

The Identification of the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7 A Messianic Prophecy

by
Kenneth J. Morgan
July 2008
Revised

Introduction

One of the most majestic scenes in the Tanakh occurs in Daniel's vision of the "son of man" described in chapter seven, verses 13-14. This mysterious figure approaches the Ancient of Days and receives an eternal kingdom. It is the purpose of this paper to determine the identity and nature of this "son of man." Is he King Messiah?

Based on a review of the evidence from Jewish apocalyptic writings, Rabbinic writings, the text of Daniel 7, and related passages in the Tanakh, two conclusions are drawn. First, the "son of man" in Daniel 7 is indeed King Messiah, and the prophecy depicts the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom of righteousness on earth. Second, specific features of the text and the description of the "son of man" point to the fact that King Messiah is not a mere man, but divine.

Messianic Prophecies

The twelfth of Maimonides' thirteen principles of the Jewish faith¹ is this:

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming.

Indeed, traditional Jews and Christians unite in affirming that a personal Messiah is predicted in the Tanakh who will inaugurate the Messianic Age of righteousness on earth.² One undisputed prediction is found in Isaiah, chapter 11; Rabbi J. H. Hertz called this text the "the greatest and most famous of all the Messianic prophecies."³

[1] And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a twig shall grow forth out of his roots. [2] And the spirit of HaShem shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of HaShem. [3] And his delight shall be in the fear of HaShem; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears; [4] But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land; and he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. [5] And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. [6] And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the

1 Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, better known as Maimonides (1135-1204 CE).

2 The Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ, "Messiah," means "anointed" or "anointed one." With one possible exception (Dan. 9:25-26), it is never used in the Tanakh as the special title of the coming King. "It was the later Jews of the post-prophetic period who, guided by a true instinct, first used the term in a technical sense" (James Crichton, "Messiah," *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* [Chicago: Howard-Severance Co., 1930], III:2039).

3 J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, second edition (London: Soncino Press, 1981), p. 1023.

kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. [7] And the cow and the bear feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. [8] And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den. [9] They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of HaShem, as the waters cover the sea. [10] And it shall come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the peoples, unto him shall the nations seek; and his resting-place shall be glorious.⁴

The question raised and answered in this paper is whether Dan. 7:13-14 also constitutes a Messianic prophecy.

The Book of Daniel

Much discussion has been given to the question of the authorship and date of the book of Daniel. Exploring those issues is far beyond the scope of this paper. Here the traditional Jewish and Christian view is simply accepted: the book was written by the sixth-century prophet, Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar carried captive to Babylon during his first invasion of Judah in 605 B.C. Daniel's public service in Babylon extended to the third year of Cyrus the Great (535 B.C.), so he likely put his memoirs together to form this book about 532 or 530.⁵

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in Daniel 2

Daniel chapter 2 provides important background material to the vision in chapter 7. The content of the dream in this chapter clearly parallels the vision in chapter 7, and both are in the section of Daniel written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew.

In this second chapter, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has a dream that Daniel, through the revelation of God, is able to interpret. He first explains to the king the nature and scope of the revelation contained in the dream.

[28] But there is a G-d in heaven that revealeth secrets, and He hath made known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the end of days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these: [29] as for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter; and He that revealeth secrets hath made known to thee what shall come to pass.⁶

The phrase "the end of days" is generally translated "the latter days" in modern translations. It's corresponding phrase in Hebrew is well know in the prophets. "The latter days" in the prophetic literature of Israel "refers to the future of God's dealings with mankind as to be consummated and concluded historically in the times of the Messiah."⁷

4 This passage and all passages from the Tanakh are taken from the Jewish Publication Society Bible, 1917, unless otherwise noted.

5 Both Jewish and Christian traditions have consistently ascribed the authorship of this book to the sixth-century prophet Daniel. Not until the third century A.D. was this view challenged by the Neoplatonist philosopher, Porphyry. For a defense of the traditional view, see, e.g., Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, revised edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 379-403.

6 Dan. 2:28-29.

7 Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 107. In addition to Dan. 2:28, the expression "latter days" occurs in the following passages: Gen. 49:1; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Num. 24:14; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1.

