

Daniel's Vision of the Son of Man

E.J. Young, Th.M., Ph.D.

[p.3]

One of the most majestically conceived scenes in the entire Old Testament is that of the judgment in which a figure like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven and was brought before the Ancient of days. The vision has to do with the judgment of four beasts which represent human kings, and also with the establishment of the kingdom of God.¹ At its central point is the scene of judgment and the introduction of the Son of man. Concerning this strange figure there has been much discussion, and it will be our purpose to ascertain, in so far as that is possible, his identity.

A Survey of Daniel VII

The seventh chapter of Daniel relates events which took place in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon.² During this year a dream came to Daniel, the content of which he recorded. In this dream he saw the great sea, a figure of humanity itself.³

From the sea there arose four beasts, each diverse from the others. These beasts did not arise simultaneously, but one after another. The first is said to have been like a lion, with the wings of an eagle. In its flight to heaven it was checked, the heart of a man was given to it and it was made to stand upon its feet as a man.

The second beast was compared with a bear raised up on one side. The third resembled a leopard, and the fourth was nondescript, compared to no animal. Particular attention, however, was directed to this fourth beast, and to the ten horns which were upon its head. There arose a little horn, which uprooted three of the horns and had a mouth speaking great things.

At this point the attention of the seer was directed to the establishment of a judgment court. Thrones were cast down, that is, they were placed so that the judges might sit upon them. One of these thrones was like the fiery flame and its wheels as burning fire, and upon it the Ancient of days sat. Judgment was pronounced and the fourth beast was given over to the burning of fire.

[p.4]

One like a Son of man who came with the clouds of heaven was then escorted unto the Ancient of days, and to Him there was given an everlasting kingdom. This vision caused Daniel great perplexity, and he inquired of one of them that stood by as to its meaning. In reply he was told that the four beasts represented four kings which arose out of the earth. The saints of the most High, however, were to take the kingdom and to possess it for ever. This was the heart of the interpretation as given to Daniel, and after more detailed information

¹ Cf. also E. W. Heaton, *The Book of Daniel*, London, 1956, p. 182.

² Dn. vii.1.

³ Dn. vii.17, which is probably to be construed as an interpretation of the sea.

concerning the fourth beast and the little horn, Daniel concludes: 'As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart' (Dn. vii.28b).⁴

The Unity of the Chapter

The very brief synopsis which has just been given is based upon the assumption that the seventh chapter of Daniel as we have it is a unity. This position has been rather generally held by scholars of all shades of opinion,⁵ but in recent times it has been subjected to severe criticism on the part of H. L. Ginsberg.⁶ It will be necessary briefly to examine the position of Professor Ginsberg. In the first place we may note that he makes a serious division between chapters ii and vii of Daniel. Chapter ii, he claims, speaks in general terms of the worldwide kingdom and says not a word about the Jewish nation occupying a position of dominance therein, whereas on the other hand chapter vii asserts that a perpetual sovereignty over the other nations of earth will be bestowed upon the saints of the most High. Chapter ii therefore is to be regarded as pre-Epiphanian, whereas chapter vii is Epiphanian. It is a product of the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who reigned from 175 to 163.⁷

In analysing the chapter Ginsberg assigns verse 8 to the secondary stratum because it employs the particle *וְלֹא*, whereas in five other verses *וְלֹא* is found. It also employs the perfect instead of participles and it uses the word 'man' as a symbol of holiness.⁸ Not only is

[p.5]

verse 8 assigned to a secondary stratum but also, in addition, all subsequent references to an eleventh horn are so assigned. Sellin had in addition excluded references to the ten horns on the fourth beast as secondary, but Ginsberg thinks that such references are all primary. The reference to an eleventh king in verse 24b, says Ginsberg, was inserted by an interpolator who forgot to add mention of an eleventh horn.⁹ One may be pardoned for wondering, however, if this actually had been the case, how competent such an interpolator was. If he forgot mention of an eleventh horn, when the mention of the eleventh king, supposedly Antiochus Epiphanes, was so extremely important, he surely was a man incompetent for his task.

In defending his thesis Ginsberg maintains that, like the first three beasts, the fourth also must have a specific number. The third beast had the characteristic number four, the first had three, and the second, one.¹⁰ Furthermore, without the above mention of the ten horns the chapter is said to be a torso. Hence Ginsberg seeks to defend the position that originally only ten horns

⁴ For the detailed exposition of the chapter cf. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, Grand Rapids, 1949, pp. 141-164.

⁵ E.g. Charles, Rowley, Pfeiffer, Leupold, Möller. Rowley is correct in asserting that in recent years few critical scholars have defended the unity of Daniel. Cf. H. H. Rowley, 'The Unity of the Book of Daniel', in *The Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. XXIII, Part One, 1950-1951, p. 233.

⁶ H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel*, New York, 1948.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

were mentioned, and that the tenth horn referred to Antiochus Epiphanes. All of this is obtained at the expense of considerable rearrangement of the chapter.¹¹

Ginsberg's reconstruction has not been allowed to go unchallenged. It was answered by H. H. Rowley, who is one of the most competent of recent students of Daniel and who has devoted a lifetime to the book's study.¹² Rowley points out that it would be 'highly improbable' that the seventh chapter of Daniel would be as misunderstood in the manner that Ginsberg supposes at a time so shortly after its composition. This point is weighty. Ginsberg thinks that the primary material of the chapter comes from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and that the interpolations were made shortly thereafter by a redactor who intended it to be understood that Antiochus was represented by an eleventh horn. Would the original purpose of the book so soon have been misunderstood? Secondly, Rowley points out that if an interpolator had been trying to impose a new meaning upon the chapter he would have made that new meaning much clearer than it is. According to Ginsberg this glossator, or interpolator, intended the ten horns to refer to ten contemporary kings, including those of Sparta and Bithynia. Rowley rightly points out that one would hardly

[p.6]

think of Antiochus as a 'little horn' in comparison with the rulers of those kingdoms.

In addition to what Rowley has remarked we would point out that the chapter as it stands does yield a good sense. Its proper interpretation fits in well with what has been taught in the parallel second chapter, and for that matter with the general framework of the remainder of the book of Daniel. We shall therefore proceed to its interpretation upon the assumption that, as it stands, it is a unity.

The Figure of the Son of Man

Actual reference to the heavenly figure like a Son of man is confined to only two verses in Daniel vii, namely, 13 and 14. This heavenly figure comes unto the Ancient of days and is brought before Him, and an eternal and universal kingdom is given to Him. The basic question with which we are concerned may be stated baldly: What is the identity of this heavenly figure? What does the writer intend us to understand by his reference to one like a Son of man? Questions such as these have naturally occasioned much discussion.

