

## The Autobiography of Jesus

All philosophical, theological and political discourse issues from a presuppositional matrix. The communicator's ideas are characterized, influenced and motivated by a preexisting corpus of antecedent beliefs. I commence with the presupposition that Jesus understood perfectly and clearly who he was. His auto-noetic frame was accurate and complete. From such a substratum his ipsissima verba would proceed. Filtered through an Occidental mindset, in particular, a pragmatic philosophy, the words of Jesus have been denuded of their intrinsic authority and regenerative power. The context in which we read the words of Christ must change, from a techno-centric, hedonistic and democratic state to a matrix of First Century Judaism. When the words of Christ are heard within the context of his day, and understood against the backdrop of rabbinic Judaism, his words blaze with unsurpassed authority and creative power (Isa. 49:2). He spoke with an authority unprecedented within the history of Israel (Ps. of Sol. 17:36, 43, Matt. 7:29, 24:35, Mk. 1:22, 27, Lk. 4:36).

Utilizing a Messianic designation from the Old Testament and a title rich in apocalyptic color, Jesus would identify himself to his Judaic world. Jesus' autobiographical designation, utilized 81 times in the gospels, was the title Son of Man. Through this Messianic prism, we shall see the transcendent dimension of Jesus' nature as defined by him. "Jesus chose it [title Son of Man] as the ideal expression for progressively and, to some extent, retrospectively, revealing the nature of his person and work." (D. A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, p. 213). Jesus adopted and repeatedly alluded to the figure Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." Daniel in vision sees four empires in succession depicted as bestial. Verses 1-12, characterize the savage, rapacious nature of their rule. But another figure comes upon the scene, he is conducted to the Ancient of Days, the Son of Man. In Hebrew, the phrase Son of Man is *bar enosh*. *Enosh* emphasizes the mortal, frail, anemic, suffering and incurable nature of man in the bondage of corruption. This figure is in stark contrast to the four preceding images, depicting the arrogant brutality of totalitarian power. An autocratic power exercised in the establishment and continuance of an empire's reign, dictatorial violence that stamps out any residue of resistance. But this figure, Son of Man, has acquired a kingdom not by military might or dictatorial tyranny, but through humiliation and suffering. In the title Son of Man there is a unitive exegetic presented, the multi-faceted significance of the humiliation and glorification of the Messiah is revealed. "... while Daniel 7:13-14 indeed speaks of the glorification of the Son of Man, it is in context a glorification and vindication through suffering. Both aspects of 1) humiliation and suffering, on the one hand, and 2) vindication and glory on the other, are signaled by the expression 'Son of Man'..." (Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, p. 87-88).

In Rabbinical literature much is said regarding the Messianic passage of Daniel 7:13. In the Talmud of Babylon Sanh. fol. 98.1, Daniel 7:13-14 is reconciled with Zechariah 9:9. Joshua ben Levy said, "If Israel are worthy, the Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven; but if they are not worthy, he comes poor, and riding on an ass." Samuel ben Nachman (270 C.E.) said that according to Daniel 7:13, the angels accompany the Messiah as far as their precincts allow, while God then conducts him to Himself, according to Jeremiah 30:21 (Midrash on Ps. 21:7). In Zohar, Gen. folio 85.4, reference is made to Daniel 7:13 as referring to the Messiah. The Hebrew name "Anani" meaning "clouds" is a name for the Messiah (alluding to Daniel 7:13) in the Targum translation of I Chron. 3:24. Mention is made of the name of a person, Anani, it is added, "Who is the Messiah that is to be revealed,"-a direct reference to Daniel 7:13. In the Talmud of Babylon Sanh. 96b the Messiah is named Bar-Naphle, the cloud-man. Rabbis Jarchi, Saadiah, Gaon, Aben Ezra, and R. Joshua expounded the text of Daniel 7:13 as referring to the Messiah. Outside of Rabbinical literature, Justin in his Dialogue 32.1 reports that the "one like a son of man" of Daniel 7:13 was identified with the King Messiah in mid-Second Century Judaism.

