

# Lesson 1c - Israel's God(s): Son of Man vs. Son of God

## The "Dual" Monotheism of Daniel 7

It would seem 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.

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. The Israelite branch of the Canaanite people partly defined itself through the rejection of this mythology, but 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.

El was known as the supreme god of the Canaanites in the mythology of the ancient Near East. He was the father of gods and men and the creator deity.

A multitude of ancient Jewish names end in -el and can be traced back to this Canaanite deity.

According to Canaanite mythology, Ba'al was the son of El, the chief god, and Asherah, the goddess of the sea. Ba'al was considered the most powerful of all gods, eclipsing El, who was seen as rather weak and ineffective.

Yale Divinity School scholar J.J. Collins has helpfully summed up the main points of comparison of Daniel 7 with Canaanite (Ugaritic) representations. "What is important is the pattern of relationships," namely, the fact that in Daniel 7 there are two godlike figures, one old and one young, the younger one comes riding on the clouds, and he receives everlasting dominion. The similarity between the

relationship 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.

The most persuasive reconstruction from the evidence we have shows that in the ancient religion of Israel, the God '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, 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.

A southern Hebrew equivalent in function (within the paradigm of relations between 'El and a young warrior god to the northern Ba'al), apparently merged at some early point in Israelo-Canaanite history, thus producing a rather tense and unstable monotheism. This merger was not by any means a perfect union. 'El and YHVH had very different and in some ways antithetical functions, and 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. 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.

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. 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.

The "dual" God 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.

The prophet Elijah (YHWH vs. Ba'al)

1 Ki 18:20-40.

**20** So Ahab sent *word* among the *Israelites*, and he assembled the prophets to Mount Carmel. **21** Elijah approached to all the people and said, "How long *will* you go limping over two opinions? If Yahweh *is* God, go after him; but if Baal, go after him." But the people did not answer him a word. **22** Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone *am* left a prophet of Yahweh, but the prophets of Baal *are* four hundred and fifty men. **23** Let them give us two bulls, and let them choose for themselves one bull, cut him in pieces, and put it on the wood, but don't let them start a fire on it. I will prepare the other bull and set it on the wood, but I will put no fire *on it*. **24** Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh, and it shall be that the god who answers by fire, he *is* God." Then all the people answered and said, "The word *is* good!"

**25** Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you *are* the majority, and call on the name of your god, but don't set fire *under it*." **26** So they took the bull that he allowed to them, prepared it, and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice and there was no answer, so they limped about the altar which they had made. **27** It happened at noon that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he *is* a god! Perhaps he is meditating, or *is* using the bathroom, or *is* on a journey. Perhaps he *is* asleep and must wake up!" **28** So they called out with a loud voice, and they cut themselves with swords and with spears as was their custom, until the blood poured out over them. **29** It happened as noon passed, they raged until the *time of* the evening offering, but there was no voice, there was no answer, and no *one* paid attention.

**30** Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me," so all the people came closer to him. He repaired the altar of Yahweh *that had been* destroyed. **31** Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of God came, saying, "Israel shall be your name." **32** With them, he built an altar in the name of Yahweh, and he made a trench *which would have held* about two seahs of seed, all around the altar. **33** And he arranged the wood,

cut the bull into pieces, and placed *it* on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four jars *with* water, and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." <sup>34</sup> He said, "Do *it* again!" They did *it* again. He said, "Do *it* a third time!" So they did *it* a third time. <sup>35</sup> The water went all around the altar, and the trench also was filled *with* water. <sup>36</sup> It happened at the offering of the *evening* oblation, Elijah the prophet went near, and he said, "O Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; let it be known today that you *are* God in Israel and *that I am* your servant and *that I have* done all of these things by your words. <sup>37</sup> Answer me, O Yahweh, answer me; that this people may know that you, O Yahweh, *are* God and that you have turned their hearts back again." <sup>38</sup> Then the fire of Yahweh fell, and it consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust; and the water which was in the trench it licked up! <sup>39</sup> When all the people saw, they fell on their faces and said, "Yahweh, he *is* God! Yahweh, he *is* God!" <sup>40</sup> Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; don't let any man of them escape!" So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the wadi of Kishon and killed them there.

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## Son of Man vs. Son of God

**From: Boyarin, Daniel. The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ. The New Press.**

**Red words are scripture.**

**Blue words are important summary statements.**

Abstract:

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. Messiah means "anointed one," no more or less, and Christos is simply a Greek translation of that very word, meaning also "anointed one."

There were, moreover, different interpretations of the Torah, different sets of ideas about God, different notions of how to practice the Law.

Many Israelites at the time of Jesus were expecting a Messiah who would be divine and come to earth in the form of a human. Thus the basic underlying thoughts from which both the Trinity and the incarnation grew are there in the very world into which Jesus was born and in which he was first written about in the Gospels of Mark and John.

Many ancient Jews simply accepted Jesus as God, and they did so because their beliefs and expectations had led them there. Others, while holding similar ideas about God, found it hard to believe that this particular, seemingly undistinguished, Jew was the one they were waiting for.

The idea of Jesus as divine-human Messiah goes back to the very beginning of the Christian movement, to Jesus himself, and even before that.

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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."

The term Son of God originates with the crowning of King David

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)

The term Mashiach throughout the Hebrew Bible means a historical "actually reigning" human king of Israel, neither more nor less. Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does this usage of Son of God 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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. The first action in the Gospel of Mark is Yeshua's baptism by John.

**9** And it happened that in those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. **10** And immediately as *he*\* was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens being split apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. **11** **And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."** Mk 1:9–11.

Note the almost identical language to David's anointing as king in the psalm above.

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.

### **Plucking Grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28)**

**23** And it happened that he was going through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and his disciples began to make *their way while*\* plucking off the heads of grain.

**24** And the Pharisees began to say to him, "Behold, why are they doing what is



not permitted on the Sabbath?" 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he had need and he and those *who were* with him were hungry—26 how he entered into the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread of the presentation, which it is not permitted to eat (except the priests) and also gave *it\** to those who were with him?" 27 **And he said to them, "The Sabbath was established for people, and not people for the Sabbath. 28 So then, the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."**

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The term Son of Man is found first in the Book of Ezekiel and later in the Book of Daniel.

The term son of man originates from the book of Ezekiel (note the -el in the name). In this early use (around 550 BCE) it refers to simply to "a man".

### **The Call of Ezekiel to Speak God's Words (Ezekiel 1:28–2:3)**

And I saw, and I fell on my face, and I heard a voice speaking. **2** And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, so that I can speak with you." **2** And *the* Spirit came into me as he was speaking to me, and it set me on my feet, and I heard the one speaking to me. **3** And he said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites..." .

Book of Daniel, written circa 161 B.C.,

The Book of Daniel is one of the earliest apocalypses that was ever written.

The prophet Daniel, Chapter 7, 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 "one 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.

In Daniel 7, we find the following account of the prophet's night vision:

9 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. 10 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. . . . 13 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. 14 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.

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. 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." Those two divinities, in the course of time, would end up being the first two persons of the Trinity.

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.

The idea of a second God as viceroy to God the Father is one of the oldest of theological ideas in Israel.

This "one like a son of man" is not given a new name, so one needs to be careful, because in the New Testament son of man can identify just a "man" or it can mean a heavenly figure. Context is everything.

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. 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.

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.

Either way, we end up with a doubled godhead and a human-divine combination as the expected Redeemer.\*

Referring to an individual as the Son of Man therefore has to be explained historically and literarily.

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).

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.

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?

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.

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.

**The book of Deuteronomy establishes strict monotheism.**