

With very few exceptions Jesus called himself the **Son of Man**, thus the question why not the Son of God. Are these two expressions to be understood interchangeably or do they have separate meanings.

Interpretation of the use of "Son of Man" in the New Testament has remained challenging and controversial and after years of debate no consensus on the issue has emerged among scholars.

The Hebrew expression "son of man" is *ben-'adam*. *Ben* means "son of or vassel" and *adam* means "humankind, man, mankind, mortal". As you can see the combination of possibilities is numerous. The term "ben adam" is said by some to be just a cumbersome but solemn and formal substitute for the personal pronoun.

In the Koine Greek version of the New Testament, expression "the Son of Man" (*ho huios tou anthropou*) appears 81 times in the four Gospels: 30 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 25 times in Luke and 12 times in John.

Although the term is not used in the Hebrew Tanakh (our Old Testament) very much, we do find that God addresses Ezekiel by this term over 90 times in the book of Ezekiel.

Except for his conception Jesus was everything we would expect of a man (human being). He was born in the normal way, grew up in the normal way, got hungry and thirsty and tired, ate and drank and slept. He looked normal, talked in ordinary language, and walked in the normal way. He had emotions such as compassion, surprise, sorrow and apprehension (Matthew 9:36; Luke 7:9; John 11:38; Matthew 26:37). He prayed to God, as humans need to. He called himself a man and other people called him a man. So it seems completely normal to call Him the Son of Man because He was for all outward appearances a man.

But some of the things He said and did seem to indicate that he was more than just a man. *"Who is this fellow?" asked the Pharisees when they heard Jesus forgive sins. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Luke 5:21). Sin is an offense against God, so how could a human say the offense is removed from the record? It was blasphemy, they said. Jesus knew what they thought about it, but he forgave sins anyway.

Even John the Baptist was a little unsure about Jesus – was He the promised one (Messiah) or would there be another?

So he (Jesus) replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Luke 7:22 (NIV)

These are the signs of the true Messiah. Many people of this time claimed to be the promised messiah. Some of them could do some of these, but none could raise the dead. So Jesus' response alludes to Isaiah's reference of the Messianic times (Isa. ch 26, 35) in making His reply. Jesus knew that John would recognize this but others listening might not recognize the reference. In othewords He doesn't come right out and say He is the Messiah or the Son of God, but shows John that He is.

Although Son of man is a distinct concept from Son of God, some gospel passages may seem to equate them in some cases, such as in Mark 14:61. During the Sanhedrin trial of Jesus when the high priest asked Jesus: *"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed one?"* Jesus responded *"I am: and you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."* This seems to build on the statement in Mark 9:31 that *"The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again."*

I believe that the reason why He used the term Son of Man in reference to Himself, rather than coming right out and saying He is the Son of God, was that He knew that it wasn't time for Him to die yet. He knew that there are many things that He needed to accomplish and claiming to be the Son of God until near the end would just make things harder.

He made some astonishing claims during His ministry, but not until He was ready to be crucified did He accept the title Son of God. Up until then He sidestepped the title when ask, by responding in a way so as to not allow it to be understood as fact.

We often substitute "Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew for the "Kingdom of God" (mentioned elsewhere) to mean the same Kingdom. Given that, I don't think that it is wrong to substitute "Son of God" for "Son of man" when it refers to Jesus. After all we do believe that He is fully human and fully divine. As hard as that is to comprehend in our physical universe.