

SON OF MAN IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF SOME CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES*

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Abstract: In this paper, different theologian's opinion will be viewed concerning the title "Son of Man" in John. It is believed that Jesus didn't introduce this title, its roots are found in the OT. Passages like in Dan.7, Ezek., 1 Enoch 37-71 mention "the Son of Man" term, so these passages where probably the source for Jesus to use "the Son of Man" title and probably the Christian community used this title for Jesus. The supporters of alternative position believe that Jesus mentioned the Son of Man as somebody else. All these views will be analyzed to find out if Jesus used the OT title for Himself or He introduced it. The meaning of the title will be found in the article. John's Gospel gives an

important role to the question of Jesus' "lifting up". Another question will be discussed – did John spoke about the ascend – descend of the Son of Man, about the exaltation of the Son of Man or about Jesus' crucifixion and death. Another issue is that several titles merge in the Forth Gospel to show Jesus Messianic origin, to show that He as the Son of Man is also the Son of God. In the beginning of each section, the argument will be offered, than the opinions of some theologians will be given. At the end of the section the author's position will be offered.

Key words: Son of Man, ascend, lifting up, Messiah, title, Son of God, John

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Introduction

Jesus is called “Son of Man” in Gospels. What does this title mean? Why does it sound such a way and who did introduce it in religious circles? There are some opinions, that are asserted by some theologians, for example, that this title was introduced by Jesus¹; that this title was originally used in the OT, that is why Jesus used it;² that this title was initiated by early Christian community;³ that this title was not related to Jesus at all.⁴ There will be attempt made in this article to search these opinions and to come to conclusion where this title came from and what did it mean in relation to Jesus. Opinions and arguments of such theologians like Schweizer, Bultmann, Bowman, Dunn, Dodd, Fuller, Schleiermacher, Witherington III will be considered who discuss in their books the Son of Man topic.

Background of the Son of Man

There is an opinion, that the Son of Man was not a new concept, initiated by Jesus or the John’s writer. Materials for the Johannine picture of the Son of Man can be found in the OT, in the prophets. Michel offered the following classification of the OT Son of Man passages:

1. Son of Man is a title of majesty in Dan. 7.
2. The descent of the Son of Man is probably implicit in Dan.7 and in Ezek.
3. John’s description of the exaltation of the Son of Man is presented in terms of the Servant of Yahweh (Is.52:13) and in the light of the resurrection.⁵

So based on these and other passages such theologians like Schweizer, Bultmann, Bowman believed that these texts were the source for Jesus or the writer of John to use the title “Son of Man.” Let’s look at their opinions and at the end of this section we will state our position.

Schweizer wrote that the Christian community, who had the OT only, borrowed from Daniel 7:13 the image of the Son of Man, to whom kingdom, power and glory will be given, whatever Jesus’ own view may have been.⁶ Bultmann goes a different way and thinks that Jesus regarded Himself as the last prophet announcing the coming Son of man, not Himself as the coming one. His argument is based on the fact that the title seems to be more firmly connected with the statement on the heavenly glory and the parousia than

¹ Archibald M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950); James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (SCM Press LTD, 1989); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus- God and Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press).

² John Bowman, *Which Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976); Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

³ Eduard Schweizer, *Jesus* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1971), 55; Günter Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Harper and Row, 1960)

⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vol. (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), v.1, ch.4.

⁵ O. Michel, “the Son of Man”, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* v.3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 632.

⁶ Eduard Schweizer, *Jesus* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1971), 55.

with those regarding the earthly life of Jesus, but that announcements of the passion and resurrection are never linked with these statements of the glory or the parousia, indeed that “I” and “Son of Man” sometimes appear to be separate.⁷ There will be some arguments below that show that Jesus did apply the title to Himself.

