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## *From Son of God to Son of Man*

WHO WAS JESUS? The conventional view, of course, is that “Son of God” is the decisive title for Jesus. It is by this title that Jesus is held to be part of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is as the Son of God that he is worshipped as divine; it is as the Son of God that he was deemed to have been given to be sacrificed in order that the world might be redeemed. But things are not quite that simple. First of all, interestingly enough, the term “Son of God” is not often used to refer to Jesus in the New Testament. In Paul, the much more common term is “Lord.” In the Gospels, Jesus is more likely to be referred to (or actually to refer to himself) by the title “Son of Man.” Most Christians today, if they have thought about it at all, would think that by this title, Son of Man, Jesus’ human nature is being designated, while the title “Son of God” refers to his divine nature. This was indeed the interpretation of most of

the Fathers of the Church. A new Bible translation called the Common English Bible has gone so far as to translate “Son of Man” as “the human one.” In this chapter, I will show that *almost* the opposite was the case in the Gospel of Mark: “Son of God” referred to the king of Israel, the earthly king of David’s seat, while “Son of Man” referred to a heavenly figure and not a human being at all.

The title “Son of Man” denoted Jesus as a part of God, while the title “Son of God” indicated his status as King Messiah. But what is the Messiah and how does it relate to the Christ? Truth be told, they were exactly the same thing, or at any rate the same word. *Messiah* (in Hebrew pronounced “mashiach”) means “anointed one,” no more or less, and *Christos* is simply a Greek translation of that very word, meaning also “anointed one.” As the Gospel of John tells us forthrightly: “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias,” which is, being translated, the Christ (John 1:41).\*

### *The Messiah Son of God as Human King*

The reason that the king was called the Messiah was because he was literally anointed with oil at the time of his

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\* This is the way most translators have translated the term, as a Jewish-Greek equivalent of *Messiah*, and it seems to me correct. Some more recent translators translate it literally as “anointed,” which is not the value that the term had in Hebrew by the first century, let alone in Greek.

accession to the kingdom. One of the best examples of this enthronement ceremony is to be found in the Book of Samuel:

Then Samuel took the vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not that YHVH has anointed you to be prince over his inheritance? (1 Samuel 10:1)

Samuel pours a vial of oil over the head of Saul and then explicitly names him King of Israel. This king of Israel has been appointed by God to be the ruler of Israel, to be charismatic, and to represent Israel before God. Through the medium of the prophet Samuel, God himself has anointed Saul with oil to be the king over his inheritance, Israel. The king is therefore referred to in the Hebrew Bible as the Anointed of YHVH or the Mashiach of YHVH. Other Israelite kings who are described as having been anointed with oil on their accession to the kingship include David (1 Samuel 16:3), Solomon (1 Kings 1:34), Jehu (1 Kings 19:16), Joash (2 Kings 11:12), and Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:30). As pointed out by the dean of Catholic biblical scholars in the United States, Joseph Fitzmyer, SJ, nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does this usage imply anything but the extraordinarily close connection between the King of Israel and the God of Israel. No awaited or future divine king is contemplated in any of these instances.<sup>1</sup>

The term *Mashiach* throughout the Hebrew Bible means a historical actually reigning human king of Israel, neither more nor less. The “prince” of 1 Samuel’s Saul evolved (not without struggle) into the full-blown monarch of the dynasty of David during the period of the Kings, and the term “Anointed of YHVH” (*Messiah*, *Christos*) is one of his titles.

The point that the *Messiah* in the Hebrew Bible always refers to an actually ruling historical king is particularly significant when we consider the following verses:

Kings of the earth set themselves up, and rulers conspire together against YHVH and against his anointed one (his *Mashiach*). . . . “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill.” I will recount the decree of YHVH: He said to me, “You are my son; this day I have begotten you.” (Psalms 2:2, 6–7)

The anointed, earthly king of Israel is adopted by God as his son; the son of God is thus the reigning, living king of Israel. “This day I have begotten you” means this day you have been enthroned.<sup>2</sup> Militating against any literal sense in which the king was taken as son of God and divine is the “this day,” which, it seems, may only mean on this the day of your accession to the throne. Another moment in the Psalms where we find the King as the Son of God is in the crucial verses of Psalm 110 (the very verses that also contribute the notion of the exalted Christ seated at

the right hand of Power [Mark 14:62]). In this Psalm we read, “In sacred splendor, from the womb, from dawn, you have the dew wherewith I have begotten you.” This verse is notoriously difficult, and I shan’t here go into the complications of its emendations and interpretations, but one thing seems clear: God says to the king here too, “I have begotten you.”<sup>3</sup> The bottom line of this demonstration is that early on the term “Son of God” was used to refer to the Davidic king without any hints of incarnation of the deity in the king: “I will be to you as a father, and you will be to me as a son.” The king is indeed very intimate with God and a highly sacralized person—but not God. The kingship is promised to David’s seed forever.

Something rather dramatic and tragic happened, however, in the history of the People of Israel. During the sixth century B.C., the kingdom of the Lord’s anointed ones in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Davidic line was lost. As the story is narrated in 2 Kings 25, following a siege in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar had installed Zedekiah as tributary king of Judah. However, Zedekiah revolted against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar responded by invading Judah and began a siege of Jerusalem in January 589 B.C. In 587 B.C., the eleventh year of Zedekiah’s reign, Nebuchadnezzar broke through Jerusalem’s walls, conquering the city. Zedekiah and his followers attempted to escape but were captured on the plains of Jericho and taken to Riblah. There, after seeing his sons killed, Zedekiah was

blinded, bound, and taken captive to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner until his death. After the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian general Nebuzaraddan was sent to complete its destruction. Jerusalem was plundered and Solomon's Temple was destroyed. Most of the elite were taken into captivity in Babylon. The city was razed to the ground. Some Israelite people were permitted to remain to tend to the land.

The people—and especially its leadership—went into exile in Babylonia, and even when they were allowed to come back, less than a century later, there was no more Davidic kingdom and no glorious king ruling in Jerusalem. The people prayed for such a king to rule over them once again and for a restoration of that earthly glory. It is, however, still an earthly and actual king for whom the people pray throughout the Hebrew Bible, for a restoration of the House of David as it was before the Exile. In this prayer for an absent king, for a new king of the House of David, the seeds, however, are planted of the notion of a promised Redeemer, a new King David whom God would send at the end of days. That notion would come to fruition in the time of the Second Temple.

