

*The Son of Man in First Enoch and
Fourth Ezra: Other Jewish Messiahs
of the First Century*

THE JESUS FOLK were not alone on the Jewish scene. Other Jews had been imagining various human figures as achieving the status of divinity and sitting next to God or even in God's place on the divine throne. At about the time of the Book of Daniel, Ezekiel the Tragedian, an Alexandrian Jew, wrote:

*I had a vision of a great throne on the top of Mount
Sinai
and it reached till the folds of heaven.
A noble man was sitting on it,
with a crown and a large sceptre in his
left hand. He beckoned to me with his right hand,
so I approached and stood before the throne.*

*He gave me the sceptre and instructed me to sit on the great throne. Then he gave me the royal crown and got up, from the throne.*¹

Here we have the crucial image of the divine throne and the emplacement of a second figure on the throne alongside of or even in place of the Ancient One. Within the context of Second Temple Judaism, “if we find a figure distinguishable from God seated on God’s throne itself, we should see that as one of Judaism’s most potent theological symbolical means of including such a figure in the unique divine identity.”² Following this principle, we see that in this text Moses has become God. Not such an impossible thought, then, for a Jew, even one who lived long before Jesus. If Moses could be God in one version of a Jewish religious imagination, then why not Jesus in another?

Jews at the same time of Jesus had been waiting for a Messiah who was both human and divine and who was the Son of Man, an idea they derived from the passage from Daniel 7. Almost the entire story of the Christ—with important variations to be sure—is found as well in the religious ideas of some Jews who didn’t even know about Jesus. Jesus for his followers fulfilled the idea of the Christ; the Christ was not invented to explain Jesus’ life and death. Versions of this narrative, the Son of Man story (the story that is later named Christology), were

widespread among Jews before the advent of Jesus; Jesus entered into a role that existed prior to his birth, and this is why so many Jews were prepared to accept him as the Christ, as the Messiah, Son of Man. This way of looking at things is quite opposite to a scholarly tradition that assumes that Jesus came first and that Christology was created after the fact in order to explain his amazing career. The job description—Required: one Christ, will be divine, will be called Son of Man, will be sovereign and savior of the Jews and the world—was there already and Jesus fit (or did not according to other Jews) the bill. The job description was not a put-up job tailored to fit Jesus!

The single most exciting document for understanding this aspect of the early history of the Christ idea is to be found in a book known as the Similitudes (or Parables) of Enoch. This marvelous text (which seems to have been produced at just about the same time as the earliest of the Gospels) shows that there were other Palestinian Jews who expected a Redeemer known as the Son of Man, who would be a divine figure embodied in an exalted human. Because it is unconnected with the Gospels in any direct way, this text is thus an independent witness to the presence of this religious idea among Palestinian Jews of the time and not only among the Jewish groups within which Jesus was active.

The Similitudes of Enoch

The Book of Enoch is a key part of the Bible of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; it does not appear in Western Bibles, whether Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. The Book of Enoch contains five sub-books: the Book of the Watchers, the Similitudes of Enoch, the Astronomical Book, the Animal Apocalypse, and the Epistle of Enoch. These books, all purporting to have been written by the antediluvian Enoch, were separate works gathered together at some point, probably during the late first century A.D. Fragments of them have been found at Qumran (among the Dead Sea Scrolls), except for the Similitudes, and fragments are known from various Greek sources as well. Present opinion is almost entirely solid that the Book of the Watchers is the oldest bit of Enoch (third century B.C.) and the Similitudes, our present concern, the youngest, dating from the mid-first century A.D. All of the pieces are couched as visions beheld or shown to that ancient sage Enoch, and thus the text as a whole is an apocalypse, a revelation, similar to the Book of Daniel or the canonical New Testament book of Revelation.

The Similitudes and the Gospels

In the Similitudes of Enoch, a Jewish writer of sometime in the first century A.D.³ makes extensive use of the

term “Son of Man” to refer to a particular divine-human Redeemer figure eventually incarnated in the figure of Enoch, thus exhibiting many of the elements that make up the Christ story.⁴ Enoch’s “Son of Man” is the descendant in the tradition of Daniel’s “one like a son of man.”⁵ In the Similitudes of Enoch, Chapter 46, we are provided with the following vision of Enoch the visionary speaker:

There I saw one who had a head of days, and his head was like white wool.⁶ And with him was another, whose face was like the appearance of a man; and his face was full of graciousness like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel of peace, who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, about that son of man—who he was and whence he was [and] why he went with the Head of Days. And he answered me and said to me, “This is the son of man who has righteousness. . . .”

