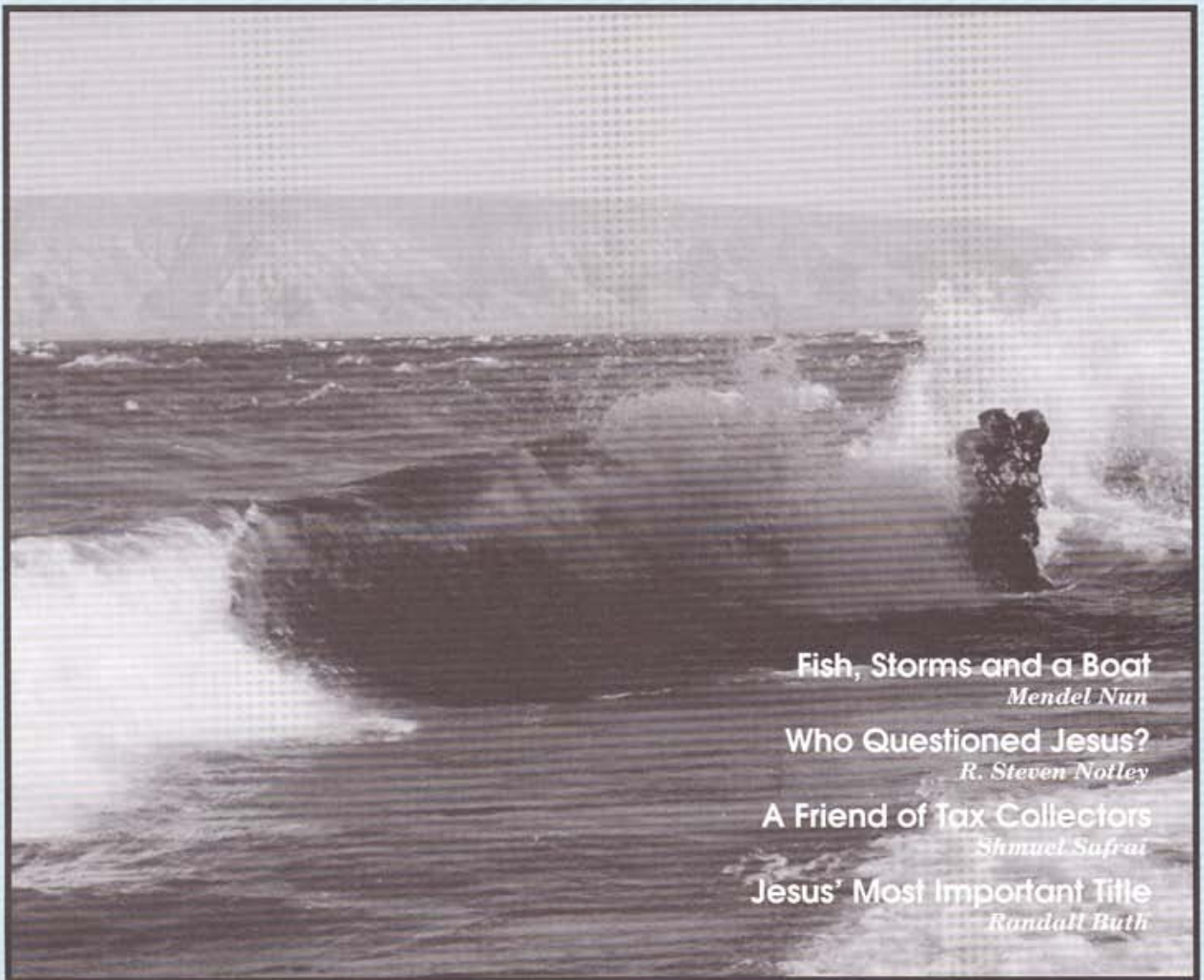


מנקודת ראות ירושלמית

# Jerusalem Perspective

March/April 1990  
Volume 3, Number 2



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*I have noticed that you always seem to refer to the Old Testament as the "Hebrew Scriptures" or "Hebrew Bible." Why do you avoid using the term "Old Testament" in your publication?*

—A reader in Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A.