To sum up, Daniel 2:28,29 leads us to expect, in the prophecy to follow, a recital of the course of the nations from Nebuchadnezzar's own time down to the setting up of the final Messianic kingdom.⁸

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he saw a gigantic metallic image of a man, mighty in size, bright in color, and terrible in aspect. Four kingdoms are represented by the four different metals of which the image is composed: head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, better known as Rashi, in his commentary on Daniel chapter 2,⁹ together with conservative Christian scholars, take these kingdoms to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.¹⁰

But then in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he sees a "stone cut without hands" strike the image on its feet and then utterly destroy it. Finally, this stone "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

[33]Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces.
[34]Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.¹¹

When Daniel gives the interpretation of the dream, he identifies this stone that destroys the Gentile kingdoms and then itself fills the earth as a kingdom set up by the God of heaven:

[44] And in the days of those kings shall the G-d of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; nor shall the kingdom be left to another people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, but it shall stand for ever. [45] Forasmuch as thou sawest that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great G-d hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.¹²

There is virtual unanimity among Jewish and Christian scholars that this kingdom is the Messianic Kingdom. Commenting on verse 44, Rashi says, "The kingdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, which will never be destroyed, is the kingdom of the Messiah."¹³ Thus, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 2 gives a continuous succession of world dominions down to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.¹⁴

While in some of these passages events are included in "the latter days" that occur before the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, in each one of them the consummation of human history in the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth is within the scope of the prophecy.

8 Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, p. 108.

9 *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach with Rashi*, edited by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg.

10 The feet of the image are made of a mixture of iron and clay. However, it is clear that the feet are still part of the fourth empire, and discussing the significance of the iron-clay mixture is beyond the scope of this paper.

11 Dan. 2:33-34.

12 Dan. 2:44-45.

13 *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach with Rashi*, edited by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg.

14 According to Culver (*Daniel and the Latter Days*, p. 116), "...in some sense, the four kingdoms endure to the consummation...[in the dream] the continuity of Gentile world dominion down to the end of it in the establishment of an Israelitish dominion under King Messiah is predicted." But the Messianic Kingdom is still future, so where is Rome today? In a real sense, "the West" still

In Daniel chapter 7, Daniel himself sees a vision that under different symbolism gives the same panoramic view of Gentile dominion, finally broken by King Messiah with the establishment of his kingdom.

Summary of Daniel 7

In chapter seven, Daniel records a multipart vision, together with its interpretation, that he received "in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon," probably 553 B.C.¹⁵ The following chapter outline is helpful:

- The four beasts (1-8)
- The Ancient of Days (9-12)
- The "Son of man" (13-14)
- The vision interpreted (15-28)

These four parts of the vision can be summarized as follows.

The Four Beasts (1-8)

In verses 1-8, Daniel sees four different beasts arise in succession from the sea. The first is like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard, and the fourth unlike any animal, though "dreadful and terrible" and having "ten horns." While Daniel watched this strange beast, another horn came up and plucked up three of the ten horns by their roots. This new "little" horn had a mouth and spoke "great things."

[1] In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed; then he wrote the dream and told the sum of the matters. [2] Daniel spoke and said: I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven broke forth upon the great sea. [3] And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

[4] The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings; I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon two feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. [5] And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was said thus unto it: 'Arise, devour much flesh.' [6] After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the sides of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. [7] After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and

dominates the world in military power, economics, and culture. And "the West" is essentially Roman. "When Rome took over, the world became a Roman world--so Roman, in fact, that the expanding Western world today still bears the plain mark of its Roman origin. It is still markedly Roman in character" (p. 114).

15 Nabonidus was the last king of the Neo-Babylonian empire, 556-539 B.C. However, according to the "Verse Account of Nabonidus" (James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Third Edition with Supplement* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969], p. 313), in his third year he "entrusted the kingship" to his eldest son, Belshazzar. Many scholars, therefore, take "the first year of Belshazzar" in Dan. 7:1 to be 553. See, e.g., D. J. A. Clines, "Belshazzar," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), I:455.

strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet; and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. [8] I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

The Ancient of Days (9-12)

Daniel next sees the establishment of a court, assembled for the purpose of judgment, which is to be poured out on the four beasts. Thrones are set up, and one of these was a throne consisting of "fiery flames" with "wheels of burning fire." On this throne the Ancient of days sat, his raiment "as white as snow" and his hair "like pure wool." "The books were opened" and the fourth beast was slain and his body "burned with fire."