Bowman believes that it isn’t surprising that Jesus should have employed the title in passages in which the exaltation motif similar to Dan.7:13 and 1 Enoch 37-71 is present. But Jesus counterposed the motif of humiliation, suffering and death of Messiah to the Son of Man concept.⁸ Hunter disagrees with him and writes that Jesus could use 1 Enoch,⁹ but since the pre-Christian date of the Book of Enoch isn’t certain; no one has yet proved that Jesus knew them.¹⁰ The evidence of the Book of Enoch isn’t entirely satisfactory, for the following reason: this portion of the Ethiopic book have no parallel in any of the extensive Greek fragments (which don’t contain any passages referring to the Son of Man).¹¹ Witherington said that, Jesus could use Enoch to supplement His self-understanding in the light of Dan.7 by the sort of ideas expressed in the book of Enoch. In this book the Son of Man is a heavenly individual; the author identified Himself as the Elect One as an Anointed One. If the latter does lie in the background of Jesus’ use of “the Son of Man”, then that phrase may be Jesus’ way of expressing His messianic self-understanding to His wider audience.¹² But it still can be only guess that Jesus used Enoch, since there is no direct proof, no direct or indirect quotation from this book.

Let’s look at the meaning of the Son of Man title in the OT. “Son of Man” was used in the OT as equivalent to “man”. In Ezekiel 33:2, the expression is used when the prophet refers to himself. In Daniel 7:13, the Son of Man is a heavenly figure who would come at the close of the age as Judge.¹³ McDonald says that it cannot be said for certain that Jesus drew upon these ideas in taking to Himself the title. The truth is, on his opinion, that Jesus derived it partly from the OT and partly from His own messianic consciousness.¹⁴ Dunn says that the initial use of the phrase was without reference to Dan.7:13, the only ground for denying Daniel allusions to Jesus is the different significance of the phrase (man, I, and reference to Dan7:13).¹⁵

It is difficult to state that Jesus derived the Son of Man concept, based on the OT passages, because there are no direct proofs that Jesus did that. We can find some marks of the OT in Jesus’ use of it. But if Jesus did use the OT passages it is difficult to understand why He had to change those passages in applying them to Himself. The main emphasis in

⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vol. (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), v.1, ch.4.

⁸ John Bowman, *Which Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 149.

⁹ <https://biblia.org.ua/apokrif/apocryph2/enoh1.shtml.htm>

¹⁰ Archibald M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), 85; также James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (SCM Press LTD, 1989), 69.

¹¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 242.

¹² Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 269; Cp. Dunn, *Christology*, 75.

¹³ Charles C. Anderson, *The Historical Jesus: A Continuing Quest* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 245.

¹⁴ H.D. McDonald, *Jesus – Human and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 46.

¹⁵ Dunn, *Christology*, 86.

Dan.7 is on Son of Man's power, dominion. In John, Christ never mentioned the title in connection to His power. "The common objection that Dan.7:13 speaks not of "the Son of Man", but simply of "one like unto a son of man" isn't decisive as an argument against its use as a title by Jesus. It may very well be that Jesus Himself transformed Daniel's simile into a title for the glorified, supernatural bringer of salvation" believes Reginald H. Fuller.¹⁶ There are several "son of man" mentions in Daniel: in Dan. 2:38, 3:82; 5:21 the term is applied to humans, in Dan. 8:17 to the prophet, in Dan.7:13, 10:16 a similar title is used for a heavenly being "like a son of man". If Jesus used "the Son of Man" title from Daniel to show that he is a heavenly messenger then why did he use the title that was applied to humans? Why didn't he use "one like a son of man" that was applied to heavenly beings? There was no sense for Jesus to change the title.

The meaning of the title

Let's look at the meaning of the title that can be traced before John. It can help us to identify why the author of the Fourth Gospel used it. He was aware that the proper equivalent of the primitive Christian term for Christ was ὁ ἄνθρωπος, says Dodd. The statements about the Son of Man, made in the Fourth Gospel, recall the figure of the heavenly ἄνθρωπος as we have meet in Hellenistic documents.¹⁷

Most scholars (Bultmann, for example)¹⁸ agree that this title can be traced back to Jesus as a reference to Himself. The problem is therefore, not whether Jesus used the phrase, but what He meant by it. It is believed that He employed the phrase to Himself as the equivalent of the words "a man" or "I".¹⁹ Lietzmann stated that Jesus could have never used "Son of Man" on the ground that in Aramaic *barnasha* means simply "a man" and therefore the use of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as a title originated in Hellenistic Christian circles.²⁰ Dodd adds that this term is unnatural in Greek as it is common in Aramaic, where the title quite simply means "a man" or "the man". In sayings, attributed to Jesus, "Son of Man" could be replaced by "I" or "me" without apparent change of meaning.²¹

Conzelmann mentioned that there is a group of scholars²² that hold a different view: Jesus expected another Son of Man to come, but the church identified Jesus with the Son of Man.²³ There is always a distinction between "I" of Jesus and "the Son of man." "The Son of Man is someone different from earthly Jesus. Only after the resurrection, the primitive community identified Jesus with the Son of Man, so that in many passages "the

¹⁶ Reginald H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 102.

