

Student Number 201626176

Course MDiv

Unit NT501D

Title Analyse the title ‘Son of God’, and one of ‘Son of Man’ or ‘Messiah/Christ’. Demonstrate what each title meant at the time of Jesus’ ministry, and how it contributes to Mark’s message.

Date Due 11/09/17

Prescribed Words 2000

Word Count 2186

Abstract

This essay analyses the significance of the titles, ‘the Son of God’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) and ‘the Son of Man’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) in Mark’s Gospel, and explains their contribution to Mark’s message. It argues that Mark’s usage of these terms is both theological and evangelistic. By the time of Jesus’ ministry, the Son of God and Son of Man were already richly value-laden, with connotations of divine authority and divine service for the one to whom they pertained. By attributing both titles to Jesus, Mark bids his readers to view Jesus’ message and purpose as bringing the Kingdom of God through his own crucifixion and resurrection. Unbelievers are invited to trust in Jesus’ message and sacrifice as authoritative and sufficient for forgiveness of sins and to follow Jesus as exalted Lord whose claims to divine sonship have been vindicated by his resurrection from the dead.

The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus of Nazareth as ‘the Son of God’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) and ‘the Son of Man’ (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).¹ As Son of God, Jesus is the uniquely chosen Davidic saviour-king of Israel who comes to do the work of God. As Son of Man, Jesus is the divinely-authoritative, glorious and majestic divine-human agent of God who brings about righteous dominion (or kingdom) of God through his own suffering and death on the cross, before being vindicated by God through his exaltation in the resurrection. Both titles therefore contribute to Mark’s message in how they intimately connect the gospel about Jesus with Jesus’ own identity or Jesus’ work and person, and how they provide both theological and evangelistic content for the reader. This essay will defend its thesis in three steps. Firstly, it will discuss the Graeco-Roman and Jewish context of the Son of God and Son of Man sayings. Secondly, comment will be given to this context as it applies to the sayings as applied in Mark. Finally, the theological and evangelistic significance of the sayings for understanding Mark’s Gospel about Jesus will be explained.

Mark 1:1 introduces the subject of Mark’s Gospel, namely, the beginning of the good news about Jesus’ work and person.² In Graeco-Roman antiquity, ‘good news’ (εὐαγγέλιον) referred to the announcement of a great military victory by Caesar.³ Therefore, both the work and the person of Jesus—his life, teaching, death, resurrection and self-identification—are of equal significance for Mark’s message about Jesus. The work and person of Jesus involves the achievement of a great victory by Jesus that is attained counterintuitively through the

¹ ‘Son of God’ sayings: Mark 1:1, 1:11, 3:11, 5:7, 9:7, 14:61 and 15:39; ‘Son of Man’ sayings: Mark 2:10, 2:28, 8:31, 8:38, 9:9, 9:12, 9:31, 10:33, 10:45, 13:26, 14:21, 14:41 and 14:62. Note this list of sayings includes equivalent sayings, such as at Mark 14:26, where “the Son of the Blessed” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ) is equivalent to “the Son of God” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) due to pious Jewish linguistic conventions, which tended to substitute the term “God” with another phrase in order to avoid accidental blasphemy.

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leichester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 25. Note, the modern ending of Mark 1:1, “the Son of God,” is missing from the best and most reliable early manuscripts, and should thus be disregarded as authentic; James A. Brooks, *Mark* (Vol. 23) (The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 39. The same is true for the extended ending in Mark 16:9-20.

³ Dennis John Kavanaugh, *The Ambiguity of Mark’s Usage of Huios Theou in Mark 15:39* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2011), 175-177.

humiliation of the cross, such that by the one action of his crucifixion, Jesus is enthroned both Son of God and Son of Man in the most explicit fashion, whereby his divine sonship is demonstrated and his mortal humanity is glorified in his selfless self-offering before final vindication in the resurrection, on the basis of which people may follow him as resurrected Lord.

