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David Friedrich Strauss

Excerpt

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THE LIFE OF JESUS.

CHAPTER IV

JESUS AS THE MESSIAH *.

§ 61.

JESUS, THE SON OF MAN.

IN treating of the relation in which Jesus conceived himself to stand to the messianic idea, we can distinguish his dicta concerning his own person from those concerning the work he had undertaken.

The appellation which Jesus commonly gives himself in the gospels is, *the Son of man*, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. The exactly corresponding Hebrew expression מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם is in the Old Testament a frequent designation of man in general, and thus we might be induced to understand it in the mouth of Jesus. This interpretation would suit some passages; for example, Matt. xii. 8. where Jesus says: *The Son of man is lord also of the Sabbath day*, κύριος γὰρ ἐστὶ τοῦ σαββάτου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου,—words which will fitly enough take a general meaning, such as Grotius

* All that relates to the idea of the Messiah as suffering, dying, and rising again, is here omitted, and reserved for the history of the Passion.

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[More information](#)

affixes to them, namely, that man is lord of the Sabbath, especially if we compare Mark (ii. 27), who introduces them by the proposition, *The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*, τὸ σάββατον διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐγένετο, οὐχ ὁ ἄνθρωπος διὰ τὸ σάββατον. But in the majority of cases, the phrase in question is evidently used as a special designation. Thus, Matt. viii. 20, a scribe volunteers to become a disciple of Jesus, and is admonished to count the cost in the words, *The Son of man hath not where to lay his head*, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἔχει, ποῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν κλίνει: here some particular man must be intended, nay, the particular man into whose companionship the scribe wished to enter, that is, Jesus himself. As a reason for the self-application of this term by Jesus, it has been suggested that he used the third person after the oriental manner, to avoid the *I*¹. But for a speaker to use the third person in reference to himself, is only admissible, if he would be understood, when the designation he employs is precise, and inapplicable to any other person present, as when a father or a king uses his appropriate title of himself; or when, if the designation be not precise, its relation is made clear by a demonstrative pronoun, which limitation is eminently indispensable if an individual speak of himself under the universal designation *man*. We grant that occasionally a gesture might supply the place of the demonstrative pronoun; but that Jesus in every instance of his using this habitual expression had recourse to some visible explanatory sign, or that the evangelists would not, in that case, have supplied its necessary absence from a written document by some demonstrative addition, is inconceivable. If both Jesus and the evangelists held such an elucidation superfluous, they must have seen in the expression itself the key to its precise application. Some are of opinion that Jesus intended by it to point himself out as the ideal man—man in the noblest sense of the word²; but this is a modern theory, not an historical inference, for there is no trace of such an interpreta-

¹ Paulus, exeget. Handb. 1, 6. s. 465; Fritzsche, in Matth. p. 320.

² Thus after Herder, Köster e. g. in Immanuel. s. 265.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

tion of the expression in the time of Jesus³, and it would be more easy to show, as others have attempted, that the appellation, *Son of man*, so frequently used by Jesus, had reference to his lowly and despised condition⁴. Apart however from the objection that this acceptation also would require the addition of the demonstrative pronoun, though it might be adapted to many passages, as Matt. viii. 20, John i. 51, there are others, (such as Matt. xvii. 22, where Jesus, foretelling his violent death, designates himself ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου,) which demand the contrast of high dignity with an ignominious fate. So in Matt. x. 23. the assurance given to the commissioned disciples that before they had gone over the cities of Israel the Son of Man would come, could have no weight unless this expression denoted a person of importance; and that such was its significance is proved by a comparison of Matt. xvi. 28, where there is also a mention of an ἔρχεσθαι, a coming of the Son of man, but with the addition ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ. As this addition can only refer to the messianic kingdom, the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου must be the Messiah.

How so apparently vague an appellation came to be appropriated to the Messiah, we gather from Matt. xxvi. 64 parall., where the Son of Man is depicted as coming *in the clouds of heaven*. This is evidently an allusion to Dan. vii. 13 f. where after having treated of the fall of the four beasts, the writer says: *I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man* (אֲנֹכִי כְּבָר, ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, LXX.) *came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion.* The four beasts (v. 17 ff.) were symbolical of the four great empires, the last of which was the Macedonian, with its offshoot, Syria. After their fall, the kingdom was to be given in perpetuity to the People of

³ Lücke, Comm. zum Joh. 1, s. 397 f.⁴ e. g. Grotius.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