¹⁷ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 243.

¹⁸ Bultmann, *Theology*, v.1, 30.

¹⁹ Bowman mentioned this discussion in *Jesus*, 147; Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 161-190.

²⁰ Lietzmann, *Der Menschensohn*, 1896 cited in Fuller, *Mission*, 96; Vermes, *Jesus*, 176; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus- God and Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 56-57.

²¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (NY: Macmillan, 1970), 113, 120.

²² This view is particularly associated with Bultmann, John Knox (в *Death of Christ*, 58-73).

²³ For example, Bornkamm said: "I consider it probable that the historical Jesus never used the title "Son of Man" to himself", in Günter Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Harper and Row, 1960), 230.

Son of Man” substitutes for “I” or vice versa. After the resurrection the words of Jesus concerning the Son of Man could be understood as words, concerning Jesus Himself”.²⁴

It is common for the Synoptic Gospels to use a third person in reference to the Son of Man, like Mar.13:26; 14:62. It is based on later Jewish interpretations of Dan.7:13 in Enoch and 2 Esdras that the term refers to a heavenly redeemer. So the church began to think of Jesus as having always been the Son of Man and inserted this term into sayings about His earthly situation. If Jesus called a different individual “the Son of Man” then who is “the Son of Man”? Pannenberg believes that the distinction between these two figures consists only in the fact that the pre-Easter Jesus walked visibly on the earth, whereas the Son of Man was to come only in the future on the clouds of heaven and was expected as a heavenly being. He said that this difference disappeared with Jesus resurrection who was expected as a coming Son of Man.²⁵ Conzelmann and Ziesler argue against this approach. If the Son of Man sayings were the early church traditions, one must explain the fact that this title occurs only on the lips of Jesus and not from His disciples.²⁶ It isn’t entirely clear why the church should have felt it necessary to reinterpret those Son of Man sayings in which Jesus had referred to another person. So it can be stated that Jesus used this title of Himself and for this reason it was remembered.²⁷ The fact that Jesus spoke of the Son of man in the third person singular does not mean that he is referring to anyone other than Himself. It was just Jesus’ speech mannerism. There are no hints in non-Christian Jewish writings that the Son of Man was someone else but Jesus, says Dunn.²⁸ There are no evidences in Jesus’ sayings that he looked for some other eschatological redeemer to come. We should agree with Anderson’s conclusion that in using this title Jesus identified Himself with men; on the other hand it enabled him to pour into the title a different meaning. The significance of the title would be realized only after His death and resurrection.²⁹ According to Pannenberg, there is a clear identification of Jesus as the Son of Man in the Synoptic Gospels, for example Mar.8:31; 9:31, that shows that Jesus identified Himself with the Son of Man before the resurrection. Jesus walking on the earth did call Himself “the Son of Man,” in Jn.9:35.³⁰

Ascend-descend of the Son of Man

The fourth Gospel contains a unique development of the Son of Man sayings in terms which Fuller calls ascend-descend Christology (κατάβασις -ἀνάβασις), like in John.3:13; 6:62. These sayings must be distinguished from those Johannine Son of Man sayings which speak only of His exaltation and which arose from enthronement the original

²⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator, A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 147-148.

²⁵ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 68-69.

²⁶ Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1973, 44-46 and J.A. Ziesler, *The Jesus Question* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press), 1980, 46.

²⁷ Vawter, *Jesus*, 117.

²⁸ Dunn, *Christology*, 84-85.

²⁹ Anderson, *Historical Jesus*, 246.