In recent times C. H. Dodd has again given expression to one common interpretation. He thinks that the writer of Daniel vii is speaking of Israel under the similitude of a human figure which was humiliated into insignificance until God visited it and raised it again to glory. With respect to the New Testament individualizing interpretation, he says: 'The New Testament use of the title "Son of Man" for Christ results from the individuation of this corporate conception.'¹³ According to this widely held view the heavenly figure at first, or at least as the figure appears in Daniel, had a collective significance, and this collective

¹¹ Ginsberg gives a translation of his reconstructed chapter, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-18.

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 250-252; 255-259. In *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. IV, 1954, pp. 246-275, Ginsberg replied to Rowley in an article entitled, 'The Composition of the Book of Daniel'. Rowley's answer appeared, in the same journal, Vol. V. No. 3, 1955, pp. 272-276.

¹³ C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, London, 1952, p. 118.

significance gave way at a later time to an individualizing significance. In applying the figure to Christ, the New Testament adopts this individualizing usage.

Precisely the opposite opinion has been maintained by Geerhardus Vos.¹⁴ According to Vos the original meaning of the figure as found

[p.7]

in Daniel was individualistic. He maintains that the passage in Daniel is a genuine Messianic prophecy and that the one like unto a Son of man is none other than the Messiah. If there was any collective significance, such was secondary or later. The individualistic meaning was primary and original.

The importance of this method of stating the matter will immediately become apparent, for the basic question which is then seen to be involved is simply whether Daniel vii is to be regarded as a true and genuine Messianic prophecy or not. Are we dealing with a prophecy concerning the Messiah, or is some other interpretation to be placed upon the one like a Son of man? The non-Messianic interpretation is probably the most widely held today. Thus, to cite but one example, in his work, *He That Cometh*, Sigmund Mowinckel makes the dogmatic statement: 'Thus in the present form of Daniel's visions of the beasts, the Son of Man is a pictorial symbol of the people of Israel, not an individual figure, and not a personal Messiah of any kind.'¹⁵

In approaching this question whether the one like a Son of man is an individual or represents a group we may first ask if there is any interpretation of the figure given in the seventh chapter of Daniel itself. Hugo Gressmann claims that the apocalyptist, i.e., the writer of chapter vii, gives his own interpretation of the four beasts, and also of the Son of man. The entire chapter, maintains Gressmann, consists of a vision and an interpretation.¹⁶ Gressmann thinks that the material of the chapter has been taken from an old tradition, and that in this old tradition the individualistic interpretation was present. The Messianic interpretation belonged to this old tradition, and the phrase 'the saints of the most High' originally read 'the saint of the most High'. The present writer has enlarged this old tradition, and that explains why he has not sought to elucidate all the details of the vision.¹⁷

For our present purpose the important point is that Gressmann thinks that in Daniel vii there is found an interpretation of the figure like a Son of man. This assumption is of course widely adopted:

¹⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, New York, 1926, pp. 228 ff. It is not denied that, like the figure of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah xlii. 1-4 and xlix. 1-9, the heavenly figure of the Son of man, may signify a corporate personality, namely, the Messiah conceived as the Head of His people. This would seem to be supported by Paul's language, 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?' (I Cor. vi.2). Through their Head, the Messiah, who is the supreme Judge, the saints derive their right to judge.

What is denied is the common claim that, to the exclusion of the individualistic, Messianic element, the seventh chapter of Daniel interprets the Son of man exclusively of the saints. Such an interpretation, if it may actually be called an interpretation, is reserved for the Corinthians' passage. Very similar is the use made of Isaiah xlix.6 in Acts xiii. 47. Daniel vii.12, 13 is Messianic and individualistic. The latter part of the chapter merely states that the kingdom will be entrusted to the saints.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 350, translation by G. W. Anderson. The original reads: 'Menneskesønnen er i den foreliggende form av Daniels dyrevisjoner altså et billedlig symbol for Israels folk, ikke en individuell skikkelse, ikke en personlig Messias av en eller annen art' (*Han Som Kommer*, København, 1951, p. 229).

¹⁶ Hugo Gressmann, *Der Messias*, Göttingen, 1929, pp. 344, 356.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 345, 367.

[p.8]

indeed, it is the principal argument employed by those who think that the collectivistic interpretation is the correct one. Thus, in one of the most recent commentaries on Daniel, that of Heaton, we read: ‘The investiture of the man-like figure in v. 13 is interpreted to be the receiving of the sovereignty of God as an everlasting possession by THE SAINTS OF THE MOST HIGH.’¹⁸ Is this position, however, correct?

What surprises the reader of Daniel is that as a matter of fact no direct interpretation of the one like a Son of man is actually given. Daniel does approach one of these who stood by him and desires to know the truth of what he had seen. We are then told: ‘So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things’ (Dn. vii. 16b). This language might seem to suggest that included in the interpretation was also an explanation of the identity of the heavenly figure, but such is not the case.

The four beasts are interpreted as ‘four kings, which shall arise out of the earth’ (Dn. vii 17), and particular attention is devoted to an explanation of the fourth beast. In verse 18 it is stated that ‘the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever’, and in verse 22 it is related that ‘judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom’. Again, in verse 27 we read ‘And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him’.

The saints here mentioned are the people of God and are not to be thought of as heavenly beings.¹⁹ In verse 18 the plural form of the word translated ‘most High’ is employed, and the phrase should be literally rendered ‘the saints of the highest ones’.²⁰ The plural occurs again in verses 22, 25 and 27. In distinction the emphatic state of the noun ‘most High’ occurs in verse 25. In this occurrence the reason is to emphasize the fact that it is the most High against which

[p.9]

the little horn speaks. Here the emphatic state is necessary. In the other occurrences, however, in which only the absolute state is employed, the phrase could conceivably mean ‘heavenly saints’. The plural in both instances, particularly when employed as the genitive following a construct, may simply be a plural of majesty.

The saints are said to receive (יְקַבְּלוּ) the kingdom and to possess it (יְחַסְּבוּ). Judgment was given to the saints (or, for the saints), and the dominion and sovereignty and greatness of the kingdoms under all the heavens were given to the people of the saints of the most High. Their kingdom is said to be an eternal one and all sovereignties are to serve and obey them. With

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 186, 187. Others who hold essentially this view are Gressmann, *op. cit.*, p. 344; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Oxford, 1929, p. 187; Johann Goettsberger, *Das Buch Daniel*, Bonn, 1928, p. 56; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Daniel*, New York, 1927, p. 319; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Daniel*, Cambridge, 1936, p. 104.

¹⁹ As is maintained, e.g. by Martin Noth, ‘Die Heiligen Des Höchsten’, in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, München, 1957, pp. 274-290.