By Jesus' lifetime, there had already developed a rich, theological discussion around the meaning of the terms, 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man.' Jewish usage of the term 'Son of God' in the Old Testament and rabbinical commentary, as demonstrated by Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures and commentaries at Qumran, reveals an acute sense of the Son of God as a priestly, Davidic saviour-figure who is chosen by God to instigate the Torah (2 Sam 7:11, 7:14a; Pss 2:2, 2:7-8, 110:1; 2 Esdras).⁴ Son of God and Son of Man were closely related ideas in the Jewish hermeneutical traditions preceding the Gospel-tradition: The fragmentary *Aramaic Apocalypse (AA)* (4Q246) and other fragments (11QMelchizedek; 4QVisAmran; 4Q175; 1QM13:10; 1QM17:5-8) speak of a person of special, spiritual significance who is designated as Son of God or Son of the Most High God and who is regarded as a uniquely chosen, Davidic redeemer-figure who fights the enemies of the righteous in order to establish God's reign upon the earth.⁵ Furthermore, a close reading of *AA* alongside Daniel 7 in the Old Testament reveals several direct correlations in structure, content, theme and theology: *AA* speaks of a great slaughter (Dan 7:3-8), a cause for peace for the people of God (Dan 7:11-12), the universally-honoured Son of Man figure (Dan 7:13) and the eternal reign of the Son of Man (Dan 7:14).⁶ Therefore, Son of God and Son of Man were already held in close relation in certain Jewish communities prior to Mark. Furthermore, both descriptions may

⁴ Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity*, trans. Harold Knight and George Ogg (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., Ltd, 1969), 279-283.

⁵ Karl A. Kuehn, 'The "One Like a Son of Man" Becomes the "Son of God".' *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69.1 (2007), 22, 24.

⁶ García Martínez Florentio and Eihert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition (Translations)* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997-1998), 494-495.

coalesce in one person, which is arguably what Mark has presented in his Gospel with regard to Jesus.

Son of Man traditions prior to Mark centred around a reading of Daniel 7:13-14 as representing either an individual, or a group of people, or an individual representing a group of people.⁷ Along with motifs of divine lordship in Psalm 110:1ff and the sacrificial suffering of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53, Daniel 7:13-14 is essential to Mark's Gospel. It is the primary source for Jesus' self-identification before Caiaphas in Mark 14:62 as the glorious Son of Man, for which reason Jesus was convicted and killed for blasphemy.⁸ However, the Son of Man motif also abounds across the Old Testament. In each case of usage, the mortality and the prophetic calling of the Son of Man in the providence of God for the purpose of the salvation of God's people and the judgement of their enemies is emphasised.⁹ Jewish apocalyptic Messianic traditions prior to the First Century A.D. associated the Son of Man figure with a supernatural agent of God: "far more than simply a human being... the Messiah, the Righteous One and God's Son... a majestic, eternal being who possesses all

⁷ Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus*, 18-19. Christian theologians have been quick to note that this is perfectly consistent with a headship-model of Christ in relation to the Church (ibid.).

⁸ Brooks, *Mark*, 243; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 447. The High Priest's cry of "Blasphemy!" warrants a brief discussion here. Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Boston; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), 409, helpfully notes that Jesus' claim to be the Christ, the Son of God, was not actually blasphemous, neither by standards of Jewish tradition by the First Century A.D. nor according to the letter of the Law (Exod 22:27; Lev 24:10-16). On what basis may Jesus be accused of blasphemy, then? According to Craig, possibly for Jews, "blasphemy constituted words or actions contemning what was regarded as sacred, particularly God himself," particularly by words or actions of self-association with God, which constituted, "an encroachment on God's prerogative" (ibid., 410). Therefore, Caiaphas' accusation holds only incidentally and by inference, and not as strict proof. Furthermore, Caiaphas' accusation is actually false if Jesus is appropriately associated with God the Father as Son of God and Son of Man. Therefore, the very accusation which leads to Jesus's condemnation and death is dubious: It is founded neither on what is clearly written in Jewish Law, nor is it obvious that Jesus' claim of self-association with God is false. Perhaps this is a case of Marcan irony: The accusation which presupposes Jesus' association with God is actually indicative of a truth Mark wishes to convey to his readers: Jesus, as Son of God and Son of Man, is associated with God the Father intimately and absolutely, which is part of Mark's Gospel's message.