When Mark in the very beginning of his Gospel writes, “The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” the Son of God means the human Messiah, using the old title for the king of the House of David. When, on the other hand, Mark refers to him in the second chapter

of the Gospel as the “Son of Man,” he is pointing to the divine nature of the Christ. This seems like a paradox: the name of God being used for Jesus’ human nature, the name of “Man” for his divine nature. How did it come about? This chapter begins to answer the question of how Jesus was understood as God by monotheistic Jews by telling the story of the Son of Man.

### *The Son of Man as Divine Redeemer*

While the expectation of the restoration of the Davidic king was growing, other ideas about redemption were developing in Israel as well. In the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel, written circa 161 B.C., we find a remarkable apocalyptic story. *Apocalypse* is a Greek-derived word that means “revelation” (the New Testament book that we call Revelation is also known as the Apocalypse). Generally in an apocalypse, the things that are revealed have to do with the end of days, with what will happen at the end of time and end of the world. The Book of Daniel is one of the earliest apocalypses that was ever written. Taking its clues from the prophet Ezekiel, it describes the heavenly visions of the prophet Daniel. The book was written sometime during the second century B.C. and became one of the most influential books for latter-day Jewry, including, perhaps even especially, in its Christian branch.

In this remarkable text, we find the prophet Daniel

having a vision in which there are two divine figures, one who is depicted as an old man, an Ancient of Days, sitting on the throne. We have been told, however, that there is more than one throne there, and sure enough a second divine figure, in form “like a human being,” is brought on the clouds of heaven and invested by the Ancient of Days in a ceremony very much like the passing of the torch from elder king to younger in ancient Near Eastern royal ceremonial and the passing of the torch from older gods to younger ones in their myths: “I saw in the vision of the night, and behold with the clouds of the Heaven there came one like a Son of Man and came to the Ancient of Days and stood before him and brought him close, and to him was given rulership and the glory and the kingdom, and all nations, peoples, and languages will worship him. His rulership is eternal which will not pass, and his kingship will not be destroyed.”

We can begin to see here a notion about redemption that is quite different from the expectation of the restoration of a Davidic king on the throne of Jerusalem. What this text projects is a second divine figure to whom will be given eternal dominion of the entire world, of a restored entire world in which this eternal king’s guidance and rule will be in accord, completely and finally, with the will of the Ancient of Days as well. Although this Redeemer figure is not called the Messiah—this name for him will have to wait for later reflections on this Danielic vision, as we

shall see below—it brings us close to at least some of the crucial characteristics of the figure named later the Messiah or the Christ.

What are these characteristics?

He is divine.

He is in human form.

He may very well be portrayed as a younger-appearing divinity than the Ancient of Days.

He will be enthroned on high.

He is given power and dominion, even sovereignty on earth.

All of these are characteristic of Jesus the Christ as he will appear in the Gospels, and they appear in this text more than a century and a half before the birth of Jesus. Moreover, they have been further developed within Jewish traditions between the Book of Daniel and the Gospels. At a certain point these traditions became merged in Jewish minds with the expectation of a return of a Davidic king, and the idea of a divine-human Messiah was born. This figure was then named “Son of Man,” alluding to his origins in the divine figure named “one like a Son of Man/ a human being” in Daniel. In other words, a simile, a God who looks like a human being (literally Son of Man) has become the name for that God, who is now called “Son of Man,” a reference to his human-appearing divinity. The only plausible explanation of the “Son of Man” is that of

Leo Baeck, the great Jewish theologian and scholar of the last century, who wrote: “Whenever in later works ‘that Son of Man,’ ‘this Son of Man, or ‘the Son of Man’ is mentioned, it is the quotation from Daniel that is speaking.”<sup>4</sup>

This dual background explains much of the complexity of the traditions about Jesus. It is no wonder, then, that when a man came who claimed and appeared in various ways to fit these characteristics, many Jews believed he was precisely the one whom they expected. (It’s also no wonder that many were more skeptical.)

There are many variations of traditions about this figure in the Gospels themselves and in other early Jewish texts. Some Jews had been expecting this Redeemer to be a human exalted to the state of divinity, while others were expecting a divinity to come down to earth and take on human form; some believers in Jesus believed the Christ had been born as an ordinary human and then exalted to divine status, while others believed him to have been a divinity who came down to earth. Either way, we end up with a doubled godhead and a human-divine combination as the expected Redeemer.\* The connections between older pre-Jesus ideas of the Messiah/Christ and those that Jesus would claim for himself are thus very intimate indeed.

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\* In these ideas lie the seed that would eventually grow into doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation in all of their later variations, variations that are inflected as well by Greek philosophical thinking; the seeds, however, were sown by Jewish apocalyptic writings.

### *Who Is the Son of Man?*

Jesus famously refers to himself by that mysterious term “The Son of Man.” Oceans of ink and forests of trees have given their substance so that humans could continue to argue about where this term came from and what it means.<sup>5</sup> Regarding its meaning, some say it refers to Jesus’ human nature, while others say it refers to his divine nature. In the Middle Ages it was taken as a sign of Jesus’ humility but later on was understood as such a potent mark of potentially blasphemous arrogance that many scholars have argued that the “Son of Man” sayings were all put into Jesus’ mouth after his death. Some have argued that the term referred to a primordial heavenly man figure and was connected with Iranian religion, while others have denied entirely that there ever was such a figure at all. All this has added up to what has been called for generations now “The Son of Man Problem.”

When Jesus came and walked around Galilee proclaiming himself the Son of Man, no one ever asked: “What is a Son of Man, anyway?” They knew what he was talking about whether they believed his claim or not, much as modern folks in many parts of the world would understand someone saying “I am the Messiah.” But there is a puzzlement here, because the term is very odd in any of the ancient languages with which we are concerned—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

The Christological use of the term “the Son of Man” as a name for a specific figure is unintelligible in Hebrew and Aramaic as an ordinary linguistic usage. In those Semitic languages it is an ordinary word that means “human being”; in Greek it indicates, at best, somebody’s child. One would think, then, that when Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, Aramaic-speakers would hear him just calling himself a person. But the contexts in Mark will not allow us to interpret Jesus’ use of the term as meaning just a human being. It would be very difficult to interpret the verses of Mark 2 (discussed later in this chapter) as meaning that any old human has the capacity to forgive sins against God or that any person is Lord of the Sabbath.

Referring to an individual as the Son of Man therefore has to be explained historically and literarily. It only makes sense if “The Son of Man” was a known and recognized title in the world of the writer and characters in Mark. Whence came this title? All such usages must have been an allusion to the pivotal chapter in the book of Daniel.