In the Enoch text, just as in Daniel and in almost the same wording, there are two divine figures, one again who is ancient and one who has the appearance of a man, the appearance of a “son of man,” a young man, or so it seems in contrast to the Ancient One. It is clear that Enoch knows exactly who the “head of days” is, but he wonders who Son of Man is. There is dramatic irony here. Although Enoch does not know who the Son of Man is, we do—the one who in Daniel comes with the Ancient of Days of the snowy

beard and two thrones as well. By the end of the Similitudes of Enoch, as we shall see below, Enoch will have become that Son of Man, much as Jesus does in the Gospels.

This book provides us with our most explicit evidence that the Son of Man as a divine-human Redeemer arose by Jesus' time from reading the Book of Daniel. Chapter 46 of the book actually provides an exciting demonstration of the process of that reading. We can see there how the chapter of Daniel has been used in the making of a new "myth," in the case of the Similitudes; for other Jews, no doubt, the myth of the Messiah formed in the same way. The interpretative process that we observe in this case is an early form of the type of Jewish biblical interpretation later known as midrash.^{7*} Strikingly, however, Enoch's angel contradicts Daniel's. While Daniel's angel explains that the Son of Man is a symbol for the holy ones of Israel (the Maccabean martyrs), Enoch's angel explains the Son

* Although a whole library could (and has been) written on midrash, for the present purposes it will be sufficient to define it as a mode of biblical reading that brings disparate passages and verses together in the elaboration of new narratives. It is something like the old game of anagrams in which the players look at words or texts and seek to form new words and texts out of the letters that are there. The rabbis who produced the midrashic way of reading considered the Bible one enormous signifying system, any part of which could be taken as commenting on or supplementing any other part. They were thus able to make new stories out of fragments of older ones (from the Bible itself), via a kind of anagrams writ large; the new stories, which build closely on the biblical narratives but expand and modify them as well, were considered the equals of the biblical stories themselves.

of Man as a righteous divine figure. As we have seen in chapter 1 of this book, this seems to have been the original meaning of the vision, a meaning the author/redactor of the Book of Daniel sought to suppress by having the angel interpret the Son of Man allegorically. What we learn from this is that there was controversy among Jews about the Son of Man long before the Gospels were written. Some Jews accepted and some rejected the idea of a divine Messiah. The Similitudes are evidence for the tradition of interpretation of the Son of Man as such a divine person, the tradition that fed into the Jesus movement as well. It is only centuries later, of course, that this difference in belief would become the marker and touchstone of the difference between two religions.

Son of Man speculation and expectation seem, then, to have been a widespread form of Jewish belief at the end of the Second Temple period. The Similitudes seem to have been not the product of an isolated sect but part of a more general Jewish world of thought and writing.⁸ Jesus' God-man Messiahship was just what the Jews ordered, even if many didn't think he fit the bill (and many others outside of Palestine, at least, never heard of him).

In the Book of Enoch, this figure is a part of God; as a second or junior divinity, he may even be considered a Son alongside the Ancient of Days, whom we might begin to think of as the Father. Although the Messiah designation appears elsewhere also, it is in Enoch 48 that the

similarities to the Gospel ideas about Jesus are most pronounced. Here is this riveting passage in its entirety:

¹*In that place I saw the spring of righteousness, and it was inexhaustible, and many springs of wisdom surrounded it.*

*And all the thirsty drank from them and were filled with wisdom;
and their dwelling places were with the righteous and the holy and the chosen.*

²*And in that hour that son of man was named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits,
and his name, before the Head of Days.*

³*Even before the sun and the constellations were created,
before the stars of heaven were made,
his name was named before the Lord of Spirits.*

⁴*He will be a staff for the righteous,
that they may lean on him and not fall;
And he will be the light of the nations,
and he will be a hope for those who grieve in their hearts.*

⁵*All who dwell on the earth will fall down and worship before him,
and they will glorify and bless and sing hymns to the name of the Lord of Spirits.*

⁶*For this reason he was chosen and hidden in his presence before the world was created and forever.*

⁷*And the wisdom of the Lord of Spirits has revealed
him to the holy and the righteous;
for he has preserved the portion of the righteous.
For they have hated and despised this age of
unrighteousness;*

*Indeed, all its deeds and its ways they have hated in
the name of the Lord of Spirits.*

For in his name they are saved.

and he is the vindicator of their lives.

