7 was increasingly understood as a messianic and pre-existent redeemer. Texts such as the *Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 37–71) expand upon Daniel’s vision, identifying the “*Son of Man*” as the chosen one who executes divine judgment and vindicates the righteous.²⁵

The development of this concept in Jewish thought reflects a growing expectation of a messianic deliverer who would restore Israel and establish God’s kingdom.²⁶ This eschatological hope laid the groundwork for Jesus’ appropriation of the title, which redefined it in light of His mission and identity

The Shift from Ezekiel to Daniel

The transition from Ezekiel’s usage of “*Son of Man*” to Daniel’s vision highlights the theological progression of the term within the Old Testament. In Ezekiel, the title emphasizes human frailty and prophetic responsibility, while in Daniel, it represents a divine figure who bridges the gap between humanity and God.²⁷ This shift aligns with the

²⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 268.

²⁵ George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch*, 85.

²⁶ Michael E. Stone, *4 Ezra*, 43.

²⁷ John J. Collins, *Daniel*, 302.

evolving eschatological expectations of the Jewish people, anticipating a redeemer who embodies both human and divine attributes..²⁸

Conclusion of Section

The title “*Son of Man*” in Daniel 7 introduces a figure of unparalleled authority, one who is both human and divine. This vision transforms the term from a symbol of human frailty to an expression of divine power and eternal dominion. The apocalyptic implications of Daniel’s vision and its development in Second Temple Jewish thought provide a crucial foundation for understanding Jesus’ use of the title in the New Testament.

VI. JESUS AS THE “*SON OF MAN*” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament presents a unique and profound expansion of the “*Son of Man*” concept as Jesus’ preferred self-designation. Appearing more than 80 times in the Gospels, this title serves as a bridge between the Old Testament prophetic literature, particularly Daniel, and its fulfillment in Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and eschatological return. Through this title, Jesus communicates His dual nature as fully human and fully divine, His redemptive mission, and His authority as the Messiah.

Jesus’ Self-Identification

In the Gospels, Jesus frequently refers to Himself as the “*Son of Man*,” employing this title in three primary contexts:

²⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 269.

In the Gospels, Jesus frequently refers to Himself as the “*Son of Man*,” employing this title in three primary contexts:

- **Earthly Ministry:** The title underscores Jesus’ humanity and His role as a servant. For example, in Matthew 8:20, Jesus states, “*The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*,” highlighting His humble and itinerant ministry.²⁹
- **Suffering and Death:** The “*Son of Man*” is associated with Jesus’ role as the suffering servant who fulfills divine purposes through His passion. Mark 8:31 states, “*The Son of Man must suffer many things*,” underscoring His redemptive sacrifice.³⁰
- **Future Return in Glory:** The “*Son of Man*” is depicted as the eschatological judge who will come “*with the clouds of heaven*” (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26), a clear reference to Daniel’s vision of the exalted figure.³¹

Michael Heiser, in *The Unseen Realm*, emphasizes that Jesus’ use of “*Son of Man*” is a deliberate reference to the Danielic figure, aligning Himself with the divine, eschatological agent of judgment.³² Heiser argues that this connection would have been clear to His audience, especially within a Jewish context where the “*Son of Man*” in Daniel 7 was understood as a heavenly, messianic figure. By adopting this title, Jesus not

²⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 134.

³⁰ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 287.

³¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 344.

³² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 267.

only identifies with humanity but also asserts His unique authority within the divine council.