Much New Testament scholarship has been led astray by an assumption that the term “Son of Man” referred only to the coming of Jesus on the clouds at the *parousia*, Jesus’ expected reappearance on earth. This has led to much confusion in the literature, because on this view it seems difficult to imagine how the living, breathing Jesus, not yet the exalted-into-heaven or returning-to-earth Christ, could refer to *himself* as the Son of Man, as he surely seems

to do in several places in Mark and the other Gospels. This problem can be solved, however, if we think of the Son of Man not as representing a particular stage in the narrative of the Christ but as referring to the protagonist of the entire story, Jesus the Christ, Messiah, Son of Man.

It has been frequently thought that the Son of Man designation refers only to the Messiah (the Christ) at the time of his exaltation and after. In Mark 14:61–62, the high priest asks of Jesus: “Are you the Messiah [Christ], the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” One could easily understand from this verse that Jesus uses the title Son of Man to refer only to the moment in which you will see him coming with the clouds of heaven. Now if the Son of Man is, the reasoning goes, the Messiah (the Christ) seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven, how could the term “Son of Man” have been used by Jesus to refer to his earthly life? The scholarship then has to go to great lengths to determine which of the Son of Man sayings Jesus could have, might have, or did say and which were added by the Early Church—the disciples or the evangelists—and put in his mouth. If, however, we understand that the designation Son of Man refers not to a single stage in the narrative of Jesus—birth, incarnation, sovereignty on earth, death, resurrection, or exaltation—but to all of these together, then these problems are

entirely obviated. If Jesus (whether the “historical” Jesus or the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels) believed that he was the Son of Man, he was so from beginning to end of the story, not just at one moment within it. The Son of Man is the name of a narrative and its protagonist.

This narrative, the narrative that Jesus understood himself to embody, grows out of a reading of the story of the career of the “one like a Son of Man” in the Book of Daniel. In Daniel 7, we find the following account of the prophet’s night vision:

<sup>9</sup>As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup>A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. . . . <sup>13</sup>As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a son of man [human being] with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup>To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

In this prophetic narrative, we see two divine figures, one who is clearly marked as an ancient and one who has the appearance of a young human being. The younger one has his own throne (that's why there is more than one throne set up to start with), and he is invested by the older one with dominion, glory, and kingship over all the peoples of the world; not only that, but it will be an eternal kingship forever and ever. This is the vision that will become in the fullness of time the story of the Father and the Son.

From the earliest layers of interpretation and right up to modern times, some interpreters have deemed the “one like a son of man” a symbol of a collective, namely, the faithful Israelites at the time of the Maccabean revolt, when the Book of Daniel was probably written.<sup>6</sup> Other interpreters have insisted that the “[one like a] son of man” is a second divine figure alongside the Ancient of Days and not an allegorical symbol of the People of Israel. We find in Aphrahat, the fourth-century Iranian Father of the Church, the following attack on the interpretation (presumably by Jews) that makes the “one like a son of man” out to be the People of Israel: “Have the children of Israel received the kingdom of the Most High? God forbid! Or has that people come on the clouds of heaven?” (Demonstration 5:21) Aphrahat’s argument is exegetical and very much to the point. Clouds—as well as riding on or with clouds—are a common attribute of biblical

divine appearances, called theophanies (Greek for “God appearances”) by scholars.<sup>7</sup> J.A. Emerton had made the point decisively: “The act of coming with clouds suggests a theophany of Yahwe himself. If Dan. vii. 13 does not refer to a divine being, then it is the only exception out of about seventy passages in the O[ld] T[estament].”<sup>8</sup> It is almost impossible to read the narrative here of the setting up of thrones, the appearance of the Ancient of Days on one of them, and the coming to him of the one like a son of man apart from stories of the investiture of young gods by their elders, of close gods by transcendent ones.\* Some modern scholars support Aphrahat unequivocally. As New Testament scholar Matthew Black puts it bluntly, “This, in effect, means that Dan. 7 knows of two divinities, the Head of Days and the Son of Man.”<sup>9</sup> Those two divinities, in the course of time, would end up being the first two persons of the Trinity.

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\* Note that at least some of the later Rabbis also read this passage as a theophany (self-revelation of God). The following passage from the Babylonian Talmud (fifth or sixth century) clearly shows this and cites earlier Rabbis as well as seeing an important moment in the doctrine of God emerging here.

One verse reads: “His throne is sparks of fire” (Dan. 7:9) and another [part of the] verse reads, “until thrones were set up and the Ancient of Days sat” (7:9). This is no difficulty: One was for him and one was for David.

As we learn in an ancient tradition: One for him and one for David; these are the words of Rabbi Aqiva. Rabbi Yose the Galilean said to him: Aqiva! Until when will you make the Shekhina profane?! Rather. One was for judging and one was for mercy.

This clear and obviously correct interpretation would seem to be belied by the continuation of the Daniel 7 text itself, however:

<sup>15</sup>As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. <sup>16</sup>I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation [*peshet*] of the matter: <sup>17</sup>“As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup>But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever.” <sup>19</sup>Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped what was left with its feet; <sup>20</sup>and concerning the

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Did he accept it from him, or did he not?

Come and hear! One for judging and one for mercy, these are the words of Rabbi Aqiva. [BT *Hagiga* 14a]

Whatever the precise interpretation of this talmudic passage (and I have discussed this at length elsewhere), there may be little doubt that both portrayed Rabbis understood that the Daniel passage was a theophany. “Rabbi Aqiva” perceives two divine figures in heaven, one God the Father and one an apotheosized King David. No wonder that “Rabbi Yose the Galilean” was shocked. In an article in the *Harvard Theological Review*, I have presented the bases for my own conclusion that such was the original meaning of the text as well; see Daniel Boyarin, “Daniel 7, Intertextuality, and the History of Israel’s Cult,” forthcoming.

ten horns that were on its head, and concerning the other horn, which came up and to make room for which three of them fell out—the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke arrogantly, and that seemed greater than the others. <sup>21</sup>As I looked, this horn made war with the holy ones and was prevailing over them, <sup>22</sup>until the Ancient One came; then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom. <sup>23</sup>This is what he said: “As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth that shall be different from all the other kingdoms; it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. <sup>24</sup>As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. <sup>25</sup>He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time. <sup>26</sup>Then the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and totally destroyed. <sup>27</sup>The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and

all dominions shall serve and obey them.”<sup>28</sup> Here the account ends. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly terrified me, and my face turned pale; but I kept the matter in my mind.

Those Jews who were Aphrahat’s opponents could clearly have retorted, then: “Is a heavenly being or junior God subject to oppression by a Seleucid king who forces him to abandon his Holy Days and his Law for three and a half years? Absurd! The Son of Man must be a symbol for the children of Israel!”