⁸*In those days, downcast will be the faces of the kings of
the earth,
and the strong who possess the earth, because of the
deeds of their hands.*

*For on the day of their tribulation and distress they
will not save themselves;*

⁹*and into the hands of my chosen ones I shall throw them.
As straw in the fire and as lead in the water,
thus they will burn before the face of the holy,
and they will sink before the face of the righteous;
and no trace of them will be found.*

¹⁰*And on the day of their distress there will be rest on
the earth,
and before them they will fall and not rise,
and there will be no one to take them with his hand
and raise them.*

*For they have denied the Lord of Spirits and his
Anointed One.*

Blessed be the name of the Lord of Spirits.⁹

This piece of beautiful religious poetry forms an absolutely pivotal text for illuminating the Christology of the Gospels—as well as for demonstrating the essential Jewishness of that phenomenon. First of all, we find here the doctrine of the preexistence of the Son of Man. He was named even before the universe came into being. Second, the Son of Man will be worshipped on earth: “All who dwell on the earth will fall down and worship before him, and they will glorify and bless and sing hymns to the name of the Lord of Spirits.” Third, and perhaps most important of all, in v. 10 he is named as the Anointed One, which is precisely the Messiah (Hebrew *mashiah*) or Christ (Greek *Christos*). It seems quite clear, therefore, that many of the religious ideas that were held about the Christ who was identified as Jesus were already present in the Judaism from which both the Enoch circle and the circles around Jesus emerged.

An equally exciting revelation comes in chapter 69 of the Similitudes, where we read about the final judgment:

*²⁶And they had great joy,
and they blessed and glorified and exalted,
because the name of that son of man had been re-
vealed to them.*

²⁷And he sat on the throne of glory

and the whole judgment was given to the son of
man,
*and he will make sinners vanish and perish from the
face of the earth.*

²⁸*And those who led the world astray will be bound in
chains,
and in the assembly place of their destruction they will
be confined;
and all their works will vanish from the race of the
earth,*

²⁹And from then on there will be nothing that is
corruptible;
for that son of man has appeared,
And he has sat down on the throne of his
glory,
and all evil will vanish from his presence.
And the word of the son of man will go forth
And will prevail in the presence of the Lord of
Spirits.¹⁰

Here the Son of Man is clearly occupying his throne of glory, seated, perhaps, at the right hand of the Ancient of Days. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Son of Man is in fact a second person, as it were, of God. And all of the functions assigned to the divine figure called “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7 are given to this Son of Man, who is also called, as we have seen, the Christ.

*And Enoch Was with God:
The Apotheosis of Enoch*

One of the most striking aspects of the doctrine of Christ is the combination in one figure of man and God. Even this radical idea, however, is not unique among Jews to followers of Jesus. We find it in the Similitudes as well. In the main body of the Similitudes, Enoch is *not* the Son of Man. This is emphatically the case, since in chapter 46 and throughout the main body of the text, he is the one who sees the Son of Man and to whom is revealed the description of the Son of Man as the eschatological Redeemer and Messiah; therefore Enoch cannot be identical with him.¹¹ In the end, however, in chapters 70 and 71, Enoch becomes the Son of Man—he becomes God.¹²

In these chapters we have a remarkable exaltation scene. In chapter 70, we are told of Enoch in the third person: “And it came to pass after this [that], while he was living, his name was lifted from those who dwell upon the dry ground to the presence of the Son of Man *and* to the presence of the Lord of Spirits. And he was lifted on the chariots of the spirit, and *his* name vanished among them.” But then, without pause, the text shifts into the first person, and we are told, “And from that day I was not *counted* among them.” We have here a midrashic expansion of the famous Enoch verse from Genesis that “Enoch walked with God and he was not”: that is, an instance

of apotheosis, of a special human becoming divine. As Moshe Idel, the world-renowned scholar of Kabbalah, has remarked:

Various important developments in the history of Jewish mysticism [are to be explained as] an ongoing competition and synthesis between two main vectors: the apotheotic and the theophanic. The former represents the impulses of a few elite individuals to transcend the human mortal situation through a process of theosis, by ascending on high, to be transformed into a more lasting entity, an angel or God. In contrast to this upward aspiration is the theophanic vector, which stands for the revelation of the divine in a direct manner or via mediating hierarchies.¹³

This very competition is being worked out in the pages of the Enochic Similitudes; moreover, a crucial synthesis is taking place, a synthesis of apotheotic and theophanic traditions that is key to the religious background of the Gospels as well. In Enoch here, as in the nearly contemporary Gospels, we find a powerful connection or synthesis between the idea of God made manifest to men by appearing on earth as a man (theophany) and of a man being raised to the level of divinity (apotheosis).

In these final chapters of the Similitudes, Enoch is shown all of the secrets of the universe and brought to the

house of the archangels, with the Ancient of Days among them. In chapter 71, the Ancient of Days comes to Enoch and declares, “You are the Son of Man who was born to righteousness, and righteousness remains over you, and the righteousness of the Ancient of Days will not leave you.” Enoch has been exalted and been fused with the Son of Man, the preexistent divine Redeemer and heavenly Messiah whom we have already met.¹⁴

Enoch Becomes the Son of Man

Notwithstanding later theological niceties, the Gospels also comprise a story of a God who becomes man (theophany) and another of a man who becomes God (apotheosis). That is, we can still observe within the Gospel (especially in Mark, which has no miraculous birth story, and also even in Paul) the remnants of a version of Christology in which Jesus was born a man but became God at his baptism. This idea, later named the heresy of adoptionism (God adopting Jesus as his Son), was not quite stamped out until the Middle Ages. Seeing the doubleness of the narrative of the Son of Man in the Enoch book thus helps us understand the doubleness of the story of Jesus in the Gospels as well. It helps us make sense of the multiple acts of the Christ story: his birth as God, his becoming of God at his baptism, his death and resurrection as a living human once again, teaching on earth, and

then his exaltation to the right hand of God for eternity. It is almost as if two stories have been brought together into one plot: one story of a God who became man, came down to earth, and returned home, and a second story of a man who became God and then ascended on high.

Looking at Enoch in detail will teach us much about the religion and religious history of these Jews who believed that a man became God (or that God became a man). The roots of Enoch's apotheosis seem to go back very far in the ancient Near East. I hope to uncover the outlines of a fateful moment in Jewish religious history, the one in which the doctrine of the Messiah as an incarnate divine person and as an exalted human is formed.¹⁵ It is good to remember here that the idea of the Messiah originally centered around an ordinary, human king of the House of David who would restore that longed-for monarchy, while the idea of a divine Redeemer developed separately. It is around the time of Jesus (or actually somewhat earlier) that these two ideas are combined into the concept of a divine Messiah. The best evidence for this is that in the Similitudes, we find the same combination of religious notions that we find in the contemporaneous Gospels.

The preexistence of the Son of Man is quite explicitly brought out in the Similitudes at 48:2–3: “And at that hour that Son of Man was named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, and his name before the Head of Days.

Even before the sun and the constellations were created, before the stars of heaven were made, his name was named before the Lord of Spirits.” This is the same chapter in which he is named as the Messiah as well. Moreover, in the verses that continue from this one, he is indicated as the Redeemer and also one to whom worship is due: “He will be a staff for the righteous, that they may lean on him and not fall; And he will be the light of the nations, and he will be a hope for those who grieve in their hearts. All who dwell on the earth will fall down and worship before him, and they will glorify and bless and sing hymns to the name of the Lord of Spirits. For this [reason] he was chosen and hidden in his presence before the world was created and forever” (vv. 4–6). And finally: “For in his name [the righteous] are saved, and he is the vindicator of their lives” (v. 7).

This is not precisely the same sort of tradition as the one that involves the ascension of a human figure to the position of preexistent heavenly Redeemer, however; the two themes seem almost to contradict each other. In chapter 46 and its sequels, the Son of Man is divine and Enoch a wise seer who has been afforded remarkable visions; in chapters 70–71, Enoch himself has been identified as divine. This is a version of the apotheosis tradition, the human who has become divine.