³⁰ Cf. note 52.

association of the parousia. He says that these passages speak not only of the exaltation but also of the pre-existence, descent and subsequent ascent. In these two sayings there is no transfer of the parousia to the ascension.³¹ The terms “descend” and “ascend” are used infrequently in John’s Gospel and should therefore be seen in connection with the Fourth Gospel’s portrait of Jesus as coming into the world and returning to the Father. The descent-ascent language clusters around characteristic of Jesus as the Son of Man (3:13; 6:62).³² These passages create a basis for the discussion.

Let’s look at some scholars’ arguments. In the second half of v.13, Jesus makes one exception to the statement “no one has ascended to heaven”: no one except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. The perfect tense ἀναβέβηκεν implies that Jesus had already ascended to heaven at the time of His dialog with Nicodemus.³³ The “ascent” corresponds to being exalted, says Michel, the “descent” to the incarnation (Cf. 3:13 with 3:14 and 1:14).³⁴

Some scholars believe that descend-ascend idea indicates Jesus’ pre-existence in John. Kuschel says that on the bases of the NT, Jesus Himself said nothing to indicate whether he thought Himself to be the apocalyptic Son of Man/Messiah or had had a heavenly pre-existence with God before appearing on earth. Nor did the post-Easter community regard Jesus as the pre-existent Son of Man; they saw him as eschatological Son of Man. “If we suppose that the earliest community knew of the apocalyptic Son of Man tradition, this lack of interest in any kind of saying about pre-existence, and even in any portrayal in a vision of a heavenly existence of Jesus before time is striking”.³⁵ The more striking about the Johannine Son of Man saying is the idea that Jesus as Son of Man is a figure who ascended to heaven to a place from which He had previously descended. John doesn’t present Jesus as just a latter day Moses or Enoch, ascending to heaven from earth. Jesus ascended to where He was before. John showed the idea of pre-existence and a pattern of descending.³⁶ There is an emphasis on the fact that the Son of Man came down from heaven (Jn.3:13; 6:62); this thought of pre-existence is absent from the synoptic sayings, and raises the question whether Johannine thought has been influenced from other sources.³⁷ So this probably influenced the movement among scholars that the Son of Man title was taken from the OT.

There are different opinions concerning the term “lifting up”. Vermes, Matera, Smith see in 12:32 an allusion to death, which is obvious from the words of bystanders (v.34). So the verb ὑψωθήναι must be understood to mean death by crucifixion and not exaltation or glory.³⁸ “Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man when He speaks of His destiny to be

³¹ Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1965), 229-230.

³² Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 126.

³³ Delbert Burkett, “The Son of Man in the Gospel of John”, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (Sheffield: Academy Press, 1991), 82.

³⁴ Michel, *Dictionary*, 631.

³⁵ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All time? The Dispute over Christ’s Origin* (SCM Press LTD, 1992), 232.

³⁶ Christopher M. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament* (Edinburg: University Press, 2001), 163-165.

³⁷ Michel, *Dictionary*, 631-632.

³⁸ Vermes, *Jesus*, 162.

exalted when lifted up on the cross. The Fourth Gospel employs “Son of Man” to clarify Jesus’ origin and never refers to him as the Son of Man who will return on the clouds of heaven at the end of the ages”.³⁹ “The Son of Man title points to Jesus’ destiny as the one who must suffer, die, rise from the dead and return as God’s eschatological agent”.⁴⁰ Bornkamm and some other scholars hold a totally opposite view and believe that the term “Son of Man”, when used by Jesus, never has the thought of suffering, death and resurrection. These ideas come out from Jesus’ “experience” and are elaborated by the church in whose later tradition the final account even altered the cast of His teaching.⁴¹

Jesus’ lifting up was to bring revelation to men. “What seems to be implied by John is that the Son of Man acts as the link by which heaven and earth are connected, the means by which the things of heaven can be revealed to those on earth. Jesus is thus the source or means of divine revelation.”⁴² In 3:13 Jesus’ statement is usually understood as a claim to be the sole mediator of revelation: no one has ascended to heaven to gain knowledge of “the heavenly things.” Jesus has descended from heaven and is therefore able to impart revelation concerning it.⁴³ We can say that Jesus’ descent partially was to bring revelation to men. He mentioned that in different passages like Mat. 11:25; Jn. 17:6,26.