Messianic Fulfillment

The early Christian understanding of Jesus as the “*Son of Man*” is deeply rooted in the apocalyptic expectations of Second Temple Judaism. Texts like *1 Enoch* expanded the Danielic “*Son of Man*” figure into a pre-existent, heavenly being who would execute divine judgment and vindicate the righteous.³³ Jesus fulfills and transcends these expectations by combining the suffering servant motif of Isaiah 53 with the divine authority of Daniel’s “*Son of Man*.”³⁴

In Luke 19:10, Jesus declares, “*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost,*” emphasizing His mission to redeem humanity. Additionally, His use of the title in relation to His suffering (e.g., Mark 8:31) and eschatological role (e.g., Matthew 25:31–32) expresses both His humiliation and exaltation as the Christ..³⁵

Contrast with Old Testament Usage

The differences between the Old Testament usage of “*Son of Man*” and its application by Jesus in the New Testament are striking:

- **Ezekiel:** In Ezekiel, the title emphasizes human frailty, mortality, and prophetic responsibility. Jesus incorporates this aspect by identifying fully with humanity through His incarnation (John 1:14).³⁶

³³ George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch*, 82.

³⁴ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 210.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

³⁶ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, 35.

- **Daniel:** In Daniel, the “*Son of Man*” is a divine figure with eschatological authority. Jesus explicitly claims this role in Matthew 26:64, stating that He will come “*on the clouds of heaven,*” a direct reference to Daniel 7:13-14.³⁷

Jesus synthesizes these dimensions, adding a redemptive element that fulfills both Ezekiel’s emphasis on human vulnerability and Daniel’s vision of divine authority. By referring to Himself as the “*Son of Man,*” Jesus bridges the gap between humanity and divinity, embodying the concept of theanthropos—the God-man.³⁸

Conclusion

Jesus’ self-identification as the “*Son of Man*” unites the Old Testament’s themes of human vulnerability and divine authority, culminating in the New Testament revelation of His identity as the God-man. This title encapsulates His redemptive mission, His divine authority, and His role in the eschatological fulfillment of God’s kingdom. As Michael Heiser observes, Jesus’ use of “*Son of Man*” is not merely a claim to messianic status but a profound declaration of His participation in the divine council and His authority to enact God’s final judgment.³⁹

VII. WHY JESUS NEVER SAID “*I AM GOD*”

One of the most common objections raised against the divinity of Jesus is the claim that He never explicitly said, “*I am God.*” While this phrase does not appear verbatim in the Gospels, Jesus’ actions, teachings, and self-identification as the “*Son of*

³⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 994.

³⁸ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 521.

³⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 255.

Man” reveal His divine nature in profound ways. This section explores why Jesus chose indirect expressions of His divinity, the cultural and theological context of His time, and the apologetic significance of His approach.

Cultural and Theological Context

Jesus ministered within a Jewish monotheistic framework that held an uncompromising view of the oneness of God, as encapsulated in the Shema: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*” (Deuteronomy 6:4). A direct claim such as “*I am God*” would have been misunderstood as polytheism or blasphemy, likely resulting in His premature rejection and hindering His mission. Instead, Jesus used titles and imagery steeped in Old Testament theology to reveal His divine nature progressively and in a manner His audience could grasp over time.⁴⁰

For instance, Jesus referred to Himself as the “*Son of Man*” more than 80 times, a title rooted in Daniel 7:13–14, where the “*Son of Man*” is depicted as a divine figure with authority and dominion.⁴¹ By adopting this title, Jesus subtly communicated His identity as the Messiah and the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy, avoiding overt statements that could be misconstrued as contradicting Jewish monotheism.

Theological Significance of the “*Son of Man*” Title

The “*Son of Man*” encapsulates Jesus’ dual nature as fully human and fully divine. This title allowed Him to express solidarity with humanity while simultaneously asserting His divine authority. In John 8:58, Jesus declares, “*Before Abraham was, I am,*”

⁴⁰ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 530.

⁴¹ John J. Collins, *Daniel*, 289.

directly referencing God’s self-revelation in Exodus 3:14 and affirming His eternal existence.⁴² Similarly, in John 10:30, He states, “*I and the Father are one,*” a claim His audience understood as equality with God, as evidenced by their response: “*You, being a man, make yourself God*” (John 10:33).⁴³

By using the “*Son of Man*” title alongside statements like these, Jesus affirmed His divine identity within a framework that allowed for progressive revelation, ensuring His mission unfolded according to God’s redemptive plan

Christological Implications

Jesus’ actions provided further evidence of His divinity. He demonstrated authority over:

- **Nature:** Calming the storm (Mark 4:39).
- **Sin:** Forgiving sins, which only God could do (Mark 2:5–7).
- **Death:** Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43–44).

