

# **The Son of Man in 1 Enoch and its Implications for the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels**

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In looking at New Testament images describing the life, work, and identity of Jesus Christ, it is often helpful to look to early Jewish concepts in order to better understand what the New Testament writers conveyed. Because of its imagery and its discussion of the idea of Son of Man, the Similitudes section of 1 Enoch has a great potential to illuminate our understanding of this phrase, which Jesus uses around forty times in the Gospels. However, there are some issues around this document that need to be addressed before its impact can be fairly assessed. This paper proposes to examine the scholarly argument around the date and background of the Similitudes section of 1 Enoch in order to determine its relevancy, to explore parallel images shared between the Similitudes and the synoptic Gospels, and to summarize the implications these images have for a Biblical Christology.

The first major area that needs to be discussed is the debate concerning the date and background of the Similitudes of Enoch. The most extant copy of this section currently available is an Ethiopic translation that dates well beyond the first century A.D., so relying on that copy alone is not really satisfactory. In the early 20th century, the scholarly consensus dated this section between the Maccabean revolt and the end of the first century A.D. until the discovery of the fragments of a portion of 1 Enoch at Qumran in the late 1940s. Since the Similitudes were not present in that fragment, several scholars took this to mean that they were written after the New Testament, even as late as 250 A.D.<sup>1</sup> However, others strongly contend that the Qumran fragments only represent a small part of 1 Enoch and should not be seen as evidence against an

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Black, "The Parables of Enoch and the 'Son of Man'," *Expository Times* 88 (October 1976): 6; A.J.B. Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 198.

earlier date for the Similitudes.<sup>2</sup> Because of this division between the scholars, one thinker minimizes the dating of the Similitudes as the real question surrounds whether this work reflects a concept present earlier in Jewish thought or represents a later development directly impacted by Christianity.<sup>3</sup> In light of Daniel 7, this latter approach helps to establish a reasonable plausibility that the concept was present in earlier Jewish thought and thereby influenced the Gospels.

With this approach to date established, the major question concerns the meaning of the phrase “Son of Man” within the Similitudes of Enoch. While there is no broad consensus on the matter, there are three major positions that have been most promoted. The traditional view stresses the use of the demonstrative in the Ethiopic and contends that this is the equivalent to using definite articles in Greek as well as old Aramaic and Hebrew, giving the English translation “that Son of Man” titular significance. This is based upon arguments from certain word usages in the Qumran scrolls and the assumption that those claiming a weaker translation are looking at Targumic Aramaic as opposed to Old Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> A second slightly more moderate position is the thought that “Son of Man” had a quasi-titular function in Jewish apocalyptic documents, especially when similes and demonstrative forms are used.<sup>5</sup> The most reductionist position of the three asserts that based on common Aramaic, “Son of Man” simply means something equivalent to “man” or “I” because it was used to generically identify individuals. Those arguing for this position claim that the use of the demonstrative form in 1 Enoch is used to

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 234.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Black. “Aramaic Bar-nasha and the ‘Son of Man’,” *Expository Times* 95 (April 1984): 202.

<sup>5</sup> Barnabas Lindars, “Enoch and Christology,” *Expository Times* 92 (July 1981): 297; Witherington, 235; Norman Perrin, “Son of Man in Ancient Judaism and Primitive Christianity: a Suggestion,” *Biblical Research*. 11(1966): 19.

distinguish which “Son of Man” was being discussed as opposed to identifying a figure with a specific title<sup>6</sup>.

While these three positions are the most widely held, several authors contend that while “Son of Man” was not a title in Jewish thought, it did have some significance and was ambivalent in meaning.<sup>7</sup> These authors are seeking a middle path between the reductionist position and those who hold that “Son of Man” was an apocalyptic title.

After reviewing these positions, the argument for a quasi-titular function in the apocalyptic or the argument that sees some significance in the midst ambivalence are the best routes to assume in this case because the evidence for “Son of Man” as a specific title relies greatly upon contentious linguistic concepts, and those who seek to reduce the meaning of “Son of Man” to “man” or “I” ignore the immediate context of both Daniel 7 and the Similitudes of Enoch.