⁹ Michael K. Folmer, *An Exposition of the Son of Man* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2010), 4-8, 22. Other instances outside Dan 7 include: Num 23:19; Job 10:21, 25:6, 35:8; Pss 8:4, 80:17, 144:3; Isa 51:12, 56:2; Jer 49:18, 49:33, 50:40, 51:43; Dan 8:17 and a total of ninety-three instances in Ezekiel in which God addresses the prophet as his anointed human servant who has been chosen to be a watchman and messenger of redemption (ibid.).

dominion... passing judgement upon all mortal and spiritual beings.”¹⁰ As applied to Jesus in Mark’s Gospel, this suggests Jesus’ identity exceeds mere humanity and that his purpose is to save and to judge through the sacrifice of the cross.

The Son of Man figure in Daniel 7:13-14 has also been interpreted as a symbol of Israel as a whole nation, a second God, the Son or God or an archangel in Jewish tradition: In the context of other ancient Near Eastern myths, such as the Ugaritic myths involving the subordination of lesser gods to greater ones, it is not incredible to say that this second figure is plausibly a divine person, an individual approaching the Ancient of Days from among the Divine Council on behalf of the people of God.¹¹ Boyarin explains the potentially binitarian implications of the passage:

“The homology between this [Ugaritic intertextual context] and our Ancient of Days and One like a Son of Man is striking. This unreconstructed relic of Israel’s religious past (if not her present as well) was no doubt disturbing to at least some Jews in antiquity... Other Jews adopted wholeheartedly, or simply inherited, the doubleness of Israel’s God, the old Ancient of Days, and the young Rider on the Clouds with the appearance of a human being [cf. Ezek 1:26, 8:2]. The two-throne apocalypse in Daniel calls up a very ancient strand in Israel’s religion, one in which, it would seem, the El-like sky-God of justice and the younger Rider on the Clouds, storm God of war, have not really been fully and successfully merged.”¹²

This has profound implications for Jesus’ identity in Mark: Jesus’ identification as the Son of Man would become a direct claim to close association with the Ancient of Days and as a potential divine figure of great authority and purpose on the earth.

It would not be surprising, given the background context of the discussion surrounding the Son of God and Son of Man sayings in the Old Testament in the traditions of Second

¹⁰ Folmer, *An Exposition*, 22-23. Folmer lists the following texts: Book of Enoch 46:1, 3, 48:2; *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*; *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:1, *Testament of Abraham*, 4 Ezra and the Dead Sea Scrolls (11Q13).

¹¹ Daniel Boyarin, ‘Daniel 7, Intertextuality, and the History of Israel’s Cult’, *Harvard Theological Review* 105.2 (2012), 146-148.

¹² Boyarin, ‘Daniel 7’, 150.

Temple Judaism, that the Christian tradition, which emerged out of Second Temple Judaism, might take advantage of those traditions in the writings of the Gospels, including Mark.¹³

Furthermore, there would have to be a catalyst in the Gospels which linked Jesus to these Old Testament traditions. Arguably, this is precisely the function of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Mark 1:11). It is no doubt that the baptism of Jesus is a matter of special pre-eminence in Mark's Gospel. It is indicative of his special, divine status of Jesus as God's Son, and equates Jesus' reception of the Spirit and calling into public ministry from that point on as indicative of his purpose as the uniquely chosen, Davidic redeemer-figure and paschal lamb (*aqedah*) of God, who becomes for God just as Isaac was for Abraham (Gen 22):

“Just as Isaac, the atoning Son/Servant, received the Spirit and the assurance that his sacrifice will be perpetually redemptive for Israel, Jesus receives the Spirit which leads him to reenact the Isaac/Servant motif. The baptism therefore becomes the *aqedah*/crucifixion, and as Jesus thus becomes to God what Isaac was to Abraham, when the faithful enter into baptism, they identify with the sacrifice.”¹⁴

The Christian movement started on the assumption that Jesus, “the [uniquely] Beloved” (ὁ ἀγαπητός), was uniquely chosen and set apart by God in some way, and that this election of Jesus was heralded by God in Jesus' baptism as his sonship is attested by a heavenly voice that determines Jesus to walk a path of misunderstanding, conflict and rejection which will lead to suffering and death, followed by final vindication as Son of God and Son of Man.¹⁵

God's pronouncement in Mark 1:11 is indicative of a coronation ceremony and commission into God's service, whereby Jesus possesses a special, filial intimacy with God by which he is called into the service of God as the servant of Yahweh who display God's

¹³ Phillip Sigal, *Judaism: The Evolution of a Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 67.

¹⁴ Sigal, *Judaism*, 70-71.