It is not just in deference to Jewish sensitivities that we avoid "Old Testament," but because we feel that for the Christian as well the term misrepresents the document. "Old Testament" seems to imply that the Jewish Scriptures have been replaced by the Christian New Testament, an idea that has led some Christians to conclude that the "Old Testament" is out of date and does not warrant as much serious study as the New Testament.

הַבְּרִית הַחֲדָשָׁה (*ha-be-RIT ha-ha-da-SHAH*, the new covenant) is the term used in Hebrew today to refer to the New Testament. What Christians call the "Old Testament" is referred to in Hebrew as תַּנַּ"ךְ (*ta-NAK*), an acronym based upon the first letter of Hebrew words for the three sections of the Jewish Bible: תּוֹרָה (*to-RAH*, Torah, Pentateuch), נְבִיאִים (*ne-vi-IM*, Prophets) and כְּתוּבִים (*ke-tu-VIM*, Writings, Hagiographa).

The term "new testament" or "new covenant" appears in the New Testament in I Corinthians 11:25, II Corinthians 3:6, Hebrews 9:15, 12:24, and in some manuscripts of Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, and Luke 22:20. It seems to be a reference

to Jeremiah's prophecy that God would one day make a "new covenant" — בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה (*be-RIT ha-da-SHAH*) — with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. The term probably should be translated "renewed covenant." "Testament" in this context is a mistranslation of a Greek word, διαθήκη (*diatheke*). This Greek word can be translated "will" or "covenant," but its Hebrew equivalent, בְּרִית (*be-RIT*, covenant), does not have this dual meaning. *be-RIT* is one of the most frequently used words in Hebrew Scripture, appearing 270 times, and is one of Scripture's most important concepts. "Testament" misses the connection with Jeremiah 31:31, and also may be misconstrued by the English reader to mean testament in the sense of a will.

"New" also may give the wrong impression to the English reader. "Renewed" is probably nearer the original intent. If the New Testament references to "new covenant" refer to Jeremiah 31:31, then we are obliged to take into account the range of meaning of חֲדָשָׁה (*ha-da-SHAH*), the Hebrew word translated "new" in that passage. Based on the meaning of its cognates in other ancient Semitic languages, the meaning of this word in Biblical Hebrew is "be or become new" and also "renew." In Hebrew, "new" can refer not only to something that has not existed before or is unfamiliar, but also to an existing thing that has undergone restoration or renovation. When this word is used in connection with buildings, for instance, it often refers to the renovation of an existing building, not the building of a completely new structure

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*Cover photo:  
An easterly storm  
on the Sea of  
Galilee.  
(Courtesy of the Israel  
Government Press Office)*

# Fish, Storms and a Boat

by Mendel Nun

**A**dam gave names only to animals and birds, apparently avoiding fish entirely (Gen. 2:19–20). The names of about fifty fish are mentioned in rabbinic literature, but the Torah merely makes a general distinction between clean fish which Jews are permitted to eat (vertebrate), and unclean (without bones) (Lev. 11:9–12, Deut. 14:9–10). Clean fish are generally recognized by the presence of fins and scales.

The reason for this lack of detailed information about fish in the Hebrew Scriptures is simple: the early Jewish experience was born in the desert, and fish were far less known than other creatures. Nor were the writers of the Gospels much more familiar with the names of the fish of the Sea of Galilee. Thus in Matthew 13:48, the “bad” fish were the catfish which, because they had

no scales, could not be eaten according to the Mosaic dietary laws, and the “good” were all the others in the catch.

## Small Fish

The Gospels mention another difference between fish, that of size: the “large fish,” musht (St. Peter’s Fish) and biny (barbels), and the “small fish,” sardines. “Small fish” are mentioned clearly in the miracle of the feeding of the 4000. According to Matthew 15:34 and Mark 8:5–7, “seven loaves and a few small fish” are what the followers of Jesus had brought to eat.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 appears in all four Gospels. Matthew 14:17, Mark 6:38 and Luke 9:13 mention “five loaves and two fish.” John’s version (6:9) is slightly different in that he specifies that the bread is loaves of barley and a different

Greek word for fish is used, ὀψάρια (*opsaria*, small fish) instead of ἰχθύες (*ichthues*, fish). We may assume that the small fish were not young individuals of large species, but sardines which are by nature small. These, with bread, in fact made up the staple diet of the local population.