On the other hand, in the earlier chapters of the Similitudes, the Son of Man does get to sit on that throne; here

we have the notion of the theophany, the divine figure who will reveal himself in the man. In these chapters, the Son of Man, who also carries, as we have seen, the title of Messiah, has the role of eschatological judge (judge at the final assizes). This clearly comes out from a way of reading Daniel 7:14—"To him was given dominion and kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages will serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away, and his kingdom is indestructible"—in which the assignment of sovereignty to the Son of Man is primarily constituted via his role as this judge at the last time.¹⁶ In these chapters, the Son of Man is made, like Moses, to sit on the divine throne itself (62:2, 5; 69:27, 29; 61:8). Following the principle just articulated—that one who sits on the divine throne either alongside or sometimes in place of God is himself divine and a sharer in God's divinity—then the Son of Man certainly fits this description in the Similitudes. He is, moreover, clearly the object of worship in this text also (46:5; 48:5; 62:6, 9). But he is not yet Enoch. Enoch in these chapters is the seer, not the seen.

We can observe, then, two parallel Enoch traditions, growing out of 1 Enoch 14 and Daniel 7: a tradition of an exalted divinized human, on one hand, and on the other, a tradition of a second God-like Redeemer who comes down to save Israel. What we don't have yet is the identification or merging of that divinized human with

the anthropized divinity, such as we find in the Gospel of Mark and its followers.

Where this comes together is in chapters 70–71 of the Similitudes, which must be seen as an independent strand of very ancient tradition, in which the two originally separate ideas of God becoming man and a man becoming God are fused.¹⁷ In the first part of the work, the Son of Man is explicitly described as preexistent to creation, while Enoch is the seventh born human after Adam. Enoch, the seventh of the patriarchs from Adam, bears strong connections with the seventh of the antediluvian Babylonian kings, Enmeduranki, who was of human descent but was taken up into heaven. Among the features that Enoch shares with his Babylonian ancestor is being seated on a throne in heaven in the presence of the gods and taught wisdom there.¹⁸ This makes clear why an identification could be made. As in the Book of Daniel itself, different texts have been quilted together to make a single theological statement.

The whole story of Enoch as the Son of Man all begins with the verses about Enoch in the Book of Genesis. The story of Enoch as we have it in those few enigmatic verses of Genesis 5 reads:

²¹And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

²²And Enoch walked with God after he begat

*Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons
and daughters:*

²³*And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty
and five years:*

²⁴*And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for
God took him.*

This terminology is unique in the Bible; of no one else is it said that “he was not.” It cannot be interpreted, therefore, to mean simply that he died. Something special happened to Enoch: not only was he shown visions and wonders and given understanding, but he was with God and he was not; he was taken by God. Chapters 70–71 likely were added to the Enoch text from some other version to answer this very question, precisely because they fill out the story of Enoch’s apotheosis. They explain what happens when Enoch walks with God; he becomes the Son of Man, and that is why he was no longer among humans. This literary move, interpreting the obscure text of Genesis by splicing together two apparently originally separate texts about Enoch, has had an enormous theological effect.

This movement of the theology is indicated precisely at the difficult textual moment in which “that angel came to me and greeted me with his voice and said to me, ‘You are that son of man who was born for righteousness, and righteousness dwells on you, and the righteousness of the

Head of Days will not forsake you.' ” Two traditions are combined in the Similitudes of Enoch: the preexistent, second God, Redeemer of Daniel, now not only described as the Son of Man but so named, and the exalted seventh antediluvian sage, Enoch, who went up to heaven because he walked with God, and God took him, and he was not. Once this stitch in time has been made, we must read the text as implying that Enoch was from the beginning the Messiah, the Son of Man, hidden from the beginning, then sent to earth in human form, and now exalted once again to his former state.