[9] I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit: his raiment was as white snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. [10] A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened. [11] I beheld at that time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke, I beheld even till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and it was given to be burned with fire. [12] And as for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away; yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

The "Son of Man" (13-14)

As Daniel continued watching the night vision, "there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man." This mysterious figure was escorted unto the Ancient of days¹⁶ and received from him "glory" and an everlasting kingdom.

[13] I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of days, and he was brought near before Him. [14] And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

The Vision Interpreted (15-28)

The vision caused Daniel great distress. He asked "one of them that stood by" what it meant. The four beasts, Daniel is told, represent four kings or kingdoms "that shall arise out of the earth" and oppose the rule of God. As in Daniel chapter 2, this paper accepts the traditional view that these kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. After the fourth of these kingdoms is destroyed, "the

16 Escorted or brought by whom? The subject of הקרבוהי is undefined. It has been variously taken to be the clouds just mentioned or the attending angels. However according to C. F. Keil, "...parallel passages with intransitive verbs speak more in favour of the impersonal translation, "they brought him = he was brought." (*Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), p. 236).

saints of the Most High" receive their everlasting kingdom.

[15] As for me Daniel, my spirit was pained in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head affrighted me. [16] I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things: [17] 'These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, that shall arise out of the earth. [18] But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.'

[19] Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was diverse from all of them, exceeding terrible, whose teeth were of iron, and its nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet; [20] and concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, and before which three fell; even that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spoke great things, whose appearance was greater than that of its fellows. [21] I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; [22] until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High; and the time came, and the saints possessed the kingdom.

[23] Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. [24] And as for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise; and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the former, and he shall put down three kings. [25] And he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time. [26] But the judgment shall sit, and his dominions shall be taken away, to be consumed and to be destroyed unto the end. [27] And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.' [28] Here is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my thoughts much affrighted me, and my countenance was changed in me; but I kept the matter in my heart.

The parallel between Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 and Daniel's vision in chapter 7 is obvious. The main difference is that God's symbolism to Nebuchadnezzar portrayed the kingdoms in a way that would appeal to a heathen monarch and would be easily explicable to him: the kingdoms are seen as grand and glorious. God's symbolism to Daniel, a man of God, portrayed the kingdoms as God sees them: as ravenous, wild beasts. Both revelations likewise conclude with the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

"Son of Man": Individual or Nation?

In the vision, it seems quite clear that the "Ancient of days" (verses 9, 13, 22) must be identified with the "Most High" (verses 18, 22, 25, 27), that is, with God himself. What is somewhat surprising is that no direct interpretation of the figure "son of man" is given to Daniel in verses 15-28. However, it seems clear that if he is given a *kingdom* by the Ancient of days, he must be interpreted as an individual, namely a *king*. Notwithstanding this logic, in recent times, liberal Christian theologians have taken "son of man" in verse 13 as a personification of "the saints

of the Most High," that is, Israel, the Jewish nation.¹⁷ It is argued that verse 13, in which an everlasting kingdom is given to one like a son of man, is to be explained by verse 27, in which this kingdom is given to the saints of the Most High. Several arguments can be urged against this interpretation.

- The vision itself makes a clear distinction between the "son of man" and his people. In v. 13 the "son of man" is portrayed as coming from heaven, not earth, in a chariot of clouds before God himself and is crowned king over all the earth without any prior warfare. By contrast, in v. 21 the "saints of the Most High" receive this kingdom only after fierce warfare on earth.¹⁸
- Delivering a kingdom to the people of God in v. 27, in the normal mode of prophetic description, implies a king. Daniel, like the other prophets, knows nothing of a kingdom without a king. The passage itself provides a description of such a king in v. 13.¹⁹

Therefore, with most interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, the "son of man" in verse 13 is taken to be an individual, in fact, a king.

King Messiah

Who, then, is this king? Again, traditional Jewish and Christian scholars unite in affirming that it is King Messiah.