God, *the saints of the Most High*: hence, he who was to come with *clouds of heaven* could only be, either a personification of the holy people⁵, or a leader of heavenly origin under whom they were to achieve their destined triumph,—in a word, the Messiah; and this was the customary interpretation among the Jews⁶. Two things are predicated of this personage,—that he was like the Son of Man, and that he came with the clouds of heaven; but the *former* particular is his distinctive characteristic, and imports either that he had not a superhuman form, that of an angel for instance, though descending from heaven, or else that the kingdom about to be established presented in its humanity a contrast to the inhumanity of its predecessors, of which ferocious beasts were the fitting emblems⁷. At a later period, it is true, the Jews regarded the coming with the clouds of heaven אָנָּשׁוֹן עֲלֵי-בָּרָאִשׁ as the more essential attribute of the Messiah, and hence gave him the name Anani, after the Jewish taste of making a merely accessory circumstance the permanent epithet of a person or thing⁸. If, then, the expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου necessarily recalled the above passage in Daniel, generally believed to relate to the Messiah, it is impossible that Jesus could so often use it, and in connexion with declarations evidently referring to the Messiah, without intending it as the designation of that personage.

That by the expression in question Jesus meant himself, without relation to the messianic dignity, is less probable than the contrary supposition, that he might often mean the Messiah when he spoke of the *Son of Man*, without relation to his own person. When, Matt. x. 23, on the first mission of the twelve apostles to announce the kingdom of heaven, he comforts them

⁵ Abenesra, see Hävernick, ut sup. Comm. zum Daniel, s. 244.

⁶ Schöttgen, horæ, ii. s. 63, 73; Hävernick, ut sup. s. 243 f.

⁷ See for the most important opinions, Hävernick, ut sup. s. 242 f.

⁸ Let the reader bear in mind the designation of David's elegy, 2 Sam. i. 17 ff. as אָנָּשׁוֹן, and the denomination of the Messiah as מָלְכֵנוּ. Had Schleiermacher considered the nature of Jewish appellatives, he would not have called the reference of υἱὸς τοῦ ἀ. to the passage in Daniel, a strange idea. (Glaubensl. § 99. s. 39. Anm.).

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

under the prospect of their future persecutions by the assurance that they would not *have gone over all the cities of Israel before the coming of the Son of Man*, we should rather, taking this declaration alone, think of a third person, whose speedy messianic appearance Jesus was promising, than of the speaker himself, seeing that he was already come, and it would not be antecedently clear how he could represent his own coming as one still in anticipation. So also when Jesus (Matt. xiii. 37 ff.) interprets the Sower of the parable to be the Son of Man, who at the end of the world will have a harvest and a tribunal, he might be supposed to refer to the Messiah as a third person distinct from himself. This is equally the case, xvi. 27 f., where, to prove the proposition that the loss of the soul is not to be compensated by the gain of the whole world, he urges the speedy coming of the Son of Man, to administer retribution. Lastly, in the connected discourses, Matt. xxiv. xxv. parall., many particulars would be more easily conceived, if the *υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* whose *παρουσία* Jesus describes, were understood to mean another than himself.

But this explanation is far from being applicable to the majority of instances in which Jesus uses this expression. When he represents the Son of Man, not as one still to be expected, but as one already come and actually present, for example, in Matt. xviii. 11, where he says: *The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost*; when he justifies his own acts by the authority with which the Son of Man was invested, as in Matt. ix. 6; when, Mark viii. 31 ff. comp. Matt. xvi. 22, he speaks of the approaching sufferings and death of the Son of Man, so as to elicit from Peter the exclamation, *οὐ μὴ ἔσται σοι τοῦτο*, *this shall not be unto thee*; in these and similar cases he can only, by the *υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, have intended himself. And even those passages, which, taken singly, we might have found capable of application to a messianic person, distinct from Jesus, lose this capability when considered in their entire connexion. It is possible, however, either that the writer may

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

have misplaced certain expressions, or that the ultimately prevalent conviction that Jesus was *the Son of Man* caused what was originally said merely of the latter, to be viewed in immediate relation to the former.

Thus besides the fact that Jesus on many occasions called himself the Son of Man, there remains the possibility that on many others, he may have designed another person; and if so, the latter would in the order of time naturally precede the former. Whether this possibility can be heightened to a reality, must depend on the answer to the following question: Is there, in the period of the life of Jesus, from which all his recorded declarations are taken, any fragment which indicates that he had not yet conceived himself to be the Messiah?