¹⁵ Ralph P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: The Parternoster Press, 1972), 104.

splendour through the perfect obedience of his sonship, which is displayed by miracle-working and, most supremely, by the cross (Exod 4:22-23; Pss 2:7; Isa 42:1, 49:6).¹⁶ Indeed, every reference to the sonship of Jesus posterior to his baptism conveys connotations of divine power and authority, as over evil spirits (Mark 3:11, 5:7), in reference to the worthiness of Jesus to be listened to, followed and obeyed by the disciples in the glorious Transfiguration (Mark 9:7) and with reference to his identity as the Son of the Blessed One and the Son of Man before Caiaphas (Mark 14:61-62). Most supremely, however, the sonship of Jesus is revealed in his death as an exhibition of supreme obedience by Jesus to the will of God the Father (Mark 15:39). The Centurion's affirmation of Christ's sonship has induced a full study of the relevance of Graeco-Roman imperial language of divine sonship and military glory to Jesus' mission in Mark's Gospel by Kavanaugh, who surmises: "Thus, in fusing imperial and OT [Old Testament] language, Mark weds Graeco-Roman and Jewish ideas of a golden age."¹⁷ Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is therefore the supreme exhibition of his obedient sonship in Mark and the purpose of his mission to bring about the Kingdom of God through his sacrifice, on account of the success of which Jesus is publicly vindicated by God in the resurrection (Mark 16:6).

The Son of Man sayings in Mark correlate similarly to the Son of God sayings with regard to matters of Jesus' authority and identity, yet with less emphasis on the authority of Jesus as God's Son, towards more of an emphasis on the responsibility of Jesus as God's servant. Every instance of the Son of Man sayings in Mark relates Jesus as Son of Man to his purpose in suffering. For example, the three predictions of the Passion of the Christ (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33) each involve Jesus referring to himself as Son of Man who is intended to suffer and die, only to rise again.¹⁸ This is also the very same, exact sequence implied by

¹⁶ Brooks, *Mark*, 43; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 37.

¹⁷ Kavanaugh, *Mark's Usage*, 179.

¹⁸ Brooks, *Mark*, 136, 148-149, 166, 318; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 252-253, 283, 318.

Jesus' response to Caiaphas' demand in Mark 14:62: If the Son of Man would come in glory following his sufferings, then Jesus is claiming ultimate victory over death and evil even in the midst of his Passion, in a decisive scene which seals Jesus' mortal fate yet which also fulfils his eternal purpose.¹⁹ This then becomes what it means for Jesus to be the Son of Man in Mark: Jesus is the humble and glorious servant of Yahweh who has come to give his life as a ransom for sins (Mark 10:45), only to receive it back again that he may be vindicated by God in order to rise to deliver God's people in the final judgement and triumph over evil (Mark 13:26-27).²⁰ As Simon J. Gathercole explains, "the Son of Man has come in the first instance not to be served but to serve by dying for his people."²¹

In conclusion, we have argued that Mark's Gospel represents Jesus as both Son of God and Son of man. As the Son of God, Jesus is the uniquely chosen, Davidic saviour-king of Israel who comes to do the work of God. As the Son of Man, Jesus is the divinely-authoritative, glorious and majestic divine-human agent of God who brings about righteous dominion (or kingdom) of God through his own suffering and death on the cross, before being vindicated by God through his exaltation in the resurrection. Three lines of argumentation were provided. The Graeco-Roman and Jewish context of Mark's Gospel convey the Son of God and the Son of Man as a divine saviour. Comment was then given to how both titles are used in Mark's Gospel, where the Son of God sayings depict Christ as uniquely authoritative and obedient to God the Father, and the Son of Man sayings associate Jesus with his mission towards death and resurrection for salvation and vindication of himself and God's people. Finally, Jesus' titles are also significant for Mark's message.

Theologically, Mark postulates Jesus as the unique divine-human Son of God and Son of

¹⁹ Brooks, *Mark*, 243; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 447.

²⁰ Brooks, *Mark*, 170, 215; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 326-328, 402-403.

²¹ Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 258.

Man. Evangelistically, the sonship of Jesus as Son of God bids unbelievers to trust in Jesus and “listen to him” (Mark 9:7). The servanthood of Jesus as Son of Man also bids unbelievers to accept his sacrifice as sufficient for the forgiveness of sins and to follow the resurrected Christ as Lord.

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