"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." (Matt. 18:11)

Jesus said unequivocally that he had the authority to forgive sins because he was the Son of Man (Matt. 9:2, 5-6, Mk. 2:5, 9-10, Lk. 5:23-24, 7:47-48). Authority is the Greek word *exousia*. The root meaning is literally, "out of substance or nature," indicating an intrinsic right and power of execution. The *exousia* was his because he identified himself as the Son of Man. As the long-awaited Savior of Israel, Jesus would embody the saving nature of God, forgiving sins on the merit of his own intrinsic nature. "... All the good which I will do unto you I do through the merit of the Messiah who was kept back all those years. He is righteous and filled with salvation." (Zech. 9:9) (Pes. R. 146b, 159b.) Jesus exercised an atoning authority in forgiving sins redemptively, a salvational act considered exclusively Divine. The Jews unwaveringly believed that "God keeps Salvation in His own power." (Talmud of Babylon Sanh. 113a) "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." (Ps. 130:4) "Forgiveness is solely with the Lord; He alone is capable of forgiving. The mouth of a mortal who, after all, is himself in need of forgiveness, cannot pronounce the sinner pure, much less render him pure. Only He, Who is as omnipotent as He is gracious, in the abundance of His grace and almighty power, can perform for man that miracle of miracles, the blotting out of the consequences of his past mistakes." (Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Hirsch Psalms*, pg. 396).

"And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven.'" "For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk'? 'But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has

authority on earth to forgive sins'-then He said to the paralytic-'Rise, take up your bed, and go home.'" (Matt. 9:2, 5-6, Mk. 2:5, 9-10, Luke 5:20, 23, 24, 7:47-48). No sinful mortal can pronounce a condemned sinner forgiven and free from sin's consequences. A sinner can share his knowledge of a savior but the saving act of forgiveness and pardon is exclusively Divine. To forgive sins is solely a Divine prerogative that Jesus unhesitatingly asserted. A salvational act no rabbi, priest, or prophet would have dared imitate for fear of committing blasphemy. (Luke 5:21, Matt. 9:3, Mk. 2:6-7) "...the word used in Hebrew for 'forgiven' is the Hebrew *salach*, literally, *nislechu lecha chatoteicha* (forgiven are your sins). Today, in Hebrew, a person may say to another, '*Ani soleach lecha*' (I forgive you), but in the time of Jesus this expression for forgiveness was only used of God's forgiving someone (cf. Leviticus 4:26, 31, 35). "...in the healing of a paralyzed man he used words of forgiveness reserved strictly in the Law to God." (Dr. Robert Lindsey, Hebrew scholar, from 1945-1990 Pastor of the Narkis Street Baptist Congregation, Jerusalem, Israel, *Jesus Rabbi and Lord*, p. 48, 50.) The idea that the redemptive act of forgiving sins is within the human domain, "Is alien to the mind of Judaism and of early Christianity." (Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, p. 199) Jesus recognized His own saving task as summed up in his words at the house of Zaccheus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk. 19:9-10).

To exercise the authority to forgive sins, as illustrated in the healing of the paralytic (Matt. 9:2, 5-6, Mk. 2:5, 9-10, Lk. 5:20, 23, 24, 7:47-48), was not a salvific work foreign to his nature as the Son of Man. Every Jew, confronted with the ministry of Jesus, understood the implication of the salvational acts of forgiveness that he singularly offered, "...the early Jewish believers in Jesus appreciated the fact that as the Messiah, he was the one who had embodied and effected the salvation promised of old..." (Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, p. 103). The healing and redemptive work of forgiving sins was an exercise of authority over the physical and spiritual realm of human malady, preadumbrating the Son of Man's role as the eschatological judge of men and nations. "This expression [Son of Man] goes beyond self-reference and, seen in the light of the post-resurrection period, surely indicates that the eschatological judge had already come on earth with the authority to forgive sin." (D. A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, p. 222) As holder of the intrinsic right and power of execution as the Universal Judge (Matt. 16:27, 25:31-46), to heal the sick and forgive sins did not tax his authority.

"The one like a man [the Son of Man] who sits upon the throne of God's glory, the sublime eschatological judge, is the highest conception of the Redeemer ever developed by ancient Judaism."--David Flusser, *Jesus*, p. 103

