

"Messiah"), "the Son of the living God," Jesus answered: "Blessed are you . . . for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." Then Jesus "warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ" (v. 20). Jesus referred to Himself as "the Son of Man," not only when speaking to His disciples, but also when speaking before crowds (e.g. Lk. 11:29-30) and even when speaking to His enemies (e.g. Lk. 5:24; and perhaps John 12:34). If "Son of Man" had obviously meant "Messiah" it would have been absurd to praise Peter for recognizing the fact, and even more absurd to ask the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ!

In adopting the term "Son of Man" as a designation for Himself, Jesus chose a phrase that occurs more than 90 times in the book of Ezekiel but only 14 times in the rest of the Hebrew portion of the Old Testament and only once in its Aramaic portion (Dan. 7:13). Most of the 14 occurrences are in poetic statements, often with the word "man" used in a preceding parallel clause.<sup>^1</sup>

As we seek to understand Jesus' use of the term it is helpful to look at the earliest recorded occasion on which He is said to have used it. This was at His meeting with the skeptical Nathanael. When Nathanael expressed great surprise that Jesus knew so much about him, Jesus said: "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that ... I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:50-51).

When Nathanael heard these words he surely remembered the many times that God had addressed Ezekiel by this expression. He might also remember that when God ordered Gabriel to explain a vision to Daniel, Gabriel addressed Daniel as "Son of man" (Dan. 8:16-17). The words would suggest that Jesus was a man who was very close to God, one to whom God would often reveal aspects of truth.

The use of the term would set Jesus apart, enabling Him to make statements about Himself, His authority and His future in a way that would sound unique without sounding egotistical, and would stress His closeness to God.