



"Jesus – Son of God?"

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'And they all said, 'Are You the Son of God, then?'
And He said to them, 'Yes, I am.'" (Luke 22:70)

Although the Gospel writers portrayed Jesus as claiming to be the Son of God, can we verify this historically and, if so, what did Jesus mean by 'Son of God?'

Two of the questions contemporary New Testament scholars ask are, 'Who did Jesus claim to be and who did he think he was?' These are profound questions. Jesus said, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.'(1) What are we to believe about Him? This is no small matter. Jesus is the central figure of the New Testament. So it may very well be that if you have missed the boat on who Jesus is, you may very well have missed the boat altogether.

Some state that when Jesus claimed to be the 'Son of God,' He did not mean it in a divine sense as Christians believe. They continue, 'The term 'son of God' was used to designate kings(2) and angels.(3) It is even used of the nation of Israel.(4) Emperors, pharaohs, great philosophers, and religious figures were sometimes called 'sons of God.'(5) So Jesus did not originally mean it in the sense that Christians today have come to believe, that Jesus is the direct offspring of God and, therefore, divine.

What did Jesus mean when He referred to Himself as the Son of God? Let us look at two references.

'No one knows about that day or hour, not even

the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.' (Mark 13:32)

Even many sceptical scholars consider this to be an authentic saying of Jesus, because of the principle of embarrassment. Jesus admits that He is unaware of the time of His Second Coming. This is not a saying you would fabricate about a man to whom you are ascribing divinity or deity(6) in order to convince your audience to worship Him. The fact that it was preserved strongly suggests that it is an authentic saying of Jesus.

When one looks at this verse in the original Greek, there appears to be a figure of speech employed called anabasis. This is when a passage has a step by step ascension increasing in stress. Notice what Jesus says: 'No one knows about that day or hour [referring to humans], not even the angels in heaven [who are higher than humans], nor the Son [who is higher still], but only the Father.' This places Jesus as 'Son of God' above humans and angels. He is claiming to be the Son of God in a uniquely divine sense, above what the sceptics claim.(7)

The second reference is found in the Gospel of Mark (12:1-12). In this text, Jesus tells the parable of the owner of a vineyard who prepared and rented it to some vinegrowers. At harvest time, he sent a slave to receive some of the produce. But they refused to listen to the slave, beat him, and sent him away. One by one as the owner sent additional slaves, they refused to listen and either beat or killed them. He had one left to send, a son. But the tenants killed him too and threw him out of the vineyard. In this parable, the vineyard owner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the slaves are the prophets who brought the word of God to Israel and were mistreated and killed as a result, and the son is Jesus. What is of interest to us at the moment is that the son is here revered above the prophets (vss. 6-7). If prophets were sometimes referred to as sons of God, Jesus is son in a higher sense.

In conclusion, our view of Jesus is important if He was who He claimed to be. Who did He think He was? The Son of God. When He used this designation of Himself, He used it in a divine sense. As Son of God, Jesus is above all men, prophets, and divine angels. He is more than the prophets who spoke the truth. He is more than

kings who uphold the truth. Jesus Himself is the truth. Prophets and kings asked others to believe them. Jesus asked others to believe in Him. Jesus claimed that as a result of God's intense love for the world, He gave His 'only begotten Son.'⁽⁸⁾ 'Only' sets Jesus above and apart from others of whom sonship is claimed. 'Begotten' is not here used in the sense of a birth or beginning, but as 'unique.'⁽⁹⁾ He follows this by claiming that anyone who puts their faith in Him will be granted eternal life, something neither priests, prophets, nor kings could deliver on.

Footnotes.

- . John 3:16 (NASB)
- . 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7
- . Genesis 6:2; Job 38:7
- . Hosea 11:1
- . See the contribution by John Hick in *More Than One Way?* Dennis L. Okholm & Timothy R. Phillips, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 35.
- . Divinity or divine refers to something that proceeds directly from God and can refer to an angel, a revelation, or the son of God. Such can come from God without being God. Deity is a stronger term and refers to one having the essential nature of God.
- . We will later investigate whether Jesus thought of Himself as deity.
- . John 3:16
- . Compare with Hebrews 11:17 where the same Greek word is used of Abraham's son, Isaac. Isaac was not Abraham's only-begotten son in the sense of only born, since Ishmael was also his son