There is a passage in the Babylonian Talmud that identifies the "son of man" coming with clouds in Dan. 7:13 as the Messiah:

R. Alexandri said: R. Joshua b. Levi pointed out a contradiction. It is written, in its time [will the Messiah come], whilst it is also written, I [the Lord] will hasten it! [Isa. 60:22] – if they are worthy, I will hasten it: if not, [he will come] at the due time. R. Alexandri said: R. Joshua opposed two verses: it is written, And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven [Dan. 7:13] whilst [elsewhere] it is written, [behold, thy king cometh unto thee] lowly, and riding upon an ass [Zech. 9:9]! – if they are meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon an ass. King Shapur [I] said to Samuel, 'Ye maintain that the Messiah will come upon an ass: I will rather send him a white horse of mine.' He replied, 'Have you a hundred-hued steed?'²⁰

Later, Rashi, in his commentary on Dan. 7:13, identifies "one like a man was coming" as follows: "That is the King Messiah."²¹

Pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic literature also identifies the "son of man" in

17 For example, R. H. Charles, James A. Montgomery, and S. R. Driver.

18 This argument is adapted from Gleason L. Archer, *Daniel*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985). p. 90.

19 This argument is adapted from C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 235. Keil further states, "After the destruction of the [fourth] beast, the kingdom and the dominion, which hitherto comprehended the kingdom under the whole heaven, are given to the people of God, i.e. under the reign of the Son of man, as is to be supplied from ver. 14" (p. 244).

20 *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 98a. This indeed was an ingenious way to reconcile Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 9:9. However, the two texts can be reconciled equally well as in Christianity by two advents of the Messiah, the first in which he enters Jerusalem on a donkey to provide an **זָבַח** (guilt-offering) for sin (Isa. 53:6, 10) and the second in which he returns to Jerusalem in power and glory to restore the nation of Israel and establish his kingdom on earth (Isa. 11:1-16; Zech. 14:1-21). Further discussion of this point is given in the last section of this paper.

21 *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach with Rashi*, edited by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg.

Dan. 7:13 with the Messiah. For example, from the Book of Enoch, chapter 46:

[1] 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,
And his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels.
[2] And I asked the **angel** who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that [3] Son of Man, who he was, and whence he was, (and) why he went with the Head of Day? And he answered and said unto me:
This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness,
With whom dwelleth righteousness,
And who revealeth all the treasures of that which is hidden,
Because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him,
And whose lot hath the pre-eminence before the Lord of Spirits in uprightness for ever.
[4] And this Son of Man whom thou hast seen
Shall raise up the kings and the mighty from their seats,
[And the strong from their thrones]
And shall loosen the reins of the strong,
And break the teeth of the sinners.
[5] [And he shall put down the kings from their thrones and kingdoms]
Because they do not extol and praise Him,
Nor humbly acknowledge whence the kingdom was bestowed upon them.
[6] And he shall put down the countenance of the strong,
And shall fill them with shame.
And darkness shall be their dwelling,
And worms shall be their bed,
And they shall have no hope of rising from their beds,
Because they do not extol the name of the Lord of Spirits.²²

R. H. Charles comments, "Thus in Enoch this title ['Son of Man'] is the distinct designation of the personal Messiah."²³ In chapter 48 of the Book of Enoch, the "son of man" is again identified as the Messiah.²⁴

Is King Messiah a Mere Man?

22 Enoch 46:1-6, from R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), II:214-215. The Book of Enoch was probably written by a number of different authors during the first two centuries B.C. (II:163).

23 R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, II:214.

24 Enoch 48:1-5, from R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, p. 216:

[1] And in that place I saw the fountain of righteousness
Which was inexhaustible:
And around it were many fountains of wisdom:
And all the thirty drank of them,
And were filled with wisdom,
And their dwellings were with the righteous and holy and elect.
[2] And at that hour that Son of Man was named
In the presence of the Lord of Spirits,
And his name before the Head of Days.
[3] Yea, before the sun and the signs were created,
Before the stars of the heaven were made,
His name was named before the Lord of Spirits.
[4] He shall be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves and not fall,
And he shall be the light of the Gentiles, [Isa. 42:6; 49:6]
And the hope of those who are troubled in heart.
[5] All who dwell on earth shall fall down and worship before him,
And will praise and bless and celebrate with song the Lord of Spirits.
[6] And for this reason hath he been chosen and hidden before Him,
Before the creation of the world and for evermore.

