

# **Jesus is the son of man**

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## **Why did Jesus call himself “the son of man”?**

In all the four gospels, Jesus liked to call himself as the “son of man” the most. Not only did he call himself as such very often, he seemed to be proud of such a title. In the gospels, there were at least 80 times by which Jesus called himself as “the son of man”. Below are two examples:

***Mt 8:20***

***Jesus said to him, “the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”***

***Mt 20:28***

***Just as the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.***

Many Christians think that “*the son of man*” is a divine title which means “Christ”. Such an understanding has no basis. Let us consider: if “*the son of man*” meant “Christ”, and Jesus often called himself as “*the son of man*” publicly, the Chief priest would not have needed to get Jesus to pledge to indicate clearly whether he was the Christ or not (Mt 26:63). This shows that the Chief priest did not regard Jesus’ calling himself as “*the son of man*” the same way as proclaiming himself as Christ (the Messiah). What was more was that if “*the son of man*” meant “Christ”, Jesus needed not ask the disciples “*Whom did the people say I was?*” (Mt 16:13). Otherwise, it would have been a redundant question, would it not?

The original word in Greek consists of two words “*anthropos*” and “*uios*”, which is translated as the son of a man. This expression originated from Aramaic, not Greek. Hence, to understand the meaning of this word properly, we have to go back to Palestine during Jesus’ times to understand the language and culture then. Many Christians do not know that the “common language” in Palestine during Jesus’ times was Aramaic. That was the language of the Lord Jesus and the Jews at that time.

The Aramaic language (including today’s Hebrew language) addresses man as “*ben adam*”. “*Ben*” means “*son*”. In the Bible, some people’s names are “*ben xx*”, such as “*Benjamin*”, which means the son of my right-hand. Benjamin was named as “*Ben-omi*” by his mother, which meant the son of my sorrow. “*Adam*” was the name given to the ancestor of mankind by God. However, “*Adam*” is also a noun, which means “*man*” (cf Gen 5:2). Therefore, “*ben adam*” means “*the son of Adam*” or “*the son of man*”, which means “*man*”, because everyone is Adam’s descendants, and Jesus is no exception.

This is the Hebrew cultural background of the title “*the son of man*”. Using “*the son of man*” to address man is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). It has occurred about 107 times; 93 times of which is in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, God addressed prophet Ezekiel as “*the son of man*”, which seemed to be reminding him that he was but a man and that he needed to depend on the Almighty God in order to accomplish his mission.

***Num 23:19***

***God is not a man (ish), that he should lie, nor a son of man (ben adam), that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?***

This is a parallel passage. Both the Psalms and Proverbs use such parallel phrases to highlight the main points. What does “*the son of man*” mean? The parallel phrases tell us that it means “*man*”. Hence, we can see that the title, “*the son of man*”, carries no divine meaning.

These verses compare God with man, emphasizing that “*God is not man*”. It is because God is not man, so the son of man is also not God. In the Hebrew language, “*ish*” means “*man*”, particularly referring to a male. Here, it equates “*man*” with “*the son of man*”; “*lies*” with “*repents*”, because not delivering promises is the same as lies and going back on our words. It seems to say that telling lies and not keeping promises are man’s characteristics.

***Job 25:6***

***How much less man (enosh), that maggot, and the son of man (ben adam), that worm!***

From this verse, we can see once again that “*ben adam*” is a synonym to “*man*” and both terms are interchangeable. Here, it depicts man as “*maggot*” and “*worm*” which are weak and unclean. The word “*enosh*” in the Hebrew language means “*man*” in the masculine form in particular, has a similar meaning as the word “*ish*”. Hence, we can see that *ish* = *enosh* = *adam* = *ben adam*, which all means “*man*”. Another example is Ps 8:4.

***What is man that you take thought of him, and the son of man that you care for him?***

In the old Testament, “*the son of man*” is usually used to describe a lowly person, which is used to contrast with the Almighty

God. The Psalmist exclaimed here how the Almighty God would be thoughtful for a lowly man. Man must recognize his own minuteness before he could appreciate the care of the Almighty God. The Hebrew writer shared the same sentiment. He cited Ps 8:4 in the Book of Hebrews and proclaimed that this verse has already been manifested in Jesus. The Hebrew writers used the title “*son of man*” in Ps 8:4 on Jesus because he was the first man, to whom God had crowned honour and glory (Heb 2:9), who was the commander-in-chief of our victory and our eldest brother. He will lead all brothers to receive glory.