These actions align with divine attributes, reinforcing His identity as God incarnate.⁴⁴

Moreover, Jesus accepted worship from His followers, an act that would have been blasphemous if He were not divine. For example, in Matthew 14:33, after Jesus walked on water and calmed the storm, His disciples worshiped Him, saying, “*Truly you*

⁴² Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 42.

⁴³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 394.

⁴⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 273.

*are the Son of God.*⁴⁵ Jesus' acceptance of worship, coupled with His claims of divine authority, leaves no ambiguity about His identity.

Theological Strategy

Jesus' indirect claims align with God's broader strategy of progressive revelation throughout Scripture. From the promise of a Redeemer in Genesis 3:15 to the unfolding of redemptive history, God's plan has always been revealed incrementally. Jesus' choice to reveal His divinity gradually reflects this strategy, allowing His disciples and followers to understand His identity fully through His teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection.⁴⁶

Conclusion

While Jesus never explicitly said, "*I am God*," His teachings, actions, and self-identification leave no doubt about His divine nature. His use of the "*Son of Man*" title, rooted in Danielic prophecy, His authoritative claims, and His acceptance of worship collectively affirm His identity as God incarnate. Jesus' approach, far from being evasive, reflects a profound theological strategy to reveal His divinity in a way that fulfills Scripture and invites faith.

VIII. EARLY CHURCH INTERPRETATION

The early church's interpretation of the "*Son of Man*" title reflects a deep engagement with both the Old Testament background and the Christological developments of the New Testament. Church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 382.

⁴⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 267.

Augustine grappled with the significance of Jesus' use of "Son of Man," recognizing it as a key to understanding His dual nature as both fully human and fully divine.

Patristic Writings

Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, argues that Jesus' use of "Son of Man" aligns Him with the figure in Daniel 7, who is both divine and human.⁴⁷ Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies*, develops this further by emphasizing the incarnation—Jesus as the "Son of Man" who bridges the gap between God and humanity.⁴⁸ Augustine, in *City of God*, interprets the "Son of Man" as a title that points to Jesus' role in the final judgment, where He fulfills the Danielic prophecy as the one who will come with the clouds of heaven.⁴⁹

The significance of the "Son of Man" title was further explored and affirmed in the early ecumenical councils, particularly the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. The Council of Nicaea established that Jesus is of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father, countering the Arian view that diminished Christ's divinity. This affirmation directly relates to the New Testament portrayal of Jesus as the "Son of Man," emphasizing His divine authority.

The Council of Chalcedon, with its definition of the hypostatic union, articulated that Jesus is fully God and fully man, two natures united in one person.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 205–206.

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 448–451.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 927.

⁵⁰ Council of Chalcedon, *Definition of the Faith*, 451 AD.

understanding of Jesus as *theanthropos*—the God-man—echoes the New Testament’s portrayal of the “*Son of Man*,” where Jesus embodies both divine and human attributes, fulfilling the roles foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

The IHUM and the Two-Ship Model provide a modern framework that builds upon Chalcedonian orthodoxy, emphasizing the distinct yet united natures of Christ. The IHUM introduces the concept of unified consciousness, resolving the tension between Christ’s human limitations and divine omniscience, while the Two-Ship Model visually represents the harmonious interaction of Christ’s human and divine faculties. These models underscore the coherence of the Chalcedonian Definition, particularly in addressing lingering questions about Christ’s dual wills and energies, as affirmed by the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD).⁵¹

These frameworks also elucidate the interplay between the two natures in Christ’s redemptive mission, drawing from the scriptural and patristic insights discussed. The Admiral analogy in the Two-Ship Model captures the unified direction of Christ’s divine and human natures, guided seamlessly by His divine purpose. By applying these models, we gain a deeper understanding of the “*Son of Man*” as both the suffering servant and the eschatological judge, embodying the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament Christology.⁵²