With the assumption that there was at least some significance to the phrase “Son of Man” in the Similitudes of Enoch, the next issue is that of the identity and nature of that “Son of Man”. As to be expected, the biases shown by the scholars on this matter largely follow their assumptions surrounding the linguistic and conceptual nature of “Son of Man”. Those who adopt the reductionist position point to controversial passages in 1 Enoch 70 and 71 that identify Enoch as “Son of Man,” and they assume that the meaning of the phrase retains a consistent meaning throughout the text, ruling out any concept of the messianic role of the Son of Man figure and his possible pre-existence.<sup>8</sup> However, other authors who assume that the given

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Casey, “Aramaic Idiom and the Son of Man Sayings”, *Expository Times* 96 (May 1985): 235.

<sup>7</sup> Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 124; Seyoon Kim, *The Son of Man as Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Casey, “Use of the term Son of Man in the Similitudes of Enoch,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period.* 7, no.1 (June, 1976): 28-29.

passage elevates Enoch to the level of “Son of Man” see it is a later extrapolation of Jewish cabbalism<sup>9</sup>, only one tradition that surrounds the document<sup>10</sup>, or a simple inconsistency.<sup>11</sup>

While some accept that the Similitudes do indeed equate Enoch with the Son of Man figure, another perspective understands that 1 Enoch 70:1 makes the claim that Enoch’s name is raised to the Son of Man but is still distinguishable from the Son of Man himself as the third person pronoun is used at this point and that 71:14 while calling Enoch “Son of Man” is simply making the statement that Enoch is the lesser earthly parallel to the Son of Man in heaven.<sup>12</sup>

Those who would affirm the idea that the Son of Man in the Similitudes was indeed a messianic figure would probably look toward assert the parallels drawn between the Son of Man, the righteous one, and the chosen or elect one throughout the Similitudes<sup>13</sup>, but others who resist such a move since the Son of Man figure seems to reflect a judicial role and seems to simply be a heavenly figure<sup>14</sup> as opposed to an earthly messiah. The protest of the latter ignores some of the eschatological functioning of the Son of Man and the overlap of the concept with messianic ideas of ruling as a judge, but they are correct to say that there is no clear correspondence that requires that the Son of Man is to be equated with messiah. Kim claims that we might be able to see sort of a heavenly picture of what messiah ought to be in the personality of Enoch and other apocalyptic figures in the usage of the Son of Man as a euphemistic and discreet way of speaking about messianic expectations<sup>15</sup> and this may be a line of reasoning that needs further exploration because it does have some merit in revealing more about the proper relationship between the two concepts at hand.

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<sup>9</sup> Chrys Caragounis, *The Son of Man: Vision and Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 93-94.

<sup>10</sup> A.J.B. Higgins, *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Fredrick Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 150-151.

<sup>12</sup> John J. Collins, “The Son of Man in First Century Judaism,” *New Testament Studies* 38 (July 1992): 453-455.

<sup>13</sup> Lindars, 298.

<sup>14</sup> Higgins. *Jesus and the Son of Man.*, 201; Higgins. *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Kim, 20.

A related but distinct concept concerning the Son of Man figure is the question of whether or not this figure was pre-existent. Those who would argue for this position focus on 1 Enoch 48:3, which indicates that the Son of Man was around before the creation of the earth, the moon, or the stars, but this could mean that the Son of Man figure was already in the mind of God at the beginning of creation.<sup>16</sup> This would certainly make sense in light of 1 Enoch 71:15, which indicates that the Son of Man figure was prepared from the foundation of the world.<sup>17</sup> Others looking at wider Ancient Near Eastern traditions make the argument that the ultimate source of this understanding in Jewish apocalyptic writings comes from Mesopotamian coronation rites, which featured the replacement of El with Baal as the new king of the gods, but those who hold more closely to Old Testament tradition believe that the concept of the pre-existence of Wisdom as recorded in Proverbs is more helpful.<sup>18</sup>