***Isa 51:12***

***I, even I am He who comforts you who are you that you are afraid of man (enosh) who dies and of the son of man (ben adam) who is made like grass,***

This is another parallel passage where we can see once again that “*ben adam*” means “*man*”. It says here that “*dies*” is man’s characteristic because he is flesh and blood just like those on the ground which fades at the blink of an eye. Man can die precisely because he is flesh and blood that is weak. It was precisely because Jesus was a man, so he also had his weaknesses (2 Cor 13:4) and he would also die. Yet, it was because of his trust and obedience towards God, God raised him to the highest, so high that was even above the angels and was crowned with honour and glory (Ps 8:5). In summary, Jesus liked to address himself as the “*son of man*” and had repeatedly emphasized this point because he was Adam’s descendant who was a true man.

### **Christianity views man as totally corrupted...**

Was it shameful for Jesus to call himself man, as Adam's descendant? From the Christian theological perspective, it was so because man who has the "*original sin*", is totally corrupted. Based on the teaching of the "*original sin*", Adam had a "*sinful nature*" after he sinned and this "*sinful nature*" would pass on like a gene to his descendant, generations after generations, such that everyone was born as a sinner because we had inherited Adam's sinful nature. Owing to the teaching of the "original sin", some churches (the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglicans, etc) advocate infant baptism. They view that babies have sin at birth, so they need to be cleansed through baptism.

The problem is that the Bible tells us the Jesus was sinless. If the original sin indeed existed, Mary would not have been exempted. Jesus was given birth by Mary. If he was a true man, he would have inherited Adam's sinful nature and became a sinful person.

This has brought trouble to the Trinitarianism which does not only emphasize that Jesus was God, but also that he was a true man. Yet, a true man would have all the characteristics including weaknesses and mortality, etc. Since all Adam's descendants inherited the original sin, Jesus would be of no exception if he was also Adam's descendant. As such, Jesus could not possibly be a sinless man.

No matter how hard they try, the Catholics could not solve the contradiction between the original sin and the Bible. How to resolve this problem in the end? The Pope could only exercise his "authority" and proclaimed that "Mary was sinless when she was pregnant" (based on Catholicism's "Papal infallibility" definition,

saying that the Pope's proclamation on the throne is from God and hence, would have absolutely no mistake). This was the famous "Immaculate Conception" in the Church history. The Pope's proclamation had stipulated that Mary was sinless and hence, Jesus whom she gave birth to was also sinless.

The Church came up with the "*original sin*" doctrine. When it was found to have contradicted the biblical teaching, the Church could only adopt such a method to solve the problem. The "*original sin*" doctrine was not from the Bible. It was originated from Augustine's theology (cf. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1020501.htm>). This doctrine advocates that man had inherited the sinful nature from Adam and thus became totally corrupted. It is precisely why Jesus as man is not attractive to us at all, and we would rather believe that he was God. No matter how Trinitarianism emphasizes that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God, its ultimate path is to emphasize that Jesus is God. It is not important whether you believe that Jesus is man, the most important thing is for you to believe that he is God.

We need to separate Church traditions from the Biblical truth and shall never replace God's commandment with our traditions (Mt 15:3).

### **The Apostles emphasized that Jesus was man**

*Ac 2:22*

*"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know ..."*

The Apostle Peter did not only address Jesus as “man” (*aner*), he has also emphasized that he was a “Nazarene”. This place, Nazareth, symbolized lowliness, uncouthness and godlessness which was despised by the Jews (Jn 1:46), but this did not deter Peter from mentioning that Jesus was a Nazarene. Although the Jews looked down upon Jesus the Nazarene, God used this lowly person to perform many miracles. That is to say that all the miracles Jesus did was not from his own power because he was but a man. It was God who did all those things through him.