Strabo, a first-century Roman geographer and historian, wrote that “at the place



called *Taricheai* the lake supplies excellent fish for pickling” (*Geographica*, XVI, 2:45). The center of the sardine pickling industry was the town of Magdala, called in Greek Ταριχέαι (*Taricheai*) meaning the place where fish are salted. It was the sardines which were most suited for pickling, since they appeared in large quantities during a short season from November to February and needed to be preserved. The large fish were sold fresh, and there was always a good market for them among the local population.

Two small fish are pictured in a sixth-century mosaic floor at Tabgha, in the Church of the Multiplication which was built to commemorate the miracle performed by Jesus. We see a basket containing four loaves with a fish on either side. However, these fish do not appear to be



Mendel Nun was born in Latvia in 1918 and immigrated to Israel in 1939. He joined Kibbutz Ein-Gev in 1941, working for the next twenty years as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. He received the Ben-Zvi Prize in 1964 for his book *Ancient Jewish Fishery* (in Hebrew).

Section of sixth-century mosaic floor in Church of the Multiplication at Tabgha, commemorating the miracle of the loaves and fish. (Courtesy of Garo Photo, M. Nalbandian)



*“Jesus Boat”  
being excavated  
from Sea of Galilee  
in February, 1986.  
(Courtesy of the Israel  
Government Press Office)*

from our lake. All fish caught in the Sea of Galilee have only a single dorsal fin, while those shown in the mosaic have two dorsal fins. The artist who designed the Tabgha mosaic probably came from abroad to do the job and worked from an established pattern. He clearly did not make it his business to inspect the fish of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus, however, had a personal acquaintance with the life of Galilean fishermen, as can be seen from Matthew 7:9–10: “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?”

This reference to stone and snake is

taken from the fisherman’s daily experience, and it symbolizes the frustration of a disappointing catch. It often happens that instead of fish the net brings in mostly stones, and it may even occur that together with the fish the net may haul up a water snake which is common in the lake. One can imagine Jesus’ followers, carrying their bundles of bread and pickled sardines, appreciating these homely references to a reality they knew well.

## Weather Forecasts

Gazing at the sky to forecast the weather is an age-old custom the world over, and the ancient fishermen of the Sea of Galilee watched the sky carefully. Knowing the moods of the lake was essential for their activities. We find an echo of this in Jesus’ saying: “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening’” (Mt. 16:2–3).

Natural phenomena have not changed in this region: a red evening sky means fair weather around the lake the following day, and a red morning sky signals stormy weather. The weather forecast in Matthew is accurate, and confirmed by generations of residents around the Sea of Galilee, including this writer.

## Storms on the Lake

Storms on the Sea of Galilee are mentioned twice in the Gospels. In one, Jesus’ disciples had gone ahead of him by boat to the other side of the lake but ran into a storm along the way. According to Matthew 14:24 (cf. Mark 6:48) their boat was being “buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.” Jesus came to their aid walking on the water and when he got into the boat with them, the storm winds ceased. Matthew added to this story another maritime event — Peter’s attempt to walk on the water too (Mt. 14:28–31).

Mark and Matthew state that after this stormy voyage the disciples finally safely reached their destination, Gennesaret on

the western shore (Mt. 14:34, Mk. 6:53). According to John 6:17 the ship arrived at Capernaum, but in any case, both accounts indicate that the ship was heading into a winter storm, either southerly or westerly.

The other stormy event occurred when Jesus, again on a winter evening, sailed with his disciples from Capernaum to Gergesa (Mt. 8:28, Mk. 5:1, Lk. 8:26). During the voyage "a storm of wind came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in danger." Jesus rebuked the wind and waves, "and they ceased, and there was a calm" (Lk. 8:22-25. Parallel accounts are in Mt. 8:23-27 and Mk. 4:35-41).

