

It was Jesus' plan that His followers should be enabled, through listening to His teaching and observing His life, to realize the greatness and uniqueness of His person. The title "Son of Man" would suggest that He was one through whom God would reveal His truth, as He had done through Ezekiel and Daniel (cf. Dan. 8:17). The extent of this closeness to God, illustrated by the picture of the angels ascending and descending on Him from heaven (John 1:51), would become more apparent in the events of the last year of His ministry (John 7ff.) and would be still more fully revealed in the discourse given to the disciples in the upper room (John 13-17). Yet even then He would find it necessary to say, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?" (John 14:9a). A few days later, after His resurrection, He would hear disciples on the road to Emmaus mourning His death and saying, "but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21a). Jesus' use of the term "Son of Man" had a valuable part in helping the disciples move forward toward realization of His uniqueness, and in preparing them to be God's instruments for winning converts and establishing the Christian church. It helped to train them for this purpose over a period of years, building up in their hearts a love for Him and a realization of His greatness, but not arousing such opposition as could bring a premature end to His mission.

At that time many Jews were looking for the coming of a "Messiah" (Greek "Christ"), who they thought would organize them into a military force that would overthrow the Roman power and establish a great empire. Public declaration that Jesus was the Messiah might immediately draw to Him many Jews who were not of the type that He desired to have for His disciples. Even though He constantly ordered that His followers keep silent about His Messiahship there was at least one occasion when a crowd desired to make Him king by force (Jn. 6:15). It was His purpose to gather and train those who would become the spiritual leaders of the early church. Attracting great numbers of Jews of a different type would only be a hindrance