***Ac 4:10***

***let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead -by this name this man stands here before you in good health.***

The Apostle Peter often addressed Jesus as the “Nazarene” in his preaching. Peter had to emphasize here again that it was God who raised Jesus from the dead. That was to say that if God did not raise Jesus from the dead, Jesus could not have done so on his own because he was a mortal man.

***Ac 17:31***

***because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.***

Although Jesus had already been raised, ascended and seated at the right hand of God, Paul still addressed Jesus as “man”. Paul said that God raised Jesus to prove to all men that he was the man (*aner*) conferred by God through whom He would judge all men.

**Ro 5:19**

***For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous.***

Paul was not comparing God with man. Instead, he was comparing the two men: Adam and Jesus. If Jesus was God, such a comparison would have been meaningless because man is not God and they would not be comparable. It was precisely because Adam and Jesus were the same, both were man (*anthropos*), such a comparison was more meaningful.

The difference between Jesus and Adam was not in that one was God and the other, man. Instead, it was between one that obeyed while the other disobeyed God. Adam's disobedience made everyone sinners while Jesus' obedience made everyone righteous.

"*Many were made sinners*" was not due to the "*original sin*", but that "*because all have sinned*" (Ro 5:12). "*many will be made righteous*" is not to be taken for granted as all men need to believe in Jesus Christ and follow his obedience to God, so as to be made righteous.

**1 Tim 2:5**

***For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men (anthropos), the man (anthropos) Christ Jesus.***

Unlike the Chinese Union Version, this verse in the original Greek text has not the phrase "descended from above". Paul used "*anthropos*" to address Christ Jesus and us. The two Greek words "*anthropos*" and "*aner*" have the same meaning, which means "*man*". The only difference is that "*anthropos*" is not a

gender-specific word while “*aner*” refers specifically to males (man or husband).

The mediator mentioned by Paul was the man Christ Jesus but the Chinese Union Version translator had made this phrase more mysterious by translating it as “*Jesus who was the man descended from above*”, which has made it look like Jesus had pre-existed and that now he appeared in another form. If Jesus had existed before he was born, he could not be a true man regardless of what form he would appear in now. The translator had clearly been influenced by Trinitarianism, thinking that Jesus was God and now descended from above as a man.

Yet, the Greek Bible only has the word “*anthropos*” which has no implication that this man was God. Furthermore, the passage before this has emphasized that “*there is only one God*”. If Jesus was also God, then there is not only one God. Paul did not say that Jesus was God. His emphasis was that Jesus was the only mediator standing between God and man (“*there is only one mediator*”).

Trinitarianism does not deny that Jesus is man but it emphasizes that Jesus is “totally God” and also “totally man”. This has, in fact, openly denied that Jesus was a true man. It is because God is God, God is not man (Num 23:19); Man is man, man is not God. Man’s characteristics (weak and mortal) and God’s characteristics (almighty and immortal) are mutually exclusive. A “god” that can die is not the biblical God and a “man” that cannot die is also not a man according to the biblical definition. To say that Jesus was both a total God and man is saying that Jesus was neither man nor God. This has also denied that Jesus was Adam’s descendant or a true man.

One more point for clarity is that the Bible only requires us to confess that Jesus is Lord (Ro 10:9), but it has never required us to believe that Jesus is God. We should never add or remove anything from the Bible with our own thinking.

Jesus is man is not only a fact, but also a glory. It is because man is God's image and glory (1 Co 11:7). The study on the concept of "man" is meant for correcting the wrong concept of man imparted to us by Christian theology. We should be proud of the fact that we are God's image and keep ourselves clean and holy. We should also imitate Christ, the most perfect image of God, to live out the glorious lives of God's image, so as to glorify our Father Yahweh who loves us.

### **Yahweh God abides in Jesus Christ**

How should we understand the relationship between the man Jesus and Yahweh God? To put it simply, according to the revelation of the Bible, Yahweh God had created a "new man" with his great power – the last Adam (1 Co 15:45), and He lived in this man; and through him, He lived among the Israelites. We can understand "*the word became flesh*" this way: it was the "true God (logos) who lives inside a "true man" (Jesus is the son of man, flesh and blood), through whom God executes His salvation.