From the above discussion, it is at least plausible to argue that the Son of Man figure in 1 Enoch was a pre-existent, heavenly being that possessed certain characteristics that overlapped with certain messianic expectations in Judaism, but before one can proceed to adopt this position for the purposes of relating the Similitudes of Enoch to the Synoptic Gospels, there are still the questions of whether the work contains any Christian extrapolations that may change the meaning of the original work and whether Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels clearly identifies himself with the Son of Man figure. Olson accepts the idea that the Similitudes were written during the first century A.D., but he protests that the Ethiopic manuscript in 1 Enoch 62 and 69 has been tampered with by switching *walda be'si* or son of the man to *balda be'sit* or son of the woman in order to assert a divine fatherhood for the Son of Man. Thus, he asserts that 1 Enoch

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<sup>16</sup> Collins, 455.

<sup>17</sup> R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973), 81.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Emerton, "The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery". *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (October 1958): 235.

71:14, which seems to identify Enoch with the Son of Man figure, is likely the only unedited passage.<sup>19</sup> While this may show some Christian editing, it does not interfere with the idea that there was at least some reservoir of imagery in early Judaism concerning the Son of Man figure as an apocalyptic, heavenly, messiah like figure even if this figure was identified with heroic ancient biblical personalities like Enoch. Even a slightly reductionist scholar like Higgins contends that while the Similitudes could be a Christianized document, similar ideas could have very well been present in Jesus' day and could have very well been known by Jesus. However, he also maintains that Jesus was talking about someone other than himself when he discussed the Son of Man and that the Gospels show no attempt to demonstrate that Jesus believed himself to be or destined to be the Son of Man.<sup>20</sup> This is an extremely bold claim, and it is not within the purview of the current project to tackle this broader issue. Therefore, one must be content to speak of how the Son of Man imagery relates to the Christology of the Synoptics as opposed to the direct thought of Jesus himself. Despite this, it is clear that Higgins' assertion that the Gospels do not identify Jesus with the Son of Man figure will certainly be questioned as this discussion continues.

With the background questions and scholarly debate around them having been explored, it is now time to move to the next phase of the paper which will focus upon the Son of Man passages in the Similitudes themselves as well as certain passages in the Synoptic Gospels that seem to be thematically similar.

The first point in the Similitudes in which the Son of Man figure appears is in chapter 46. In this passage, the Son of Man figure is described as the one to whom righteousness belongs, with whom righteousness dwells, who was chosen by the Lord of Spirits to be victorious in

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<sup>19</sup>Daniel Olson, "Enoch and the Son of Man in the Epilogue of the Parables". *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18 (October 1998): 35.

<sup>20</sup>Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man*, 199-200.

eternal uprightness, and who would overthrow oppressive evil kings and wicked persons that did not glorify the Lord of Spirits. It is also asserted in this passage that the Son of Man is the source of all kingly authority. There are several passages in the synoptics that reflect this type of imagery, but Matthew 13:41-43, Matthew 19:28-30, Luke 12:8-9, and Matthew 28:18 are most pertinent. In the first passage, Jesus is explaining the parable of the wheat and the weeds and describing how at the end of the age the Son of Man and his angels will take all causes of sin and all evildoers away to the furnace of fire to be destroyed. This may indeed be related to the overthrow of the wicked described in the Similitudes. The second passage discusses how the Son of Man will give thrones to the disciples and that those who follow Jesus will be rewarded for their sacrifices, but the real connection to 1 Enoch 46 in this passage is the assertion that many of the first or those in authority or with great wealth will be last in the coming kingdom. Luke 12:8-9 speaks of those who will or will not acknowledge Jesus. In this passage, those who acknowledge Jesus will be acknowledged by the Son of Man and those who do not acknowledge him will not be acknowledged. The latter category seems similar to 1 Enoch 46's assertion that wicked and evil rulers do not acknowledge the Son of Man who is the ultimate source of their own authority.