This theological innovation must have taken place before the actual writing of the Similitudes of Enoch in the first century A.D.; it is of major importance for understanding the similar development that we can observe in the Christology of the New Testament. Just as the Son of Man in the Similitudes is a preexistent divine figure holding the dignity of the second divine throne and afforded all the privileges and sovereignty of the one like a son of man in Daniel, so too the preexistent Son of Man who lies behind the Gospels. This divine figure became ultimately identified with Enoch in two ways, one via his becoming Enoch when Enoch is exalted into heaven and one in his being revealed as having been Enoch all along. This is the paradox that inhabits the Gospel story of the Christ as well: on one hand, the Son of Man is a divine person, part of God, coexistent with God for all eternity, revealed on

earth in the human Jesus; on the other hand, the human Jesus has been exalted and raised to divine status. To use once more the terms afforded us by Moshe Idel, we have here an instance of the “Son of Man” as apotheosis, a man becoming God, and at the same time, the “Son of Man” as theophany, the self-revelation of God in a human.¹⁹ To be sure, the emphasis in the Enochian version is on the apotheosis, in the Gospel on the theophany, and that will be an important part of the further story, but I think it well established that both elements are present in both versions of the *Jewish Son of Man* tradition. Further examination of the history of the Enoch tradition will help prepare us to understand this better.

Enoch and the Christ Son of Man

The second book of 1 Enoch, the *Similitudes of Enoch*, is a product roughly of the same time as the Gospel of Mark—but there is a still earlier first book. Known as the *Book of the Watchers*, this first book of 1 Enoch is probably as old as the third century B.C. Enoch 14, from the *Book of the Watchers*, is thematically directly related to Daniel 7, and very probably its progenitor, which is to say that the vision of Daniel was based on an even older literary apocalyptic tradition.²⁰ In 1 Enoch 1 14–16, we find the following elements in order: Enoch has dreams and visions; “In a vision, I saw” (14:2); clouds summoned him

and winds carried him up; he sees a throne with wheels like the shining sun; streams of fire go out from under the throne; God's raiment is whiter than snow; Enoch is called to God's presence who hears his voice saying: "Fear not, Enoch, go, say the message."²¹ Now there may be no doubt that this text draws on the prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel in the prophet's book, chapters 1–2, incorporating as well Ezekiel's tour of the heavenly temple in chapters 40–44. It is perhaps only somewhat less apparent that the author of Daniel 7, in turn, is drawing on this chapter in 1 Enoch and developing it further in accord with his own theological traditions and other apocalyptic sources that include the vision of the second throne and the second divine person.

Whatever the precise case on the genetic relationship, it is clear that the author of the Similitudes, who clearly derives his Son of Man figure from Daniel 7, could easily have identified the one like a son of man from Daniel with Enoch as described in Enoch 14. Both arrive with clouds; both are brought near the Ancient of Days by one of the angels; both include the description of the throne as having before it streams of blazing fire and of his person as wearing garments brighter than snow. The two texts are thus almost certainly related, with the most likely scenario invoking dependence of Daniel on the most ancient part of 1 Enoch, the Book of the Watchers.²²

The author of the Similitudes associated the Enoch of Enoch 14 and the one like a son of man of Daniel 7 and concluded, quite naturally, in Enoch 71 that “you [Enoch] are the Son of Man.” A crucial step in the developed messianic idea thus had been taken: the merger of the second God, heavenly Redeemer figure and an earthly savior exalted into heaven.²³ We can detect in the Similitudes of Enoch the actual tracks of a religious history in which two originally independent strands of tradition have been combined into one. On one hand, we see the development of the one like a son of man of Daniel 7 from a simile into a title; we can literally see this development taking place on the page.²⁴ On the other hand, we see the tradition of the seventh antediluvian human king who was exalted and given a place in heaven, which is one of the most powerful themes of the whole Enoch work. In chapter 71 of the Similitudes we observe these two traditions being combined into one and the two figures of Enoch and the Son of Man coming together. The complex, doubled story of the Son of Man had already been prepared for in pre-Jesus Jewish speculation and was extant at the time of his life: it already included the two elements of a Son of Man who was the preexistent, transcendent Messiah and the element of the human being who would be the embodiment of that Messiah on earth and be exalted and merged with him. Thus was born the Christ, not quite a historical

virgin birth or creation out of nothing but the fulfillment of the highest and most powerful aspirations of the Jewish people.