Both sides of this argument are right. As we’ve just seen, Daniel’s vision itself seems to require that we understand “the one like a son of man” as a second divine figure. The angelic decoding of the vision in the end of the chapter seems equally as clearly to interpret “the one like a son of man” as a collective earthly figure, Israel or the righteous of Israel. No wonder the commentators argue. The text itself seems to be a house divided against itself. The answer to this conundrum is that the author of the Book of Daniel, who had Daniel’s vision itself before him, wanted to suppress the ancient testimony of a more-than-singular God, using allegory to do so. In this sense, the theological controversy that we think exists between Jews and Christians was already an intra-Jewish controversy long before Jesus.

Ancient Jewish readers might well have reasoned, as the Church Father Aphrahat did, that since the theme of riding on the clouds indicates a divine being in every other instance in the Tanakh (the Jewish name for the Hebrew Bible), we should read this one too as the revelation of God, a second God, as it were. The implication is, of course, that there are two such divine figures in heaven, the old Ancient of Days and the young one like a son of man.<sup>10</sup> Such Jews would have had to explain, then, what it means for this divine figure to be given into the power of the fourth beast for “a time, two times, and a half a time.” A descent into hell—or at any rate to the realm of death—for three days would be one fine answer to that question.

The Messiah-Christ existed as a Jewish idea long before the baby Jesus was born in Nazareth. That is, the idea of a second God as viceroy to God the Father is one of the oldest of theological ideas in Israel. Daniel 7 brings into the present a fragment of what is perhaps the most ancient of religious visions of Israel that we can find. Just as seeing an ancient Roman wall built into a modern Roman building enables us to experience ancient Rome alive and functioning in the present, this fragment of ancient lore enabled Jews of the centuries just before Jesus and onward to vivify in the present of their lives this bit of ancient myth.

The rest, as they say, is Gospel. But the point is that these ideas were not new ones at all by the time Jesus appeared on the scene. They are among the earliest ideas

about God in the religion of the Israelites, comparable to the ancient relationship between the gods 'El and Ba'al in which "Ba'al comes near in his shining storm cloud. 'El is the transcendent one."<sup>11</sup> 'El, the ancient sky god of all of the Canaanites (his name comes to mean just "God" in biblical Hebrew), was the god of justice, while his younger associate, named Ba'al by most of the Canaanites—but not the Israelites, who called him YHVH—was the god of war. In the biblical religion, in order to form a more perfect monotheism, these two divinities have been merged into one, but not quite seamlessly. The Israelites were a part of that ancient Canaanite community, differentiated to some extent by different ideas about God that they developed through their historical existence, but the idea of a duality within God was not easily escaped, however much certain leaders sought to enforce it. A God that is very far away generates—almost inevitably—a need for a God who is closer; a God who judges us requires almost inevitably a God who will fight for us and defend us (as long as the second God is completely subordinate to the first, the principle of monotheism is not violated).

The unreconstructed relic of Israel's religious past (if not her present as well) that we find in the two-thrones theophany of Daniel 7 was no doubt disturbing to at least some Jews in antiquity, such as the author of Daniel himself in the second century B.C. We know that other Jews adopted wholeheartedly, or simply inherited, the

doubleness of Israel's God, the old Ancient of Days and the young human-appearing rider on the clouds. These became the progenitors of the Judaism of Jesus and his followers.

The two-thrones 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 merged as they are for most of the Bible.<sup>12</sup> I find it plausible that this highly significant passage is a sign of the religious traditions that gave rise to the notion of a Father divinity and a Son divinity that we find in the Gospels.

Taking the two-throne vision out of the context of Daniel 7 as a whole, we find several crucial elements: (1) there are two thrones; (2) there are two divine figures, one apparently old and one apparently young; (3) the young figure is to be the Redeemer and eternal ruler of the world.<sup>13</sup> It would certainly not be wrong to suggest, I think, that even if the actual notion of the Messiah/Christ is not yet present here, the notion of a divinely appointed divine king over earth is, and that this has great potential for understanding the development of the Messiah/Christ notion in later Judaism (including Christianity, of course). The second-God Redeemer figure thus comes, on my view, out of the earlier history of Israel's religion. Once the messiah had been combined with the younger divine figure that we have found in Daniel 7, then it became natural to ascribe to him also the term "Son of God." The occupant of one

throne was an ancient, the occupant of the other a young figure in human form. The older one invests the younger one with His own authority on earth forever and ever, passing the scepter to him. What could be more natural, then, than to adopt the older usage “Son of God,” already ascribed to the Messiah in his role as the Davidic king of Israel, and understanding it more literally as the sign of the equal divinity of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man? Thus the Son of Man became the Son of God, and “Son of God” became the name for Jesus’ divine nature—and all without any break with ancient Jewish tradition.

The theology of the Gospels, far from being a radical innovation within Israelite religious tradition, is a highly conservative return to the very most ancient moments within that tradition, moments that had been largely suppressed in the meantime—but not entirely. The identification of the rider on the clouds with the one like a son of man in Daniel provides that name and image of the Son of Man in the Gospels as well. It follows that the ideas about God that we identify as Christian are not innovations but may be deeply connected with some of the most ancient of Israelite ideas about God. These ideas at the very least go back to an entirely plausible (and attested) reading of Daniel 7 and thus to the second century B.C. at the latest. They may even be a whole lot older than that.

One of the most important sources that we have for the most ancient stages of the religion of Israel are some

epic texts about the gods of Canaan that were found in an archaeological excavation in a place called Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) early in the twentieth century. These epics reveal a very rich ancient Canaanite mythology, especially in the elaborated stories of the gods 'El and Ba'al and their rivals and consorts. While, of course, the Israelite branch of the Canaanite group partly defined itself through the rejection of this mythology, much of the imagery and narrative allusions that we find in the works of the Israelite prophets, the Psalms, and other biblical poetic texts are best illuminated through comparison with these ancient texts. These fragments of reused ancient epic material within the Bible reveal also the existence of an ancient Israelite version of these epics and the mythology that they enact. Yale Divinity School scholar J.J. Collins has helpfully summed up the main points of comparison of Daniel 7 with Canaanite (Ugaritic) representations.<sup>14</sup> As he argues, "What is important is the pattern of relationships,"<sup>15</sup> namely, the fact that in Daniel there are two godlike figures, one old and one young, the younger one comes riding on the clouds, and he receives everlasting dominion.<sup>16</sup> Colpe has noted "the mythographical similarity between the relation of the Ancient of Days and Son of Man on the one side and that of El and Ba'al on the other, which fits into the broader conclusion that older material lives on in the tradition of Israel and Judah."<sup>17</sup>

