

DANIEL 7:9-14

"I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, its wheels *were* a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened. Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

Far too frequently, many Christian Bible readers—and even a number of people within our Messianic faith community—come to the conclusion that when Yeshua the Messiah refers to Himself as the "Son of Man," that Yeshua is referring to Himself as a human. While it is to be observed that there are places in the Hebrew Scriptures where the terminology "son of man" (*ben-adam*, בֶּן־אָדָם; Psalm 8:5) can be used as an essential synonym of "human being," the title "Son of Man," employed by the Messiah, has a significant background in Daniel 7:9-14. Not only is a proper recognition of the Daniel 7:9-14 background of the title Son of Man critical for evaluating the nature of the Messiah, but is also imperative for understanding certain reactions witnessed when He invokes this title (i.e., Mark 14:53-65; Matthew 26:57-68; Luke 22:63-71). The Son of Man is a figure which appears in Heaven before God proper, and has a status and level of power which only God proper can seemingly possess.

The theophany of Daniel 7:9-14 is surrounded by the Prophet Daniel's vision of the four beasts (Daniel 7:1-8, 9-28). While these four beasts have been historically interpreted as representing the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome—although with some disputes here and there—no Bible reader disputes how the four beasts are indicative of an anti-God and anti-people-of-God world system. Any survey of the theophany of Daniel 7:9-14 definitely provides the people of God—which for the Prophet Daniel's initial audience in the Sixth Century B.C.E. would involve his fellow Southern Kingdom exiles taken into Babylonian captivity—a word of hope and comfort. God as the Ancient of Days (Ara. *'Atiq Yomin*, עֲתִיק יוֹמִין), seated upon His throne in Heaven, sitting in judgment over the beasts (Daniel 7:9-12)—a surety of their ultimate defeat and God's ultimate triumph—is paralleled by the description seen by the Prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:26-28:

"Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking."

Within the theophany of Daniel 7:9-14, it is not only witnessed that the Ancient of Days oversees the judgment and ultimate defeat of the different beasts. It is also witnessed that a figure

designated as the *bar enash* (בֶּר אִנָּשׁ) or “Son of Man,” is brought before the Ancient of Days, and given supreme power and an everlasting Kingdom:

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14, RSV).

Yeshua the Messiah referring to Himself constantly throughout the Gospels as the “Son of Man,” given the Danielic presentation of the *bar enash* before the throne of the Ancient of Days, would be quite severe. Yeshua the Messiah was not just claiming some sort of special status or relationship or association with the Ancient of Days; **Yeshua the Messiah was claiming a status of supreme authority over all humanity and all human kingdoms.** Yeshua the Messiah would claim to be one coming on the clouds of Heaven (Mark 14:62; Matthew 26:64), a status that God proper often demonstrates, when He comes in power to vindicate His own (Psalm 97:2; 104:3; Isaiah 19:1).

It would be enough to recognize the supreme power of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of Man, present in how most English Bibles render Daniel 7:14a: “He was given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him” (HCSB). There are good reasons, however, to translate the verb *yiflechu* (יִפְלְחוּ) as “worshiped” (NIV) and not simply “serve(d).” (The Kohlenberger interlinear has “they-worshiped.”)¹⁶² It is witnessed lexically how the Aramaic verb *pelach* (פִּלַּח), commonly thought to mean “serve; pay reverence to” (*A Reader’s Hebrew Bible*),¹⁶³ can indeed mean “to labour; hence to serve...specially, to worship God” (*Gesenius*),¹⁶⁴ “to serve, to revere, to worship” (*AMG*),¹⁶⁵ “to serve (man or deity); to worship” (*Jastrow*).¹⁶⁶ Questions can legitimately be raised—in light of the status that this Son of Man is given, in order to enact vindication for the righteous—as to whether or not a supernatural yet created agent of God proper would have the exclusive veneration of all human kingdoms, and hence all Creation. Questions are significantly raised, if the Aramaic *pelach* in Daniel 7:14 is to be taken as “worship,” and not just “serve.”

Both Christian and Jewish examiners have certainly had to deliberate over the identity and nature of the *bar enash* or “Son of Man” seen in Daniel 7. In his useful resource, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, Wright weighs a number of different factors which can no doubt be in the mind of different Bible readers who encounter the terminology “Son of Man.” Is this a human figure or a supernatural figure? As Wright properly notes, it is ultimately the Divine aura surrounding the title “Son of Man” from Daniel 7, which was the significant factor in Yeshua being condemned of blasphemy against the God of Israel by the Jewish religious leaders, and not just His general claim to being the Messiah:

¹⁶² Kohlenberger, 4:464.

¹⁶³ A. Phillip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith, *A Reader’s Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 1473.

¹⁶⁴ H.F.W. Gesenius: *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 675.

¹⁶⁵ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 901.

¹⁶⁶ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004), 1178.

“In Daniel 7, Daniel sees the kingdoms of this earth, portrayed as ravaging beasts from the sea, given the freedom to oppress and harass the people of God. The people of God, described as ‘the saints of the Most High’, are attacked and devoured almost to the point of extinction. But then the visionary scene changes dramatically in verse 9. Instead of a picture of human history at ground level, we are transported into the presence of God (‘the Ancient of Days’) seated on his throne. There, through the presence of a human figure described as ‘one like a son of man’, the tables are turned. This son of man comes into the presence of the Ancient of Days, the beasts are stripped of authority and destroyed, and dominion, kingdom and authority are given to the son of man and the saints for ever.

