

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - HIS NAME AND TITLES

THE NAME AND TITLES OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:

The name and titles of Jesus Christ found in the Bible tell us a great deal about Him. We will look at the meanings of the name and select titles as applied to Jesus Christ to see what we can learn from them. It is important to realise that names in Biblical times were very important as they were intentionally given to convey some aspect of the person so named.

1. *Jesus.*

This is the personal name of Jesus (the other names are really titles). It was given to Him by the angel who announced His birth to Joseph in Matt.1: 21 "*...and you are to give him the name JESUS, because he will save his people from their sins*". The angel also gives Mary the instruction to use this name for her child in Lk.1: 31. The name Jesus is the Latin form of *Iesous* (pronounced *ee-ay-sooce'*) in Greek and *Jehoshua* (pronounced *yeh-ho-shoo'-ah*) in Hebrew and means "Jehovah saves". The theological implication of this name then is that Jehovah is the Saviour. Thus we see that in His name, Jesus is intimately connected with Jehovah which is the Hebrew name of God. This is of tremendous significance because it implies that Jesus *is* Jehovah (God). This meaning is further established in the words of the prophet Isaiah (7: 14) quoted in Matt.1: 23 "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel - which means, 'God with us'.*" Here again, the implication is that Jesus is God Himself come to be with man.

The Bible has many other things to say concerning this name, for example:

1. Phil.2: 10-11 says, "*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Compare this verse with Isaiah 45: 23 quoted in Rom.14: 11, "*...'As surely as I live', says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God'.*" Once more we see Jesus equated with God in these verses.
2. Acts 4: 10-12, "*...by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, ... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*"

However, this name "Jesus" was a fairly common name amongst the Jews. For example, in Col.4: 11 Paul mentions "*And Jesus, which is called Justus...*" and the Jewish historian Josephus says that there were at least four high priests who had this name. Hence, in order to differentiate between the Jesus who is the Saviour of the world and all the other

people with this name, in the Bible He is often called Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth or some similar combination of His name and titles.

2. *Christ (Messiah).*

The word Christ is the English form of *Christos* (pronounced *khris-tos*) in the Greek and is the equivalent of the word *mashiyach* (pronounced *maw-shee-akh*) in the Hebrew. The Hebrew word was also transliterated into the Greek as *messias* (pronounced *mes-see'-as*) in John 1: 41 & 4: 25. The words mean "the anointed one" and can refer to a specially chosen human being such as a king, prophet, or priest in the Old Testament. However, there was a clear doctrinal understanding amongst the Jewish people that there was to come one particular "Anointed One" who would excel in all respects all other anointed ones. This was the concept of the Jewish Messiah. In the New Testament the words are applied to Christ as *the* chosen or anointed one of God - the promised Messiah of Judaism. Jesus Himself, however, never used the title of Messiah to describe Himself, preferring instead to use the title "Son of man". We shall see why below!

3. *Son of Man.*

Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of man" 69 times in the three Synoptic Gospels and 13 times in John's Gospel. It would appear that the background of His use of the term is related to Dan.7: 13-14, *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."* There is no evidence that Judaism had any particular doctrinal concept of the term "Son of man" and it is not used by the Christian church to any extent. Why then did Jesus use it of Himself instead of using the title "Messiah" and what does it mean?

The term "Son of man" is sometimes thought of as being opposite to "Son of God" to show us Jesus' humanity as opposed to His divinity. However, in the light of Dan.7: 14 the term actually reflects Christ's divinity! In Mk.14: 61b-62 Jesus equates the title of Christ (Messiah) with the title of "Son of man", *"Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am', said Jesus, 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'."* Jesus chose this title for Himself rather than the title of "Messiah" for the following reasons:

- a) When Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) in Matt.16: 13 Jesus strictly forbade His disciples to tell anyone. Why? Well, the Jews of Jesus' day associated the Messiah with political deliverance from their enemies (in this case the Romans). He could have attracted a following of political aspirants who would have proclaimed Him as king and this would have caused serious problems with the authorities.

- b) The two main Jewish religious parties had different concepts of the Messiah, the Sadducees did not believe in a Messiah while the Pharisees did. There were other Messianic views that were held as well. For Jesus to have used the title of Messiah could have indicated to people that He was aligning Himself with a particular group and Jesus did not want to be "claimed" by any one group of people.
- c) The term "Messiah" was closely associated with Judaism while the term "Son of Man" was more open to encompass the whole of humanity. Jesus did not want to be identified as a strictly Jewish figure that would exclude the Gentile peoples for whom He also came to die.

Jesus thus used the designation "Son of Man" to conceal to the broader population the fact that He was the Messiah while at the same time revealing this fact to His close followers. Although on occasion Jesus did use this title simply as an indication of His humanity, (for example, Matt.8: 20 "*Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head'*") in most cases He used it in its Messianic context.