The most persuasive reconstruction from the evidence

we have shows that in the ancient religion of Israel, 'El was the general Canaanite high divinity while YHVH was the Ba'al-like divinity of a small group of southern Canaanites, the Hebrews, with 'El a very distant absence for these Hebrews. When the groups merged and emerged as Israel,<sup>18</sup> YHVH, the Israelite version of Ba'al, became assimilated to 'El as the high God and their attributes largely merged into one doubled God, with 'El receiving his warlike stormgod characteristics from YHVH.<sup>19</sup> Thus, to restate the point, the ancient 'El and YHVH—a southern Hebrew equivalent in function (within the paradigm of relations between 'El and a young warrior god to the northern Ba'al)<sup>20</sup>—apparently merged at some early point in Israelo-Canaanite history, thus producing a rather tense and unstable monotheism.<sup>21</sup> This merger was not by any means a perfect union. 'El and YHVH had very different and in some ways antithetical functions, and I propose that this left a residue in which some of the characteristics of the young divinity always had the potential to split off again in a hypostasis (or even separate god) of their own.<sup>22</sup> This tension and resultant splitting manifests itself in the traditions behind the Daniel 7 theophany, where we see a new young one, apparently nameless until he comes to be called Jesus—or Enoch.<sup>23</sup> As a medieval rabbinic hymn, still feeling that tension, would have it, YHVH is an “ancient on the day of judgment and a youth on the day of battle.”

This merger, if indeed it occurred, must have happened very early on, for the worship of only one God characterizes Israel, at least in aspiration, from the time of Josiah (sixth century B.C.) and the Deuteronomist revolution, if not much earlier. This merger leaves its marks right on the surface of the text, where the 'El-YHVH combination can still be detected in the tensions and doublings of the biblical text, available to be resurrected, as it were, by astute readers of a certain cast of religious mind as a second, young God, or as a part of God, or as a divine person within God (and all of these options have been adopted by perfectly "orthodox," non-Christian Jewish theologians as well as by Christians).<sup>24</sup>

The young God in the original mythic text in Daniel is the figure who will redeem Israel and the world, not an exalted Davidic king.<sup>25</sup> There is, as I have argued, nothing in this vision that suggests or even allows seeing the one like a son of man as an actual human being. Setting aside the internal explanation and just looking at the original vision, however, we do find that this divine figure will be given "the dominion, the glory, the kingdom and all of the peoples, nations, and languages will worship him, and his dominion will be eternal dominion which will not pass and his kingdom which will not be destroyed." This mythic pattern of second God as Redeemer will be crucial, of course, in interpreting the Gospels and the pattern of religion proclaimed there and in which we will have

to try to understand better the relation of this divine Redeemer to the human one, the Davidic Messiah.

The general outlines of a theology of a young God subordinated to an old God are present in the throne vision of Daniel 7, however much the author of Daniel labored to suppress this. In place of notions of 'El and YHVH as the two Gods of Israel, the pattern of an older god and a younger one—a god of wise judgment and a god of war and punishment—has been transferred from older forms of Israelite/Canaanite religion to new forms. Here, the older god is now entirely named by the tetragrammaton YHVH (and his supremacy is not in question), while the functions of the younger god have been in part taken by supreme angels or other sorts of divine beings, Redeemer figures, at least in the “official” religion of the biblical text. Once YHVH absorbs 'El, the younger god has no name of his own but presumably is identified at different times with the archangels or other versions of the Great Angel, Michael, as well as with Enoch, Christ, and later Meṭaṭron as well.<sup>26</sup> Some of the ancient guises of the younger god found in Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and later, especially “the Little Yahu,” Yaho'el,” indicate his extrabiblical identity as YHVH.<sup>27</sup> It is the power of that myth that explains the continuing life of Jewish binitarianism into Christian Judaism and vitally present in non-Christian Judaism as well (Little Yahu as a name for the divine vice-regent; Meṭaṭron appearing as late as the

Byzantine period in a Hebrew Jewish text). There are thus two legacies left us by Daniel 7: it is the ultimate source of “Son of Man” terminology for a heavenly Redeemer figure, and it is also the best evidence we have for the continuation of a very ancient binitarian Israelite theology deep into the Second Temple period. Although these are separate in Daniel (since that text contains no figure explicitly called the Son of Man), it is the not entirely successful suppression of this myth in Daniel and thus its strong association with the “one like a son of man” that will explain the later development of “Son of Man” as a title in the Gospels (as well as some other ancient Jewish religious texts such as the Book of Enoch).

The meaning of the term “Son of Man” and its usage within chapter 7 of Daniel is a bit of very precious evidence—all the more so as it is against the grain of the biblical theology itself—for the continued vitality of worship of an old God and a young God in Israel. This evidence helps clarify the historical ties of that pattern of religion to later forms of Judaism, including both rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.<sup>28</sup> I see it as very much a living part of Israel’s religion both before and long after, explaining both the form of Judaism we call Christianity and also much in non-Christian later Judaism as well.<sup>29</sup> If Daniel is the prophecy, the Gospels are the fulfillment.

*How the Jews Came to Believe That Jesus Was God*

If all the Jews—or even a substantial number—expected that the Messiah would be divine as well as human, then the belief in Jesus as God is not the point of departure on which some new religion came into being but simply another variant (and not a deviant one) of Judaism. As controversial a statement as this may seem, it must first be understood in the context of a broader debate about the origins of the divinity of Jesus. The theological idea that Jesus actually was God, however refined by the later niceties of trinitarian theology, is referred to as a “high Christology,” in opposition to “low Christologies” according to which Jesus was essentially an inspired human being, a prophet or teacher, and not God.

“Christology” is the term in Christian theology and the history of Christianity for all of the issues and controversies that make up the story and the doctrine of the Christ. In the fifth century, for instance, the great controversy about whether Jesus had one human nature and one divine nature or one combined divine-human nature was called the “Christological controversy.” Many other issues have been discussed and thought about under the rubric of Christology, however. Was Jesus divine from birth or an ordinary human later adopted by God and made divine? How did Jesus effect salvation—through his crucifixion, his teaching, his showing the way for humans to become

divine? It has frequently been asserted that low Christologies are “Jewish” ones, while high Christologies have come into Christianity from the Greek thought world. Oddly enough, this position has been taken both by Jewish writers seeking to discredit Christianity as a kind of paganism and by orthodox Christian scholars wishing to distinguish the “new religion” from the old one as far and as quickly as possible. This doubly defensive approach can no longer be maintained.