§ 62.

HOW SOON DID JESUS CONCEIVE HIMSELF TO BE THE MESSIAH, AND FIND RECOGNITION AS SUCH FROM OTHERS?

Jesus held and expressed the conviction that he was the Messiah; this is an indisputable fact. Not only did he, according to the evangelists, receive with satisfaction the confession of the disciples that he was the *Χριστός* (Matt. xvi. 16 f.) and the salutation of the people, *Hosanna to the Son of David* (xxi. 15 f.); not only did he before a public tribunal (Matt. xxvi. 64, comp. John xviii. 37,) as well as to private individuals (John iv. 26, ix. 37, x. 25,) repeatedly declare himself to be the Messiah: but the fact that his disciples after his death believed and proclaimed that he was the Messiah, is not to be comprehended, unless, when living, he had implanted the conviction in their minds.

To the more searching question, how soon Jesus began to declare himself the Messiah and to be regarded as such by others, the evangelists almost unanimously reply, that he assumed that character from the time of his baptism. All of them attach to his baptism circumstances which must have convinced himself, if yet uncertain, and all others who witnessed or credited them that he was no less than the Messiah; John makes his earliest

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

disciples recognise his right to that dignity on their first interview (i. 42 ff.), and Matthew attributes to him at the very beginning of his ministry, in the sermon on the mount, a representation of himself as the Judge of the world (vii. 21 ff.) and therefore the Messiah.

Nevertheless, on a closer examination, there appears a remarkable divergency on this subject between the synoptical statement and that of John. While, namely, in John, Jesus remains throughout true to his assertion, and the disciples and his followers among the populace to their conviction, that he is the Messiah; in the synoptical gospels there is a vacillation discernible—the previously expressed persuasion on the part of the disciples and people that Jesus was the Messiah, sometimes vanishes and gives place to a much lower view of him, and even Jesus himself becomes more reserved in his declarations. This is particularly striking when the synoptical statement is compared with that of John; but even when they are separately considered, the result is the same.

According to John (vi. 15), after the miracle of the loaves the people were inclined to constitute Jesus their (messianic) King; on the contrary, according to the other three evangelists, either about the same time (Luke ix. 18 f.) or still later (Matt. xvi. 13 f. Mark viii. 27 f.) the disciples could only report, on the opinions of the people respecting their master, that some said he was the resuscitated Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremiah or one of the old prophets: in reference to that passage of John, however, as also to the synoptical one, Matt. xiv. 33, according to which, some time before Jesus elicited the above report of the popular opinion, the people who were with him in the ship¹ when he had allayed the storm, fell at his feet and worshipped him as the Son of God, it may be observed that when Jesus had spoken or acted with peculiar impressiveness, individuals, in the exaltation of the moment, might be penetrated with a conviction that he was the Messiah, while the general

¹ That the expression *οἱ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ* includes more than the disciples, vid. Fritzsche, in loc.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

and calm voice of the people yet pronounced him to be merely a prophet.

But there is a more troublesome divergency relative to the disciples. In John, Andrew, after his first interview with Jesus, says to his brother, *we have found the Messiah, εὐρήκαμεν τὸν Μεσσίαν* (i. 42); and Philip describes him to Nathanael as the person foretold by Moses and the prophets (v. 46); Nathanael salutes him as the Son of God and King of Israel (v. 50); and the subsequent confession of Peter appears merely a renewed avowal of what had been long a familiar truth. In the synoptical evangelists it is only after prolonged intercourse with Jesus, and shortly before his sufferings, that the ardent Peter arrives at the conclusion that Jesus is the *Χριστός, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος* (Matt. xvi. 16, parall.). It is impossible that this confession should make so strong an impression on Jesus that, in consequence of it, he should pronounce Peter blessed, and his confession the fruit of immediate divine revelation, as Matthew narrates; or that, as all the three evangelists inform us, (xvi. 20, viii. 30, ix. 21,) he should, as if alarmed, forbid the disciples to promulgate their conviction, unless it represented not an opinion long cherished in the circle of his disciples, but a new light, which had just flashed on the mind of Peter, and through him was communicated to his associates.