Some people believe that the Greek word ὑψόω has double meaning in the same passage in John. This term talks about Jesus’ crucifixion and exaltation after the resurrection. Marshall says: “In John the references correspond to those of the passion and resurrection of Jesus in the other Gospels. But in John the reference is to “lifting up” of the Son of Man. The verb is ambiguous and can refer to “being lifted up” on the cross or to “being exalted” (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:34).⁴⁴ The “lifting up” of the Son of Man on the cross in 12:32-33, combines two elements of Jesus’ mission. John adopts an unusual word for “lifted up”, which normally refers to exaltation, and combines two notions of crucifixion and exaltation in a single ambiguous word.⁴⁵ Michel writes that Jesus is to be “lifted up” on the cross, ὑψόω refers both to His being physically lifted up to die and to His being “exalted” by God in His death itself and not simply by means of the resurrection: Jesus glorifies God and is glorified by Him precisely in His death on the cross.⁴⁶ We should find in the Servant passages of Isaiah a clue to the mysterious idea of “exaltation” of the Son of Man. Is. 52:13 is a parallel to Jn. 3:14, 12:34, which both speak of the Son of Man being glorified. The word ὑψώθηναι was used in primitive Christianity for the “exaltation” of

³⁹ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 232.

⁴⁰ T.S. Smith, “The Christology of the Fourth Gospel”, *Review and Expositor*, Winter 1974, 19-30.

⁴¹ Bornkamm, *Jesus*, p.177, also cf. Bowman, *Jesus*, p.130. Bowman adds to Bornkamm and says: “By then also, the term “Son of Man” had been wholly equated with “Jesus” and so was quite capable of being “interchanged” with this historic name in the church’s thought and speech.” J.O. Murray, *Jesus According to St. John* (London: Longmans, 1936), 57-58 adds that for John the shame of the cross has been swallowed up by its glory.

⁴² Tuckett, *Christology*, 164.

⁴³ Burkett, *Son of Man*, 82.

⁴⁴ I. H. Marshall, “Son of Man” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 777.

⁴⁵ Burkett, *Son of Man*, 128.

⁴⁶ Michel, *Dictionary*, 631.

Christ to the right hand of God (Act. 2:33, 5:31). That Christ is exalted, as He is glorified, in His death, is a turn of thought, essential to the whole Johannine position.⁴⁷

The verb ὑψόω is an ambiguous term. To understand what Jesus meant we have to look at the close context of each passage where the word is mentioned. In Jn.3:14 it implies to Jesus' lifting up on a cross, as compared to the serpent being lifted up on a stake. In Jn.8:28 He says that people will lift Him up. It is difficult to imagine that He meant that people will exalt Him (may be only indirectly), but probably He meant in this passage His lifting up on the cross. In Jn.12:34 Jesus was talking about His death, and probably about His ascent to heaven in v.32. We should agree with Smith's saying about this verb usage. In the Fourth Gospel, the writer that used ὑψόω did this so that the verses that do allude to Jesus' death are declared to focus on the manifestation of His glory rather than on His sufferings.⁴⁸ The verb ὑψόω is used with both meanings: His lifting up on the cross (John 8,28; 12,32) and His lifting up to glory in His ascent to heaven (Acts. 2,33; 5,31; Phil 2,9). These both events are connected: one couldn't be without the other. The cross for Jesus was the way to glory. But the idea of suffering Messiah was a strange one for Jews.

Son of Man and Messiah

In John, the different Christological categories tend to merge into each other. That is why some scholars believe that some of what is partially said of Jesus as "the Son of Man" applied also to "the Son of God", "Messiah", and indeed is sometimes said of (by) Jesus without reference to any specific Christological category or title at all.⁴⁹ "The Biblical Aramaic idiom, "one like a *son of man*", in Dan.7:13, though not individual and Messianic in its origin, acquired in the course of time a definite Messianic association. However, none of the interpretative sources employs it as a title, or places it on the lips of speaker as a self-designation. But based on the peoples question in 12:34 acceptance of "the Messiah" role must be supposed, states Vermes.⁵⁰ "It may be conceded that the title acquired a more definite messianic connotation, as Jesus became more and more able to unfold to His disciples His messianic calling and intention. It is at any rate, significant to observe that as He the more disclosed His Messiahship so the more frequently does He use the title Son of Man", said McDonald.⁵¹

