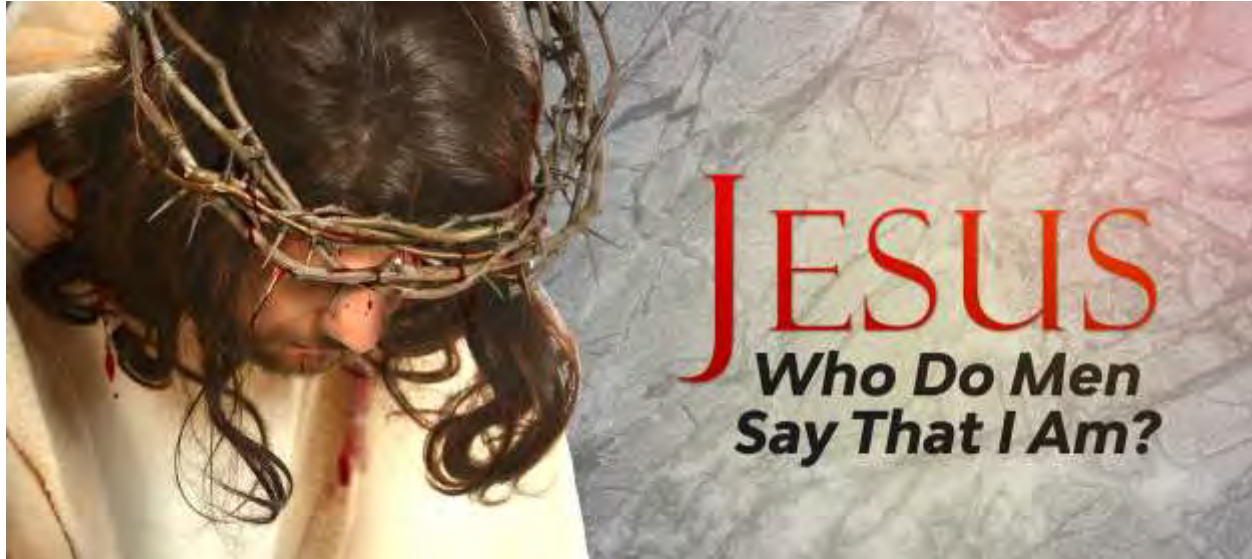


Who Do Men Say That I Am?

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At the time of Jesus' coming there were of course many varied expectations which anticipated him. Different segments of Jewish society provided a mosaic background of preconceived mental images of the one who was to come, ranging from a very human and worldly man who would lead Israel to military victory over their oppressors, to a supernatural and divine being who would miraculously transform Israel, giving it world dominion as God's chosen people. Among these various expectations were included the terms, Son of God (e.g., Ps. 2:7, Dan. 3:25), Messiah, Christ, Savior, and Son of Man.

Son of God is a term which is restricted almost exclusively to the New Testament. The word "Son" clearly does not refer to an office as such, but rather to a relationship. The Son of God has a relationship with God which is unique in the sense that there can be no closer relationship with God than a Father-Son relationship. So, the Son shares the same nature with the Father. Many people, therefore, accept the Son as being equal with God.

Moreover the Son of God is a title of the Messiah. In the New Testament the designation Son of God is used 45 times. Forty-four of those times it refers clearly to Jesus.

The term Messiah traditionally applies to any person who is anointed with holy oil, such as the high priest or the king. The title Messiah was also given to certain central individuals, or leaders such as Abraham, Isaac, and to the Persian king Cyrus. Throughout the Old Testament the term Messiah whenever it appears, e.g. Dan. 9:25, means simply an anointed one, except possibly in prophecy in Jeremiah, Micah, and Isaiah which began to speak of a certain king who would appear. Finally by the beginning of the Christian era the term Messiah technically referred to the deliverer who was awaited, and became a designation for Jesus.

The term Christ corresponds to the Hebrew and Aramaic Messiah. It was borrowed from the Septuagint, especially from Ps. 2: 2 and Dan. 9:25.

Savior means one who saves from any danger or evil. In the Old Testament it is often used to refer to God

who is viewed as the deliverer of His chosen people Israel. The Greek term *soter* has an equivalent meaning and is used by classical writers to refer to the Greek gods. But sometimes a king would use the title, as did Ptolemy Soter and Demetrius I. In the New Testament it refers sometimes to God (I Tim. 1:1, 4:10; Titus 1:3, 3:4, and Jude 25) and sometimes to Jesus (Matthew 1:21).

Son of man is a term which designates a person as a human being, with the emphasis on human. In Syriac the term denotes "man" or "human being."

In the Gospel of Matthew 16:13-17 we read:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

This passage uses the terms Son of man, Christ, and Son of God, and is richly colored with different meanings. Jesus' question is, "Who do men say that the son of man is?" By asking the question in these words Jesus is humbling himself to his disciples and speaking to them literally in a man-to-man sense. Living the expression "Son of man" humbly places Jesus at the level of other men and no higher.

Nevertheless their initial response to his question surely offended Jesus. It must have cut into his heart when they replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Replying in such a way showed that the disciples were accepting him on that level, as a man, as equal to the prophets and saints who had come before.

Continuing humbly, Jesus asked precisely, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter's response expressed faith that Jesus was indeed the awaited one, the Christ, the King of Israel, but even more Peter said that Jesus was the Son of the living God. By this Peter was saying that he accepted Jesus as the unique and very precious son of God, the savior of the world. Then Jesus blessed Peter and affirmed Peter's response saying, "... flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

Jesus' response affirmed that he was the Son of God, the actual, practical, and essential fulfillment of even the highest expectations of the Jewish people, though he may not have been the literal fulfillment of even the least of their expectations.