The next question to be answered is whether this "son of man," King Messiah, who appears before the Ancient of days, is a mere man or something more. The rabbis in the Talmud seem to speak with one voice on this issue:

On one point the Rabbis were unanimous, viz. he would be just a human being divinely appointed to carry out an allotted task. The Talmud nowhere indicates a belief in a superhuman Deliverer as the Messiah...The prevailing belief was that the Messiah would be a descendant of the king [David], and common designation for him in Rabbinic literature is "the son of David."²⁵

On the question of whether King Messiah was to be "just a human being," this paper argues that the Rabbis in the Talmud are in error. What is the basis of this argument? The issue must be determined by careful exegesis of the Messianic prophecies in the Tanakh. Is there anything the Rabbis might have missed in Dan. 7:13-14 that indicates King Messiah to be more than just a man?

Before tackling this question, it might be noted that the writers of the Book of Enoch seem clearly to view the Messiah as more than a mere man.

First, according to R. H. Charles, "The Parables [in the Book of Enoch] assert the actual pre-existence of the Son of Man."²⁶ Here are some examples:

And his [the "Son of Man's"] face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels (46:1)

Before the stars of heaven were made, his name was named before the Lord of Spirits (48:3).

And for this reason hath he [the "Son of Man"] been chosen and hidden before Him [the "Lord of Spirits"], before the creation of the world and for evermore (48:6).

For from the beginning the Son of Man was hidden, and the Most High preserved him in the presence of His might, and revealed him to the elect (62:7).

Second, the Book of Enoch actually depicts the "Son of Man," King Messiah, sitting on the throne of his glory and judging the world, certainly prerogatives that cannot be predicated of a mere man.

And there was great joy amongst them
And they blessed and glorified and extolled
Because the name of that Son of Man had been revealed unto them.

And he sat on the throne of his glory,
And the sum of judgment was given unto the Son of Man,
And he caused the sinners to pass away and be destroyed from off the face of the earth,
And those who have led the world astray (69:26-27).²⁷

However, the Book of Enoch can show only what some pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptists thought of King Messiah.²⁸ Only Holy Scripture can determine the

25 A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1949), p. 347.

26 Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, II:216.

27 This very prerogative is claimed by Jesus in John 5:22.

28 During the post-prophetic period of Israel's history, "The repeated disasters that overtook the Jews led to the transference of the national hope to a future world, and consequently to the

issue authoritatively. There are several indications in Dan. 7:13-14 that King Messiah is far more than a man.²⁹

"One Like Unto a Son of Man"

Several points about this phrase should be noted. First, it is not a title, and therefore the translation in the King James Version is incorrect. It is not "the Son of man." Of course, there is no definite article in Aramaic, but more important than that is the common idiom, "son of." "Son of man" means simply "a man." Daniel thus describes the Messiah as "like" a man.

Second, there is a clear contrast developed in Daniel's vision between the character of the four beasts and the character of this one "like a son of man." As the beasts oppose God and his rule, so King Messiah is wholly devoted to him and wholly devoted to his rule. It is difficult to predicate this characteristic of a mere man. Even King David himself fell short of that standard.

Third, the preposition, "like," is a particle of comparison, כּ, prefixed to the word "son," בֶּר (bar). What is the significance of the preposition, כּ? The particle כּ, as well as דְּמוּת ("likeness," "similitude"), are used in visions to indicate the ideal character of something (see, for example, in Ezekiel, chapter 1). Thus, כּ not only points to similarity but also to difference. Due to the relationship in which King Messiah stands to the Ancient of days in verse 13, it is impossible that he can be less than a man. Therefore, the particle implies that he is more than a man.

"Came With the Clouds of Heaven"

The next clue in this vision to the nature of King Messiah is the description of him coming with the clouds of heaven. What does this imply?

First, it implies that King Messiah comes from heaven and not from earth. This conclusion is supported by the fact that in the interpretation of the vision, the beasts--who contrast the Messiah in every way--are specifically said to arise from the earth (verse 17). Therefore, the vision depicts the Messiah as a heavenly figure.