²⁰ I.e. יְקַבְּלוּ מַלְאָכָא Montgomery, *op. cit.*, p. 308, regards the form as a plural of the abstract (‘majesty’).

respect to the Son of man, power and honour and the kingdom are given to him and the eternity of his kingdom is stressed.

These descriptions, it has been 'claimed, serve clearly enough to identify the figure like a Son of man with the saints of the most High. The similarity in the language cannot of course be denied. To the Son of man and also the saints, a kingdom, eternal in nature, is given. In the one instance it is said to be his kingdom; and in the other it is identified as theirs. These facts cannot be gainsaid, but does the conclusion really follow that there is an actual interpretation of the one like a Son of man such as is given of the four beasts?

The first point to be noted is that nowhere is an actual interpretation made of the Son of man such as is made of the beasts. With respect to the beasts it was clearly stated, 'These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth' (Dn. vii.17). Again, 'The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth' (Dn. vii.23a). 'And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise' (Dn. vii.24a). Nowhere in the chapter, however, is there a statement such as 'And the one like a Son of man is the saints of the most High'. That obvious fact must not be over looked. No explicit interpretation of the Son of man is given in the later parts of the chapter.

In the second place the description of the saints of the most High is not such as would warrant one to assert that it is the Son of man who is being described. In verse 18 it is stated that the saints will receive the kingdom, and the question naturally arises: From whom will they receive this kingdom which they are to possess for ever? Those who hold that the Son of man represents Israel will say that the kingdom is received from God. On the other hand, the interpretation is equally possible which asserts that the kingdom is received by the saints from the Son of man, to whom

[p.10]

it had been given by God (verse 14). The language which is employed is interesting. The saints are said to receive and to possess the kingdom. This would seem to imply that they receive the kingdom somewhat in the nature of a fief; it is entrusted to them for ever. At the same time, it is a kingdom which belongs to God and which has only been entrusted to the saints.

The Positive Identification of the One Like a Son of Man

If then the remainder of the chapter does not present an interpretation of the heavenly figure, we must confine our study to the two verses in which this figure is actually mentioned. The vision is introduced with particular solemnity by the words 'I was beholding in visions of the night'. This particular phrase is not used to mark a new vision but an episode of particular importance in the one vision. The entire vision was introduced by the words 'I saw in visions (which were) with the night' (vii.2). The section concerning the fourth beast, which marks a new stage in the vision, was also introduced by the phrase, 'After this I saw in visions of the night' (vii.7). Again in verse 9 the phrase 'I saw' is employed to direct attention to the scene of judgment, and in verse 11 the phrase 'I saw' is twice employed. With verse 13 we reach a new stage in the development or unfolding of the vision, indeed, its very climax. It is this to which everything preceding has pointed. The judgment scene was not merely for the purpose of showing that the fourth beast, the great opponent of the kingdom of God, would be

destroyed by means of the judgment, but also to point out that God Himself would establish a kingdom which, in contradistinction to the earlier human kingdoms, would be divine in nature, and would continue for ever.²¹

Daniel first directs attention to the clouds of heaven, and the significance of this phrase must be derived from the context. One may speak of the birds of the heaven, as Daniel had done in chapter iv, and such a phrase simply indicates that the heaven is the natural habitat of birds; it says nothing about their origin. Here, however, the context leads us to a different conclusion. In this particular instance there is a reason for the mention of the clouds of the heaven. First of all they cause one to look upward, and point to the place from which the Son of man is to come, namely, heaven.

Before we examine further the force of this description, we may remark that various views have been set forth with respect to the

[p.11]

place of the judgment. One may note the strange view of Hoffmann, that the Son of man is carried on the clouds from the earth to heaven.²² Inasmuch, however, as the clouds are immediately identified as clouds of heaven, i.e., clouds which belong to heaven, this view would have to be ruled out. Fortunately, it has not been widely held. On the other hand, Vos maintains that the Son of man is brought by the clouds of heaven to the earth and that the scene of the judgment is here upon the earth.²³ This interpretation is far more in keeping with the phenomena of the vision than is that of Hoffmann. Paul Heinisch, however, asserts that the scene of the judgment is heaven itself.²⁴

It should be noted that the text does not actually mention the place of judgment. It does not say that the judgment took place upon the earth, nor that it took place in heaven. About the actual location in which the judgment court was set up and the judgment was given, not a word is uttered. That question must be answered, if it can be answered at all, only upon the basis of other considerations. Inasmuch, however, as it is God who pronounces judgment, it may be that we are to understand the vision as setting forth a heavenly judgment scene. The clouds of heaven would then simply be the vehicle for conveying the Son of man to the scene of judgment.

The clouds of heaven point to the place from which the Son of man came, namely heaven. His coming is from the other world. This presents a marked contrast to the four beasts, each of which arose from the sea and was therefore merely of human origin. In so far as it is permitted to speak of the provenience of the Son of man we must conclude that in the vision the place of his provenience is heaven in distinction from earth.

What is the relationship which the Son of man sustains to the clouds of heaven? The text simply states it is with these clouds that he comes. This preposition *בְּ* signifies association, and we may bring out the thought by the words 'in company with'. Montgomery remarks: 'Position upon the *clouds*, which the writer avoids, would rather be the attribute of Deity, e.g.

²¹ I have sought to expound this position, *op. cit.*, pp. 160 ff.

²² As given in Kliefoth, *Das Buch Daniels*, Schwerin, 1868, p. 213; I have not seen Hoffmann's work.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 241, 244.

²⁴ Paul Heinisch, *Christus, Der Erlöser im Alten Testament*, Graz, 1954, p. 286.

Is. 19:1, Ps. 104:3.²⁵ Montgomery belongs to those who do not find a Messianic identification in the passage, but consider the reference to be to Israel. In the first place, his statement, 'which the writer avoids', is too strong.

[p.12]

There is no evidence that the writer avoids anything. Furthermore, it should be noted that in Psalm civ.3 the situation is not quite the same as here. In the Psalm it had been said that the Lord 'places the clouds as his chariot, who goes upon the wings of the wind'. Inasmuch as the Lord is said to have placed the clouds as His chariot, we might expect that the text would assert that He rode *upon* the wings of the wind. The preposition לַע, however, does not in itself assert the deity of the one who rides, it merely indicates the position of the rider. One who rides, using the clouds as a chariot, would naturally be said to ride *upon* the wings of the wind. The same is true of Isaiah xix.1. Here again there is reference to riding upon a cloud. It is difficult to understand how this thought could be brought out by the expression 'riding with the clouds'. If the Lord does come, using the clouds as a chariot, we most naturally expect that He will ride upon them. To argue, however, that the use of the preposition לַע indicates deity, and that the writer therefore avoids this preposition, is to argue without solid foundation.

