

LORD OR LEGEND: JESUS AS THE MESSIANIC SON OF MAN

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Abstract: *In several recent works, Bart Ehrman has argued that Jesus frequently taught about the coming of a figure called the Son of Man who was a divine figure, cosmic judge, and ruler of the kingdom of God. Although Jesus did not see himself as this Son of Man, his disciples mistakenly identified him as this figure as a result of their belief in Jesus's resurrection. This article surveys the use of the title Son of Man by Jesus and Jewish literature and generally confirms Ehrman's view of the meaning of the title. It further argues that the standard criteria of authenticity which Ehrman confidently employs in his works also confirm that Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man. Thus, the high Christology of early Christianity is not the result of "legend" as Ehrman claims but resulted from Jesus's own divine claims.*

Key words: *Son of Man, Bart Ehrman, Christology, historical Jesus, criteria of authenticity, Daniel 7:13–14, Daniel 7:9–10*

Chapter 5 of *Jesus, Interrupted* by Bart Ehrman is titled “Liar, Lunatic, or Lord? Finding the Historical Jesus.” Ehrman drew his title from the famous closing words of the chapter “The Shocking Alternative” in C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*. Lewis wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [Jesus]: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹

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¹ C. S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity,” in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2002), 36.

Ehrman suggested that Lewis overlooked a fourth option. Perhaps Jesus was neither Lord, liar, nor lunatic. Perhaps he was “legend,” not in the sense that he never existed, but in the sense that he proclaimed a message other than his own divinity but later followers developed the idea that he was divine.

Ehrman presents several different models for explaining how Jesus’s later followers came to assume that he was divine. One model is the “Son of Man” model:

Another path to seeing Jesus’ divinity starts not with the idea of Jesus as the Son of God but with Jesus as the Son of Man. Jesus himself spoke of the coming of the Son of Man, a cosmic judge of the earth who would bring judgment in his wake, based on his understanding of Daniel 7:13–14. Once his followers came to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, however, they thought that he himself would be the one who would come from heaven to sit in judgment on the earth. This is Paul’s view, expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4–5. Paul was writing to gentiles, not to Jews, and so does not use the title Son of Man. But that is how he understood Jesus: as the future judge to come from heaven. If the Son of Man was a kind of divine figure, and Jesus was the Son of Man, that makes him a divine figure who lives with God.²

Ehrman’s treatment of the historical Jesus in *Jesus, Interrupted* is based on a careful application of the historical critical method. Based on the compelling historical evidence, Ehrman affirmed that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who frequently taught about the coming of a figure called the Son of Man. He affirmed that Jesus used this title against the background of Dan 7:13–14 and that Jesus viewed this Son of Man as a divine figure, a cosmic judge, and the ruler of the kingdom of God.³ Although he denied that Jesus viewed himself as the Son of Man, he affirmed that Jesus’s earliest followers identified him as the Son of Man after they came to believe in his resurrection.

This article will survey the use of the title “Son of Man” by Jesus in Jewish literature of the Second Temple period and in rabbinic Judaism, largely confirming Ehrman’s discussion of the meaning of the title. It will further argue that the standard criteria of authenticity consistently employed by Ehrman throughout his study also confirm that Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man and that this constituted a divine claim.⁴

² Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009), 253. Ehrman later claimed, “The idea that Jesus was divine was a later Christian invention, one found, among our Gospels, only in John” (249).

³ Ehrman illustrated his point by quoting two Jewish texts, the Similitudes of Enoch and 4 Ezra, which he dated “roughly from the time of the beginning of Christianity.” Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 231–32.

⁴ Ehrman (*How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* [New York: Harper Collins, 2014], 86–87) reports that his early doubts about the deity of Jesus were based on the view that Jesus claimed to be God only in the Gospel of John: “If Jesus really went around calling himself God, wouldn’t the other Gospels at least mention the fact? Did they just decide to skip that part?” If the Synoptic Gospels (and their hypothetical early sources) affirm Jesus’s deity, a key argument supporting Ehrman’s view of an evolving Christology that exalted Jesus from a mere apocalyptic prophet to the incarnation of deity collapses.

I. JESUS'S USE OF THE TITLE "SON OF MAN"

One of the best-established features of Jesus's teaching is his frequent use of the title "the Son of Man." The phrase "son of man" appears eighty-six times in the NT. It appears eighty-two times in the four Gospels as an apparent self-designation of Jesus. By my count, the title appears thirteen times in Mark, eight times in Q, twelve times in John, at least five times in M, and at least five times in L.⁵ Thus the title has independent attestation from all five early sources.⁶

Furthermore, the title was not used by anyone but Jesus in the Gospels and rarely appears outside of the Gospels.⁷ Three of the four occurrences of "son of man" in the NT outside of the Gospels are quotations of or allusions to the OT and cannot properly be described as titular since they lack the definite article, that is, they refer to "a son of man" rather than "the son of man."⁸ This makes it highly unlikely that the title developed apart from Jesus's influence in the early church and was later placed on Jesus's lips by the evangelists. Consequently, the criterion of dissimilarity confirms Jesus's use of the title.⁹

⁵ Appearances in Mark include 2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21, 41, 62. Appearances in Q include Luke 9:58 // Matt 8:20; Luke 7:34 // Matt 11:19; Luke 12:10 // Matt 12:32; Luke 11:30 // Matt 12:40; Luke 17:24 // Matt 24:27; Luke 17:26 // Matt 24:37; Luke 17:30 // Matt 24:39; Luke 12:40 // Matt 24:44 and possibly Luke 19:10 // Matt 18:11 (though the text in Matt is doubtful since it is absent from such important manuscripts as \mathfrak{N} and B and is likely a byproduct of scribal assimilation of Matthew to Luke). Appearances in John include 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34 (2x); and 13:31. The phrase also appears in the vision of Stephen in Acts 7:56. Appearances in M include Matt 10:23; 13:37, 41; 24:30; 25:31. These do not include instances in which Matthew replaced a first person reference or a reference to the "kingdom of God" in Mark with "son of man" (Matt 16:13, 28; 24:30) or in which Luke's version of Q contained a first person reference and Matthew inserted "son of man" (Matt 19:28 // Luke 18:29–30). Appearances in L include Luke 17:22; 18:8; 21:36; 22:48; 24:7. These do not include instances in which Matthew's rendering of Q utilizes a first-person pronoun but Luke's rendering uses "son of man" (Luke 6:22 // Matt 5:11; Luke 12:8 // Matt 10:32). Not only do Son of Man sayings appear in Q, according to Adela Yarbro Collins, they appear in all stages of Q's development. See Collins, "The Son of Man Sayings in the Sayings Source," in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J.* (ed. M. P. Horgan and P. J. Kobelski; New York: Crossroad, 1989), 369–89.

⁶ For Ehrman's clear explanation and affirmation of the criteria of authenticity, see *Jesus, Interrupted*, 152–55. He affirmed the criteria of multiple independent attestation, dissimilarity, and historical plausibility. See also Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 85–96, 134–37; idem, *How Jesus Became God*, 94–98. These criteria are applied in this article simply because Ehrman (along with most other critical scholars) affirms them, not because of any personal suspicion that the Gospels cannot be trusted in their entirety.

⁷ The single exception is John 12:34 in which bystanders respond to Jesus's teaching about the Son of Man by asking, "Who is this Son of Man?"

⁸ The title seldom appears outside of the Gospels. The title was used in the description of Stephen's vision in Acts 7:56. The author of Hebrews used the phrase in a quotation of Ps 8:5–7 in Heb 2:6. Finally the phrase "one like a son of man" appears in Rev 1:13 and 14:14.