The question of the origins of high Christology is one that continues to animate a great deal of scholarship on the prehistory of Christianity, or the history of pre-Christianity as attested in the New Testament, for at first glance it would seem to violate the absolute principle of Jewish monotheism. In a recent article, Andrew Chester has helpfully summarized the various positions that are currently held and defended by scholars on this question, which can be divided into four broad schools of thought.<sup>30</sup> According to the first, which has been popular among liberal Protestants for over a century, the idea of the divinity of Christ could only have been a relatively late and “Gentile” development that marks a decisive break with anything that could reasonably be called Jewish. The argument goes that the early Jewish believers in Jesus believed in him as an inspired teacher, perhaps a prophet, perhaps the Messiah but only in the human sense. It was only later on, this view would hold, after the majority of

Christians were no longer Jews, that the idea of Jesus as God came in, possibly under the sway of the “pagan” ideas of many of the new Christian converts.

A second approach, currently enjoying ascendance especially among New Testament scholars, sees the earliest versions of high Christology as emerging within a Jewish religious context.<sup>31</sup> I submit that it is possible to understand the Gospel only if both Jesus and the Jews around him held to a high Christology whereby the claim to Messiahship was also a claim to being a divine man.\* Were it not the case, we would be very hard-pressed to understand the extremely hostile reaction to Jesus on the part of Jewish leaders who did not accept his claim. Controversy

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\* Adela Yarbro Collins has recently distinguished two senses of “divinity”: “One is functional. The ‘one like a son of man’ in Daniel 7:13–14, ‘that Son of Man’ in the Similitudes of Enoch, and Jesus in some Synoptic passages are divine in this sense when they exercise (or are anticipated as exercising) divine activities like ruling over a universal kingdom, sitting on a heavenly throne, judging human beings in the end-time or traveling on the clouds, a typically divine mode of transport. The other sense is ontological.” Adela Yarbro Collins, “‘How on Earth Did Jesus Become God’: A Reply,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. David B. Capes et al. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 57. It is that former sense to which I refer throughout this book, as I believe that the very distinction between “functional” and “ontological” is a product of later Greek reflection on the Gospels. In this context, see the ever-sensible and ever-helpful Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children*, 35–38. (I am grateful to Adela Yarbro Collins for this last reference.)

among Jews was hardly a new thing; for a controversy to lead to a crucifixion, it must have been a doozy. A Jew claiming that he was God, that he was the divine Son of Man whom the Jews had been expecting and, moreover, not being laughed out of the village for this claim, would have been such a doozy.

### *The Blasphemy of the Son of Man*

The reasons that many Jews came to believe that Jesus was divine was because they were already expecting that the Messiah/Christ would be a god-man. *This expectation was part and parcel of Jewish tradition.* The Jews had learned this by careful reading of the Book of Daniel and understanding its visions and revelations as a prophecy of what would happen at the end of time. In that book, as we have just seen, the young divine figure is given sovereignty and made ruler of the world forever. I want to show that Jesus saw himself as the divine Son of Man, and I will do so by explaining a couple of difficult passages in the second chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

The Son of Man has been afforded glory, sovereignty, and dominion over all the sublunary world, as we saw in Daniel 7 above: “<sup>27</sup>The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms *under the whole heaven* shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all

dominions shall serve and obey them.” While this verse comes from an interpretative framework within the chapter that seeks to demythologize the narrative of the Son of Man, such effort could not withstand the power of the verses earlier in the chapter in which the divinity of the Son of Man is so clearly marked.

In Mark 2:5–10 we read the following:

<sup>5</sup>And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” <sup>6</sup>Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup>“Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins except the one God?”<sup>32</sup> <sup>8</sup>And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question thus in your hearts? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk’? <sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic . . .

“But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” The Son of Man has authority (obviously delegated by God) to do God’s work of the forgiving of sins on earth. This claim is derived from Daniel 7:14, in which we read that the one like a son of

man has been given “authority, glory, kingship”—indeed, an “authority that is eternal that will not pass away.” The term that we conventionally translate as “authority” in its New Testament contexts, *ἐξουσία*, is exactly the same term that translates the Aramaic *שְׁלִטָּן* in the Septuagint, namely, “sovereignty” or “dominion.” That is, what Jesus is claiming for the Son of Man is exactly what has been granted to the one like a son of man in Daniel; Jesus rests his claim on the ancient text quite directly.<sup>33</sup> According to this tradition, then, Jesus claims to be the Son of Man to whom divine authority on earth “under the heavens” (Daniel 7:27) has been delegated.<sup>34</sup> The sovereign, moreover, is the one who has the power to declare exceptions to the Law.

The objection of the Scribes, calling Jesus’ act of forgiveness “blasphemy,” is predicated on their assumption that Jesus is claiming divinity through this action; hence their emphasis that only the *one* God may forgive sins, to which Jesus answers in kind: the second divine figure of Daniel 7, the one like a son of man, is authorized to act as and for God. This constitutes a direct declaration of a doubleness of the Godhead, which is, of course, later on the very hallmark of Christian theology. Throughout the Gospel, whenever Jesus claims *ἐξουσία* to perform that which appears to be the prerogative of the divinity, it is that very *ἐξουσία* of the Son of Man that is being claimed, which is to say, a scriptural authority based on a very close

reading of Daniel 7.<sup>35</sup> We see now why the later Rabbis, in naming this very ancient religious view a heresy, refer to it as “two powers in heaven.”

*“The Son of Man Is Lord Even of the Sabbath”*

The question of how to read Daniel 7 was very much on the minds of Jews of the period, and not only those who became followers of Jesus. Mark, quite directly and intentionally, is offering us a close reading of Daniel. In this light, we can begin to interpret one of the most puzzling and pivotal “Son of Man” statements in the Gospel. I place these texts in an entirely different context from the one in which they are usually read; in this new context, certain clues become much more vivid and telling. It’s a question of looking at the text in a new and different way, which in turn reveals connections that help sketch an entirely different picture of what’s going on—or better put, what was at stake for the evangelist and his hearers. This interpretation of Mark 2:10 as being a close reading of Daniel 7:14 enables me to begin to understand anew the other puzzling Son of Man statement in Mark 2, known as the incident of the plucking of grain on the Sabbath. In this story, Jesus’ disciples are discovered plucking grain and eating it as they walk on the Sabbath by some Pharisees who challenge Jesus as to this seemingly insouciant or arrogant violation of the Sabbath. Jesus defends them vigorously.

This passage helps us understand how it was that Jesus saw himself (or is portrayed as seeing himself) both as the divine Redeemer and as the Davidic Messiah whom the Jews were expecting:

<sup>23</sup>One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup>And the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" <sup>25</sup>And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>26</sup>how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" <sup>27</sup>And he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; <sup>28</sup>so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath."

