

“SON OF MAN”

LORD, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him? (Psalms 144:3 NKJV)(cf. Hebrews 2:6)

Words are interesting to me. There are words in almost every language that cannot be translated exactly into other languages. Poets know that the sound of a word is a whole new dimension other than its meaning. There are words that sound alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings such as deer and dear or read and red. Hole and whole are pronounced the same but have opposite meanings.

Some words acquire new, additional meanings over time. The word “drive” comes from Old English and Old High German. Its first meaning was to frighten or prod wild game or cattle into moving in a certain direction. Then in trading it took on the meaning of driving a hard bargain. In battle, it meant to repulse or push back an enemy. Then it took on the meaning of operating a machine by the force of steam or electricity. From that it acquired the meaning of directing the course of a vehicle and to convey a person in a vehicle. In sports, it acquired the meaning of a series of successful plays in a game. In psychology, it is used to mean a force compelling change, to urge on to relentless exertion. In the modern world, it has taken on many additional uses and meanings, even parts of a computer. The basic meaning of drive didn’t change, the ways it is used has multiplied.

In today’s sermon, I want to trace the use of the term “son of man” in the Old Testament and into the New Testament.

“Where cross the crowded ways of life,
Where sound the cries of race and clan,
Above the noise of selfish strife,
We hear Thy voice, O Son of Man.”

Frank Mason North, 1903

1.) "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Numbers 23:19 NKJV)

From the time of Moses circa 1500 B.C. to the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah circa 600 B.C. the expression "son of man" was used to mean literally a child or children of a man or it was used figuratively to mean the works or human power and authority. Although it isn't in the Old Testament and it doesn't use the expression "son of man", this idea is used by John to say that men are not made to be children of God by any human power, efforts, or abilities but by faith in God:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 NKJV)

Notice how the Psalmist uses the expression "son of man" both literally and figuratively.

LORD, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him? (Psalms 144:3 NKJV)

Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. (Psalms 146:3 NKJV)

Isaiah only uses the expression "son of man" twice and both times he uses it to literally mean the progeny of human creatures.

"I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid Of a man who will die, And of the son of a man who will be made like grass? (Isaiah 51:12 NKJV)
Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil." (Isaiah 56:2 NKJV)

The prophet Jeremiah uses "son of man" literally four times.

As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah And their neighbors," says the LORD, "No one shall remain there, Nor shall a son of man dwell in it. (Jeremiah 49:18 & 50:40 NKJV)
"Hazor shall be a dwelling for jackals, a desolation forever; No one shall reside there, Nor son of man dwell in it." (Jeremiah 49:33 NKJV)

Her cities are a desolation, A dry land and a wilderness, A land where no one dwells, Through which no son of man passes. (Jeremiah 51:43 NKJV)

For a thousand years "son of man" did not acquire new meaning or use.

2.) The Babylonian Captivity brought new uses of "son of man" into the language. The prophecy of Daniel uses it in two new ways. It is used to describe Christ in a prophetic vision:

"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him." (Daniel 7:13 NKJV)

That must mean that the promised Messiah was being referred to as "the son of man" for it to be understandable to Daniel and others.

It was also used at least once by angel Gabriel addressing Daniel.

And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end." (Daniel 8:16-17 NKJV)

The prophecy of Ezekiel was also written during the Babylonian Captivity. In my opinion, it is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand. An amazing feature of the prophecy is how Ezekiel's actions, what he preaches, the prophecies he records in writing are being directed from heaven. In some places we are told that it is an angel who is telling him what to do and what to say to explain his actions to the people. At least ninety-four times he is addressed from heaven or by a messenger sent from heaven. That is more times than Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and others combined. Each time he was addressed as "son of man."

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? (Ezekiel 34:1-2 NKJV)

...behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway. And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see." (Ezekiel 40:3-4 NKJV)

3.) "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Matthew 25:31 NKJV)

In the New Testament "son of man" is used in a manner that is totally opposite of its original meaning. In the Old Testament it either meant literally the offspring of a human or figuratively the works of human beings. In Daniel and Ezekiel it is used to address the prophet. In the New Testament it used almost exclusively by Jesus to refer to Himself. The only exceptions are Stephen who said, as he was dying, that he saw the Son of Man in heaven and also in the Revelation there are two references which speak of Christ in heaven as the Son of Man.

Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man who came from heaven.

"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. (Matthew 18:11 NKJV)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45 NKJV)

"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. (John 3:13 NKJV)

After His mission on earth the Son of Man will return to heaven.

"Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God." Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?" So He said to them, "You rightly say that I am." (Luke 22:69-70 NKJV)

Jesus, the Son of Man will return to earth in power and glory.

"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:27 NKJV)

"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30 NKJV)

"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:44 NKJV)

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Matthew 25:31 NKJV)

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:63-64 NKJV)

Son of Man is the name Jesus used to identify Himself as God's Son.