⁹ Delbert Burkett suggested that the distribution of references to the Son of Man hinted at the Palestinian origin of the sayings: "The absence of the title 'Son of Man' in the New Testament outside of the Gospels and Acts can best be explained if the title had currency primarily in Palestinian Christianity. While most of the New Testament represents the legacy of Hellenistic Christianity outside of Palestine, the Gospels and the early chapters of Acts retain traces of Palestinian tradition. If the title 'Son of the Man' arose in a Palestinian context, it should appear precisely where it does (Branscomb 1937: 149)." *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (SNTSMS 107; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Few deny that Jesus frequently used this title. James Dunn claimed, "It was Jesus who, if we may put it so, introduced 'the son of man' phrase into the Jesus tradition. The evidence could hardly point more plainly to that conclusion."¹⁰ He elsewhere wrote, "It simply beggars scholarship to deny that this feature stemmed from a remembered speech usage of Jesus himself."¹¹ Theissen and Merz admit, "It is certain that Jesus used the expression 'son of man.'"¹²

Although scholars acknowledge that Jesus used the title "the son of man," they hotly debate the meaning of this epithet. A growing number of scholars insist that the phrase is simply a literal translation of the Hebrew *ben adam* or the Aramaic *bar enash* meaning merely "a person," "one," or "I."¹³ These scholars claim that this view is confirmed by several Synoptic parallels in which one Gospel uses the phrase "the son of man" and the parallel uses personal pronouns referring to Jesus.

However, this argument is plagued by two fallacies, one logical and one linguistic. The Hebrew and Aramaic phrases translated "son of man" and meaning "I" are consistently indefinite (or, to be more precise, appear in the absolute or construct state but not the determined or emphatic state). However, in Jesus's usage both the noun "son" and the noun "man" were definite. One cannot simply assume that the definite and indefinite forms were synonymous.¹⁴

The definite article in Jesus's usage is probably the "well-known" article, that is, it pointed to a son of man figure that was well known to those in Jesus's audience. Alternatively, the article may be broadly anaphoric, the so-called article of previous reference, that pointed to a particular son of man previously mentioned in the Scriptures. This would parallel references to "the prophet" in the Gospels which allude to the prophet like Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18:15.¹⁵ Thus,

1999), 123. Burkett does not, however, accept the authenticity of the Son of Man sayings. He states: "Why do the sayings have Jesus refer to the Son of Man in the third person? Bultmann's answer, that Jesus referred to a Messiah other than himself, no longer commands general assent. Nor is it clear why a Christian prophet speaking as the voice of Jesus would use the third person rather than the first. If the theory that Jesus referred to himself with a nontitular idiom cannot be accepted, then the likeliest solution is that the third-person speech represents the voice of the church rather than that of Jesus. The church's language about Jesus has been retrojected onto the lips of Jesus himself." See Burkett, *Son of Man*, 123. The use of the third person, however, is rather weak evidence that the Son of Man sayings were the invention of the early church. Burkett's own argument against a Christian prophet using the third person when acting as the voice of Jesus seems to apply here as well.

¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Christianity in the Making 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 738.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, "Can the Third Quest Hope to Succeed?," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; NT Tools and Studies 28/2; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 47.

¹² Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 548.

¹³ See especially Maurice Casey, *The Solution to the "Son of Man" Problem* (LNTS 343; London: T&T Clark, 2007).

¹⁴ Burkett, *Son of Man*, 92–93. Earlier, A. J. B. Higgins had appealed to the definite form of the Greek and Aramaic expression to argue that the expression was titular rather than a mere substitute for the first-person singular pronoun. See Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 17.

¹⁵ See BDF 131–32, §252; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 217–20; 225.

Jesus used the definite form because he was referring to the familiar Son of Man figure in Daniel 7.

Furthermore, although “I” and “son of man” are used interchangeably in the Synoptics, this does not imply that the terms are synonymous. I may refer to myself as “I” or by my nickname “Chuck,” but this does not imply that “Chuck” means “I.” To argue that “Chuck” means “I” or that because Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, Son of Man means “I” “confuses sense and reference.”¹⁶

The interpretation of the phrase best supported by the Gospels views Son of Man as a messianic title drawn from Dan 7:13–14.¹⁷ Several lines of evidence confirm this view. First, Jesus explicitly quoted Dan 7:13–14 on at least two occasions. In the Olivet discourse, Jesus (Matt 24:30 // Mark 13:26 // Luke 21:27) used the title “the Son of Man” (Dan 7:13), referred to his coming in the clouds (Dan 7:13), and described his great power and glory (Dan 7:14). He did so in proximity to a reference to “the abomination of desolation,” an allusion to Dan 9:27.

Later during Jesus’s trial, the high priest asked Jesus if he were the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One (Matt 26:64 // Mark 14:62 // Luke 22:69). Jesus replied, “I am and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Again, Jesus’s words use the title Son of Man and refer to his coming on the clouds of heaven, both details drawn from Dan 7:13.

One may attempt to dismiss the authenticity of these logia based on the fact that they appear only in the Synoptics and according to the “two document hypothesis” lack multiple independent attestation. This objection is unconvincing. Numerous uses of the title Son of Man appear to allude to the Daniel 7 vision. These appear in at least four independent sources including Mark, M, L, and John.

The so-called triple tradition, Mark, Matthew, and Luke, exalts the Son of Man as one who has authority to forgive sin (Mark 2:10 // Matt 9:6 // Luke 5:24), a divine prerogative as Jesus’s opponents insisted. The triple tradition (and there may well be a Q overlap here) also describes the Son of Man as Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28 // Matt 12:8 // Luke 6:5), a title properly belonging only to God. The triple tradition also describes the Son of Man as one who is coming to judge sinners in the glory of his Father together with the holy angels (Mark 8:38 // Matt 16:27 // Luke 9:26).

The so-called M material, unique to Matthew, describes the Son of Man as the master of angels, the ruler of a kingdom who bears authority to judge and condemn sinners (Matt 13:41). It later describes the Son of Man as one who comes in his glory with all the angels, sits upon his glorious throne, and judges all the nations (Matt 25:31).

In the so-called L material, material unique to Luke, Jesus urged his disciples, “Watch by praying in every hour so that you may be able to escape all these things

¹⁶ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 315.

¹⁷ Burkett, *Son of Man*, 122–23; Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 147–47. Ehrman notes, “When Jesus refers to the Son of Man, he appears to be alluding to this vision in Daniel 7.”

that are going to happen and to stand before the presence of the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). The ability to “stand” before the Son of Man contrasts with the inability to stand in verse 26. The unprepared will “faint from fear” as the signs of the coming of the Son of Man appear. Jesus’s disciples, however, will stand up and lift up their heads because their redemption is near (Luke 21:28).

John says that the Son of Man descended out of heaven (3:13; 6:62) and refers to his exaltation and glorification. Furthermore, John 5:27 agrees with descriptions of the apocalyptic Son of Man in the Synoptics by assigning eschatological judgment to the Son of Man: *καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κρίσιν ποιεῖν, ὅτι υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν*.¹⁸ Stephen’s vision in Acts 7:56 likewise portrays the Son of Man as standing at the right hand of God.