In the Greek translation the preposition ἐπί is used, and Theodotion employs the word μετά. Both of these, however, amount to interpretations. All that the Aramaic text signifies is that the coming of the Son of man is in accompaniment with the clouds of heaven. From this there is no warrant for the conclusion that He is the flying man, to use the terminology of Gressmann.²⁶ We are not told precisely what His position was with relationship to the clouds. At the same time the symbolism is not without important significance. The coming with the clouds of heaven has a very definite meaning.

The clouds are mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament in connection with the Lord. Thus, 'And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies' (2 Sa. xxii.12). 'Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven' (Jb. xxii.14). 'Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds' (Ps. lxxviii.34). These passages are sufficient to show that the clouds are regarded in the Bible as an accompaniment of the Lord. In one way or another this is thought to be so, whether the clouds are conceived as hiding Him, or whether they are actually that in which His strength is manifested. One of the staunchest defenders of the individualistic interpretation of the figure like a Son of man was Grill,

[p.13]

but Grill sought to identify this heavenly figure with an angel.²⁷ The mention of the clouds, however, would seem to exclude this. Nowhere in the Old Testament are the clouds represented as the accompaniment of an angel, but rather that which belongs to the Lord Himself. Now it is interesting to note that it is precisely this symbolism of the clouds of heaven which our Lord employed so effectively in speaking of His parousia, and thus stressed the supernatural character of His coming.²⁸ Vos remarks: 'The main thing these

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 303.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 349.

²⁷ Grill, *Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums*, I, 1902, p. 50f.

²⁸ See Mt. xxiv.30, xxvi.64; Mk. xiii.26, xiv.62.

passages have derived from Daniel is, however, the atmosphere of the supernatural in which they are steeped. The “coming” is a coming theophany-like, a coming out of the other world. Nothing else in the Gospels has so impressed the stamp of the supernatural and the superhuman upon the self-portrayal of Jesus as these parousia “Son of Man” passages.²⁹

It will be well then to notice how this coming with the clouds is interpreted in the New Testament. It will not be necessary to examine all the New Testament references to the coming of the Son of man, but a few such passages will make it clear what the view-point of the New Testament is. Mark xiii.26 is instructive. ‘And then they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds (the preposition ἐν is employed) with great power and glory.’ The reference is eschatological our Lord is speaking of His second advent. ‘And then’, He says, referring to the time when He will come in clouds, ‘he will send the angels and will gather his elect from the four winds from the corner of earth unto the corner of heaven’ (cf. Mk. xiii.27). It should be noted that the employment of the preposition ἐν in this particular passage does not exclude deity. The work which is here assigned to the Son of man is that of judgment and deliverance. He comes in great power and glory; He sends His angels (they are angels which belong to Him and which do His bidding at His commands); and He gathers His elect.

In connection with His identification of Himself as the Son of the Blessed One, Jesus Christ said; ‘...ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.’³⁰ It should be noted that this statement is made in conjunction with Christ’s explicit identification of Himself as the Messiah He links up the identity of the Messiah with the coming with the

[p.14]

clouds of heaven. Here, it would seem, the reference to Daniel is particularly clear, for the clouds are said to be those of the heaven. The preposition μετά is employed.

This passage, together with its parallel in Matthew xxvi.64, makes it clear that our Lord in so speaking had in mind the prophecy of Daniel and that He linked up the doctrine of the Messiah with the One who came on the clouds of heaven. Our Lord at least held to a Messianic interpretation of the heavenly figure like the Son of man presented in Daniel. More than that, in speaking as He did in reply to the high priest, He evidently expected that there would be agreement with that interpretation.

In these passages in which mention of the clouds is made, both the prepositions συν and μετά are employed, neither one of which is the precise equivalent of the Aramaic ܠܥ. In Revelation i.7 it is stated: ‘Behold, he cometh with (μετά) clouds; and every eye shall see him...’ Here the reference is to judgment, and the context clearly teaches the deity of the One who comes with the clouds. This passage therefore shows that deity may be expressed and assumed, even when a preposition such as μετά is employed.

It is interesting to note that the coming of the Son of man in the Gospels is clearly associated with a work of judgment, a work such as God alone could carry out. This is seen, for example, by a passage such as Matthew xiii.40ff., which reads: ‘As therefore the tares are

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 234.

³⁰ Mk. xiv.62.

gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.' There can be no serious question but that Jesus Christ here assigns to Himself a role that God alone can play. He is to be Judge at the end of the world.

By way of summary of this very brief survey of New Testament usage, we may assert that our Lord did identify Himself as the Son of man of Daniel, and that He spoke of a coming in connection with the clouds. Nowhere does He speak of a coming upon the clouds, but rather of a coming in association therewith. At the same time He does not hesitate to ascribe to Himself functions which belong to God alone, namely, the function of judgment. It would be blasphemy for any mere man to arrogate to himself the work which Jesus Christ in these passages attributes to Himself. Plainly, then, our Lord was willing to speak of a coming with the clouds and to associate such a coming with deity. In thus speaking Jesus Christ

[p.15]

has furnished us with an interpretation of the language of Daniel. He did not stumble at the preposition 'with'; He gives no evidence that He thought that the presence of this preposition would preclude reference to deity. Rather He employs this very preposition in connection with the thought of deity. And what is of surprising interest is the fact that apparently no one challenged such an interpretation. No one said that deity could be found only if the preposition ἐπι was employed. Such a distinction seems to be a nicety of modern scholarship which our Lord did not consider to be of sufficient importance to observe. Here then is an interpretation, we would say an infallible interpretation, which makes it clear that the usage of the preposition ἄνω was not essential to posit deity of the Son of man in Daniel.

In returning to Daniel we may say that the writer does not avoid mentioning position on the clouds. The writer is simply asserting that the coming of the heavenly figure is in accompaniment with the clouds. The significance of this is to be discovered, not in the use of any particular preposition, but by means of other considerations. At the same time the mention of clouds does point to a heavenly origin. It is a heavenly figure with which we here have to do. This fact is brought to the reader's attention even before the Son of man himself is mentioned. It stands in contrast with the manner in which the four beasts had been mentioned. The four beasts were called to the reader's attention before there was any mention of the sea. In verse 3 we read 'And four great beasts were coming up from the sea'. Here the emphasis is upon the beasts themselves, and the place of their origin is more or less secondary. It is not the purpose of Daniel to lay emphasis upon the fact that the four beasts arose from the sea. It is, however, his purpose to stress the fact that it was from heaven that the Son of man came.

The introductory language of the vision, therefore, shows that the figure which is to be presented cannot be the people of Israel. What ever may be intended by the usage of the phrase, 'the saints of the most High', found in the latter portion of the chapter, one thing would seem to be clear, namely, that Daniel does not intend to introduce the 'saints of the most High' at this particular point. It is difficult to see how, in contrast to the beasts which arise from the sea, the 'saints of the most High' can possibly be regarded as coming with the clouds of heaven. The clouds of heaven are represented as a vehicle for the accompaniment of a divine Person, and the saints of the most High cannot be regarded as of heavenly origin.