The use of the term "son of man" in such Old Testament passages as Ps.8: 4, "*What is man that you art mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?*" and Ezek.2: 1, "*He said to me, 'Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you'*", is simply a synonym for "man" or "human being". It is used repeatedly as such in the book of Ezekiel and serves to illustrate the difference between insignificant man and the greatness of God.

4. *Son of God.*

Jesus seldom referred to Himself as the Son of God, this title is usually given to Him by others. It is clear, however, that the New Testament presents Jesus as the Son of God in a unique sense. He is not just *a* Son of God but *the* Son of God, the unique one-and-only.

- He was proclaimed as such from before His birth in Lk.1: 35, "*So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*"
- He was acknowledged by God as such at His baptism in Matt.3: 17, "*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'*"
- His son-ship was challenged by Satan in Matt.4: 3, "*The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones become bread.'*"
- His son-ship was recognized by the demons in Matt.8: 29, "*What do you want with us, Son of God? ...*"
- He was acknowledged as the Son of God by His disciples in Matt.14: 33, "*Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'*"
- He was confessed as the Son of God by Peter in Matt.16: 16, "*Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'*"
- Jesus Himself acknowledged His son-ship in Matt.26: 63-64, "*...The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'. 'Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replied'...*"
- The crowd at His crucifixion were aware that Jesus laid claim to being the Son of God in Matt.27: 43, "*He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'*"

- He was confessed as such by the Gentile Roman soldiers at the Cross in Matt.27: 54, *"When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'"*
- He was recognized as such by John the Baptist in Jhn.1: 34, *"I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."*
- Jesus proclaimed His son-ship to Nicodemus in Jhn.3: 16-18, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*

From the above selection of scriptures from the Gospels it is clear that Jesus was acknowledged as the Son of God by angels, by demons, by men from all walks of life, by God and by Himself. This acknowledgment continues in the other New Testament books in such verses as Acts 8: 37; Rom.1: 4; II Cor.1: 19; Gal.2: 20; Eph.4: 13; Heb.4: 14; I Jhn.5: 5; etc. But how, exactly, are we to understand what is implied by this title "Son of God"? We will consider two aspects of this title below.

1. *It cannot be understood as a normal father/son relationship.* In the Old Testament, the expression "son(s) of God" was applied to the following beings:
 - a) Angels - Job 1: 6, *"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them."* (KJV). Also, Job 2: 1 and Job 38: 7 *"When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"* (KJV). However, as Heb.1: 5 points out, no individual angel is ever called the Son of God in the Bible, *"For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'?"*
 - b) Undefined beings - Gen.6: 2 *"The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose."* Also, Gen.6: 4.
 - c) Israel - Ex.4: 22-23, *"Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son'."* Also, Hos.11: 1, *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."*
 - d) The king (Solomon - prophetically) - II Sam.7: 14, *"I will be his father, and he will be my son."*
 - e) The King (Christ- typologically) - Ps.2: 7, *"I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'."* (cf. Heb.1: 1-14).
 - f) Adam - Lk.3:38 *"...which was the son of God."* (KJV).

It is obvious that all the expressions pertaining to "son-ship" above are intended to be understood in a figurative or prophetic/typological sense. The New Testament also uses the expression "sons of God" for believers (Jhn.1: 12; Rom.8: 14; Phil.2: 15; I Jhn.3: 1-2) and this is also to be understood in a figurative or legal sense and not in a biological sense. In the case of Jesus, however, it is clear that He is not just a son of

God but He is pre-eminently *the* Son of God, not in a biological sense even if such a thing were possible, but in a profound spiritual sense. Jesus' relationship with God His Father was unique in that He was the revelation of God Himself incarnated in human flesh. This is made abundantly clear in Jhn.1: 1-18 and in Heb.1: 1-14. Theologically-speaking, the expression "Son of God" in the New Testament means God Himself in much the same way as "the angel of the LORD" in the Old Testament is often a euphemism for God Himself (e.g. Gen.16: 7-13; Gen.21: 17-18; Gen. 22: 11-12; Gen. 31: 11-13; Ex. 3: 2-4; Jdg. 6: 11-18).

2. *It can only be understood as a unique relationship between two separate Persons who are yet One in every respect.* This is abundantly evident in such Scriptures as the following:

- a) Jhn.5: 18, *"For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."* It is clear here that the Jews understood that Jesus was saying that He was equal with God.
- b) Jhn.5: 22, *"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son..."* Throughout the Bible God is often described as the Judge (e.g. Deut.32: 36, *"The LORD will judge his people..."*; Ps.50: 6, *"And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge."*; Ps. 82: 8, *"Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance."*). What Jesus is effectively saying in Jhn.5: 22 then, is that He is God.
- c) Jhn. 5: 23, *"That all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him."* Here again, the equality between Father and Son is obvious.
- d) Jhn.5: 30, *"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgement is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."* Here we see the total interdependence between the two Persons of Father and Son - Jesus can only judge in unity with the Father; He cannot judge apart from Him. The oneness between the two is again apparent.