Only Q lacks a clear allusion to Daniel 7 in its use of the title Son of Man or what may be deemed an apocalyptic use of the title. Nevertheless, even Q appears to affirm the divinity of the Son of Man in a manner that is likely reminiscent of the Daniel 7 vision.¹⁹ Regardless of whether Q contained an apocalyptic use of the title, the claim that Jesus used the title Son of Man in an apocalyptic sense and in reference to Daniel 7 is nearly as well established by the criterion of multiple independent attestation as the fact that Jesus used the phrase.²⁰

The evidence above demonstrates the high probability that Jesus used the title Son of Man and did so with clear appeal to the use of the epithet in Daniel 7. We must now examine the use of the epithet in Daniel 7 and in later Jewish interpretation of the text to determine what concepts were implicit in this allusion.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SON OF MAN

1. *The Aramaic text of Dan 7:9–14*. Since the use of the title Son of Man by Jesus, in Second Temple Jewish literature, and in rabbinica, is clearly dependent on reflections on the Son of Man vision in Daniel 7, a brief survey of the characteristics of the Son of Man in the Danielic vision is appropriate. The Son of Man vision appears in Dan 7:13–14:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.²¹

¹⁸ See Higgins (*Jesus and the Son of Man*, 168–69) for the argument that the saying is both of Semitic origin and of “considerable antiquity.” Ehrman overlooks these texts when claiming that John initiated a process of “de-apocalypticizing” of Jesus’s message about the Son of Man. See his *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 131–32.

¹⁹ See the initial discussion in the section “Jesus’s Affirmation of the Deity of the Son of Man” later in this article.

²⁰ Ehrman sees the use of the title in Q (Luke 17:24, 26–27, 30 // Matt 24:27, 37–39) as apocalyptic. See *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 129.

²¹ NRSV, with insertions of the literal translations of the Aramaic from the margins.

Although debate still rages on regarding the identity of Daniel's Son of Man, his basic characteristics are clear. First, the Son of Man is portrayed as a royal figure who will reign over a universal and eternal kingdom. The universal nature of his rule is expressed unambiguously in the statement "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." The eternal nature of his reign is explicitly stated in the climatic statement of the vision—his dominion is "everlasting," "shall not pass away," and "shall never be destroyed."

The vision also portrays the one like a son of man as an other-worldly figure.²²

Several features of the vision combine to mark this intention of the author's portrayal. First, the one like a son of man comes "with the clouds of heaven" (עִם-עַנְנֵי שָׁמַיָא). The use of the cloud to depict the divine glory in the Pentateuch and the presence of clouds in theophanies such as the vision of Ezekiel 1 (which has a close relationship to the Daniel 7 vision), mark the Daniel 7 vision as theophanic.²³

Daniel 7:14 highlights the exalted status and divine nature of the figure with the words "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." The statement parallels the description of the Ancient of Days, "A thousand thousands served him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him" (Dan 7:10). Although both texts speak of throngs serving heavenly figures, these texts are nevertheless slightly different. The thousands who serve the Ancient of Days are evidently angelic figures; those who serve the one like a son of man are clearly human.

The text also uses distinct vocabulary to describe the service rendered to the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man. The verb used to describe angelic service to the Ancient of Days is שָׁמַשׁ, a commonly used verb denoting service in many different forms. The verb used to describe the service to the Son of Man is פָּלַח, perhaps best translated "worship." In biblical literature, the verb is used exclusively to refer to the veneration or worship of God or gods.²⁴ This usage was prominent in Daniel leading up to the Son of Man vision. For example, Dan 3:12 used this verb in the Chaldeans' complaint that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego "do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up." The verb also appears in the bold affirmation of the three Jewish men, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire" and "we will not serve your gods" (Dan 3:17–18). The verb also shows up in Nebuchadnezzar's praise of the Jews' sacrificial devotion to monotheism, "They ... yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God" (Dan 3:28).

²² Caragounis, *Son of Man*, 80–81: "A careful exegesis of Dan 7 reveals that the 'SM' is portrayed as a heavenly Being with honors and powers normally predicated of God, and is, in the Interpretation Part of the chapter, identified with the 'Ehōshān'."

²³ Like Ezekiel 1, the Daniel 7 vision speaks of a divine throne with wheels engulfed in flames. Compare Dan 7:9–10 with Ezek 1:15–28.

²⁴ See Dan 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28; 6:17, 21; 7:14, 27. Ezra 7:24 uses the participial form to refer to a "servant of the house of God" who officiates in ritual worship in the Jerusalem temple. Furthermore, the derivative noun form פִּלְחָן refers to worship or ritual service in the temple as well (Ezra 7:19). See "פָּלַח," and "פִּלְחָן," HALOT 1957.

Against that background, the use of the verb פָּלַח connotes the service, veneration, or worship reserved particularly for YHWH.²⁵ The author's use of a generic term to describe service to the Ancient of Days and, by contrast his employment of a term reserved for divine worship to describe service to the Son of Man is unexpected and telling. The offer of such worship to the Son of Man rather naturally leads to the suspicion that he is being portrayed as deity, the embodiment of the glory of YHWH.

This interpretation is also supported by the grammar of Dan 7:27. Although most English versions translate the text in a manner similar to the NRSV, "Their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey *them*," the Hebrew text, Old Greek, and Theodotian use a third person singular pronoun, "All dominions shall serve and obey *him*."²⁶ The statement that all dominions shall serve (לְהִפָּלַח לוֹ) him echoes the description of the Son of Man in Dan 7:14, "All peoples, nations, and languages should serve (לְהִפָּלַח לוֹ) him." Since "the Most High" is the nearest referent eligible to serve as the antecedent of the pronominal suffix ("him"), it thereby assigns an identical role to the Most High and to the Son of Man.²⁷ The grammar implies that the kingdom is given for the benefit of the saints of the Most High, but to a single figure, the Son of Man who embodies the Most High or serves as the special representative of the Most High.

One final feature of the Daniel 7 vision is also significant. Daniel 7:9 indicated that "thrones" (pl.) were set in place and the Ancient of Days took his "throne" (sg.). This raises the question of who would occupy the other throne(s). The proximity and close connections between the Son of Man and Ancient of Days visions suggest that the throne was intended for the Son of Man. He is to be seated on that throne as he is granted "dominion and glory and kingship." The idea that this figure is seated beside the Ancient of Days on a heavenly throne has far-reaching implications for his nature and stature. This enthronement strongly implies that this son of man is a divine or quasi-divine figure. Furthermore, since the vision of the Ancient of Days is a scene of divine judgment in which a court is convened and books of evidence are opened, if the Son of Man occupies a throne beside the Ancient of Days, he likely participates in divine judgment as well.

Although many modern scholars will dispute the claim that these features were intended by the author to portray the Son of Man as both a divine and royal figure, these objections are irrelevant for the present purpose.²⁸ The discussion

²⁵ The verb was also used to speak of divine worship in extrabiblical Aramaic. See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica, 1996), 1178. Michael Shepherd correctly observed that the meaning of the verb is closer in sense to נָסַח than to עָבַד. See his "Daniel 7:13 and the New Testament Son of Man," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 99–111, esp. 101 n. 6.

²⁶ Emphasis added.

²⁷ Although the collective singular "people" may serve as the antecedent, the plural construct noun "holy ones" and the use of plural pronouns to refer to the people elsewhere (Dan 9:15, 16) make this less likely.

²⁸ Other evidence suggests that the early messianic interpretation of the Son of Man was correct. Dan 2:28 states that Nebuchadnezzar's dream related to "the ends of the days," borrowing an important

above is merely intended to highlight the features of Daniel's vision that prompted later Jewish interpreters who carefully reflected on the details of the vision to portray the son of man as a divine king, eternal ruler, and cosmic judge. That later Jewish interpreters understood the text in the manner suggested above will soon become evident from the survey of interpretations in post-exilic sources, second-temple literature, and rabbinica.