There are several well-known problems attending on this passage, which (as is Mark 7, which I will presently treat) is of enormous importance for reconstructing Jewish religious history.<sup>36</sup> The major issues are the reason for the disciples plucking on the Sabbath; the nature and meaning of Jesus' reply invoking the analogy of David; the connection between that reply and vv. 27–28, in which the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, and the Sabbath is

made for man; and the meaning and connection between those verses.<sup>37</sup> Jesus seems to be giving too many justifications of the disciples' behavior; is the defense based on an ancient halakhic principle that the Sabbath may be violated for human welfare, or does it have something to do with Jesus' messianic status? Many scholars have "solved" these problems by assuming that the text has been interpolated. This explanation, while in itself unsatisfactory, points up the tension in the text between ancient halakhic (legal) controversy (which there certainly is here) and radical apocalyptic transformation in the words of Jesus (which I believe is also here). What convinces me that there is genuine memory of halakhic controversy here is the fact that the elements of Jesus' arguments are found later within the traditions of the Rabbis.\*

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\* "The Rabbis" is a designation for the leaders of a group of Jewish teachers who produced the Mishna, the midrashim, and the two Talmuds, Palestinian and Babylonian. They flourished from the second through the seventh centuries A.D. in Palestine and Babylonia and were eventually accepted as the authoritative transmitters of Judaism. The authorities cited in this passage are all second-century Palestinians (*tannaim*), so even if the attributions are genuine, the text is later than the Gospels. Although the rabbinic parallel does illumine some aspects of Jesus' statement—namely, its scriptural basis—what is more important is that the Gospel attests to the antiquity of a rabbinic idea. What we see here is convergence (despite some vitally important differences) between two sets of Jewish traditions about the Sabbath, both of which permitted at least some healing on the Sabbath based in part on the same reasoning, namely, that the Sabbath was given to benefit those who keep it, not that the people are there to serve the Sabbath.

Here is the crucial text for our purposes:

Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi El'azar the son of Azariah and Rabbi Akiva were walking on the way and Levi Hassaddar and Rabbi Ishmael the son of Rabbi El'azar the son of Azariah were walking behind them. And the question arose among them: *“From whence do we know that the saving of a life supersedes the Sabbath?”*

Rabbi Ishmael answered: Behold it says: “If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; <sup>3</sup>but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed” [Exodus 22:2–3]. And this is true even if we are not sure whether he came to kill or only to steal. Now the reasoning is from the light to the heavy: Just as the killing of a person which pollutes the Land and pushes the divine presence away supersedes the Sabbath (in such a case of one caught at night breaking and entering), even more so the saving of a life!”

Rabbi El'azar spoke up with a different answer: “Just as circumcision which [saves] only one member of a person supersedes the Sabbath, the entire body even more so!” . . .

Rabbi Akiva says: “If murder supersedes the Temple worship which supersedes the Sabbath, saving a life even more so!”

Rabbi Yose Hagelili says: “When it says ‘But keep

my Sabbaths,' the word 'but' makes a distinction: There are Sabbaths that you push aside and those that you keep [i.e., when human life is at stake, this supersedes the Sabbath]."

Rabbi Shim'on the son of Menasya says: "Behold it says: Keep the Sabbath because it is holy to *you*; to *you* the Sabbath is delivered and not you to the Sabbath." Rabbi Natan says: "It says: And the Children of Israel kept the Sabbath to keep the Sabbath for their generations. Profane one Sabbath for him [the sick person] in order that he may keep many Sabbaths!" (Mekhilta, Tractate Sabbath, 1)<sup>38</sup>

In seeking to distinguish the radically new and un-Jewish in Jesus' preaching, Christian writers have frequently read his statement that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath both as indicating total opposition to the keeping of the Sabbath laws at all and as initiating a religion of love and not one of casuistry. In this text, however, we see that the Rabbis themselves held views about the Sabbath that were closely related to Jesus' own (more expansive, to be sure) views, certainly not in direct contradiction of them. The thematic similarities between some of these arguments and Jesus' arguments in the Gospel are striking. This parallel gets even stronger when we consider one further argument that we find in Matthew 12 but not in Mark: "Or have you not read in

the law how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you something greater than the Temple is here,” thus providing a parallel to Rabbi Akiva’s argument from the Temple as well.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus may very well have been in controversy with ancient Pharisees who had not yet articulated the principle that saving a life supersedes the Sabbath. As my colleague Aharon Shemesh points out, such was the opinion of the Jews of the Dead Sea Community.<sup>40</sup> Jesus’ teaching in this regard, however, is hardly in opposition to the teaching of the later *tannaim*, who possibly did learn it from Jesus but probably did not. What is distinctive to the Jesus of the Gospels is, I think, the further apocalyptic extension of these principles, namely, the Son of Man statement—the statement that the Son of Man, the divine Messiah, is now lord of the Sabbath.

It is this too that explains the one probable and potentially huge difference between the saying of the Rabbis and that of the evangelist (or Jesus). The rabbinic interpretations, and their halakha, tend strongly in the direction of allowing the violation of the Sabbath by a Jew to save another Jew, while the setting of Jesus’ saying and its consequence seem (but not inescapably) to indicate that any human might be saved on the Sabbath. If it is the case, as it seems, that the Rabbis’ law applies only to Jews, Jesus’ extension of it is a product of the radical apocalyptic moment within which the Gospel of Mark is written, a moment

in which the Torah was not rejected but expanded and “fulfilled”—to use Matthean terminology—a moment in which the Son of Man was revealed and claimed his full authority.<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man, according to Daniel, was indeed given jurisdiction over all of the nations, and I would suggest gingerly that this explains the extension of the Sabbath (and thus Sabbath healing) to them. Here in Mark we find a Jesus who is fulfilling the Torah, not abrogating it.