Another group of scholars is against this approach. "Son of Man" doesn't refer to a messianic figure for whom people were waiting, says Matera since there is no point in the narrative when the crowd exclaims, "So you are the Son of Man!" The crowd is puzzled by this language and asked Jesus who this Son of Man was (12:34). Rather, Son of Man is the manner in which the Johannine Jesus speaks of His origin from God and His destiny to be glorified".⁵² Dodd wrote that there is little evidence that in pre-Christian Judaism the term "Son of Man" was used as a Messianic title. In Dan.7:13, ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου

⁴⁷ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 247.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Christology*, 19-30.

⁴⁹ Tuckett, *Christology*, 159.

⁵⁰ Vermes, *Jesus*, 176.

⁵¹ McDonald, *Jesus*, 46.

⁵² Matera, *Christology*, 233.

is expressly identified with “the people of the saints of the Most High,” with the true and final People of God to whom ultimate dominion is promised. In the Book of Enoch 46:1-3, the apocalyptic description of Dan.7 is imitated, and a “being whose countenance had the appearance of a man” is referred to the Ethiopic expression which apparently represents ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. This figure appears to be identified with the “Elect One”, who is also called Messiah. In Enoch 70-71, Enoch himself is apparently identified with the Son of Man.⁵³ With just one exception in John 12:34 (where the people ask Jesus regarding the use of the term) – which isn’t a true exception since it reflects Jesus’ own usage and attributed to Jesus Himself. The question “who is this Son of Man?” of John 12:34, indicates something of this ambiguity in the people’s inability to apprehend Jesus’ preference for this title rather than that of Messiah.⁵⁴ Although the Fourth Gospel doesn’t employ the Son of Man as another messianic title, Jesus’ description of Himself as the descending and ascending Son of Man who will be exalted by being lifted up on the cross enriches the Gospel’s confession of Him as Messiah.⁵⁵

It is difficult to see that Jesus, using “Son of Man,” meant “Messiah.” Sometimes people thought about Him as Messiah, He acted like Messiah. There is only one passage (Jn.12:34) that can suppose that other people (not Jesus) considered “Son of Man” to be equal with “Messiah”. Some of Jesus’ words pointed to His Messianic nature, and they could be traced in the Son of Man teaching, like Jn.12:34. Jesus used “the Son of Man” to show another aspect of His being and to prepare people to understand His Messianism. Only at the end of His ministry (ch.12) people made a parallel between Messiah and the Son of Man.

Son of Man and Son of God

In John 6:62 interpreters always try to look for the distinction between Christ’s divine (Son of God) and human (Son of Man) nature. We don’t have any proofs that Christ’s human nature was in heaven before His descent. So Schleiermacher doesn’t accept this distinction between “Son of Man” and “Son of God”. In either case, whether He uses any of the title, Christ means His whole being. There is nowhere any suggestion that Christ distinguished between the divine and the human in Himself. Because Jesus cannot have had any such separation of natures in mind and because he never refers to it, Schleiermacher cannot take Jn.6:62 to mean that in any literal sense Christ had a consciousness of an earlier state of being in heaven, for what the phrase “Son of Man” designates could never have been a consciousness of His personality. So the passage indicates that Christ had in mind His exaltation, His having been sent by God and, in both taken together, the fulfillment of His destiny, His earthly existence. However the title Son of God draws attention to His difference from men, while the title Son of Man emphasizes His identification with men.⁵⁶ In some instances, it isn’t clear whether Son means Son of God or Son of Man.

⁵³ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 241-242 и Dodd, *Founder*, 119.

⁵⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (SCM Press LTD, 1970), 88-90.

⁵⁵ Matera, *Christology*, 234.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 269-272.