2. *The Greek text of Dan 7:9–14.* The Old Greek text of Dan 7:9–14 contains a reading different from that which appears in the MT and Theodotian. Both the MT and Theodotian's version distinguish the Son of Man from the Ancient of Days. In the Old Greek text, the Ancient of Days and the "one like a son of man" refer to one being, rather than to two separate beings.

ἐθεώρου ἐν ὄραματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἤρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν, καὶ οἱ παρεσχηκότες παρήσαν αὐτῷ.

I was watching in the nightly visions and behold, he was coming on the clouds of heaven like a son of man, and he was coming like the Ancient of Days, and those who were present were coming to him.²⁹

This reading is supported by the earliest known manuscript of the LXX, MS 967, which dates to the second century. Although some scholars argue that the Septuagint reading is a product of unintentional scribal error which mistook *ἕως* for *ὡς*, most critics now conclude that the original Greek translation equated the Son of Man and Ancient of Days to express a carefully thought-out interpretation of the Aramaic text.³⁰ Some have even argued that the original Greek translation preserves the original Hebrew reading that stands behind the current Aramaic text.³¹ Second Thessalonians 1:7–8 and Rev 1:14 conflate descriptions of the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days in a manner that suggests that the reading of MS 967 was known in the mid to late first century. If the MS 967 reading is original and intentional, the interpretation assumed in the LXX reflects the earliest known interpretation after the composition of Daniel.

phrase from the poems of the Pentateuch. Parallels between Daniel 7 and 2 suggest a close connection between the two sections.

²⁹ Translation mine.

³⁰ Siegfried Kreuzer, "Papyrus 967" in *Die Septuaginta — Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten: Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D)* (ed. M. Karrer and W. Kraus; WUNT 219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 64–82. See also F. F. Bruce, "The Oldest Greek Version of Daniel," *OJS* 20 (1975): 22–40; Bogdan Bucur, "The Son of Man and the Ancient of Days: Observations on the Early Christian Reception of Daniel 7," *Phronema* 32 (2017): 1–27, esp. 1–6; S. Kim, "The 'Son of Man' as the Son of God (WUNT 30; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983): 22–25; M. Hengel, "Setze dich zu meiner Rechten! Die Inthronisation Christi zur Rechten Gottes und Psalm 110, 1," in *Le Trône de Dieu* (ed. Marc Philonenko; WUNT 69; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993): 160. For arguments against this view, see Otfried Hofius, "Der Septuaginta-Text von Daniel 7:13–14: Erwägungen zu seiner Gestalt und seiner Aussage," *ZAW* 117.1 (2005): 73–90.

³¹ J. Lust has argued that the LXX preserves the most ancient form of the text. See his "Daniel 7,13 and Septuagint," *ETL* 54 (1978): 62–69.

3. *The Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch*. The Similitudes of Enoch offer important evidence for pre-Christian Jewish interpretation of Dan 7:13–14. Scholars who specialize in Enochic studies have long argued that the Similitudes are Jewish, rather than Christian, in origin and constitute “valuable evidence for the belief in certain circles in the time of Jesus in the Son of Man as a messianic heavenly judge and ruler, and deliverer of the righteous from their oppressors.”³²

Although personally open to a date of composition shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, Suter has admitted that “a clear majority of specialists argues for a date at the turn of the era,”³³ a date early enough for Enoch’s descriptions of the Son of Man to exert an influence on NT Christology. Charlesworth likewise has noted that a date for the Similitudes sometime during the reign of Herod the Great is a conclusion “shared by almost every leading specialist on 1 Enoch or Second Temple Judaism.”³⁴

The Similitudes of Enoch clearly allude to Dan 7:9–10 and 13:14 at several points. The two clearest allusions are 1 En. 46:1 and 47:3:

And there I saw One who had a head of days, and His head was white like wool, and with Him was another being whose countenance had the appearance of a man (1 En. 46:1).

In those days I saw the Head of Days when He seated himself upon the throne of His glory, and the books of the living were opened before Him: and all His host which is in heaven above and His counselors stood before Him (1 En. 47:3).³⁵

Some scholars have interpreted the Son of Man as a reference to Enoch himself.³⁶ Nevertheless, the current scholarly consensus is that the Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch was originally a messianic figure distinct from Enoch. Although the use of the Son of Man title in the Similitudes is clearly dependent on Daniel 7, Collins noted that the Similitudes develop implicit features of Daniel 7 in interesting ways. First, the Similitudes explicitly identify the Son of Man as the Messiah. Second, the Son of Man casts kings down from their thrones and is seated on a throne of glory as judge (62:5; 69:29). Third, the Son of Man seems to be assimilat-

³² Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man*, 15.

³³ David W. Suter, “Enoch in Sheol: Updating the Dating of the Book of Parables,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (ed. Gabriele Boccaccini; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 443.

³⁴ James H. Charlesworth, “Can We Discern the Composition Date of the Parables of Enoch?,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (ed. Gabriele Boccaccini; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 467. Charlesworth has pointed to new evidence for this date which may well be decisive.

³⁵ For a full list of parallels, see Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Son of Man* (WUNT 38; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 101–2.

³⁶ Leslie W. Walck, *The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch and in Matthew* (T&T Clark Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies 7; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 152–54. This view was based on the description of Enoch as “son of man” in 1 En. 71:14. However, the Ethiopic phrase used to describe Enoch is different from the phrases that refer to the Danielic Son of Man. See *OTP* 1:50, note s.

ed to the Deity. For example, 1 En. 48:5 says, “All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him [the Son of Man].” These newer features are a byproduct of a close reading of Daniel 7 that explores all of its implications as well as a mingling of Daniel 7 with texts such as Proverbs 8; Psalm 110; Isa 11:2, 4; and 49:2.³⁷

One of the most interesting developments in the use of the title Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch relates to the poignant references to the Son of Man’s deity. The Parables of Enoch identify the Danielic “ancient of days” with the designation “Lord of the Spirits” which in turn reflects the Hebrew title **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** (Lord of hosts).³⁸ The Parables make numerous references to a special unique name that is possessed by the Lord of the Spirits.³⁹ Sinners deny this name (1 En. 38:2) but the righteous know and praise this name (1 En. 49:7). Charles A. Gieschen has correctly argued: “This ‘name’ of the Lord of the Spirits is self-evident for any Jewish reader; it is **יְהוָה**, the revered Divine Name.”⁴⁰

Amazingly, the Similitudes assign this divine name to the Son of Man. In 1 Enoch 48, a vision of the Son of Man rolls back the clock of the ages and portrays him before the beginning of creation. In that hour before time began, the Lord of the Spirits gave the Son of Man a special name. Isaac’s literal translation (incorporating the literal renderings from the notes) reads, “At that hour, that Son of Man was named by the name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits, the Before-Time; even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was named by the name in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits” (1 En. 48:2–3).

The Parables never specifically identify this name given before time to the Son of Man. Although the Son of Man is identified by various titles such as Chosen One (1 En. 48:6), Messiah (48:10), staff for the righteous (48:4), light of the Gentiles (48:4), no proper name is explicitly mentioned. However, the Parables contain numerous references to the “name of the Lord of the Spirits” and this heavy concentration strongly suggests that the reader was to recognize the Divine Name

³⁷ For the influence of Proverbs 8 and Psalm 110, see Helge S. Kvanvig, “The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 189–93. Some of the features of the Son of Man in the Similitudes appear to be a byproduct of reading the reference to “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7 against the background of the reference to one “whose face was like that of a man” in Dan 10:1–19. For example, the description of the Son of Man as one “whose face was full of grace like that of one of the holy angels,” who “reveals all the hidden storerooms,” and who “will remove the kings and the mighty ones from their seats” (1 En. 46:1–4) appears to allude to Daniel 10. Interestingly, Rev 1:13–15 seems to conflate the two texts in a similar fashion.