This is an accurate description of an easterly storm on the Sea of Galilee, closely matching the experience of modern fishermen who have set out during the winter to fish for sardines along the northeastern edge of the lake and were caught by the well-known easterly storm. Even today this storm, which usually starts in the early evening, is good cause for apprehension among fishermen.

## Boat from Magdala

In February 1986, when a drought had drastically lowered the water-level in the Sea of Galilee, an ancient wooden boat was excavated from the exposed lakebed near the coast at Migdal, ancient Magdala. Amid much publicity, it was painstakingly transported in its entirety to a building especially constructed to house the boat at Kibbutz Ginossar, not far from where the boat was found. In all probability, this boat sailed the Sea of Galilee for many years toward the end of the Second Temple period, and was used for both fishing and transportation.

How did this boat, made of wooden planks from the cedars of Lebanon, with

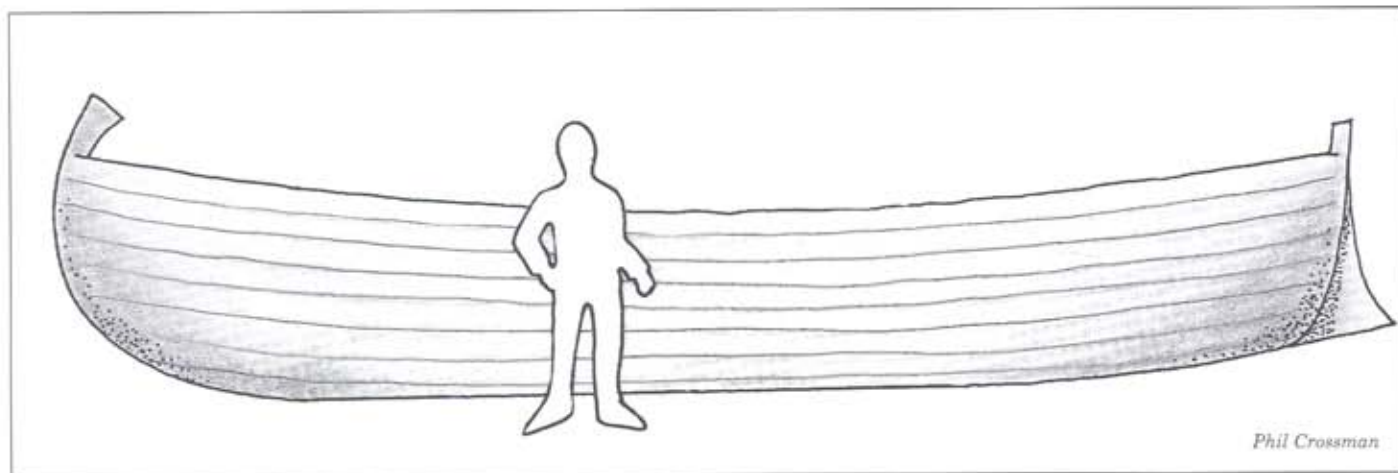
oak ribs, survive for nearly 2000 years? When it was no longer seaworthy, it was apparently left at the dockyard where parts from its interior were removed and used to repair other boats. In the course of this dismantling, the boat was covered with silt carried down by the sudden flooding of a near-by stream. It was this packaging of mud that preserved the boat until the day, nearly 2000 years later, when it was discovered by two brothers, fishermen from Kibbutz Ginossar.

The boat is 8.8 meters long, 2.5 meters wide, and 1.25 meters deep (29 x 8 x 4 feet). These are almost exactly the measurements of boats used by seine net fishermen on the Sea of Galilee until the middle of this century when such fishing was discontinued.

It has been called the Kinneret Boat, the Magdala Boat, the Galilee Boat, and the Jesus Boat, and it is the first detailed message from the maritime and fishing history of the Kinneret which we have received. Pottery sherds found within and near the boat, as well as carbon-14 dating of the wood, indicate that the boat plied the Sea of Galilee during the first century C.E. — a time that was crucial in the history of the Jews, and for the entire world.