[p.16]

This fact must be stressed. It might conceivably be argued that the clouds of heaven symbolized the fact that the saints were the people of God, and that they were heavenly in the sense that they were God's people. The symbolism, however, does not permit such an interpretation. The mention of the clouds, clouds which belong to the heaven, is intended to point to heavenly origin, and it is this heavenly origin which cannot be predicated of the saints. The first clause in the description, we may conclude, i.e., the words 'clouds of heaven', precludes reference to the saints of the most High who are mentioned later in the chapter.

The One who comes with the clouds is described as 'like a Son of man'. The common translation of the King James' Version, for example, 'the Son of man', is incorrect, for the phrase is not employed in the vision as a title. In itself the word 'Son' simply indicates the fact that the figure belongs to the category 'man'. He is a man, in distinction from the beasts which had earlier been mentioned. Heaton, for example, simply says, 'The crucial expression here may be translated simply "one like a man".'³¹ J. T. Nelis speaks to the same effect, 'The expression "Son of Man" is an Aramaism, identical with the *ben 'adam* of Ezekiel 3:1 etc., and means that the so-named being belongs to the category man, cf. Daniel 3:25, *bar 'elahin*, son of gods.'³² The late Professor Bentzen simply commented, 'The Son of Man, i.e. One like a man.'³³

This human-like figure was coming with the clouds of heaven, as Daniel beheld him. As has often been pointed out, however, Daniel does not say 'I saw a man', or 'I saw a Son of man'.³⁴ The particle of comparison (כּ) is employed and we may render literally, 'Behold, with the clouds of heaven like a Son of man was coming.' What is the significance of this preposition? Paul Volz suggested that it denoted that which belonged to a vision. The apocalyptists, he maintained, loved such particles of comparison, for they indicated the mysterious. Volz paraphrases 'I saw a visionary form, that belonged to the category man', and he compares such expressions as 'like a lion' and 'like a panther' which had occurred earlier. Hence,

[p.17]

Volz speaks several times of the 'Visionary Man' whom Daniel saw.³⁵

Such an interpretation, however, overlooks certain factors. In the first place it must be noted that there is quite a distinction made between the description of the beasts and that of the Son of man. With respect to the latter Daniel uses the words 'like a Son of man'. With respect to the former, however, he does not say 'like a beast'. In verse 3 he relates 'And four great beasts were coming up from the sea'. The particle of comparison or likeness is missing. In verse 4 it is stated 'The first was like a lion', not 'The likeness of the first was like a lion'.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 182.

³² J. T. Nelis, *Daniel*, Roermond en Masseur, 1954, p. 88: 'De uitdrukking, mensenzoon' (*bar 'nās*) is een arameïsme, identiek met het *bar 'ādām* van Ez. 3, 1 enz., er beduidt dat het aldus genoemde wezen tot de categorie mens behoort, vgl. Dn. 3, 25 *bar 'elahin*, godenzoon.'

³³ Aage Bentzen, *Daniel*, Tübingen, 1952, p. 62: 'Menschensohn, d.h., Menschen-Ahnliche.'

³⁴ See the standard commentaries.

³⁵ Paul Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde in neutestament lichen Zeitalter*, Tübingen, 1934, p. 12: 'Ich sah eine visionale Gestalt, die der Gattung Mensch angehört.'

This same manner of expression is then carried out consistently throughout the description. We may note in particular the manner of introduction of the fourth beast. 'And behold a fourth beast.' Nowhere does Daniel speak of 'one like a beast', but always of a beast itself. The comparison of these beasts with various animals is thus something quite different from the usage of the particle of comparison before the words 'Son of man'. This obvious point has too often been overlooked.³⁶ What, however, is its significance, if any?

It must of course be remembered that the entire chapter records a vision. What Daniel saw, he saw in that mysterious condition in which a vision was vouchsafed to the prophets in Old Testament times.³⁷ He did not see an actual sea, nor did he behold actual animals arising therefrom. At the same time he did see in vision, mysterious as this fact may be to us, and in this vision there were beasts and there was also the likeness of the Son of man. The vision may be described as objective, in so far as it was not the product of Daniel's own mind, but was imposed upon him from without. It was, in other words, a true revelation given unto the prophet from God Himself.³⁸

It would seem then that an obvious distinction was intended between the animals on the one hand and the likeness of a man on the other. But wherein is this distinction to be found? One answer that is sometimes given, although many commentators do not even discern a problem here, is that the beasts represent the harsh and bestial quality of the kingdoms in their desire for conquest, whereas

[p.18]

the Son of man represents the manliness or humanness of the kingdom of the saints of the most High.³⁹ Thus in the description of each one of the first three beasts a check is introduced. To the first, the heart of a man is given, and it is made to stand upon its hind feet like a man. The second receives a command which made it clear that it could conquer only as a divine permission was granted to it. The third receives power, which would seem to indicate that in itself it was unable to obtain this power. It is subject to One that is higher than itself.

The fourth beast is finally given over to the judgment of fire. Each of the four beasts, then, is shown to be subject to a Power greater than itself. Heaton brings out the contrast as follows: 'Just as the beasts represent the kingdoms opposed to the Rule of God, so the man-like figure represents the kingdom responsive to the Rule of God, the People in whom the sovereignty of God is to be perfectly manifested.'⁴⁰ In these words, Heaton has hinted at the true solution of the problem.

The suggestion that the contrast is really one between cruelty and humanness is not borne out by the sequel. The beasts do, of course, represent that which stands in opposition to God. They come from the sea of mankind, a mankind which would exalt itself above God. The spirit of the beasts comes to its fullest expression in the little horn whose mouth utters blasphemous and presumptuous things against God. It is in this manner that the bestiality is

³⁶ Volz, e.g., does not notice it.

³⁷ Cf. Young, *My Servants The Prophets*, Grand Rapids, 1953, pp. 161 ff.

³⁸ It is this which the vision itself purports to be, and the position of the vision as an integral part of Holy Scripture also supports such an interpretation.

³⁹ Cf. Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 182.

interpreted in the chapter itself. 'And he shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time' (Dn. vii.25).