³⁸ The title occurs 265 times in the MT. For statistics, linguistic analysis, and theories of origin and meaning, see “**צְבָא**,” *HALOT* 994. The Enochic designation expresses the view that the “hosts” are angelic armies over which God rules.

³⁹ See 1 En. 38:2; 39:7, 9, 14; 40:4, 6; 41:2, 8; 43:4; 45:1, 2, 3; 46:7; 47:2; 48:7; 50:2, 3; 53:6; 55:4; 61:3, 9, 11, 13; 63:7; 67:8.

⁴⁰ C. Gieschen, “The Name of the Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 239. See also the treatment on the use of the Divine Name in first-century Judaism in S. M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev 1:4 in Its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* (WUNT 2/107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 58–122.

YHWH as the name by which the Son of Man was named. Several lines of evidence support this equation.

First, 1 En. 48:6 which immediately follows the description of the naming of the Son of Man adds, “All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him [the Son of Man]; they shall glorify, bless, and sing the name of the Lord of the Spirits.” Gieschen’s seminal essay on this topic concluded, “They will use the name of the Lord of the Spirits in worshiping the Son of Man because *both* possess the same Divine Name.” The author of the Similitudes recognized the implications of the verb “worship” in Dan 7:14 and thus describes all who dwell on earth as falling down and worshiping the Son of Man by the name of the Lord of the Spirits, the Divine Name, YHWH.

Second, 1 Enoch 69 contains a scene in which the Son of Man is enthroned. The righteous glorified God because the name of the Son of Man was revealed to them (1 En. 69:26). Once again, the name is not explicitly mentioned. Nevertheless, this unspoken name becomes readily apparent from the context. The angel Beqa spoke the name to the angel Michael so that he could memorize it and disclose it to God’s people. This name caused God’s people to tremble and was the power behind the oath that was uttered in order to create the heavens, the earth, the seas, the sun, moon, and stars, the winds, thunder, and lightning. First Enoch 69:27 records the response of God’s people to the revelation of this name by which the universe was created, “There came to them a great joy. And they blessed, glorified, and extolled (the Lord) on account of the fact that the name of that (Son of) Man was revealed to them.” This is the climactic scene of the final parable of the book of Similitudes. The dramatic revelation of the name of the Son of Man is a point toward which the narrative has been building since that name was first introduced in 1 Enoch 49. D. C. Olson has argued that this section constitutes a mystical contemplation of the Divine Name.⁴¹

Under the influence of OT texts such as Exod 23:20–22 and Deut 12:21; 14:24, ancient Jewish literature makes frequent reference to a theophanic figure who possesses the Divine Name.⁴² Texts such as the first-century Apocalypse of Abraham and the fifth or sixth century Jewish mystical text 3 Enoch speak of figures such as Metatron or Yahoel as angels who embody the glory of Yahweh and possess the Divine Name. Similarly, Philo of Alexandria identifies the angel of Exod 23:20–22 who bears the name of God as *ὁ λόγος*. The bearer of the Divine Name in first-century Judaism was clearly seen as a divine hypostasis. Early Jewish interpreters assumed that the Son of Man was the embodiment of the glory of

⁴¹ D. C. Olson, *Enoch: A New Translation* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2004), 270–73.

⁴² Note that R. G. Hamerton-Kelly and G. von Rad respectively describe the divine name in Deuteronomy as a “quasi-hypostasis” or state that it “verges closely upon a hypostasis.” See Hamerton-Kelly, *Preexistence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man: A Study of the Idea of Pre-existence in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973), 15–16; von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (trans. D. Stalker; London: SCM, 1953), 37–44.

Yahweh since only this would prevent the worship directed toward him from being idolatrous.⁴³

4. *The Son of Man in 4 Ezra*. Other first-century Jewish texts show that the portrayal of the Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch was by no means idiosyncratic, but rather reflected a common trend in Messianic views in this period. Fourth Ezra was probably written around AD 100.⁴⁴

In the Sixth Vision of the book, the author describes the following dream:

And behold, a wind arose from the sea and stirred up all its waves. And I looked, and behold, this wind made something like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea. And I looked, and behold, that man flew with the clouds of heaven; and wherever he turned his face to look, everything under his gaze trembled, and whenever his voice issued from his mouth, all who heard his voice melted as wax melts when it feels the fire.⁴⁵

Most scholars regard the reference to the man flying on the clouds as an allusion to Daniel 7. The description of this man and the interpretation of the vision that immediately follows it parallel the Similitudes by portraying the Son of Man as a “preexistent, transcendent figure whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages.”⁴⁶ Collins listed six points of overlap in the descriptions of the Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch and 4 Ezra. First, both documents assume that the Son of Man is an individual rather than a collective symbol. Second, both documents identify the Son of Man as the Messiah. Third, both documents describe the Son of Man as preexistent. Fourth, since Enoch's Son of Man sits on the throne of glory and Ezra's Son of Man is portrayed in the theophanic terms of the divine warrior, both documents apply imagery to the Son of Man that was normally reserved for Yahweh alone. Fifth, both documents describe the Son of Man as the agent of the destruction of the wicked. Sixth, both seem to portray the Son of Man as Isaiah's “servant of the Lord.”

Collins rightly concluded:

The correspondences between 4 Ezra and the Similitudes point to common assumptions about the interpretation of Daniel 7 in first century Judaism. ... There is no evidence of influence between the Similitudes and 4 Ezra, and they were certainly not products of a single group. It is reasonable to suppose that their common assumptions were also shared by others in first-century Judaism. Whether these common assumptions amount to a “Son of Man” concept is evidently a matter of definition, but we may at least conclude that anyone in the late first century who spoke of one in human form riding on the clouds, or appearing with an Ancient of Days, or in any terms of Daniel 7, would evoke a

⁴³ See the immensely helpful treatment in Gieschen, “Name of the Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” 242–49.

⁴⁴ See B. M. Metzger, “Fourth Book of Ezra,” *OTP* 1:520.

⁴⁵ Collins suggested, based on the reading of the Syriac text, that the original text described the man from the sea as **בר אנשא** or **בן אדם**.

⁴⁶ Collins, “Son of Man in First-Century Judaism,” 464.

figure with distinct traits which go beyond what was explicit in the text of Daniel's vision.⁴⁷

5. *The Son of Man in rabbinic literature.* The Babylonian Talmud helpfully illustrates various views of the interpretation of Son of Man vision of Daniel 7 in rabbinic Judaism. *B. Sanh.* 98a contains an attempt to harmonize several descriptions of the coming of the Messiah (identified by the titles "Son of David," "Redeemer," and "Son of Man") in OT prophecy that appear contradictory. Among the prophecies in tension were Dan 7:13, "And behold one like a Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven," and Zech 9:7, "Behold your king comes to you ... lowly and riding on a donkey." R. Joshua b. Levi resolved the tension by arguing that if the Israelites were characterized by righteousness, then the Messiah's coming would be glorious (with the clouds of heaven); but if the Israelites were wicked, then the Messiah's coming would be lowly (riding on a donkey). R. Joshua b. Levi was a Palestinian rabbi of the early third century. The discussion suggests that Jewish interpreters of the era generally regarded the Son of Man as the Messiah.