The Gospels are testimony to the antiquity of themes and controversies that later appear in rabbinic literature. Since there is little reason to believe that the Rabbis actually read the Gospels, it follows that we have independent witnesses to these controversies. The arguments from David’s violation of the Torah, from the assertion that the Sabbath was made for the human being, and from the service in the Temple constituting a permitted violation of the Sabbath (the latter found in Matthew and not in Mark) are all mobilized in rabbinic literature in order to justify saving life on the Sabbath (including, no doubt, salvation from starvation), with only the important proviso that it must be necessary for the healing to be done on the Sabbath, that is, the condition is life-threatening, or might be if not treated. This concatenation can hardly be coincidental; some very early version of a controversy of the permission to heal on Sabbath is to be found in this passage.<sup>42</sup> Were we to remain at this level of interpretation, we would find a not particularly radical, even strangely

“rabbinic” Jesus fighting against some rigorists whom he identifies as Pharisees. However, this approach leaves too much in the text unexplained. It doesn’t explain at all the argument from David’s having fed himself and his followers on forbidden bread. We will see presently how taking that textual moment seriously will reveal another dimension of the Markan theology of Jesus (Christology).<sup>43</sup>

In short, my suggestion is that a set of controversy arguments in favor of allowing violation of the Sabbath for healing (now an accepted practice) has been overlaid with and radicalized by a further apocalyptic moment suggested by the very connection with David’s behavior. The David story itself can go either way. Just as the Rabbis chose to emphasize David’s hunger and thus the lifesaving aspect of the story, justifying other breaches of the law if a life can be saved (Palestinian Talmud Yoma 8:6, 45:b), so did Matthew; Mark, by contrast, understanding the story as being about the special privileges of the Messiah, pushed it in the direction that he did. On this account, the reason for the absence of v. 27 in Matthew (and Luke) is that Mark’s messianic theology was a bit too radical for the later evangelists.

I think that the problems of this sequence of verses are best unraveled if we take seriously its context following Mark 2:10, as I have just discussed. If Jesus (the Markan Jesus, or the Jesus of these passages) proclaims himself as the Son of Man who has \_\_\_\_\_ by virtue of Daniel 7:14, then

it is entirely plausible that he would claim sovereignty over the Sabbath as well. Extending the clearly controversial notion that healing is permitted on the Sabbath by virtue of various biblical precedents and arguments, Jesus makes a much more radical claim: not only does the Torah authorize healing of the deathly sick on the Sabbath, but the Messiah himself, the Son of Man, is given sovereignty to decide how to further extend and interpret the Sabbath law. This is, I suggest, primarily motivated by the fact that it is David who violates the Law to feed his minions, so Jesus—the new David, the Son of Man—may do so to feed his minyan.<sup>44</sup> The point is surely not—as certain interpreters give it—that David violated the Law and God did not protest, so therefore the Law is invalid and anyone may violate it. Rather, it is that David, the type of the Messiah, enjoyed sovereignty to set aside parts of the Law, and so too does Jesus, the new David, the Messiah. This is not an attack on the Law or on alleged pharisaic legalism but an apocalyptic declaration of a new moment in history in which a new Lord, the Son of Man, has been appointed over the Law.

Paying attention to the Danielic allusion implicit in every use of the phrase “Son of Man,” one can see that in all those situations the Markan Jesus is making precisely the same kind of claim on the basis of the authority delegated to the Son of Man in Daniel as he does in Mark 2:10.<sup>45</sup> This enables me to propose a solution to the sequence of vv. 27–28. One objection could be that the

Sabbath is not “under the heavens” but in heaven and thus not susceptible to the transfer of authority from the Ancient of Days to the one like a son of man. This objection is entirely answered by the statement that the Sabbath was made for the human being; consequently the Son of Man, having been given dominion in the human realm, is the Lord of the Sabbath.<sup>46</sup> It is actually a necessary part of the argument that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, for if the Sabbath is (as one might very well claim on the basis of Genesis 1) in heaven, then the claim that the Son of Man, who has sovereignty only on earth, can abrogate its provisions would be very weak. I think that this explanation of the connection between vv. 27 and 28 answers many interpretative conundrums that arise when 27 is read as a weak humanistic statement, something like “The Sabbath was made for man, so do whatever you want.”<sup>47</sup> In my view, in contrast, what may have been a traditional Jewish saying to justify breaking the Sabbath to preserve life is, in the hands of Mark’s Jesus, the justification for a *messianic* abrogation of the Sabbath.<sup>48</sup> This interpretation has the virtue, I think, of solving two major interpretative sticking points in the text: the unity of the two answers of Jesus (both are references to his messianic status) and the subordination of “So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”<sup>49</sup>

The halakhic arguments in Jesus’ mouth here and in chapter 7 are too well formed and well attested historically to be ignored; Jesus, or Mark, certainly knew his way

around a halakhic argument.<sup>50</sup> They are not a relic but represent, I believe, actual contests from the first century, and as such, they provide precious evidence that such halakhic discourse and reasoning was extant already then. But that is not all there is here, of course. There are two elements that mark off the Gospel mobilization of these arguments from a purely halakhic controversy. The first is that in both cases, Jesus uses the argument itself and the halakha itself as a sign of an ethical reading, a kind of parable (called such explicitly in chapter 7); the second and most exciting is that the apocalyptic element of the Son of Man is introduced here, as in the story of the paralytic, to bring home the messianic nature, the divine-human nature, of the sovereignty of Jesus as the Son of Man now on earth. The comparison to David is, of course, very pointed and does suggest that the Redeemer of Daniel 7:13–14 is indeed understood as the messianic king, son of David. I would find here, therefore, clear evidence of identification of the Davidic Messiah with the Son of Man, an identification that clearly does not require a human genealogical connection between the two, for the Son of Man is a figure entirely heavenly who becomes a human being.<sup>51</sup> There were other ancient Jews from around the time of the earliest Gospel writings who also read Daniel 7 in the way that I am suggesting Jesus did. On this reading, Mark's saying about the Son of Man being Lord of the Sabbath is precisely a radical eschatological move, but not one that is constituted by a

step outside of the broad community of Israelites or even Jews. If Daniel's vision is now being fulfilled through the person of Jesus as the incarnation of the Son of Man, some radical change is exactly what would be expected during the end times. The sovereign, we are told by modern political theorists, is the one who can make exceptions to the law when judged necessary or appropriate. It is exactly for such judgments that the Son of Man was given sovereignty. The sovereignty is expressed by extending the permission granted to Jews to violate the Sabbath to save the lives of other Sabbath observers by Jesus the Messiah to include all humans. This eschatological move is one that many Jews would have rejected not because they did not believe that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath but because they did not believe that Jesus was the Son of Man.

I would argue that this divine figure to whom authority has been delegated is a Redeemer king, as the Daniel passage clearly states.<sup>52</sup> Thus he stands ripe for identification with the Davidic Messiah, as he is in the Gospel and also in non-Christian contemporary Jewish literature such as Enoch and Fourth Ezra. The usage of "Son of Man" in the Gospels joins up with the evidence of such usage from these other ancient Jewish texts to lead us to consider this term used in this way (and, more important, the concept of a second divinity implied by it) as the common coin—which I emphasize does not mean universal or uncontested—of Judaism already before Jesus.