

PARACLETE

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The Son of Man

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Two and one-half years into His public ministry, Jesus took His apostles on a northern retreat to **Caesarea Philippi**, at the base of the nearly-10,000-foot-high Mount Hermon (Matthew 16:13ff.). Surprisingly, that late in His ministry the question was still, “*Who is this Son of Man*” (John 12:34). Jesus asked His disciples, “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*” The disciples’ answer revealed that people were still confused about Jesus’ identity (Matthew 16:14).

To avoid the popular, Jewish, firm commitment to a political and nationalistic Messianic hope, Jesus avoided widespread use of the title of “**Messiah**” (or Christ) and “**Son of David**.” These titles would tend to stoke insurrection against Rome by the masses, as illustrated by their response at the feeding of the 5,000: “*This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world... they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king...*” (John 6:14-15).

Incognito (so to speak)

Based on the Old Testament prophecies, the Jews were expecting several personages who were yet to come into history. Some of these are indicated when they sought John the Baptist’s



The Banias Waterfall near Caesarea Philippi is fed by a spring at the base of Mt. Hermon, which is the principle source of the Jordan River (public domain).



“Caesarea Philippi (Banias)” is a painting by American artist Harry Fenn (1845–1911) (public domain).

identity: “*And they asked him, and said to him, ‘Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the **Christ**, nor **Elijah**, nor the **Prophet?**’*” (John 1:25, emphasis added). Isaiah identified yet another person: “*Behold, My **Servant**, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him...*” (Isaiah 42:1, emphasis added). Since the Jews already had expectations, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations associated with these persons, Jesus was reluctant to identify Himself as any of them. Then who is He?

There was an additional Old Testament figure who was yet to come who was less set and understood in the minds of the Jewish leadership and the common people: “*...One like a **Son of Man** was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him*” (Daniel 7:13, emphasis added). This was the more ambiguous title, “**Son of Man**,” which Jesus chose to use repeatedly and exclusively for Himself throughout the Gospels.

Fully Revealed

Jesus had another reason to choose “**Son of Man**.” It was “empty” of Jewish expectations and misconceptions. During His ministry, then, Jesus could progressively fill it with meaning and the fullest expression of who He is. For

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Did You Know?

The Ibex Ascends

There are several species of wild goats of the genus *Capra* living in Israel and in the mountainous regions of Europe, Southwest Asia, and Northeast Africa (French “*bouquetin*”; Italian “*stambecco*”; and Alpine “*steinbock*”). The ibex is translated as “mountain goats” in the Bible, but it is not to be confused with the North American and Alaskan wild variety which is in a different genus *Oreamnos*.



The name ibex (Hebrew “*Yael*,” meaning literally, “**to ascend**”) aptly describes its agility in climbing mountain terrain. It is mentioned at least four times in the Old Testament. In Job 39:1, God asks, “*Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?*” The literal Hebrew is “goats of the rock” and is a reference to the ibex. In I Samuel 24:2, Saul pursued David to the cliffs at Ein Gedi overlooking the Dead Sea, “*near the Craggs of the Wild Goats*” [Ibex]. Since the ibex was permitted for food in the Jewish dietary law (Deuteronomy 14:5), they were hunted to near extinction by the early twentieth century. As a result of conservation measures, its population has again “ascended,” and ibex again roam the Negev and Judean deserts by the thousands.

Male ibexes are easily identified by their large, semicircular, knotty horns



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example, during His first two years of ministry, he incorporated the personages of the **Prophet** (John 7:16ff.) and the **Messiah** (Luke 4:17-21) into His identity as the Son of Man. Six months before His crucifixion, He added the **Suffering Servant** (Matthew 20:18-19; Isaiah 53). In the final week, He included His role as eschatological **king** (Matthew 24:29-31; 25:31ff.). **Over His three and one-half years of ministry, Jesus had incorporated every prophetic personage expected by the Jews (except Elijah) into a single identity – the Son of Man. He was the fulfillment of them all. That is who He is!**

Thus, the Son of Man had the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7-12) and was Lord even of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). The Son of Man will “*be delivered up for crucifixion*” (Matthew 26:2) and will rise from the dead (17:9). He will return with glory and be the judge of all and establish His kingdom (Matthew 16:27-28). Jesus’ entire life and ministry was as the Son of Man.



“The Son of Man and the seven lampstands,” from the Book of Revelation in the 11th-century Bamberg Apocalypse (public domain).

The God-Man

Heretical groups have arisen throughout history claiming either that Jesus was only “spirit” but not a physical human being; or the opposite, He was human but not really a divine being. Jesus’ identity as the Son of Man refutes both errors. First, the very title points to His humanity, as the Scripture says, “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us...*” (John 1:14); and “[*W*hen the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law...” (Galatians 4:4); and the “*last Adam*” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

On the other hand, the biblical ori-

gin of the title, “Son of Man,” was of a unique Divine Being:

...*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 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*” (Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus identified Himself with this Divine Son of Man at His trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin: “...*I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN*” (Matthew 26:64). The high priest knew immediately this was a claim to be God (v. 65).

Only months before His death, Jesus put the question of His identity before the Twelve: “*Who do you say I [the Son of Man] am?*” What deep satisfaction it must have been for Jesus to hear Peter’s confession, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” (Matthew 16:15-16). **Yes, He is the man they had come to know and love. But He is much more than that. He is the Messiah and the very Son of God – the God-Man!**

IN THE NEWS

It’s the Law!

Louisiana became the first state in more than forty years to require public schools and universities to display the Ten Commandments. Under the new statute, by January 1, 2025, a framed display at least eleven by fourteen inches in size with “large, easily readable font” must be on display in every public school building and classroom, from kindergarten to college. State representative Dodie Horton sponsored the bill with the motivation to “Get God’s moral standard back in front of our children, because right now, they don’t



seem to have a standard.” Rather than celebrate the potential for good among the youth, Horton reports that she has “never known this level of evil attacks” from civil rights groups and the political left. Christians everywhere should be praying for future favorable court rulings related to the lawsuits this legislation has generated.

Will this law be allowed to stand?

The US Supreme Court, in its 1980 decision (Stone v. Graham, 449 U.S. 39) said, in part,

The preeminent purpose of posting the Ten Commandments, which do not confine themselves to arguably secular matters, is plainly religious in nature, and the posting serves no constitutional educational function... [as would be allowed for studying the Bible for “history, civilization, ethics, comparative religion, or the like”].... If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause.

Source: “Thou shalt put them on display,” *World Magazine*, Aug. 2024, pp. 110-111. Online record of Supreme Court cases, Stone v. Graham, 449 U.S. 39 (1980), <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/449/39/>, accessed 9/24/2024.

Did You Know?

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and black beards. They are larger than domesticated goats, often weighing 250-300 pounds. These majestic creatures appear in many artistic representations. Proverbs 5:19 identifies “*a graceful doe*” (Hebrew “*yaalah*” = Ibex) as a metaphor for the desirability of a youthful wife. Ancient Egyptians considered the ibex a good luck charm and symbol of renewal. In biblical times their skin was used to make parchment for writing.

Source: “Ibex,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Summer 2023, p. 68.

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