More importantly, the Talmud also demonstrates that both early Christianity and some representatives of rabbinic Judaism interpreted the visions of Daniel 7 in a manner that conferred prerogatives of deity to the Son of Man. *B. Sanh.* 38b contains a discussion of texts which the minim, the heretics or Christians, used to support their heresy of plurality within the Godhead and the deity of the Messiah. Most of the texts discussed involve cases in which God is spoken of in both the singular and the plural number (Gen 1:26–27; 11:5–7; 35:3–7; Deut 4:7; 2 Sam 7:23). The final passage in the list is Dan 7:9: "As I watched, thrones (plural) were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne (singular)." The text raises the obvious question, if the Ancient of Days occupied only one of the thrones, for whom was the other throne(s) intended? The ensuing Talmudic discussion suggests that the rabbis found this text particularly perplexing and not as easily dismissed as other texts which seemed to suggest both the plurality and oneness of Deity. The initial response to the dilemma appeals to the Tannaim and concludes that the plural thrones referred to two thrones of which one was for the Ancient of Days and the other was for David. Evidently the rabbis saw the interrelationship between the Ancient of Days vision and the Son of Man vision and equated the Son of Man with the Davidic Messiah.

The Talmud traces this opinion to R. Aqiba, the famous rabbi of the third generation of the Tannaim associated with the Bar Kokhba rebellion. This earliest documented rabbinic opinion was unacceptable to the rabbis of later generations. They recognized that such an interpretation supported the claims of the minim who insisted on the deity of the Messiah since it assigned the Messiah a throne alongside that of the Ancient of Days himself. The rabbinic discussion shows two alternative views of R. Aqiba's contemporaries. R. Jose saw the two thrones as occupied by the Ancient of Days at different times. He will occupy one throne when he is dispensing just judgment on the wicked and other when he is exercising mercy

⁴⁷ Collins, "Son of Man in First-Century Judaism," 465–66; see also 449.

or bestowing reward on the righteous. R. Eleazar b. Azariah argued that the Ancient of Days occupied both thrones at once. One throne serves as his seat and the other as his footstool. Both rabbis negatively reacted to the earlier interpretation of R. Aqiba because they viewed his claim that the Davidic Messiah was enthroned beside the Ancient of Days as blasphemous. Thus Jose asked Aqiba, "How long are you going to treat in a profane way the Presence of God?" The Talmud claims that R. Jose succeeded in winning Aqiba over to his opinion.

The Talmud exhibits concern among the rabbis that the earliest rabbinic interpretation of Daniel 7 granted the Messiah a quasi-divine status. The question "Did he (Aqiba) accept this answer (the alternative interpretation of R. Jose) or not?" followed by "Come and see" shows that the rabbis were troubled by the fact that the earliest known rabbinic interpretation of Daniel 7 viewed the messianic Son of Man as enthroned alongside the Ancient of Days and that it was very important to demonstrate that Aqiba subsequently abandoned that view. The discussion demonstrates that even in the early second century, despite the troublesome claims of the minim, some Jewish teachers continued to affirm that Daniel 7 was messianic and that the Messiah was enthroned with the Ancient of Days in a manner that some critics found blasphemous because it appeared to present him as Yahweh's coequal.⁴⁸

III. JESUS'S AFFIRMATION OF THE DEITY OF THE SON OF MAN

Mark, followed by Matthew and Luke, has Jesus affirm the deity of the Son of Man through a bold assertion. In Mark 2:28, Jesus claimed that the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. This claim appears to enjoy multiple independent attestation. In their parallels, Matthew (12:8) and Luke (6:5) revise the Markan statement in identical ways. Both Matthew and Luke omit Mark 2:27. Both omit the ascensive *καί*. Both shift the words "of the Sabbath" from the end of the sentence and place it between "is" (*ἐστίν*) and "the Son of Man." One cannot argue that Matthew and Luke have simply improved Mark's style and word order in similar ways. Even after their adaptations of Mark, the resulting Greek word order is awkward and unusual. One would have expected Matthew and Luke to place *τοῦ σαββάτου* immediately after *κύριος* rather than separating them with *ἐστίν*. This has led several scholars to suggest some sort of dependency between Luke and Matthew other than a mutual dependence on Mark. R. Gundry argued that the close similarity between Matthew and Luke here resulted from Luke's dependence on Matthew.⁴⁹ H. Hübner argued

⁴⁸ Ehrman overlooks this important evidence. He argues that since neither the claim to be the Messiah nor the claim that the Son of Man was soon to arrive were considered blasphemous, Mark's account of the trial must not accurately record the legal proceedings. See *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet*, 220–21. He later admits: "One explanation for Mark's narrative is that since Mark understood that Jesus was himself the Son of Man, he assumed that the high priest inferred this as well, and so thought that Jesus was claiming to be the divine judge of the earth, a claim that he found blasphemous." However, Ehrman claims that this does not make sense as something that "actually happened when Jesus was confronted by the Jewish high priest" (252).

⁴⁹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 224–25.

more convincingly that Matthew and Luke were influenced by an overlapping Q tradition.⁵⁰ It is also possible that Matthew and Luke independently preserve a well-known oral tradition that overlapped with Mark.⁵¹

Unless one is willing to jettison the accepted theory of the literary relationships between the Gospels, it appears that multiple independent attestation supports Jesus's identification of the Son of Man as the Lord of the Sabbath.⁵² Others like M. Casey have affirmed the early date and authenticity of the saying on other grounds. Although he treated the saying as Marcan, he noted that the narrative assumes practices from Jewish law, such as taking Peah, reaping grain left for the poor at the borders of a field.⁵³

Some scholars argue that since Jesus prefaced this comment with the words, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," "Son of Man" is in parallel with "man" and thus means merely "human being," a usage paralleled in Mark 3:28. Consequently, the logion is an allusion to Genesis 1–2 and argues that since man was created before the Sabbath, he is lord of both creation and the Sabbath. In this interpretation, the saying has no serious Christological implications.⁵⁴

Several problems plague this interpretation. First, Matthew and Luke both completely omit Mark 2:27 which suggests that neither evangelist saw it as the key to understanding the statement that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Second, the alleged parallel in Mark 3:28 is not a true parallel. When Jesus spoke of humanity generically in Mark 3:28, he used the plural "the sons of men." The shift in number seems intended to distinguish between two different uses of the phrase.⁵⁵ Third, in Mark 2:28 ὥστε likely draws a conclusion from the entire preceding discussion and not just the immediately preceding statement. In the preceding discussion, Jesus appealed to the behavior of David and his companions as justification for his

⁵⁰ H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition* (Witten: Luther, 1973), 113–23.

⁵¹ A third alternative, that the similarity between Matthew and Luke is a product of scribal assimilation, is less likely. Although some later manuscripts do conform the Luke 6:5 to Mark 2:28 (A L D Q Y), the earliest manuscripts and versions strongly support the reading in the UBS⁵ which received a B rating.

⁵² Several scholars have suggested that Mark 2:28 was a Marcan addendum to Jesus's words. See Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 485. However, several features of the text challenge this theory. First, Luke clearly regarded the statement as a logion of Jesus (Luke 6:5) since he introduced the saying with the words "And he [Jesus] said to them." Second, Mark did not elsewhere introduce an addendum to Jesus's words with a clause beginning with ὥστε. Only in Mark 10:8 does ὥστε immediately follow words of Jesus. There too the context suggests that Jesus is drawing an inference from his own words rather than that Mark is providing commentary. Matthew 19:6 clearly interprets the words as those of Jesus.

⁵³ See Casey, *The Solution to the Son of Man Problem*, 122. Casey argued for the authenticity of the saying on the grounds that it used an Aramaic idiom. On the use of allusions to Jewish law to establish the date of Gospel traditions, see J. G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (JSNTSup 266; London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Sabino Chialà, "The Son of Man: The Evolution of an Expression," in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 165.