Hence, Jesus's actions and words on earth were manifesting Father Yahweh's nature because it was Yahweh who acted and spoke from inside of Jesus. Jesus, on the other hand, was totally obedient to the Heavenly Father, so that the Father's will can be fulfilled in his life unhindered. It was because Father Yahweh was in Jesus, so Jesus always mentioned the union between him and the Heavenly Father:

***Jn 14:7***

***"If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."***

***Jn 14:9***

***Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long \* with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father '?"***

How could the disciples see the Father? It was through seeing Jesus because the Father was hidden inside of Jesus. Hence, Jesus could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father". If the disciples had already regarded Jesus as Yahweh God, they would not need to raise such a request. Hence, we can see that the disciples saw Jesus as a man, the Christ whom Yahweh sent. They knew that this teacher had a special relationship with Yahweh God, and that was why they would request Jesus to show them the Father.

Yet, Jesus' answer was puzzling to the disciples (and us as well). He said, "If you know me, you would know the Father", "He who has seen me, had seen the Father". Jesus was not answering their question, was he? Of course, he was and what he said was a spiritual truth.

***Jn 14:9-11***

***<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father '?" <sup>10</sup> "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does His works. <sup>11</sup>"Believe me that I am in***

***the Father and the Father is in me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.***

Note the word “abiding” in verse 10: “*The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does His works*”. Jesus’ obedience towards the Father was evident. Hence, Yahweh could do the work through him without any hindrance. Jesus, in verse 11, said to the disciples in desperateness that if the latter could not see this fact, then they should at least see some traces of the Father’s abiding in him through the work that Jesus had done. That was to say that if your spiritual eyes were not sharp to see the Father, hopefully the things that Jesus did could help you believe.

***Mt 27:45-46***

***<sup>45</sup> Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. <sup>46</sup> About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"***

Many people are puzzled by verse 46 on why God forsook Jesus at that moment. These words were spoken at the ninth hour. What had happened at that time? Verse 50 tells us, *Jesus “crying out with a loud voice” and “breathed his last”*. What did Jesus cry about?

**Lk 23:44-46**

***<sup>44</sup> It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed his last.***

This happened at the ninth hour. Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, "*Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit!*" which shows that Yahweh did not leave him and this was the clue. Yet, why did Jesus say in Matthew that God had forsaken him?

Once we understand that the union between Yahweh and Jesus was when Yahweh abides in Jesus, Jesus' words could be clearly understood. It was because at the ninth hour, Jesus had to die soon. A question arose: Jesus was a mortal man while Yahweh is an immortal God. If Jesus died, what happened to Yahweh? Of course, Yahweh had to be separated from Jesus because Yahweh is immortal.

Trinitarianism faces a problem which can never be resolved: if Jesus was a total God and also a total man, and yet God could not die, then was it the total man or the total God who died on the Cross? If it was the total man who died on the Cross, then Jesus did not really and totally die. Why would the Bible say that Jesus had died for us?

Having understood the union between Yahweh and Jesus, everything becomes clear now. God is immortal but Jesus had to die at that moment and hence, God had to separate from him. As far as Jesus was concerned, he felt as if the Heavenly Father was forsaking him. Moreover, he had to shoulder the sins of all mankind,

something which he had never experienced before, it was as if he had entered into the valley of death (Ps 23:4). Yet, do not forget that he cried out at the last moment, *“I commit my spirit in your hands!”* That means, he would return to the Father very soon, to be with the Father forever (Ps 23:6), because he had fulfilled the will of the Heavenly Father. The union between the Heavenly Father and him remained.

Jesus’ actions and words on earth had reflected Father Yahweh’s nature because it was Yahweh who was acting and speaking in him. The Heavenly Father could fulfill His will through Jesus was precisely because Jesus was willing to obey His leading and have the Father’s will as his life goal. This was the faith of the son of man Jesus towards the Heavenly Father Yahweh and it is what every Christian should imitate.

The union between the Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father is also something that the Heavenly Father would want to establish with everyone who imitates and obeys the son of man, Jesus. Therefore, the Lord Jesus had also prayed for the disciples ***“that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they also may be in us...”*** (Jn 17:21).

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