⁵¹ D. Gene Williams Jr., *The Integrated Hypostatic Union Model: Addressing Christological Coherence—A Proposal for a Unified Framework in Understanding and Navigating the Dual Natures of Christ Through Kenosis and Selective Communication*, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://trinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

⁵² D. Gene Williams Jr., *Two-Ship Model Based on the Integrated Hypostatic Union Model*, accessed November 30, 2024, <https://trinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

Michael Heiser’s work, *The Unseen Realm*, offers a modern lens through which to view these early interpretations and the theological developments solidified by these councils. He suggests that the church fathers correctly understood the “*Son of Man*” as a title that encapsulates both Jesus’ role in the divine council and His mission as the eschatological judge, a concept that aligns with the definitions established at Chalcedon.⁵³

Christological Developments

The “*Son of Man*” title played a significant role in the early church’s Christological debates, particularly in affirming the unity of Jesus’ divine and human natures. The early church fathers’ interpretation of the “*Son of Man*” was instrumental in combating heresies that either diminished Jesus’ humanity (such as Docetism) or denied His divinity (such as Arianism). By rooting the “*Son of Man*” title in the Danielic vision and its Second Temple developments, the early church articulated a Christology that upheld the full scope of Jesus’ identity and mission.

Michael Heiser’s insights further demonstrate that the “*Son of Man*” serves as a bridge between Jesus’ humanity and His divine authority. This Christological synthesis helped early Christians understand and defend Jesus’ dual nature as both suffering servant and reigning King.

Conclusion

⁵³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 253–255, 270–272.

The early church's interpretation of the "*Son of Man*" title demonstrates its theological richness and centrality to Christian doctrine. By engaging with the Old Testament background and affirming Jesus' divinity and humanity, the church fathers laid the foundation for understanding His mission as the God-man. Their insights continue to shape Christological discussions and affirm the truth of Jesus' identity.

IX. CONCLUSION

The title "*Son of Man*," as used in Ezekiel, Daniel, and by Jesus in the New Testament, encompasses profound theological and apologetic depth. Its meaning spans human frailty, prophetic responsibility, divine authority, and eschatological fulfillment. While Ezekiel's usage emphasizes the prophet's human limitations and solidarity with Israel, Daniel introduces a figure who bridges the gap between humanity and divinity—a figure with dominion and eternal authority who foreshadows the messianic expectations that Jesus ultimately fulfills.

Michael Heiser's interpretations, particularly his emphasis on the divine council and Second Temple Jewish literature, provide a critical framework for understanding the evolution of the "*Son of Man*" title.⁵⁴ Heiser's analysis demonstrates that Jesus' identification with the "*Son of Man*" in Daniel 7 is far more than a claim to messianic status; it is a profound declaration of His participation in the divine council and His authority to enact God's final judgment.⁵⁵ By adopting this title, Jesus connects the apocalyptic vision of Daniel with His earthly mission and redemptive work.

⁵⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 267.