It might just be that the Evangelist didn't make any differentiation between the two titles and understood that which applied to the other. Throughout the Gospel there is only one specific claim from the words of Jesus that He was the Son of Man (9:37).⁵⁷ Most of the other references are statements about Him, which leave no doubt that He accepted these titles. The author of the Fourth Gospel was aware of Jesus' acceptance of the title, but he decided to equate the expression with the Son of God and reinterpret it with a meaning of pre-existence. It could very well be that Jesus used the title Son of Man to stimulate His hearers to ask questions about who He was.⁵⁸ Jesus is the Son of Man because in Him the Son of God came to men. It is a characteristic of John's radical reinterpretation that he uses this title, which designated the apocalyptic World Judge to refer to the earthly existence of Jesus. The Son of Man is neither a man among others, nor the representation of the people of God or of the ideal humanity, but God descending into the human realms and manifesting His glory there.⁵⁹ Jesus used "Son of God" to indicate His role as Israel's representative, both at the last judgment before God and presently as the representative of suffering Israel on earth.⁶⁰

Tuckett said that the words stating that Jesus is Son of Man are slightly but significantly different from things said about Jesus as the Son or the Son of God. Jesus as the Son of Man is one who "ascends", language not normally used of Jesus as the Son of God; and while Jesus as the Son is often said to be "sent" by God; this language isn't used of Jesus as the Son of Man.⁶¹ The Johannine Son of Man was the Son of God; He descended from heaven and ascended to heaven again (3:13; 6:62). He is in intimate union with God, "dwelling in Him". He is archetypal at least in the sense that His relation to the Father is the archetype of the true and ultimate relation of men to God.⁶²

Млакuzhyil regards the Johannine "Son of Man" as fulfilling a bridge function between the titles "Messiah" and "Son of God": "Because "the Son of Man" has a mysterious heavenly origin (3:13; 6:62), these theological titles may be considered a theological bridge between the Messianic title "Christ" and the divine title "Son of God".⁶³ So these two titles merge into each other. The early church used them interchangeably (9:37).⁶⁴ They belong to the same person. As the Son of God he showed His heavenly origin, as the Son of Man he showed His connection with people.

⁵⁷ There is a difference in reading of this passage in different manuscripts. The external support is weighty (p. 66, 75, B D W syr cop^{sa}, p^{bo}, ach) for ἀνθρώπου and improbability of Θεοῦ being altered to ἀνθρώπου (A L D Q 070 0141) may be an indication that the early church considered these two titles as interchangeable. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 194.

⁵⁸ Smith, *Christology*, 19-30.

⁵⁹ Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 13.

⁶⁰ Witherington III, *Christology*, 269.

⁶¹ Tuckett, *Christology*, 159.

⁶² Dodd, *Interpretation*, 244.

⁶³ George Mlakuzhyil, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Rome: Analecta Biblica 117, 1987), 270-271; also mentioned in Köstenberger, *Missions*, 127.

⁶⁴ Cf. note 57

Conclusion

The main goal of this article was to look at different scholars opinions concerning the title Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel and clarify some of the problematic Son of Man passages. The title “Son of Man” was used in some prophetic books and referred to humans. Jesus could have used this title from Dan.7 but it wasn’t a usual title in the OT for Messiah. Jesus probably used this title in the NT based on His self-understanding. He used this title to identify Himself with men. If He wanted to use the title from Daniel, to show His heavenly origin, He should have used the title “like a son of man” since this title was applied to heavenly beings. But He could use the title like in Dan. to show His humanity. If the title was the early church product it’s difficult to explain why only Jesus called Himself “the Son of Man”. There probably never was a time when “Son of Man” was understood by Jesus or the early church as somebody other than Jesus. John talks about “the lifting up” of the Son of Man. The verb ὑψόω is an ambiguous term and was used in both meanings: Jesus’ lifting up on the cross and His lifting up to the glory in His ascend to heaven. Both these ὑψόω are connected: one couldn’t be without the other. The cross for Jesus was the way to glory. The descent shows Jesus’ pre-existence. He was sent by Father, revealed God to people on the earth, and eventually returned to the place where He had come from. John has taken a number of different notions and combined them in His portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God, Son of Man, and Messiah. It isn’t sure that Jesus equated “Son of Man” with “Messiah”, but there are hint that can lead us to believe that people considered these titles to be equal. Jesus is the Son of Man and at the same time He is the Son of God, who is pre-existent with God in heaven, from where He descended and to where He ascended.

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