It would seem therefore that in the heavenly figure we are to see the very opposite, and that to the fullest degree, of what was represented by the beasts. He represents the acme and perfection of obedience to the will of God. Just as the beasts are opposed to God, so is the Son of man wholly devoted to Him. This very thought would seem to preclude reference to the people of Israel. More is intended by the symbolism than mere responsiveness to the rule of God. The utter opposite of all that the beasts stand for is found in the One like a Son of man. For this reason, one cannot, seriously entertain the thought that this figure which comes with the clouds of heaven is intended to portray or to represent the saints of the most

[p.19]

High.⁴¹

At this point it may be well to note that the saints of the most High are simply human beings. They are not divine beings, nor is there evidence to support the view that they are wholly dedicated to obedience to the will of God. Daniel had prayed concerning his own people and had said, 'We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments' (Dn. ix.5). Such people, to whom belonged confusion of faces, could hardly be described as those who represented the very opposite of what the beasts signified. At no period in their history do the Jews stand out as a people known for its zeal to be responsive to the rule of God. The symbolism of Daniel therefore would here seem to preclude reference to the people as such.

We would conclude, therefore, that a definite distinction and even contrast is intended by Daniel's direct reference to beasts and his strange statement, 'like a Son of man'. Is there, however, anything further that we may learn from this preposition? Why does the prophet use such language? Why does he speak of one 'like a Son of man'? There have been expositors who have thought that this particular choice of expression does have a definite significance. Calvin, for example, thought that the preposition indicated a pre incarnate state. 'He appeared to Daniel as a son of man, because Christ had not yet put on our flesh.'⁴² Robert Rollock comments: 'Daniel saw one like the Son of Man, not the Son of Man Himself. When long ago Christ appeared in human form to the Fathers and Prophets He was not then clothed with true human flesh, but took on the form only and as a certain shadow of His future humanity. For the humanity of Christ was not already present from the beginning, but in time.'⁴³ Hengstenberg quotes Carpzov to the effect that 'The prefiguration of a thing is different from the thing prefigured. It was not a real man that appeared to Daniel in this vision, but a certain *φάντασμα* with the likeness of a man, just as the beasts which he saw, foreshadowing the four monarchies, were not real beasts, but a resemblance of them presented to the imagination.

⁴¹ Nelis expresses the argument as follows, *op. cit.*, p. 89. 'Van de andere kant schijnt de aureool van wolken, die de menszoon omgeeft, erop te wijzen dat men in hem meer moet zien dan louter een symbol van een yolk, zij het ook van het uitverkeren yolk.'

⁴² Calvin, *Praelectiones in Danielelem*, Brunsvigae, 1889, col. 60: 'Propheta enim dicit sibi *apparuisse tanquam filium hominis*, quia nondum Christus induerat carnem nostram' (Vol. xl-xliv).

⁴³ Cf. Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 154, 155.

[p.20]

He who was actually to exist at a future time, was here beheld by the prophet in vision.'⁴⁴

Hengstenberg himself seems to point to the true solution when he remarks that 'The particle of comparison כ is used, like אֲמֹר and other similar terms, in connexion with visions (for example in Ezek. 1.) when it is required to show that what is seen bears an ideal character, as in the case of the cherubs, and that a symbolical drapery is employed.'⁴⁵ The particle serves to indicate not merely that there was a similarity with man but also that there was a difference. This is also supported by the usage in Revelation i.13 and xiv.14. The figure is like a man, but inasmuch as he is said to be 'like a Son of man' he is also far more than a man. The particle כ is used therefore, in the first instance to introduce a contrast with the four beasts of the vision, a contrast which had to do with their very natures. It is also employed to indicate the fact that, although the heavenly figure was like a man, nevertheless he was also more than a man. Whether there is any reference to the actual humanity of the figure or not is a question that is difficult to decide. Nor need we accept the position of Calvin, Carpzov and others that the preposition simply had reference to a pre-incarnate state of the One whom Daniel saw in the vision. If anything, the particle points in the direction of deity, and thus in itself constitutes an objection to the identification of this heavenly figure with the people of Israel.

It may be well to ask the question whether in this symbolism there is any reference whatever to the pre-existence of the One like a Son of man. That there is is categorically denied, for example, by Paul Volz, who on the whole is one of the more penetrating interpreters of the passage. Volz claims that nothing is asserted about pre-existence, but that the principal point is to be found in the thought that from now on the kingdom of God and its leader will take the rule in the place of the demonic worldly kingdoms, and that this will be to the honour of God and to the benefit of the people of God.⁴⁶

Heaton in effect denies any pre-existence when he remarks that 'it can no longer be maintained that the writer here was seeing afar off the person of Christ...'⁴⁷ He also remarks of the heavenly figure that 'He came not from God but to Him', and he definitely

[p.21]

rejects the view that the Son of man descended from heaven.⁴⁸ On the other hand Vos is most emphatic in his presentation of the opposite position, 'for there can be no doubt but the scene in Daniel means to describe the introduction of a super-human, heavenly Being into the lower world, and that after a theophanic fashion.'⁴⁹

It is of course true that in itself the phrase, 'like a Son of man', does not signify pre-existence. At the most, as we have sought to point out, it indicates that the one in question was more than a man. He might have been an angel, as is the case in Daniel where the reference is to

⁴⁴ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (translated by James Martin), Vol III, Edinburgh, MDCCLVIII, p. 85.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ Volz, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 241.

Gabriel who is described as one 'as the appearance of a man'. The answer to our question is to be found rather in the mention of the clouds of heaven. This symbolism in the Bible signifies judgment, a work which belongs to God alone. Nowhere in the Scriptures, either of the Old or the New Testaments, is the coming on or with the clouds assigned to anyone lesser than God Himself. Isaiah, for example, remarks, 'Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt tremble at his presence, and the heart of Egypt melts within it' (xix.1).⁵⁰ What appears from these considerations is that the Son of man comes from the heavenly world and He comes as the Judge. It would be difficult to conceive a higher picture of Him than is here given. The One of whom Daniel here speaks is deity, and hence, we may rightly speak of His pre-existence. As Vos puts it, 'He came from there (i.e., heaven); on that the emphasis rests, and on that the evidence for the pre-existence, generically considered, depends, not on the phrase describing the form possessed before or assumed at the point of his entrance into the sphere of the visible.'⁵¹

It is then the entire context which leads one to believe that the heavenly figure is truly a pre-existent being. In this respect He is to be contrasted with the beasts which represent kingdoms that are temporal. This representation raises a problem. The Ancient of days who sits upon the throne of fire, the throne of judgment, is of course intended to represent God as Judge.⁵² Upon this point there

[p.22]

seems to be unanimity of opinion. At the same time the One who comes with the clouds of heaven is Himself a divine Person. How is this to be reconciled? In answer we would simply remark that these facts compel us to acknowledge that here is an adumbration of the doctrine of the Trinity later to be revealed in its fulness. It is sufficient that from Daniel's majestic vision we may learn that there is truly a plurality of Persons in the Godhead. It is a divine Being which sits upon the throne of judgment and it is a divine Being who comes with the clouds of heaven in great majesty

An Enthronement Scene

It is this heavenly Being who comes to the Ancient of days and who is brought before Him. What is the significance of this symbolism? It has been suggested for example, by Bentzen, that an enthronement scene is here pictured.⁵³ To support this view appeal is made to the language of the text in which it is stated that the Son of man is brought before the Ancient of days, and is invested with a kingdom and with the authority to rule as the vicegerent of the Ancient of days. The seventh chapter of Daniel, says Bentzen, 'is an eschatologized representation of the ancient Enthronement Festival. It has been influenced by the idea of

⁵⁰ Cf. also Ps. civ.3, xviii.10-18, xcvi.2-4; Na. i.3; Mk. xiii.26; Mt. xxiv.30, xxvi.64.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 243, 244.