The final passage that seems to relate to this section is Matthew 28:18. While this does not directly mention the Son of Man specifically, it is the acknowledgment that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. This echoes the concept that the Son of Man figure is the ultimate source of all authority as expressed in 1 Enoch 46.

The Son of Man appears next in the Similitudes in chapter 48. In this section, it is asserted that the Son of Man had at least a conceptual pre-existence before the creation of the earth, was chosen in order to be a light for the Gentiles and the hope of those who are sick in

heart, is the revealer of wisdom of God to the righteous ones who have hated the evil and oppression of the world and who will be saved in his name, and will bring judgment to the wicked who will be gathered and consumed by fire. Obviously, the imagery from Matthew 13:41-43 discussed above has an even greater connection to this particular passage as fire to consume the wicked are used in both cases. For the first part of the passage, Luke 2:30-32, while it does not directly mention the Son of Man, is important because in seeing the infant Jesus, Simeon claims that he has seen the salvation of God and a light to the Gentiles. This repeats the theme concerning both the Gentiles and the salvation of the righteous in 1 Enoch 48.

After chapter 48 of the Similitudes, the Son of Man does not appear again until chapter 62. In this section the Son of Man is seated in the throne of glory to judge the wicked oppressors and to vindicate the righteous ones. In this scene, the people are divided into two groups. The righteous will stand and be honored before him while the wicked will try to plead with him but will be driven away and delivered to the angels for punishment. The themes that the Son of Man will be a concealed figure until the judgment and has ultimate authority are also important in the passage. Borsch argues that the symbolism in Mark 14:62 is similar to that of 1 Enoch 62:5 and reflects the idea that the Son of Man would rule from God's own throne and explains why the Sanhedrin then proceeded to convict Jesus of blasphemy after his assertion in this verse.<sup>21</sup> While this is an interesting connection, perhaps a more important related passage is the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. The similarities here are very pronounced. Both passages feature the Son of Man on his glorious throne, the dividing of persons into two groups, and the condemnation of the wicked and the vindication and rewarding of the righteous. The fact that both groups did not recognize the Son of Man figure before the judgment is also repeated in this passage. The only major difference is that the wicked in 1 Enoch are specifically

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<sup>21</sup> Fredrick Borsch. "Mark 14:62 and 1 Enoch 62:5," *New Testament Studies* 14 (July 1968): 537.

describe as corrupt rulers while those in Matthew are simply identified with those who apathetically ignore those in need. While a case could be made that it is the wealthy ruling class that ignores those in need the most, it is not a direct equivalent. In fact, the Matthew passage may provide a sort of commentary explaining why the wealthy rulers of the day would be condemned.

Another passage that could be related to 1 Enoch 62 is Luke 9:26 in which it is stated that those who have been ashamed of Jesus and his words would be treated likewise by the Son of Man in the presence of the glory of the Father and his holy angels. This is somewhat connected in two ways. First, those who ignore the commands of Jesus to care for those in need are the very ones being judged. The other point is that there will be a presence of angels at the time of the judgment of the Son of Man. The fact that the Luke passage directly precedes the transfiguration also shows the connection between the glory of the Son of Man and the glory of Jesus that would be revealed.

Finally, Luke 21:36 may have some distant connection to 1 Enoch 62 as it stresses that one should be alert and pray that one can escape the calamities that are to come to Jerusalem and can stand before the Son of Man. This indicates that this is not only a prayer of escape but also a prayer to be found righteous before the Son of Man.