The Wisdom elements of the newly born Messiah figure come in, I think, together with Enoch, carrying in their wake the early readings of Proverbs 8 and the Logos traditions as well.²⁵ The Son of Man of the Similitudes judges and condemns, was created before the universe like (or even as) the Wisdom of Proverbs, is equated with the Messiah (but not the human messiah), is assimilated to the Deity, and is portrayed as a proper recipient of worship. All that was required then for the full picture was the association of Enoch, the human exalted to heaven, with the Son of Man and the full Christological transformation will have taken place.

All of the elements of Christology are essentially in place then in the Similitudes. We have a preexistent heavenly figure (identified as well with Wisdom), who is the Son of Man. We have an earthly life, a human sage exalted into heaven at the end of an earthly career, enthroned in heaven at the right side of the Ancient of Days as the preexistent and forever reigning Son of Man. While the Gospels are certainly not drawing on the Similitudes, the Similitudes help illuminate the cultural, religious context in which the Gospels were produced. As New Testament scholar Richard Baukham so well phrased it, "It can readily be seen that early Christians applied to Jesus

all the well-established and well-organized characteristics of the unique divine identity in order, quite clearly and precisely, to include Jesus in the unique identity of the one God of Israel.”²⁶ In the worship of the Messiah/Son of Man/Enoch in the Similitudes of Enoch, we find the closest parallel to the Gospels. Since there is no reason in the world to think that either of these texts influenced the other, together they provide strong evidence for the confluence of ideas about the human Messiah, the son of David, and the divine Messiah, the Son of Man, in Judaism by at least the first century A.D. and probably earlier.²⁷

Fourth Ezra and the Son of Man

The Similitudes of Enoch was not by any means the only first-century Jewish text other than the Gospels in which the Son of Man was identified as the Messiah. In another text from the same time as the Similitudes and the Gospel of Mark, the apocalypse known as Fourth Ezra, we also find a divine figure based on Daniel 7 and identified with the Messiah. Fascinatingly enough, we also find evidence in this text for yet another attempt to suppress this religious idea, thus adding to our evidence that the idea was controversial among Jews entirely outside of the question of Jesus’ divinity and Messiahship. This text is, as we shall see, dependent as well on Daniel 7 and provides us with one more option for an interpretation of the Son of Man

figure that is important for understanding the Gospels. In chapter 13 of that text, we meet the Danielic one like a son of man once again. In some ways the Son of Man figure in Fourth Ezra is even closer to the one of the Gospels than the version in Enoch:

After seven days I dreamed a dream in the night;
²and behold a great wind arose from the sea so that it stirred up all its waves. ³And I looked, and behold, this wind made something like the figure of a man come out of the heat of the sea. And I looked, and behold, that man flew with the clouds of heaven; and wherever he turned his face to look, everything under his gaze trembled, ⁴and wherever the voice of his mouth issued forth, all who heard his voice melted as wax melts when it feels the fire.

⁵After this I looked, and behold, an innumerable multitude of men were gathered together from the four winds of heaven to make war against the man who came up out of the sea. ⁶And I looked, and behold, he carved out for himself a great mountain, and flew upon it. ⁷And I tried to see the region or place from which the mountain was carved, but I could not.

⁸After this I looked, and behold, all who had gathered together against him, to wage war with him, were much afraid, yet dared to fight. ⁹And when he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude,

he neither lifted his hand nor held a sword or any weapon of war; ¹⁰but saw only how he sent forth from his mouth as it were a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a storm of fiery coals.²⁸

Needless to say, the enemies of the man are then burnt to a crisp, if not worse than that. This passage, of course, is clearly based on a reading of Daniel 7, as are the Enoch passages discussed above. Even more sharply (partly owing to its relative density) than in Enoch, the Ezra passage makes absolutely clear the combination of the divine Son of Man and the Redeemer or Messiah—a high Christology indeed, and, of course, one that is independent of the Jesus movement entirely.* Closely paralleling the Enoch passage as well, here too close reference is made to Daniel by citing the appearance of the figure as a man and only then referring to him as *the* Man. Once again, we see a simile become a Redeemer. And since the simile clearly refers to a divine figure (a divine warrior), the Redeemer is held to be divine.²⁹ As Stone remarks, “It is quite interesting that the passages referring to breath or word are

* This point is perhaps most sharply brought out in Fourth Ezra 12:32, in which it is insisted that the heavenly Son of Man comes from the posterity of David, “even though it is not apparent why a descendant of David should come on the clouds.” A.Y. Collins and J.J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 207.

applied both to God and to the redeemer, but, other than our present passage, the passages in which fire is specifically mentioned all refer to God. Therefore, the present passage is unique in this respect and serves to emphasize the cosmic role of the human figure, which in any case many other elements of the text highlight.”³⁰ Pushing the point just a bit further, we arrive at the same sort of argument that has been advanced for the one like a son of man of Daniel, namely, that if it is only YHVH who comes riding on clouds, then here too that figure is a divine one. Ezra’s Man is divine as well.