“The ‘son of man’ figure in Daniel 7 has a curiously double point of reference. On the one hand, he appears to represent the saints – that is, the human people of God in history. The parallelism between verse 14 (where authority and kingdom are given to the son of man) and verse 18 (where the kingdom is given to the saints) shows this. The son of man, in the vision, represents or symbolizes the saints. It has been suggested that he may be an angelic figure, since in Daniel, nations can be represented in the spiritual domain by angels (e.g. 10:13, 20f.). Or perhaps he is simply a kind of corporate, representative human figure, embodying, in the vision, the people of God as a whole. From this point of view, the figure fitted in very well with Jesus’s identification of himself with Israel. As the Son of Man he represented them. He shared their experience. His destiny was theirs and vice versa.

“But on the other hand the son of man in Daniel 7 is closely associated with God himself. Daniel sees him ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’ (v. 13). That was very much part of the ‘ambience’ of deity in the Old Testament. Furthermore, he is given authority, glory, power and worship and his kingdom is eternal (v. 14)—all rather more than the normal lot of any son of Adam. In fact, there are Greek versions of the text which translate Daniel 7:13 in such a way as to *identify* the son of man with the Ancient of Days. And this tradition finds a strong echo in Revelation, where the description of Jesus in glory is a combination of the reference to the son of man and a virtual direct quotation of the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9f. (Rev. 1:7, 12-16). The two descriptions are conflated into one picture.

“So there was an air of divinity about the son of man figure also. Indeed, it may have been this aspect of the Danielic figure which clinched the verdict against Jesus on the grounds of blasphemy at his trial. When asked whether he was the Messiah, Jesus did not deny it, but went on to claim that his accusers would see the Son of Man in divine glory ‘coming on the clouds of heaven’—i.e. in the presence of God (Matt. 26:63f.). The shift from Messiah to Son of Man must be deliberate and the description is clearly Danielic.”¹⁶⁷

One of the more provocative approaches to the figure of the “Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is seen in the 2012 book, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, by the broadly liberal Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin. Boyarin, who is no Believer in Yeshua of Nazareth, and who dates the Book of Daniel to the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., is ultimately forced from the text of Daniel, to recognize how it serves not just as a legitimate Jewish background to Him being regarded as Divine by His followers, but also as source material for a plural Godhead at least composed of the Father and the Son:

“In this remarkable text, we find the prophet Daniel having a vision in which there are two divine figures, one who is depicted as an old man, an Ancient of Days, sitting on the throne. We have been told, however, that there is more than one throne there, and sure enough a second divine figure, in form ‘like a human being,’ is brought on the clouds of heaven and invested by the Ancient of Days in a ceremony very much like the passing of the torch from elder king to younger in ancient Near Eastern royal ceremonial and the passing of the torch from older gods

¹⁶⁷ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), pp 151-152.

to younger ones in their myths: 'I saw in the vision of the night, and behold with the clouds of the Heaven there come one like a Son of Man and came to the Ancient of Days and stood before him and brought him close, and to him was given rulership and glory and the kingdom and all nations, peoples, and languages will worship him. His rulership is eternal which will not pass, and his kingship will not be destroyed.'

"...What this text projects is a second divine figure to whom will be given eternal dominion of the entire world, of a restored entire world in which this eternal king's guidance and rule will be in accord, completely and finally, with the will of the Ancient of Days as well. Although this Redeemer figure is not called the Messiah—this name for him will have to wait for later reflections on this Danielic vision, as we shall see below—it brings us close to at least some of the crucial characteristics of the figure named later the Messiah or the Christ.

"What are these characteristics?

"He is divine.

"He is in human form.

"He may very well be portrayed as a younger-appearing divinity than the Ancient of Days.

"He will be enthroned on high.

"He is given power and dominion, even sovereignty on earth.

"All of these are characteristic of Jesus the Christ as he will appear in the Gospels...Moreover, they have been further developed within Jewish traditions between the Book of Daniel and the Gospels. At a certain point these traditions became merged in Jewish minds with the expectation of a return of a Davidic king, and the idea of a divine-human Messiah was born. This figure was then named 'Son of Man,' alluding to his origins in the divine figure named 'one like a Son of Man/a human being' in Daniel. In other words, a simile, a God who looks like a human being (literally Son of Man) has become the name for that God, who is now called 'Son of Man,' a reference to his human-appearing divinity...

"....

"There are many variations and traditions about this figure in the Gospels themselves and in other early Jewish texts. Some Jews had been expecting this Redeemer to be a human exalted to the state of divinity, while others were expecting a divinity to come down to earth and take on human form; some believers in Jesus believed the Christ had been born as an ordinary human and then exalted to divine status, while others believed him to have been a divinity who came down to earth. Either way, we end up with a doubled godhead and a human-divine combination as the expected Redeemer..."¹⁶⁸

Recognizing the veneration due to the Daniel 7:9-14 Son of Man is vital, for Bible readers who wish to properly recognize the significance of how Yeshua the Messiah calls Himself the Son of Man in the Gospel narratives. When it is recognized that the Son of Man is the figure brought before the Ancient of Days and given not only an eternal Kingdom—but is to be demonstrated the veneration, service, *and* worship one would assume would be exclusive to such an Ancient of Days—we have a figure who is indeed Divine. Most unfortunately, not enough Bible readers are too consciously aware of the Tanach background of Yeshua the Messiah being the "Son of Man."

¹⁶⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), pp 31-34.