There is a third equally serious discrepancy, relative to the declarations of Jesus concerning his Messiahship. According to John, he sanctions the homage which Nathanael renders to him as the Son of God and King of Israel, in the very commencement of his public career, and immediately proceeds to speak of himself under the messianic title, Son of Man (i. 51 f.): to the Samaritans also after his first visit to the passover (iv. 26, 39 ff.), and to the Jews on the second (v. 46), he makes himself known as the Messiah predicted by Moses. According to the synoptical writers, on the contrary, he prohibits, in the instance above cited and in many others, the dissemination of the doctrine of his Messiahship, beyond the circle of his adherents. Farther, when he asks his disciples, *Whom do men say that I am?*

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

(Matt. xvi. 15) he seems to wish² that they should derive their conviction of his Messiahship from his discourses and actions, and when he ascribes the avowed faith of Peter to a revelation from his heavenly Father, he excludes the possibility of his having himself previously made this disclosure to his disciples, either in the manner described by John, or in the more indirect one attributed to him by Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount; unless we suppose that the disciples had not hitherto believed his assurance, and that hence Jesus referred the new-born faith of Peter to divine influence.

Thus, on the point under discussion the synoptical statement is contradictory, not only to that of John, but to itself; it appears therefore that it ought to be unconditionally surrendered before that of John, which is consistent with itself, and one of our critics has justly reproached it with deranging the messianic economy in the life of Jesus³. But here again we must not lose sight of our approved canon, that in glorifying narratives, such as our gospels, where various statements are confronted, that is the least probable which best subserves the object of glorification. Now this is the case with John's statement; according to which, from the commencement to the

² There is a difficulty involved in the form of the question, put by Jesus to his disciples: *τίνα με λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*; i. e. what opinion have the people of me, the Messiah? This, when compared with the sequel, seems a premature disclosure; hence expositors have variously endeavoured to explain away its primâ facie meaning. Some (e. g. Beza) understand the subordinate clause, not as a declaration of Jesus concerning his own person, but as a closer limitation of the question: For whom do the people take me? for the Messiah? But this would be a leading question, which, as Fritzsche well observes, would indicate an eagerness for the messianic title, not elsewhere discernible in Jesus. Others, therefore, (as Paulus and Fritzsche,) give the expression *υἱὸς τ. α.* a general signification, and interpret the question thus: Whom do men say that I, the individual addressing you, am? But this explanation has been already refuted in the foregoing section. If, then, we reject the opinion that the *υἱὸς τ. α.* is an addition which the exuberant faith of the writer was apt to suggest even in an infelicitous connexion, we are restricted to De Wette's view, (exeg. Handb. 1, 1, s. 86 f.), namely, that the expression, *ὁ υἱὸς τ. α.* was indeed an appellation of the Messiah, but an indirect one, so that it might convey that meaning, as an allusion to Daniel, to Jesus and those already aware of his messiahship, while to others it was merely the equivalent of, *this man*.

³ Schneckenburger, über den Ursprung u. s. f. s. 28 f.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

close of the public life of Jesus, his Messiahship shines forth in unchanging splendour, while, according to the synoptical writers, it is liable to a variation in its light. But though this criterion of probability is in favour of the first three evangelists, it is impossible that the order in which they make ignorance and concealment follow on plain declarations and recognitions of the Messiahship of Jesus can be correct; and we must suppose that they have mingled and confounded two separate periods of the life of Jesus, in the latter of which alone he presented himself as the Messiah. We find, in fact, that the watchword of Jesus on his first appearance differed not, even verbally, from that of John, who professed merely to be a forerunner; it is the same *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matt. iv. 17) with which John had roused the Jews (iii. 2); and indicates in neither the one nor the other an assumption of the character of Messiah, with whose coming the kingdom of heaven was actually to commence, but merely that of a teacher who points to it as yet future⁴. Hence the latest critic of the first gospel justly explains all those discourses and actions therein narrated, by which Jesus explicitly claims to be the Messiah, or, in consequence of which this dignity is attributed to him and accepted, if they occur before the manifestation of himself recorded in John v., or before the account of the apostolic confession (Matt. xvi.), as offences of the writer against chronology or literal truth⁵. We have only to premise, that as chronological confusion prevails throughout, the position of this confession shortly before the history of the Passion, in nowise obliges us to suppose that it was so late before Jesus was recognised as the Messiah among his disciples, since Peter's avowal may have occurred in a much earlier period of their intercourse. This, however, is incomprehensible—that the same reproach should not attach even more strongly to the fourth gospel than to the first, or to the synoptical writers in general. For it is surely

⁴ This distinction of two periods in the public life of Jesus is also made by Fritzsche, *Comm. in Matth.* s. 213. 536, and Schneckenburger *ut sup.*

⁵ Schneckenburger, *ut sup.* s. 29.