In the Jewish Apocalyptic book, *The Parables of Enoch*, the date of authorship is considered to be pre-70 C.E. (see James Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, p. 40, ff), the Son of Man is presented as pre-existent from all eternity. He is specially related to God, in that he shares both the heavenly glory of God and is God's chosen agent of vengeance and judgment. The picture of his exalted greatness and authority is overwhelming to behold. "And there I saw One who had a head of days, and His head was white like wool, and with Him there was another whose countenance had the appearance of a man, and his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that Son of Man, who he was, and whence he was, and why he went with the Head of Days? 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 forever. And this Son of Man whom thou hast seen shall put down the kings and mighty from their seats, and the strong from their thrones, and shall loosen the reins of the strong and break the teeth of sinners. And he shall put down the kings from their thrones and kingdoms because they do not extol and praise Him, nor humbly acknowledge when the kingdom was bestowed upon them. 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.'" (I Enoch 46:1-6) "And the kings and the mighty and all who possess the earth shall bless and glorify and extol him who rules over all, who was hidden. 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. And the congregation of the elect and holy shall be sown, and all the elect shall stand before him on that day. And all the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and set their hope upon that Son of Man, and petition him and supplicate him for mercy at his hands." (I Enoch 62:3-8) "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 he destroyed from off the face of the earth, and those who have led the world astray. With chains shall they be bound, and in their assemblage-place of destruction shall they be imprisoned, and all their works vanish from the face of the earth. And from henceforth there shall be nothing corruptible; for that Son of Man has appeared, and has seated himself on the throne of his glory, and all evil shall pass away before his face, and the word of that Son of Man shall go forth and be strong before the Lord of Spirits." (I Enoch 69:26-29) In the above cited passages the Son of Man is seated on the Throne of Glory. He exists before the sun and stars were created, executes universal judgment, and brings salvation at the end of ages, when he will be enthroned as king of the world. "The son of man has a superhuman, heavenly, sublimity. He is the cosmic judge at the end of time; seated upon the throne of God, he will judge the whole human race with the aid of the heavenly host, consigning the just to blessedness and sinners to the pit of hell; and he will execute the sentence he passes." (Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 15, p. 160) The authority of this figure Son of Man, far transcends any anointed office in the Old Testament or the entire angelic order. He stands signally alone in all Judaism as the final arbiter of the destiny of men and nations. "The image of this Bar-Enosh is fascinating

and unique. It is the figure of an almost super-human judge, who is to sit on the throne of God and to separate the righteous from the wicked. He is to deliver the righteous to everlasting life and the wicked to everlasting punishment." (David Flusser, professor of early Christianity, Hebrew University, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, p. 56) In attempting to define the nature of this One, the Gordian Knot, consisting merely of a human evaluation, looms large in Judaism. Can he be the cosmic judge of such unlimited authority and simply be super-human? Is this description a trivialization of his true character?

The authority that the Son of Man is portrayed as being invested with, as cited in the above passages, far transcends any delegated authority to adjudicate legal disputes, wage war, or interpret the Torah. The Son of Man's judicial exercise encompasses the entire earth, in its execution of the justice of God. The Father has vested all judiciary powers in the Son of Man (see Targum on Genesis 49:11, Targum on Isa. 11:4, 10:27, 14:29, Targum on Ps. 72:1-2, Psalms of Solomon 17:21-30, II Baruch 72:2-6, John 5:22-24, 27-30). "Thus it seems that the concept [the eschatological figure Son of Man] preceded the final identification of the Son of Man with the Messiah, which became common at the end of the second temple. It was so applied in the time of Jesus, who used to speak of the Son of Man as the heavenly judge and it seems that finally he identified himself with this sublime figure." (Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 15, p. 160).

Jesus states unequivocally that he has an all-encompassing judicial authority. "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son. In order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgement, but has passed out of death into life." "...and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." (John 5:22-24, 27-30) The above passages are startling in their boundless import. Jesus claims that he has universal judicial authority as the Judge of all, because he is the Son of Man. No prophet, priest, scribe, or rabbi has ever executed such a judicial authority. No mere man or angelic being operates in such a realm. In the Old Testament, the prerogative of judgment belongs exclusively to God (Gen. 18:25, Judges 11:27, Ps. 9:8, 50:60, 82:8, 94:2, 98:9, 110:6, Isa. 33:22, I Chron. 16:33, Aboth 4:29).

Jesus' use of the Messianic title Son of Man, encompasses the full breadth of his nature: preexistent, suffering, atoning death, exaltation, glorification, and enthronement as the coming King and Judge. In consequence, no devised category can contain Jesus. He bursts forth and declares that he is illimitable. Prerogatives that are solely Divine are affirmed by him. A trilemma confronts anyone who undertakes a serious investigation of the Person of Jesus. Either he was a fraud, self-deceived, i.e., nut or he was who he says he was. There can be no other options. The good moral teacher category, utilized to neatly dismiss Jesus, demands by definition truthfulness and sanity. If his declarations are untrue, they would nullify such a classification. "The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man. If you think you are a poached egg, when you are looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane, but if you think you are God, there is no chance for you." (C. S. Lewis, essay: "What Are We to Make of Christ?" *God in the Dock*, p. 158) A rubicon decision is demanded by him, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15) Jesus leaves no one in a moral no-man's land. May his spirit grace us with a vision of his nature, a Divine unveiling from the Father. "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon bar Jona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" (Matt. 16:16-17).

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## About the Author

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