In the early years of that century, Jesus and his disciples sailed the Sea of Galilee in boats like the one recently discovered, while in 67 C.E., during the great revolt of the Jews against the Romans, the Sea of Galilee was the scene of a naval battle between the Jewish nationalists in similar boats and a fleet of Roman vessels (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 3:522-531). Beyond any doubt, this boat sailed the Sea of Galilee and docked countless times at the ports that ringed the lake during that era. **JP**

*Reconstruction of recently discovered "Jesus Boat."*



# A Friend of Tax Collectors

The Gospels present tax collectors in a negative light. Prof. Safrai explains why this is and how they were viewed by their contemporaries.



by Shmuel Safrai

**R**abbinic literature in general, both early and late, has little good to say about tax collectors, and considers them to be blatant sinners. The tax collectors spoken of in the Gospels served a foreign government that did not have the manpower to execute the enormous task of gathering taxes in all the provinces of their far-flung empire. Their fellow Jews in the province of Judea saw tax collectors as collaborators who enabled the Romans to continue to impose their conquest over the land of Israel.

Furthermore, even if the Romans had been able to send their own tax clerks, these would not have been as effective as locals in collecting the taxes. Local Jewish tax collectors could not be fooled as easily as foreigners since they knew the vernacular and what was taking place on the local scene. Thus tax collectors were resented all the more. One's neighbor just shouldn't do such a service for the conquering power.

Tax collectors were especially hated because they increased their profit by collecting more taxes than their masters actually demanded.

## Rabbinic Examples

Tax collectors, according to the sages, were considered evil and not allowed to serve as judges or give testimony in court (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 25<sup>b</sup>). They were not accepted as part of the community nor considered reliable by the community at large.

The Tosefta tractate Demai 2:17 records: "There was a woman who married a *haver*, and she tied knots for him. She later married a tax collector and she tied knots for him." A *חֵבֵר* (*ha-VER*, friend) in this context refers to a member of an order who strictly observed the commandments. The first husband of this woman was engaged in preparing *tefillin* (phylacteries) for others, and the woman assisted him by tying the knots of the *tefillin*. Her later husband was a tax collector, and she assisted him by tying the knots which, perhaps together with a seal, were attached to goods on which tax had already been paid.

The point is that this woman was of weak character, since it made little difference to her whether she was tying knots for a righteous husband or an evil one. However, we also learn in passing that a tax collector is the opposite of a righteous man, and here the tax

*Bas-relief on third-century C.E. tombstone of Pannonian merchant or tax collector. The deceased is shown sitting at a table, ledger in hand, counting coins while his clerk reads accounts from a scroll. (Courtesy of the National Museum, Belgrade, Yugoslavia)*

collector is contrasted to the *haver*, the most observant of the observant.

A very early rabbinic story, perhaps from before the destruction of the Second Temple, also portrays tax collectors as gross sinners by contrasting two *hasidim* with a tax collector named Ma'ayan (Jerusalem Talmud, Hagigah 77<sup>d</sup>). The *hasidim*, a sect of pious sages, were close to the Pharisees' world of ethics and religious values; but in contrast to the Pharisees they were characterized by an extremely familiar relationship with God.

A tannaic (circa 30 B.C.E.–230 C.E.) tradition in the Mishnah states: "One may not change money from the money box of a tax collector or from the purse of an exciseman, nor may one accept charity from them, but one may accept charity from them while in their homes or in the market" (Bava Kamma 10:1). One could not change money with or accept charity from tax collectors because whatever they possessed in an official capacity was considered to be stolen. Charity could be accepted from a tax collector encountered while shopping in the marketplace because he was not then engaged in his profession. Charity also could be accepted from a tax collector while in his home since there the gift might be considered his personal property and not necessarily dishonestly gained.

In the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kamma 103<sup>a</sup>, in a discussion of the above Mishnah passage, there is a tannaic statement that one is even allowed to smuggle wares past the tax collector since this is considered like smuggling goods past a thief and thus saving them.