⁵² The description of the Ancient of days may be compared with Jb. xxxvi.26; Ps. cii.25-28; Is. xli.4. A somewhat parallel expression appears as a description of El in the Ugaritic texts, *ab snm* (father of years), cf. the Baal and Anat texts, 49, I.8 and 51, IV.24, Cyrus Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook II*, 137, 141. It does not follow however, 'dass man hier eher mit Anleihen bei nordsyrisch-phönizisch-kanaanäischen Vorstellungen zu rechnen hat als beim Parsismus?' (Bentzen, *op. cit.*, p. 61). The similarities with Ugarit are not exact, and the antecedents of the symbolism seem rather to lie in the biblical passages themselves.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

world periods, peculiar to eschatology proper. It culminates in the taking over of world dominion by the Jewish peoples represented by the figure of the "Son of Man".⁵⁴

It is not our purpose to consider the background or the antecedents of the vision, other than to stress the fact that we believe the contents thereof were given to Daniel by divine revelation. But we are not convinced that in ancient Israel there was annually celebrated a festival of the enthronement somewhat akin to the *akitu* festival of Babylonia.⁵⁵ And one thing would seem to be sure. There is no evidence extant to support the position that the seventh chapter of Daniel represents part of a myth which was recited in an annual enthronement festival. At the same time there is a certain element of truth in this conception of an enthronement, at least in a formal sense. The scene does indeed depict the investiture of the Son of man with kingly authority.

[p.23]

The text states that the Son of man came to the Ancient of days and that they brought Him before the Ancient of days. The reason for this majestic escorting is that the Son of man may receive a kingdom; we are explicitly told that there was given to Him power and honour and a kingdom. While it is not expressly declared that these things were given to Him by the Ancient of days, it is certainly implied that such was the case. For the purpose of the judgment scene is not merely that a judgment should be pronounced, and the four kingdoms destroyed, but is also to prepare the way for the introduction of another kingdom which contrasts with the former in a marked fashion. It would therefore be a legitimate assumption that the One who had the power not only to pass judgment upon the former kingdoms also had the power to grant the kingdom of God to the one of His choice.

The kingdom which is identified as belonging to the Son of man is depicted as both universal and eternal.⁵⁶ In these respects it stands in striking contrast to the four preceding kingdoms. Each of these was limited and to a certain extent local. The kings of these kingdoms sought to make them universal, but none succeeded in the attempt. This fact is emphasized in the descriptions. With respect to the second beast, the command was, 'Arise, devour much flesh' (Dn. vii.5b), and of the third we are told, 'and dominion was given to it' (Dn. vii.6b). But of none of these kingdoms could it be said that 'all peoples, nations and tongues would serve him'. The kingdom of the Son of man alone is truly universal.

It is also eternal, and in this respect too it differs from the kingdoms represented by the four beasts. Each of these stood for the king of a kingdom that was temporal. Each had his day and then came to an end. In both an affirmative and a negative manner, however, the eternity of the kingdom of God is stressed. 'His dominion is an everlasting dominion' is the positive affirmation. And the same truth is stated in negative fashion in the words, 'which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed'.⁵⁷

These two attributes make it clear that the kingdom is of divine nature. No human kingdom could last for ever, nor could a human kingdom be universal in the sense that is here described. This kingdom therefore is essentially different from the four previously described.

⁵⁴ *King and Messiah*, London, 1955, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Norman H. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, London, 1947 pp. 205 ff.

⁵⁶ Note the designation 'his kingdom' in Dn. vii.14.

⁵⁷ Dn. vii.14.

They had human rulers. In fact, the four beasts are clearly interpreted in the latter portion of the chapter as having a

[p.24]

reference to four kings (Dn. vii.17). It is true, and many have pointed out the fact, that the words for the king and the kingdom are used interchangeably in Daniel.⁵⁸ At the same time the text does mention rulers, and we have every warrant from the book of Daniel to assert that the kingdoms represented by the four beasts were human kingdoms ruled over by human kings.

What, however, is to be said about the rulers of a kingdom that is both eternal and universal? It is of course perfectly true that such a kingdom might be given to a human vicegerent of God. The answer to the question, however, depends, not upon what might conceivably be done, but upon the text itself. Everything in the context which we have been considering leads one to believe that the ruler of this kingdom, the heavenly Son of man, is unlike the rulers of human kingdoms. There is one word in which the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Son of man is set forth that is of unusual significance. It is stated that 'all people, nations, and languages, should serve him' (Dn. vii.14). The verb פִּלְּץ is important. Wherever this verb occurs in the book of Daniel it seems to denote not political service but service of a higher kind.

Apart from this present passage the word is confined to the third chapter of Daniel and in each instance has to do with worshipping the image which Nebuchadnezzar had erected. That this involves far more than a mere sign or token of respect is shown by the fact that the word 'god' also appears. The force of the verb comes to expression with particular clarity in the latter part of verse 28, 'that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.' In Ezra vii.19 the reference is to the 'vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God'. Here the noun is פִּלְּץָּ employed. The meaning, however, is clear. The vessels are to be used in the worship of God. This root, wherever it appears in the Aramaic of the Bible, has reference to religious service.

It might seem that in this very chapter in Daniel there was an exception to the rule. Do we not read in verse 27 in reference to the kingdom of the saints, 'and all dominions shall serve and obey him'? As a matter of fact, however, this verse is not an exception. Inasmuch as people serve the saints of the most High they serve the King of these saints. They do not offer religious service to these saints in themselves, but only to the One who is the Head and the Lord of the saints. An example of this usage is found in Daniel ii.

[p.25]

46, which states that 'Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel'. Porphyry took great offence at this verse, and some have condemned Daniel for having received such worship. But a proper interpretation of the text will show that it was not the man Daniel as such whom the king worshipped, but rather the God whose representative Daniel was. This was correctly stated as early as the time of Jerome.⁵⁹ Another passage in which the same truth is illustrated is Isaiah xlv.14. 'Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of

⁵⁸ Cf. e.g., Nelis, *op. cit.*, p. 89, Volz, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Cf Young, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, *saying*, Surely God *is* in thee; and *there is* none else, *there is* no God.’ In this passage the heathen worship the people of God because they recognize that the true God is in the midst of His people. Elsewhere they cannot find God, and for that reason they bow down before God’s people.

