

Some notes on the phrase “Son of Man.”

From Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet*, pages 36-67:

There is one parallel that has exercised the experts more than all the others put together, and that is the puzzling relationship between Enoch and the Son of Man. No question has been more diligently discussed in the journals than the identity of the son of Man; few scholars can resist the temptation of pointing out with magisterial ease just who he is, but with little or no agreement among themselves. Aside from Jesus, it is Enoch who of all the candidates lays by far the most convincing and challenging claim to the Son of Man title “as teacher, wise one, advocate, prophet, ideal man, bringer of salvation, revealer of hidden mysteries, etc.” The key to the identification as R. Otto sees it is that Christ “lived and preached in the role and in the name of the Son of Man, just as Enoch also in his preaching was a functionary of the Son of Man and his Righteousness.” In 1 Enoch 37:71, “Enoch has become the eschatological Saviour himself, the ideal of the pious community,” officially designated as the “Son of Man.” Though earlier scholars were disturbed by the outright identity of the two (R. H. Charles deliberately alters the ancient text to avoid it), their identity was fully recognized by ancient theologians; indeed, the Christian “tendency to identify Adam in all his characteristics with Jesus, who similarly is represented as ‘The Perfect Man,’” matches the practice of identifying Enoch also with Adam. Eusebius states the case thus: “The Son of Man and the Son of Adam are the same thing, so that Adam and Enosh are the same; carnal (sarkikon) through Adam, rational (logikon) through Enosh.” He also makes it perfectly clear that by Enosh he means Enoch: “The Hebrews say that Enosh not Adam was the first true man. . . . He ‘was not found’ [said only of Enoch] means that truly wise men are hard to find. He withdrew from the world of affairs and thereby became the Friend of God [cf. Abraham]. The Hebrews call him ‘The Friend,’ signifying thereby the favor (charin) of God.” For the Mandaeans, the Son of Man is necessarily the Son of God, “for he is Enosh, the first man created,” in the direct image of God.

In the intertestamental period, “the Son of Man tradition [was] in a fluid state and could be adapted to any Messianic Figure.” The individual is unique, but the type can be shared. Thus in the Dead Sea Scrolls Michael is the Son of Man, but for that matter so is Melchizedek. “The fact that the prophets spoke in the person of God or Christ was a common observation,” as Rendell Harris pointed out. “It [was] inevitable that this impersonation should cause difficulties of interpretation.” Impersonation? Was it not enough to be the agent without actual impersonation? Time and again when we think we have discovered an overlooked “Enoch figure,” it turns out that the ancient author was quite aware of the parallel. Thus Zerubbabel or Paul or Rabbi Ishmael or Isaiah in their heavenly journeys all meet with Enoch before the story is over. Are these men guilty of impersonation? The question concerns C. P. Van Andel, who acquits them all: A man who performs the function of Enoch has, he concludes, a perfect right to assume the name of Enoch.

Today emphasis is being placed on the society of the faithful itself as the actual embodiment of the Son of Man: “Enoch has become the eschatological Saviour himself, the ideal of the ‘pious community’” officially designated as the “Son of Man.” Such “Enoch circles” naturally identified whoever was their leader with Enoch. Matthew Black, seeing the Metatron title “Man as the Measure,” equates “the elect community” with the “Head of the Community, the immortalized patriarch, the elect one, the Son of Man.” The communities that followed John

the Baptist regarded him as both Enoch and Elijah. “How could John [the Baptist also] be Elijah?” L. E. Keck asks. This was one of the great mysteries to which various sects claimed to have the key, secretly passed down from the Lord to the Apostles. The passing down thus took place during the forty-day ministry of the Lord, at which time he appears exactly in the manner of Enoch as one whose comings and goings are as thrilling and mysterious as are the great secrets of knowledge he imparts.

In the Old Testament, the expression “Son of Man” is found only in four poetic passages, in which it is hardly more than an expression for an ordinary human. In the New Testament, it is not, as anyone would naturally expect, the unassuming title of one who would depict himself humbly as a common mortal “delicately and modestly,” or even in “self-depreciation.” For in all the occurrences of the title in the New Testament, it refers to the Lord in his capacity as the exalted one from on high whose real nature and glory are hidden from men.

From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*

Page 740:

SON OF MAN. From his mother Jesus inherited mortality. Hebrew ben ‘adam denotes “a son of Adam,” that is, any mortal man (Dan. 8:17). Thus, as a son of Adam, Jesus represents Adam’s children, acting as their agent with the Father. As both Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus stands between God and man as mediator. With the definite article, the Son of Man described an expected apocalyptic heavenly figure, identified with the Messiah (Dan. 7:13). Jesus is the son of the archetypal Man, the perfect heavenly Man, the Eternal Father (Moses 6:57; 7:35). In this sense, “Son of Man” equals “Son of God” and conveys an intentional ambiguity, reflecting both Jesus’ mortal and immortal parentage.

Page 852:

Man of Holiness

According to Enoch’s record, Man of Holiness is one name of God: “In the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ” (Moses 6:57). God further declared in the revelation to Enoch: “Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name” (Moses 7:35). This name reinforces the observation that God the Father is an exalted man of flesh and bones (D&C 130:22), and that every aspect of his character is holy.

In almost a dozen instances, the pre-Christian Nag Hammadi text “Eugnostos the Blessed” uses similar terms—“Immortal Man,” “First Man” and “Man”-for the Father (Robinson, pp. 229-31). Another Nag Hammadi tractate, “The Second Treatise of the Great Seth,” refers to God as “the Man” and “Man of Greatness” (Robinson, p. 364). Thus, ancient authors likewise seem to have defined the Father as a glorified person with a body in whose image man was created.

[See also God the Father: Names and Titles of.]

Bibliography

Brown, S. Kent. "Man and Son of Man." In *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations From God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and C. Tate. Provo, 1989.

Robinson, James M., ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 3rd rev. ed. San Francisco, 1988.

From *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (s.v., "Son of Man") points out that the phrase is mostly used to refer to the prophets in the Old Testament (e.g., Ezekiel 37:16; see also Moses 1:13). It is used 93 times in Ezekiel alone. One interpretation of the phrase is that the prophet is *the* one person out of all humanity who has been singled out to talk with God and to be his messenger.

For the phrase, "one like the son of man," see Daniel 7:13. Daniel 7 makes the parallel between Adam and the one it refers to clear, and it is clear to Christians that the one like the son of man is Jesus.

In the New Testament, almost every use of the term is by Jesus in reference to himself. (If I recall, there are only two exceptions.)

In Mark, "Son of God" refers to Jesus's pre-existent glory and "Son of Man" refers to his post-resurrection glory. The usage in the other Gospels seems similar.

What about "like the Son of Man"?

I think there are several possible answers. Given the New Testament usage of the phrase to refer to the post-resurrection glory of Jesus, to say that someone is like the Son of Man could indicate a person who has not yet received his full glory, though he is on his way to doing so.

Given the use of the phrase to describe prophets, another possibility is that the phrase speaks of those who are a "type" of Jesus, who is their "anti-type." Using Book of Mormon language, Jesus is the figure and the prophet is the shadow of that figure, so we can say that the figure is like its shadow when we have only seen the shadow previously.