The next part of the Similitudes in which the Son of Man appears comes at the end of chapter 69. The immediate context is the praising of God by the holy angels after the names and misdeeds of the fallen angels are tabulated and the name of the Son of Man is revealed. Here the premises that the Son of Man is incorruptible, imperishable, will be seated on the throne of glory, and will drive away all evil are all asserted again in contrast with fallen angels and their followers who will be imprisoned and punished. The Synoptic Gospels do not really explore

angelology and its relation to the Son of Man very much, but there is some praising of God by angels in Luke 2:9-14. It is at this point that it is revealed to the shepherds that the Messiah had been born and was lying in a manger in Bethlehem. After the announcement by one angel, a whole chorus joins in giving glory to God. For those who want to separate the Messiah from the Son of Man, this would not be relevant, but if there is a connection between the two figures, angels praising God at the revelation of the Son of Man's name in 1 Enoch 69 and angels praising God at the revelation of the fact that Jesus the Messiah had been born is an important link in terms of concept and eschatological imagery.

The final relevant passage in which Son of Man is mentioned in the Similitudes of Enoch is in chapter 71. This is the controversial passage in which some argue that Enoch becomes the Son of Man. It is true that an angel addresses Enoch as "Son of Man" at this point, but it is unclear whether this refers to the same concept as has been previously explored. The passage goes on to explain how God's righteousness will never leave Enoch and that those who follow in his path will join him in his dwelling places and be with him forever. Finally, the Similitudes ends with the promises that there will be no end to the days that the righteous will have with the Son of Man, that peace will come to the righteous, and that the path of the Son of Man is upright for the righteous. This passage is slightly difficult because it is not clear whether Enoch and the Son of Man are distinguishable figures. Despite this challenge, the imagery does point toward certain parallels in the Gospels. While the most important passages that relate in this case are in John's Gospel such as the promise that Jesus is going to prepare a place for the disciples and that Jesus is leaving his peace with the disciples, there are a few thematic elements shared in the synoptics. First, in following Jesus is the path that leads to God's dominion. A good example that shows this and the sacrifice that it requires is in Luke 9:59-62. Here, Jesus stresses to two

men that being a part of this kingdom requires that even family obligations such as burying the dead must be put aside to follow the path of righteousness. The idea that God's righteousness will never leave Enoch could bring some light upon Jesus' promise that he would always be with the disciples in Matthew 28:20. The promise that the Holy Spirit will be with those who would witness to the Son of Man in Luke 12:12 also reflects this point to some extent.

After having looked at the Son of Man figure throughout the Similitudes of Enoch and the comparisons to similar themes in the synoptic Gospels, the overall picture of the Son of Man in both instances is a heavenly, judging being who sits on the throne of God who will judge both wicked humans and fallen angels and will vindicate and reward of the righteous. This figure is the source of all ultimate authority and causes the holy angels to give praise and glory to God. From the above analysis, it seems clear that at least for the Gospel writers, Jesus fulfills many of the functions of the Son of Man figure described in 1 Enoch. One author contends that in the figure of the exalted Enoch in the Similitudes, the Gospel writers and the early church saw a picture of the type of Messianic figure that Jesus was in his life, death, and resurrection and that Son of Man becomes a title only when it is attributed to a certain individual.<sup>22</sup> While it is unclear to what extent Jesus understood himself as Son of Man, it is apparent that this was one of the many ideas that shaped the Christology of the synoptics, and from the above evidence, Higgins' claim that the Gospel writers make no real effort to portray Jesus in this light falls a bit short. To conclude, while the Son of Man does not embrace the full breadth of Christological imagery in the Gospels, it is important to assert that the synoptic evangelists, when expressing the concepts of heavenly origin, judicial function, exaltation, and ultimate glory in relation to Jesus, seemed to be drinking from the same proverbial well as the Jewish apocalyptic writer or writers of the Similitudes and found the Son of Man concept as recorded in this writing as significant

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<sup>22</sup> Perrin, 19.

and meaningful enough to shape their understanding and presentation of the life of Christ. For this reason, understanding the Son of Man imagery in Jewish apocalyptic literature, such as the Similitudes of Enoch, is important in understanding the Scriptural witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and reminds us of the Jewish heritage upon which the categories for constructing a Biblical Christology rest.

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