The usage of this root פלח therefore is an indication of the fact that the One who is the King, the One to whom the kingdom is given, is One who is deserving of worship. Men will serve Him in the same manner as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego served their God. The usage of this word also makes it clear that the Son of man is not the people of Israel. For, no matter how honoured the people of Israel had been, it cannot be said of them that in their own right religious service might be given to them. It is true that all peoples will serve the saints, but this is only because they are the saints of the most High, whose King is One that is worthy to receive such worship.

It should also be noted that in Daniel vii.14 there is a rather exclusive force in the language ‘all people, nations, and languages’. This would seem to be even more all embracing than the language employed in verse 27, and if such is the case, it follows that the ‘all people’ would include even the saints themselves. Perhaps this argument should not be pressed too far, but it is difficult to escape the impression that contrast is intended between the Son of man on the one hand and all peoples, nations and tongues on the other.⁶⁰

In the interpretation which is given to Daniel the emphasis is placed upon the kings. The four beasts are said to be four kings, and emphasis is laid upon the fact that they have arisen from the earth. There would seem to be a reason for this emphasis. Each of the four kingdoms found its head and ruler in one that was of the earth

[p.26]

earthly, a mere man who had temporal and limited power, and who represented the spirit of man that expressed itself with culminating force in the mouth of the little horn. This would lead the reader to suppose that the One to whom the universal, eternal and divine kingdom was given was also a king, one who, unlike the four kings of earthly kingdoms, was not of the earth earthly, but the Lord from heaven. He did not arise from the sea; He came with the clouds of heaven. His provenience therefore was the exact opposite of that of the four kings. He was a king unlike them, One who came from heaven.

The Messianic interpretation of the passage, it may be noted incidentally, is also supported by the history of its interpretation. In 4 Esdras xiii.3ff., we have a picture of a man who flies with the clouds of heaven,⁶¹ and in the book of Enoch the term ‘Son of man’ becomes a title of the Messiah.⁶² That the passage is given a Messianic interpretation in the New Testament is of course universally recognized.⁶³ In fact in these early interpretations there is none which applies the passage in Daniel to the people of the most High. Such an interpretation appears

⁶⁰ Cf. Kliefoth, *Das Buch Daniel*, 1868, p. 214.

⁶¹ 2 Esdras xiii.3f.

⁶² *The Book of Enoch*, xlvi.2, lli.4.

⁶³ Cf. the masterful discussion in Vos, *op. cit.*, pp 228-256.

only later, for even the rabbis, with reference to this passage, spoke of the Messiah as the 'anani', 'the cloudy one'.⁶⁴

The view that the figure like a Son of man merely represents the saints of the most High is one that does not do justice to the language of Daniel. In addition to the other considerations which have been adduced it should also be noted that, if the writer had intended to represent the saints by means of the heavenly figure, he should, and probably would, have been more explicit. If he had intended to set forth the ideal people, would he not have given some indication of this fact? The actual description which he does give in verses 13 and 14 is such that it leads one to believe that the writer is speaking of an individual, namely, the Messiah.

The weaknesses of the older, liberal view become more apparent the more one studies this passage. In reality the position of Gressmann is an argument against the collectivistic interpretation. According to him the material found in Daniel vii is very ancient and in its entirety is not all the original work of the writer. If it had been all original, maintains Gressmann, the writer would have given

[p.27]

a more detailed explanation than is actually the case.⁶⁵ Gressmann thinks that the writer took his material from old tradition and broadened it out a bit so that it would apply to Antiochus Epiphanes.⁶⁶ Originally the individualistic emphasis was present, not the collectivistic. The Messianic understanding, says Gressmann, was not a misunderstanding, but was older than Daniel. The writer, however, engaged in interpretation, and the interpretation is later than the original tradition. In Daniel vii, as we now have it, the figure is interpreted of the saints, but this interpretation was not original.⁶⁷

In the light of the exegesis of the passage, it would appear that the commonly accepted collectivistic interpretation of these verses will not stand. It has been held that this view was modified by our Lord who gave to the passage a Messianic import. Such a later re-interpretation of the figure in individual terms, we are told, is not regarded as illegitimate. As Heaton puts it, 'The original corporate meaning of "one like unto a son of man" in this passage is not forgotten in the new and unprecedented use of the expression when it was borrowed as a title for THE SON OF MAN in the Gospels.'⁶⁸ Those interpretations of Daniel, however, which see in the Son of man an individual, even though they believe that this individualistic emphasis goes back to tradition older than the writer of Daniel, have a deeper insight into the true meaning of Daniel vii.13, 14 than do those views which maintain that the verses themselves present a collectivistic force.

Our Lord did not alter or modify an already existing interpretation of the Son of man which the writer of Daniel had made. He rather saw in the heavenly figure none other than the Messiah, and He spoke of Himself as that Son of man, because He believed that He was Himself the Messiah. We have great sympathy with those views which maintain that the background of the Son of man is not to be found in ancient mythology or tradition but in the

⁶⁴ Nelis, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 345.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 346: 'Der Apokalyptiker hat die bereits vorhandene Vision aufgegriffen und sie etwas erweitert, so dass sie jetzt auf Antiochus IV. Epiphanes passt.'

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 344.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 184.

Davidic king. At the same time, it must be insisted that the content of Daniel vii was granted to Daniel by revelation. It was a prophecy in the truest sense of the term, a prophecy which pointed forward to One and to One alone, and that One was the Lord Jesus Christ.

[p.28]

There is a distinction which must here be insisted upon. Jesus did not merely see in the Son of man One whose description might indeed apply in His own case. Rather, He Himself was the Son of man. As Hengstenberg has stated the matter, 'The appearance of Christ in the flesh, which is expressly foretold in chap. ix is here presupposed.'⁶⁹ And again, 'We have started with the assumption, that the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven was Christ.'⁷⁰ This position rests upon the presupposition that God truly exists and that He has revealed Himself to man in a special way. Believing in these presuppositions we may confidently assert that our Lord is truly that One like a Son of man, whose 'dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.'

Prepared for the web in November 2004 by Robert I Bradshaw.

© 1958 E.J. Young. This lecture was delivered in Cambridge on June 28th, 1958 at a meeting convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research. It was originally published by the Tyndale Press in 1958 and is reproduced here by permission of the author's daughter and son – Mrs Jean Gaffin & Dr Davis A. Young.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk>
rob@biblicalstudies.org.uk

⁶⁹ *Op. Cit.*, p. 83.

⁷⁰ *Op. Cit.*, p. 86.