⁵⁵ Based on Mark 3:28, if Mark 2:28 were generic, one would have expected "the sons of men are lords over the Sabbath." The singular "the man" is likely a reference to Adam. Adam would not be appropriately described as a son of man. Thus an argument that the singular "the man" prompted the singular "the son of man" is faulty.

behavior and that of his disciples in a manner which identified him with King David. In Matthew's parallel, Jesus asserts he and his disciples have authority to pick grain on the Sabbath because "something greater than the temple is here." Consequently, most scholars regard the saying as an expression of Jesus's personal authority over the Sabbath due to his identity as the Son of Man.⁵⁶

What though does such a title mean? Many scholars simply interpret "Lord" as a title of authority so that "Lord of the Sabbath" simply means that Jesus or humanity in general has authority over the Sabbath. Casey, for example, followed Wellhausen in arguing that the original Aramaic term translated by *κύριος* was *שליט* which merely means "master." He claimed that the Pharisees had used this very word in the question regarding the Sabbath that they had posed to Jesus and in Jesus's first argument related to the behavior of David and his men. Such an argument is very precarious, however, since no Greek equivalent to this Aramaic term appears earlier in the pericope.⁵⁷ Meyer's reconstruction using *מרא* is much more likely.⁵⁸ This is the term that the Syriac versions recognized as the equivalent of *κύριος*. This term more closely overlaps with the potential range in meaning for the Greek term as well.

However, Jesus's original Jewish audience would likely have suspected that the title implied far more than mere human authority. Saldarini has suggested that the title is an allusion to Lev 23:3, "a Sabbath to the Lord," in which Lord is a reference to Yahweh who instituted and commanded the Sabbath.⁵⁹ This title would likely have evoked memories of the Decalogue:

Remember to dedicate the Sabbath day: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

The implications of this claim are staggering. R. T. France observed:

Not only is the Son of Man greater than David and the temple, but he is "Lord" of the institution which is traced in the OT to God's direct command (Gen 2:3), enshrined in the Decalogue which is the central codification of God's requirements for his people, and described by God as "my Sabbath" (Exod 31:13; Lev 19:3,30; Isa 56:4, etc.; cf. the recurrent phrase "a Sabbath to/for Yahweh," Exod 16:23; 20:10; 35:2, etc.). Against that background to speak of humanity in general as "lord of the Sabbath" would be unthinkable; to speak of an individual

⁵⁶ See Hamerton-Kelly, *Preexistence*, 63; H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 131.

⁵⁷ Casey, *The Son of Man*, 124.

⁵⁸ A. Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache: Das galiläische Aramäisch in seiner Bedeutung für die Erklärung der Reden Jesu und der Evangelien überhaupt* (Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1896), 93.

⁵⁹ A. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 129.

human being as such is to make the most extraordinary claim to an authority on a par with that of God himself.⁶⁰

This logion, apparently found in both Mark and Q, describes the Son of Man as divine. It coheres with logia from the triple tradition in which the Son of Man is portrayed as a divine figure. In Mark 2:1–12 (Matt 9:1–8 // Luke 5:17–26) Jesus pronounced the forgiveness of the paralytic's sins. The scribes view the pronouncement as blasphemous since only God has the authority to forgive sins. Jesus replied that the Son of Man had authority to forgive sins. In context, this statement clearly assigns a divine prerogative to the Son of Man. Jesus's use of the title Son of Man and the high priest's charge of blasphemy also suggests that Jesus put the Son of Man on a par with God himself (Mark 14:53–65 // Matt 26:57–68 // Luke 22:54–71).

IV. JESUS'S USE OF THE TITLE SON OF MAN AS A SELF-DESCRIPTION

Ehrman largely agrees with the discussion of the title Son of Man above. We part ways, however, on the matter of whether Jesus utilized the epithet Son of Man as a self-description. Ehrman suggests that Jesus's use of the title Son of Man was always intended to refer to another person. Jesus carefully and intentionally distinguished himself from the Son of Man.⁶¹ Although Ehrman denied that Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man, he affirmed that Jesus, at least privately, claimed to be the Messiah in a future, apocalyptic sense.⁶²

Since Bultmann, numerous scholars have asserted that Jesus never employed the title Son of Man of himself.⁶³ The claim that Jesus identified himself as a future, apocalyptic Messiah, but did not consider himself to be the Son of Man is difficult to sustain. Even as Bultmann's view was becoming popular, Richard Longenecker objected:

But though this line of argument is highly defensible on its own presuppositions, it runs roughshod over *prima facie* interpretations of the evidence and bases itself upon hypothetical reconstructions in favor of a more normal reading of the data. We must not deny that there were theological motives and tendencies at work in the composition of the Gospels, so that the reporting of the words of Jesus was conditioned in each case by the author's background, interests, purpose, and au-

⁶⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 462–63.

⁶¹ Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 159; idem, *How Jesus Became God*, 107.

⁶² Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 118–24; idem, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 169–71, 233. Ehrman later states that these views are “nothing particularly new or unusual.” They are “fairly standard fare,” the view of the “majority of scholars in North America and Europe” for about a century, and “the views taught in leading institutions of higher learning in the country.”

⁶³ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM, 1952), 1:29–31, 49. Under Bultmann's influence, this view became widely accepted in the mid-twentieth century. See also H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. D. M. Barton; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965); Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man*; F. C. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 13–53; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 34–43.

dience. But we handle the evidence much too loosely if we interpret the records as indicating the exact reverse of what they purport.⁶⁴

Although the Son of Man title is typically associated with the Synoptic Gospels, the Jesus of the Gospel of John utilizes the title as well. In John 9:35, for example, Jesus asked the man born blind, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The blind man replied, "Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus replied, "He is the One speaking to you," thereby clearly identifying himself as the Son of Man.⁶⁵

The evidence from John should not be disregarded as a late Christological development. John merely explicates what is already implicit in the Synoptic tradition. For example, Q material portrays Jesus as the Son of Man. Q 7:34 says, "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say: 'Behold, a gluttonous and drunken man, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" Compelling evidence exists for ascribing this logion from Matt 11:19 // Luke 7:34 to Q. The logion does not appear in Mark and the verbal parallels between Matthew and Luke here are striking. Matthew and Luke merely differ in the tense of the verb *ἔρχομαι* (Matthew: *ἦλθεν*; Luke: *ἐλήλυθεν*), the person of the verb *λέγω* (Matthew: *λέγουσιν*; Luke: *λέγετε*), and in one instance of word order (Matthew: *τελωνῶν φίλος*; Luke: *φίλος τελωνῶν*).⁶⁶ The use of the aorist tense in Matthew and the perfect tense in Luke to describe the coming of the Son of Man precludes interpreting the statement as a reference to the future coming of a distinct apocalyptic figure. The description of the Son of Man as a friend of tax collectors and sinners comports with descriptions of Jesus in texts like Mark 2:16, Matt 9:11, and Luke 15:2. Thus the logion strongly suggests that Jesus viewed the Pharisee's indictment of his own friendship with sinners as a criticism of the Son of Man himself and in a manner that equates Jesus with the Son of Man.

L material also contains a stark and explicit statement in which Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man. The triple tradition contains a reference to Judas's kiss of betrayal. Both Matthew and Luke add to Mark Jesus's verbal response. In Matt 26:50, Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came here to do." However, in Luke 22:48, Jesus replied, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Since the previous verse stated that "he [Judas] drew near to Jesus so he could kiss him," interpreting Jesus's reference to the Son of Man as anything other than a self-identification seems strained. Carsten Colpe is probably correct in his assertion that the saying belongs to Luke's "special source," is "pre-Lucan," and is integral to Luke 22:21.⁶⁷ Of the six references to the Son of Man unique to Luke's Gospel,

⁶⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, "'Son of Man' as a Self-Designation of Jesus," *JETS* 12 (1969): 151–58.