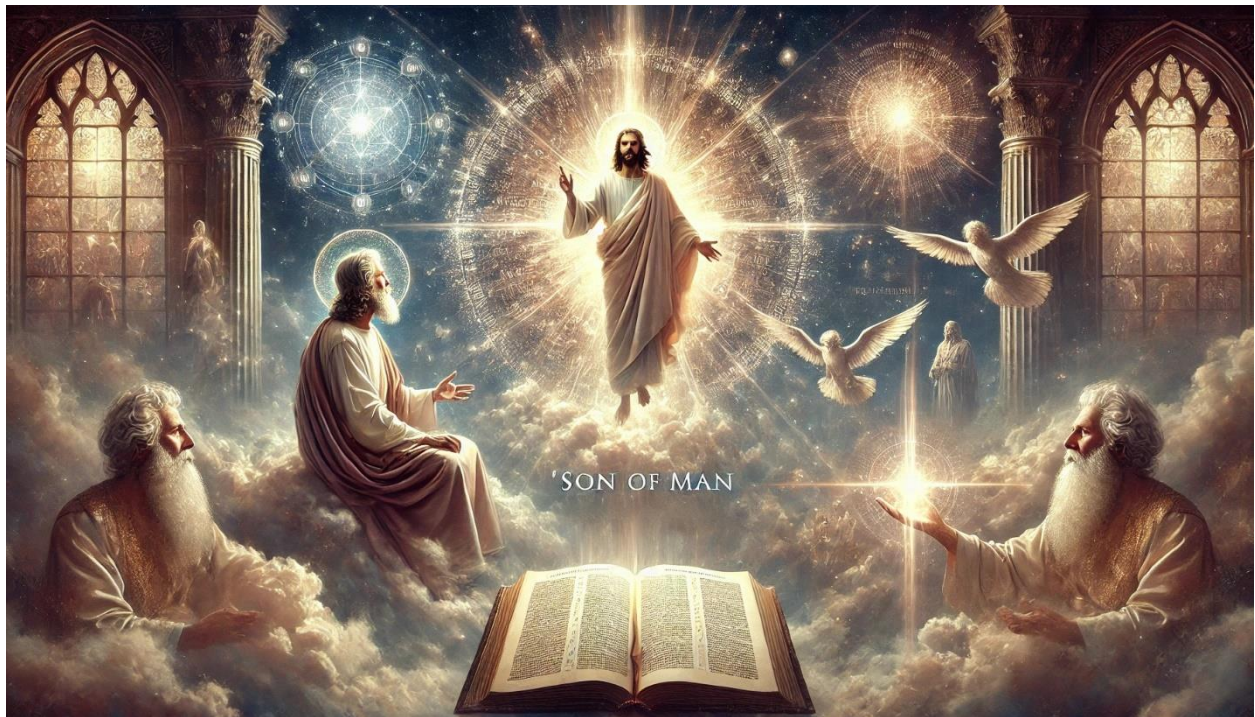
⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

The early church's appropriation of the "*Son of Man*" title further solidified its significance, making it a cornerstone of Christian doctrine. This doctrinal foundation was formalized in the early ecumenical councils, particularly the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. At Nicaea, the full divinity of Christ was affirmed, countering Arianism by declaring that Jesus is of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father. Chalcedon expanded this understanding by articulating the doctrine of the hypostatic union, affirming that Jesus is fully God and fully man—two natures united in one person without confusion or division.⁵⁶ These councils provided theological clarity that aligns with the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as the "*Son of Man*," a figure embodying both divine authority and human vulnerability.

In this way, the title "*Son of Man*" serves as a powerful expression of the unique Christological synthesis recognized by early Christians. It encapsulates Jesus' dual roles as both the suffering servant and the divine judge, fulfilling the prophetic visions of the Old Testament and the theological affirmations of the early church. By understanding this title, we grasp the full scope of Jesus' identity and His redemptive mission, affirming Him as the God-man who bridges the human and the divine.

⁵⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Continuum, 2000), 243–245.

APPENDIX A: THE SON OF MAN: A VISION OF DIVINE AUTHORITY AND HUMAN FRAILTY



This image encapsulates the profound biblical and theological dimensions of the title “*Son of Man*.” At its center stands Jesus Christ, glorified and radiant, elevated on a cloud, representing Daniel 7:13-14's vision of the exalted figure given dominion and glory. Below, Ezekiel is portrayed in a humble, prophetic posture, symbolizing human frailty and the title's earlier usage in his ministry.

An open Book of Daniel glows with light, reflecting the eschatological fulfillment of divine authority. Celestial elements and the faint outline of the Ancient of Days emphasize the connection between the divine and human realms. The composition captures the reverence and mystery of Jesus' dual nature as both fully human and fully divine, fulfilling prophetic visions and theological truths central to the Christian faith.

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