Second, coming with the clouds of heaven has specific significance in the Tanakh. Everywhere else, coming on or with the clouds is attributed to God and only God. Is it likely that Dan. 7:13 is the only exception? For example, Psalm 104:1-3:

[1] Bless HaShem, O my soul. O HaShem my G-d, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with glory and majesty.

[2] Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment, who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain;

[3] Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters, who makest the clouds Thy chariot, who walkest upon the wings of the wind.

transformation of the Messiah [in the apocalyptic literature] from a mere earthly king into a being with supernatural attributes" (James Crichton, "Messiah," *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, III:2042). The apocalyptists certainly saw the Messiah as more than "a mere earthly king," but their foundation for such a belief may not have derived entirely from political and national disaster. This paper argues that there are clear indications to the same effect in the Messianic prophesies of the Tanakh itself.

²⁹ I am indebted for much of the following material to Edward J. Young, "Daniel's Vision of the Son of Man," in John H. Skilton, gen. ed., *The Law and the Prophets* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 425-451

Therefore, Daniel's vision attributes a description apropos to deity to the person of the Messiah.

But there is more. Elsewhere the coming of HaShem on or with the clouds of heaven is often a coming in judgment, a divine activity. For example, Isa. 19:1:

The burden of Egypt. Behold, HaShem rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt within it.

Also, Nahum 1:3:

HaShem is long-suffering, and great in power, and will by no means clear the guilty; HaShem, in the whirlwind and in the storm is His way, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.

It is not specifically stated in Daniel's vision that judgment on the worldly kingdoms will be executed by King Messiah. However, since Messiah is here depicted as coming with the clouds of heaven, with an everlasting kingdom given to him by the Ancient of days, it is reasonable to conclude that he is the agent of judgment on the earthly kingdoms which must fall as he sets up his Messianic kingdom on earth. Elsewhere it is part of the prophetic picture of King Messiah that he will fight Israel's enemies and then restore the kingdom to Israel. If this conclusion is correct, there is then additional evidence in Daniel's vision that this Messiah is himself deity.

But in the words 'as a man' it is not meant that he was only a man. He that comes with the clouds of heaven may, as Kranichfeld rightly observes, "be regarded, according to current representations, as the God of Israel coming on the clouds, while yet he who appears takes the outward form of a man." The comparison (אֲדָמָה, as a man) proves accordingly much more, that this heavenly or divine being was in human form.³⁰

"All Nations...Should Serve Him"

Here is another clue from the text of Daniel that King Messiah is assigned attributes of deity. It is stated in verse 14 that "there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." The word "serve" is highly significant here. Whenever the פָּלַח root occurs in the Aramaic of the Tanakh, it always refers to religious service or worship.

According to a standard lexicon, the basic meaning of the verb is "pay reverence to; serve (deity)."³¹ It is used in the sense of "pay reverence to deity" in Dan. 3:12,14,17,18,28; 6:(16)17,(20)21;7:14,27. It also appears as a plural construct used as a noun in the sense of "servants" of the house of God in Ezra 7:24. Finally, the noun form, "service" or "worship" is used in Ezra 7:19. This summary includes every occurrence of the root in biblical Aramaic.

Therefore, as used in biblical Aramaic, this word is limited to the religious service, reverence, and homage due to God alone.³²

30 C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 236.

31 Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 1108.

32 In the Targums, its use is broadened to include all the meanings of the Hebrew עָבַד, to work, serve

Conclusion

Careful exegesis of Daniel's vision has brought forth the following points:

- King Messiah is "like" a man, that is, he has the form of a man, but is more than a man.
- King Messiah's origin is heaven, again implying that he is more than simply a man, and he comes to earth to establish an everlasting kingdom.
- King Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven, implying deity.
- All peoples and nations will offer divine service and worship to King Messiah, again implying deity.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Messiah is portrayed in Daniel's vision as God himself. But the Ancient of days is also portrayed as God in this vision. How can these two points be reconciled? How can God appear before God?

Before answering this question, it should be noted that there is a similarly curious phenomenon in the book of Zechariah. In chapter three, we have HaShem calling upon HaShem to rebuke Satan.