⁶⁵ See also John 12:34 in which the question of the crowd implies that the terms Messiah and "Son of Man" were equated.

⁶⁶ See James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffman, and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 146.

⁶⁷ See Colpe, "ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου," *TDNT* 8:446–47. Others have argued that the saying is Luke's substitution for Mark 14:41 which was paralleled in Matt 26:45 but otherwise omitted by Luke. See Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man*, 80.

two definitely and another likely refer to Jesus in context (see Luke 19:10 and especially 24:7).

The triple tradition identifies Jesus as the Son of Man. In Mark 2:10 // Matt 9:6 // Luke 5:24, Jesus demonstrated that the Son of Man had authority to forgive sins on earth by healing the paralytic. If he had intended to distinguish himself from the Son of Man, one would have expected him to heal the paralytic in the name of the Son of Man. Instead, Jesus exclaimed, "I say to you, get up and walk." The words "I say to you" (Mark 2:11 // Luke 5:24) seem to emphasize that Jesus healed the paralytic by his own authority.⁶⁸ Consequently, Jesus's authority to heal expressed the Son of Man's authority to forgive in a manner that implies that Jesus is the Son of Man.

The passion predictions of the triple tradition more explicitly identify Jesus as the Son of Man. For example, Mark 8:31 (Matt 16:21 // Luke 9:22) says, "He [Jesus] began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer, and to be tried by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and to die, and to rise again after three days." Jesus made similar predictions in Mark 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33; 14:21, 41 (and parallels). These predicted events are precisely those experienced by Jesus in the passion and resurrection narratives. It is hard to imagine the original readers of the Gospels identifying the Son of Man as anyone other than Jesus. This is definitely the way in which the evangelists interpreted the predictions. Matthew's adaptation of Mark 8:31 contains one revision that is particularly illuminating. Rather than stating that Jesus said that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer, like Mark and Luke recorded, Matthew wrote that Jesus said it was necessary for *him* (αὐτόν) "to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes." In this grammatical context, the antecedent of the third person pronoun is definitely "Jesus." Matthew is so confident of the Son of Man's identity as Jesus that he does not hesitate to replace the title with other personal references to Jesus. This phenomenon is not restricted to this text. Similar substitutions appear in Matthew's revision of Q (Matt 5:11 // Luke 6:22 and Matt 10:32–33 // Luke 12:8–9). At least three times Matthew substitutes pronouns referring to Jesus for references to the Son of Man in Mark or Q in a manner that clearly shows that these early interpreters of the Jesus tradition believed that "Son of Man" was Jesus's preferred title for himself.

Jesus's identity as the Son of Man in the Synoptic tradition is clearly asserted at his hearing before the Sanhedrin. The high priest's interrogation climaxed with this question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus replied, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."⁶⁹ The high priest responded by tearing his robes and charging Jesus with blasphemy. To claim to be the Messiah was not considered blasphemous since there were different conceptions of the Messiah and not all held him to be divine. To claim to be the Son of the Blessed One was not blas-

⁶⁸ Cf. Mark 5:41

⁶⁹ Mark 14:61–62 (par. Matt 26:63–64; Luke 22:67–70).

phemous since, under the influence of Ps 2:7, this might be interpreted as merely confirming that Jesus was a messianic claimant. The charge of blasphemy arose because Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and then portrayed the Messiah in terms of the Daniel 7 Son of Man vision which implied that the Messiah was divine. Although the title Son of Man and the reference to his coming on the clouds of heaven are clearly drawn from Daniel 7, the words “seated at the right hand of the Power” are drawn from Ps 110:1. Jesus’s rationale for conflating these two texts is not difficult to discern. In Dan 7:9, the Ancient of Days vision begins with the statement “thrones (plural) were set in place and the Ancient of Days took His seat.” The Ancient of Days clearly occupies one of the thrones. Like R. Aqiba of a later generation, Jesus assumed that the other throne was reserved for the Son of Man who was escorted before the Ancient of Days and then given “authority to rule” alongside Him. Like the later rabbinic opinion preserved in the Talmud, the Sanhedrin regarded the interpretation that saw the Son of Man as enthroned beside the Ancient of Days as a “profaning of the divine presence.” In the view of the judges of the Council, for Jesus to identify himself as that Son of Man who would be enthroned beside the Ancient of Days as his coequal was more than profane; it was blasphemy at its very worst.

The criterion of multiple independent attestation strongly supports the claim that Jesus viewed himself as the Son of Man. Statements equating Jesus as the Son of Man appear in Mark, Q, M, L, and John, all five of the earliest Gospel sources affirmed by the majority of scholars. Thus, the claim that Jesus distinguished himself from the Son of Man seems to amount to special pleading.

Ehrman acknowledges that in some Jewish traditions, the Messiah was viewed as a divine deliverer and cosmic judge. He further acknowledges that Jesus and his earliest followers belonged to this tradition.⁷⁰ Claiming that Jesus identified himself as a futuristic apocalyptic Messiah but distinguished himself from the Son of Man seems to lack proper sensitivity to the use of these titles in Second Temple Judaism. First Enoch 48 specifically identifies the Danielic Son of Man as the Chosen One, the Elect One, the staff for the righteous, the light for the Gentiles, the Messiah.⁷¹

Although 4 Ezra does not use the title Messiah to describe the one with the appearance of a man who flew with the clouds of heaven, it portrays him as reconstituting the scattered tribes of Israel, punishing the wicked, and ruling from Mt.

⁷⁰ “Especially in the apocalyptic tradition, within which Jesus and his followers stood, it was sometimes thought that the future savior would not be merely an earthly king. He would be a cosmic judge of the earth, sent from God to overthrow the forces of evil with a show of strength. This divine figure was called a variety of things in different texts, including ‘the Son of Man’ (based on a reading of Daniel 7:13–14).” Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 231.

⁷¹ Charlesworth, “Can We Discern the Composition Date of the Parables of Enoch?” 467, appropriately stated, “The Book of Parables (1 Enoch 37–71) appears to be a Jewish work that antedates Jesus, and the author seems to imagine a connection between the Messiah, the Righteous One, and the Son of Man. The work most likely took shape in Galilee, not far from where Jesus centered his ministry. He, thus, could have been influenced by this writing or the traditions preserved in the Parables of Enoch. In this case, his own self-understanding may have been shaped by the relationship between the Son of Man and the Messiah that is found only in the Parables in Enoch.”

Zion and applies other texts and titles to him that are clearly Messianic in nature. Finally, R. Aqiba of the early second century is representative of a tradition within rabbinic Judaism that identified the Son of Man as the Messiah. If Jesus intended to distinguish the Messiah from the Son of Man, one would have expected further explanation of this unusual, and as far as one can tell based on the extant evidence, unprecedented view.

V. CONCLUSION

Ehrman acknowledges that Jesus viewed himself as the Messiah, that he taught about the Son of Man, and that he viewed the Son of Man as divine. A consistent application of the criteria of authenticity which Ehrman sees as the key to reconstructing the historical Jesus further supports the claim that Jesus regarded himself as the Son of Man and hence divine. Consequently, the fourth option, “legend,” that Ehrman added to Lewis’s trilogy “Lord, liar, or lunatic,” is not a viable option. Jesus claimed to be Lord, and an evaluation of his identity and character must be made in light of that stunning claim. Thus one may say of the “legend” option exactly what Lewis wrote about the “good moral teacher” option, “He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”