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On the Ascension/Coming of the Son of Man

In all 4 gospels, Jesus' favorite way to refer to himself is "the Son of Man." He uses it 80 times. He obviously thought this title was important for helping people understand who he was and what he was all about. So it's surprising that we spend so little time thinking about what it means. When I look deeper into it, I find that it adds a profound dimension of meaning to our understanding of Jesus' mission.

So let's have a quick Bible study...

In the earliest biblical writings, "son of man" is just a way of referring to humans in general. For example: "*What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?*" (Psalm 8.4). It is also a title for an Israelite king being crowned: "*Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself*" (Psalm 80.17). Hebrew tradition carries the idea that "son of man" can also refer to the nation of Israel, in their role as representatives of the whole human race.

"Son of man" is how Yahweh refers to Ezekiel in his role as the prophet who will speak judgment to Israel. This is the most common usage in the Bible, used 93 times. "*Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel: The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land*" (Ezekiel 7.2). "*Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear*" (12.2). The son of man is the one who especially speaks judgment against the Temple (21.2) and "*to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves?*" (34.2).

Daniel later takes up the term to describe his vision of a human figure who rides the clouds from earth to heaven. Thus entering Yahweh's presence, this son of man receives an everlasting kingdom and is worshipped by all people (Daniel 7.13-14).

So to sum up the Old Testament concept: The Son of Man is the entire human race, especially as represented by the nation of Israel and embodied in a singular human person. This person is seen moving from earth to heaven, in order to join Yahweh in ruling and being worshipped. It is also worth noting that, on his trip to heaven, he rides on the clouds -- an image of divine judgment (Isaiah 18.1).

This is the Son of Man, and this is the title Jesus applies to himself 80 times in the gospels. He says that all things will be renewed when the Son of Man arrives at his throne in heaven (Matt 19.28). Daniel's prophecy will be fulfilled in the generation to whom Jesus was speaking; some of those alive then would see the Son of Man riding the clouds from earth to heaven, and this would mean judgment against Israel (Matt 16.28; 24.30,34). "*Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man*" was fulfilled as a result of Jesus entering Jerusalem (Luke 18.31).

Jesus associates Daniel's prophecy with what will occur after his own death (Luke 22.69). Mark associates Daniel's prophecy with the moment of Jesus' ascension (Mark 16.19). Jesus indicates that his "*coming on the clouds*" is to be seen together with his sitting down at Yahweh's right hand (Matt 26.64). After the ascension, Stephen sees with his own eyes that Daniel's prophecy has been fulfilled (Acts 7.56). The ascended Son of Man is later depicted as being not far away but "among" his

churches (Revelation 1.13).

Okay, so what do we learn here about how Jesus saw his mission?

That he acted as the representative of all the “sons of men” (all humanity).

That his actions included and implicated all the “sons of men.”

That his mission would involve movement from earth to heaven.

That this movement would vindicate him over those who oppose him.

That this movement would result in the suffering of those who oppose him.

That he himself absorbed the brunt of this suffering.

That all of this came to pass during the lifetimes of some in his original audience.

That his coming and his presence are tightly linked realities.

Christ is ascended. Christ is with us. Christ is come. Christ is coming. Amen.

~ John Stonecypher