[1] And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of HaShem, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. [2] And HaShem said unto Satan: 'The HaShem rebuke thee, O Satan, yea, HaShem that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this man a brand plucked out of the fire?'

How can God appear before God in Daniel? How can HaShem call upon HaShem in Zechariah? According to the Shema, there is only one God. That is a fact. But these texts in the Tanakh hint that there is a plurality in the Godhead. One might propose that both the Ancient of days and the Messiah, though distinct persons, share the same, single divine essence.³³

Is the "Son of Man" Jesus?

The culminating question to which this study has led is quite simple: Is Jesus King Messiah?

Of course, every detail of the previous analysis of Daniel's vision might be correct, and yet that would not prove that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus, however, did claim to be the Messiah. Is his claim true?

The early Christian apostles argued that God bore witness to the truth of the claims of Jesus by many signs and miracles.³⁴ However, according to Peter in his sermon to the "men of Israel" on the Day of Pentecost, the ultimate testimony of God came when he raised Jesus from the dead.³⁵

(C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 237).

33 This, in fact, is precisely the claim of the New Testament regarding Jesus. He was "in very nature God" (Phil. 2:6), and in him "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

34 Heb. 2:4.

35 Acts 2:22-36.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give the details of these arguments. We simply conclude with Jesus' own comments on his relationship to Daniel's vision.

First, Jesus often referred to himself as "*the Son of man*," thus identifying himself, at least implicitly, with the one "like a son of man" in Daniel's vision.

Second, he explicitly identified himself with this "man" in the vision. In his discourse with his disciples on the Mount of Olives shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus predicts,

[29] Immediately after the distress of those days

'the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

[30] At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. [31] And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.³⁶

Keil, a Christian scholar, has this to say:

If, then, Jesus speaks of Himself as the Son of man, He means thereby not merely to say that He was the Messiah, but He wishes to designate Himself as the Messiah of Daniel's prophecy, i.e. as the Son of man coming to the earth in the clouds of heaven. He thereby lays claim at once to a divine original, or a divine pre-existence, as well as to affirm true humanity of His person.³⁷

By placing the fulfillment of Dan. 7:13-14 at his second advent in power and glory, Jesus also reconciles Dan. 7:13-14 with Zech. 9:9 in a way very different from the Rabbis in the Talmud. At the time he predicted his future "coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory," he had already entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Zech. 9:9. This occurred during his first advent:

[1] As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, [2] saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. [3] If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

[4] This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

[5] "Say to the Daughter of Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"³⁸

Third, Jesus claims all the attributes of the "son of man" implicit in Daniel's vision. During the first part of his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus is mostly silent. However, the High Priest finally puts him under oath before God and demands an answer to a very specific question:

36 Matt. 24:29-31, *New International Version*.

37 C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 274.

38 Matt. 21:1-5, *New International Version*.

[63] ...The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

[64]"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."³⁹

Note in the question of the High Priest, he seems to view the predicted Messiah as the Son of God, a title that implies deity. Jesus answers the High Priest and claims to be the Messiah. Further, he claims to be the Messiah explicitly depicted in Daniel's vision. Finally, he claims all the attributes of King Messiah that are implicit in that vision itself: he claims to be the Son of God--he claims deity.

Why was it necessary for King Messiah to be both Son of God (divine) and Son of Man (a man)? Because he had to die as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of his people. God had established a twofold pattern for sacrifice in the Tanakh. First, the shedding of blood was required for atonement, the remission of sins:

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.⁴⁰

Second, it was also necessary for the sacrifice to be without defect or blemish.⁴¹ Therefore, to remain consistent with this pattern, the divine Messiah took on the nature of true man to shed real blood as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

The message to Jewish people today is not to renounce their heritage, "convert" to Christianity, and effectively become Gentiles. Instead, the message is to believe the God of their fathers who sent his Son, King Messiah, to die as a sacrifice for their sins during his first advent and who will again send him in power and great glory to restore the kingdom to Israel at his second advent. Such belief and commitment will ensure resurrection to life and participation in this Messianic Kingdom.⁴²

39 Matt. 26:63-64, *New International Version*.

40 Lev. 17:11.

41 Lev. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18; 6:6; et al.

42 Dan. 12:1-2.