Why then did Jesus seldom refer to Himself as the Son of God? Quite simply, He wanted people to "see" who He was by faith. He wanted them to realise who He was by the things that He said and the things that He did. Only then would they believe in Him. For Jesus to have proclaimed Himself the Son of God, possibly with an ostentatious display of miraculous power, would have been to defeat His purpose in coming to die for the sins of mankind. It would have been tantamount to giving in to the temptation of Satan when he said to Jesus in Matt.4: 5, *"If you are the Son of God', he said, 'throw yourself down..."* (from the top of the Temple). Jesus could have proved that He was the Son of God by performing some spectacular feat such as this - but this was not God's way because it was not the way of the Cross.

5) Lord.

The Greek word for Lord is *kurios* (pronounced *koo-ree-os*). This word is used in a variety of ways for a wide variety of people as well as for God, but it is also the most

commonly used title for Jesus so that it has become synonymous with His name. The word Lord implies authority. Some examples of its use in Biblical times are:

- a) The master (father) of a household.
- b) A master as opposed to a slave.
- c) An owner of property.
- d) A magistrate or judge.
- e) A military commander.
- f) A moral leader of high ethical standing.
- g) A sovereign authority.
- h) A form of polite address in everyday speech similar to "sir" in English.
- i) A legal guardian.
- j) The official title of the Roman emperor.
- k) The standard title of any pagan god.
- l) Most importantly, in the Old Testament it is the word used for God Himself. (The Jews felt that the name of God, YHWH, was too sacred to pronounce so they replaced it with the Hebrew word *Adonai* which is translated as *kurios* in Greek.

Thus, we see that the word Lord can be used of humanity as well as of divinity. When used of Jesus though, it is in the ultimate sense of identifying Him with God. This is particularly so outside of the Gospels in the books of the New Testament. In the Gospels Jesus is seldom referred to as Lord, but in the letters of Paul He is called Lord over 200 times.

Some New Testament scriptures are ambiguous as to whether the Father or the Son (or both?) is intended when the word Lord is used, e.g. Acts 1: 24; 2: 47; 8: 39; 11: 21; 13: 10-12; 16: 14; 20: 19; 21: 14.

In Rom.14: 10-12 Christ, Lord and God are all used interchangeably.

In Acts 8: 39 and 9: 31 Lord is used in connection with the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament scriptures that refer to *Adonai* or YHWH are applied to Jesus in the New Testament, e.g. Isa.40: 3 and Mal.3: 1 in Mk.1: 3; Jer.9: 22 in I Cor.1: 31 and in II Cor.10: 17; Joel 2: 28 in Acts 2: 17-21 and in Rom.10: 13; Ps.102: 25 in Heb.1: 10; Ps34 in I Pet.2: 3; Isa.8: 13 in I Pet.3: 15.

In some cases Jesus is shown to be one with God in His relationship with the Father by the use of the word Lord, e.g. compare Isa.45: 21-22 with Phil.2: 9-11; Num.21: 5 with I Cor.10: 9; Deut.6: 4-9 with Eph.6: 4.

The creed of the early church was *Jesus Christ is Lord!* The following scriptures emphasize the Lordship of Jesus in various contexts:

Phil.2: 11, "*And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

Rom.10: 9, "*That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*"

I Cor.12: 3, "...and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit."

I Cor.8: 6, "*Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*"

Eph.4: 5, "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*"

Thus, when a man calls Jesus his Lord, he is acknowledging a number of things, namely:

- a) Jesus' supreme authority over his life - Jesus is his master.
- b) Jesus is his leader and judge.
- c) Jesus is his teacher and guide.
- d) Jesus is his God.

In the days of the early church the emperor of Rome was worshipped as God by the peoples of the Roman Empire. In fact, Caesar worship became compulsory (except for the Jews who were exempted) and men were obliged to confess that "Caesar is Lord". The early Christians refused to do this because Jesus was their Lord and not Caesar. Consequently, they suffered cruel persecution because of their refusal to acknowledge the emperor as Lord, and yet the day came when even the Roman emperor eventually confessed that Jesus was Lord and the worship of Caesar ceased. A man faces the supreme test of faith when he has to answer the question, "Who is your Lord?"

There are many other titles given to Jesus in the Scriptures, but those discussed above are the main ones. To give Jesus His fullest title then would be to call Him *The Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God*.

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
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WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - HIS NAME AND TITLES

Questions:

1. What does the name "Jesus" mean?
2. What does the title "Christ" mean?
3. For what reasons did Jesus avoid using the title of Messiah?
4. Why did Jesus seldom refer to Himself as the Son of God?
5. What do we acknowledge when we call Jesus our Lord?