The vision concludes:

¹²After this I saw the same man come down from the mountain and call to him another multitude which was peaceable. ¹³Then the forms of many people came to him, some of whom were joyful and some sorrowful; some of them were bound and some were bringing others as offerings.

This bit of the text nails down the claim that the Man, the Messiah, is God, for this eschatological vision with its offerings is drawn directly from Isaiah 66:20: “And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the Lord.” Those others brought here as offerings then are brought to the Lord, the *kurios*, the Son of Man, the Redeemer. Note that the same sort of argument that

is used to prove the divinity of Jesus—namely, the application of verses to him that are in the Bible predicated of YHVH—works here as well for the Man. This Man is the Lord. If Jesus is God, then, by the very same reasoning, so is this Man.

Here too, as in Daniel 7 itself, we find another witness to a pre-Christian religious conflict within Israel between those who accepted the very ancient idea of an older-appearing divine figure and a younger one who shares his throne and to whom the older one gives authority and other Jews who rejected this idea as a seeming contradiction of monotheism.* Two different strands of the religious imagination, one in which the ancient binitarianness of Israel's God is essentially preserved and transformed and one in which that duality has been more thoroughly

* This point is supported by a very important observation made by Michael Stone: the description of the Redeemer in chapter 13 that is being presented here is unique within Fourth Ezra itself. In all other moments within that text, the Redeemer, while in some sense preexistent, seems to fall much more toward the pole of the human Davidic Messiah tradition than the second divinity that we find in Daniel 7, the Similitudes of Enoch, and Fourth Ezra 13. Moreover, as also observed sharply by Stone, the interpretation of the vision in the second half of chapter 13 suppresses the cosmic divine aspect of the Man. What has not been noticed, I think, is that this matches up beautifully with Daniel 7 itself, in which the vision of a second divine figure, the one like a son of man, is also rendered as entirely human and as an allegorical symbol by the interpretation in the second half of the chapter. Michael Edward Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book 1 Fourth Ezra*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 211–13.

suppressed, live side by side in the Jewish thought world of the Second Temple and beyond, being mixed in different ways but also contesting each other and sometimes seeking to oust the other completely. This background, I think, explains much of the religion of the Gospels as a continuation and development of a strand of Israelite religion that is very ancient indeed.

The usage of “Son of Man” in the Gospels joins up with the evidence of such usage from Similitudes to lead us to consider this term used in this way (and, more important, its implication of a second divinity incorporated as the Messiah implied by it) as the common coin—which again I emphasize does not mean universal or uncontested—of Judaism already before Jesus.³¹

The Gospel of Mark and the Similitudes of Enoch are independent witnesses to a Jewish pattern of religion at their shared time. Texts are not religions (any more than a map is territory), but they are evidence of the religion, tips of icebergs that suggest massive religious developments and formations below the surface, or, perhaps better put, aboveground nodes on a rhizomic system underground that suggest the shape of the rhizomes. The territory was surely as bumpy and variegated as an earthly territory would be; as Carsten Colpe has put it, “The differences in the functions of the Son of Man may be explained by the differences between the groups which expected Him and the times in which they did so.”³²

The great innovation of the Gospels is only this: to declare that the Son of Man is here already, that he walks among us. As opposed to Enoch, who will be in those last days the Messiah Son of Man, Jesus already is. As opposed to the Son of Man flying on the clouds, who is a vision for the future, Jesus has come, declare the Gospels and the believers. The last days are right now, proclaims the Gospel. All of the ideas about Christ are old; the new is Jesus. There is nothing in the doctrine of the Christ that is new save the declaration of *this* man as the Son of Man. This is, of course, an enormous declaration, a huge innovation in itself and one that has had fateful historical consequences.