## In the Gospels

Tax collectors are mentioned often in Jesus' parables and the stories of his life. They usually are described as wicked and are occasionally mentioned together with sinners (Lk. 5:30, Mk. 2:16, Mt. 9:11, Lk. 7:34, Mt. 11:19). Tax collectors are even mentioned along with prostitutes, as when Jesus told the priests and elders of the people that they would not come into the Kingdom of Heaven, but the tax collectors and prostitutes would, "for John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes did" (Mt. 21:31).

In Luke 18:9–14 Jesus tells the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector who both made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray at the Temple. The Pharisee considered himself a righteous man, while the tax collector was so ashamed of himself that he could not even

pray. The parable teaches that the arrogant Pharisee was the real sinner, while the repentance of the tax collector was accepted by God. Nevertheless, the parable posits the initial character depictions of the tax collector as sinner and the Pharisee as righteous.

The most extreme description in the New Testament of the disdain in which tax collectors were held is found in Jesus' words regarding how a member of the community of his disciples who sinned was to be reproached. According to Matthew 18:15–17, the sinner first should be confronted privately by one member of the community. If this did not work, then he who admonished the sinner should take one or two witnesses along with him. If even this did not work, then the entire community was to be informed, and if the sinner still refused to listen, then he was to be considered "a pagan and a tax collector."

Occasionally Jesus was accused of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Lk. 7:34, Mt. 11:19), and of socializing with them (Lk. 5:30, Mk. 2:16, Mt. 9:11). Jesus, however, did this not because he made light of their sins, but because he sought to draw them away from their evil deeds and bring them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

## John's Answer

It is possible that John the Baptist's answer to the tax collectors, "Collect no more than is appointed you" (Luke 3:13), represented a rather moderate attitude toward the government and the authorities. As far as John was concerned, it was sufficient if the tax collector did not take any more than the legally imposed tax. Perhaps the tax collectors who came to him were officials of Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee and Peraea from 4 B.C.E. to 39 C.E., and their only sin was to have inflated the taxes they charged and pocketed the difference. After all, taxes for Antipas had to be collected to provide services such as public roads for those he ruled.

On the other hand, John may have opposed any co-operation whatsoever with the authorities. Even if Antipas were a Jewish king, he ruled by the grace of the "evil kingdom" — the Romans. Thus, when John told the tax collectors to take no more than what they had to, he really meant that they should take nothing. According to this understanding, John would have considered the taking of any sum as thievery and immoral, and the tax collectors would have done better to find themselves a new occupation. **JP**



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# Who Questioned Jesus?



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by R. Steven Notley

The question of complicity in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus has been discussed since the early days of the Church, and the misapplication of guilt has done much to generate Christian anti-Semitism. In the last twenty years, however, Jewish and Christian scholars have attempted to clarify the historical setting of these events and to correct traditional misunderstandings.

## Lukan Solutions

The synoptic tradition contains a number of historical and literary problems. In many instances the solution to these problems lies in adopting the theory of Lukan priority, that is the assumption that the first Gospel to be written was Luke's, which influenced Mark and through Mark even Matthew to varying degrees. This is the approach advocated by members of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research.

The significance of Lukan priority does not concern just the meaning of individual pericopae, but affects our understanding of the entire synoptic relationship. A number of Lukan solutions have been acknowledged within established New Testament scholarship. However few scholars have realized the full significance of the priority of Luke's Gospel and its importance for establishing the historicity of the events described.

Most New Testament scholars have assumed that Mark or Matthew were the first of the synoptic Gospels to be written. This often has been an obstacle to a clear understanding of the synoptic passion narratives. David Flusser has pointed out the difference between Matthew and Mark's portrayal of Jewish participation in the trial and crucifixion as compared with Luke's account ("The Crucified One and the Jews," *Immanuel*, 7 [1977], 25–37). According to Matthew and Mark, the Jewish crowds at Jesus' crucifixion "derided him, wagging their heads" (Mt. 27:39, Mk. 15:29), whereas in Luke's version they "stood by watching" (Lk. 23:35) and at his death "returned home beating their breasts" (23:48).

