

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

“The KJV renders this phrase as ‘the Son of God,’ an apparent allusion to the second person of the Trinity. Either the NIV or KJV translation is possible grammatically. In biblical Aramaic the plural noun *’elāhīm* may be assumed to have the same force as *’elōhīm* in biblical Hebrew, which can be rendered as a plural, ‘gods,’ or as a singular, ‘God,’ when denoting the true God, the plural form being an attempt to express the divine fullness and majesty. In this context, however, the translation of the NIV and most modern versions is to be preferred, since Nebuchadnezzar was polytheistic and had no conception of the Christian Trinity. Thus the pagan king only meant that the fourth figure in the figure was divine.

“From the Christian perspective, we know that the preincarnate Christ did appear to individuals in the Old Testament. Most likely the fourth man in the fire was the angel of the Lord, God himself in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, a view held by many expositors...”¹⁶⁰

Most English translations today are going to render *bar-elahin* as “a son of the gods,” to emphasize the place of Nebuchadnezzar, who witnessed a fourth, supernatural figure, in the fiery furnace. Those who think that a wider consideration of data should be factored in, and/or that Nebuchadnezzar could speak of realities unknown to and greater than himself, might think it more appropriate for *bar-elahin* to be rendered as “Son of God,” drawing attention to a probable Christophany in Daniel 3:25.

The further word of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:28 is, “Blessed is the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who hath sent His messenger [*di-shelach malakhei*, מַלְאָכָה], and hath delivered His servants who trusted on Him” (YLT). It is hardly unreasonable to propose that the messenger or angel, seen by Nebuchadnezzar, is the significant figure of the *malakh* YHWH or “messenger/angel of the LORD” witnessed throughout the Tanach (previously discussed). Miller concurs, “‘Angel’ (or heavenly ‘messenger’) could denote an angel or God himself (cf. Gen 18:1-2, 10ff).”¹⁶¹

Daniel 7:9-14

“The Exalted Son of Man Whom All Creation Must Worship”

“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

¹⁶⁰ Stephen R. Miller, *New American Commentary: Daniel* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), pp 123-124.

¹⁶¹ Miller, 125.

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 יְמִין), 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 אֲנָשׁ) 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 *yiflechun* (יִפְלְחוּן) as "worshipped"

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(NIV) and not simply “serve(d).” (The Kohlenberger interlinear has “they-worshipped.”)¹⁶² It is witnessed lexically how the Aramaic verb *pelach* (ܦܠܚܐ), 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?

“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 parallellism 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.”¹⁶⁷

As one encounters later in the Gospels, 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.

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

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.

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

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

Joel 3:11-13

“The Lord as Supreme Judge”

“Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones. Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.”

An undeniable theme of the Book of Joel is the Day of the Lord, and while there are multiple components and dimensions as to what such a Day of the Lord involves—it definitely involves the Lord’s vindication of His people, and His judgment to be issued upon His enemies. Bible readers should immediately be able to make a connection between the word of Joel 3:13 and what is witnessed later in Revelation 14:18: “Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.’” While some of the details of an oracle like Joel 3:11-13 are a bit unclear, and require consultation and some synthesizing with other statements appearing in the Hebrew Prophets and the Apostolic Writings, the thrust of what is communicated is not unclear: the Lord God of Israel is going to bring judgment to the nations of Planet Earth.

A default view of approaching what the Prophet Joel decrees is represented by Duane A. Garrett, who would take what he says in the direction of it pointing to more specific realities witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures:

“[T]he notion of ‘rousing’ or ‘awakening’ the nations calls to mind the New Testament picture of the peoples of earth being awakened from the dead to face judgment (as in Rev 20:11-13). Joel did not explicitly speak of a resurrection or judgment of the dead, but his language in this chapter is universal and draws the apocalyptic theme of the day of the Lord to a crescendo.”¹⁶⁹

We will have to wait and see what “Let the nations bestir themselves” (Joel 3:12a, RSV) really means in future history. What cannot be avoided is how in Joel 3:12[4:12] that it is the Lord proper, in the first person, who judges the Earth: “I will sit in judgment over all the nations” (NJPS). While God as Judge is a theme witnessed throughout the Tanach or Old Testament, significant questions are raised in the continuing testimony of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, as the activity of judging is something actually to be performed by Yeshua the Messiah. James Limburg summarizes,

¹⁶⁸ One of the more provocative approaches to the figure of the “Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is seen in Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), pp 31-34. 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.

¹⁶⁹ Duane A. Garrett, *New American Commentary: Hosea, Joel*, Vol 19a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 387.