Applying the principle of Lukan priority,

Prof. Flusser has been able to clearly identify those who conspired to deliver Jesus to the Roman authorities. Indeed, in a subsequent article written with Dan Barag, Flusser narrowed responsibility to a single high-priestly family whose members included Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander ("The Ossuary of Yehohana Granddaughter of the High Priest Theophilus," *Israel Exploration Journal*, 36 [1986], 39–44). Flusser's identification notwithstanding, there still remains the problem of an apparent reference in Luke 22:66 to the involvement in Jesus' trial of Jerusalem's Great Sanhedrin.

## Great Sanhedrin

The Hebrew word סַנְהֶדְרִין (*san-hed-RIN*) derives from the Greek word συνέδριον (*synedrion*), meaning "council," and literary sources from the Second Temple period refer to various sanhedrins. In *Antiquities* 14:91, the Jewish historian Josephus mentions the creation in 57 B.C. of five συνέδρια (*synedria*, councils) by the Roman governor Gabinius to govern the five regions of Judea. These appear to have been purely political bodies concerned with local disputes and civil responsibilities, with no interest in religious matters.

Such secular councils should be distinguished from the Great Sanhedrin which convened in the Chamber of Hewn Stone in the Temple in Jerusalem. This council consisted of seventy-one members headed by the high priest. According to the Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin 11:2, it was the forum from which "the Torah went forth to all Israel." Though its primary function was dealing with religious matters, it occasionally functioned as a court — for example in the trial of a high priest or false prophet (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 1:5).

Capital offenses were adjudicated by the Great Sanhedrin, and it had the power to authorize four types of death penalties: stoning, burning, beheading and strangling (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 7:1). The penalty for blasphemy, which according to Matthew 26:65 and Mark 14:64 is the charge brought against Jesus before the Great Sanhedrin, was stoning (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 7:4).



Luke reports no such accusation (22:67–71).

Although the Great Sanhedrin was empowered to hand down death sentences, the death penalty appears to have been passed with the greatest reluctance, as the following passage from Mishnah Makkot 1:10 indicates: “A Sanhedrin that puts someone to death in a week [i.e., in seven years] is called ‘destructive.’ Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah says: ‘Even one person in seventy years.’ Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva say: ‘If we had been members of the Sanhedrin no one would ever have been put to death.’”

## Secondary Meaning

The first mention in the New Testament of *συνέδριον* (*synedrion*) occurs in Matthew 5:22, in a saying of Jesus found only in Matthew’s Gospel. Another reference is found in Matthew 10:17 and Mark 13:9, where sanhedrins are mentioned in connection with the anticipated persecution of Jesus’ disciples. The Lukan parallel to Matthew 10:17 and Mark 13:9 contains no mention of sanhedrin (Luke 21:12).

In Matthew and Mark’s version of Jesus’ arrest and interrogation, the chief priests and the Great Sanhedrin conspire against Jesus: “Now the chief priests and **the whole Sanhedrin** sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death” (Mt. 26:59, Mk. 14:55). The attempt to procure false witnesses does not appear in Luke’s account, nor does the nocturnal trial that is found in Mark and Matthew. The Sanhedrin was forbidden to hold a night trial of capital offenses. “In civil cases the trial is held during the daytime but the verdict may be reached during the night; in capital cases the trial is held during the daytime and the verdict also must be reached during the daytime” (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:1).

If the reference to sanhedrin in Luke 22:66 is to the Great Sanhedrin, then the inquiry or interrogation of Jesus by the high priests may have been part of a trial. However, there may be a better explanation of *συνέδριον* (*synedrion*) in this passage. Luke could be referring not to a group of people, but to a place where people meet, the *לשכת הקוֹזֵית* (*lish-KAT ha-ga-ZIT*, the Chamber of Hewn Stone) mentioned in Jewish sources as the meeting place of the Great Sanhedrin (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 11:2; Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 19<sup>c</sup>).

The use of *synedrion* in 22:66 is Luke’s only use of this term in his Gospel: “At day-break the elders of the people assembled,

[including] both chief priests and scribes, and they led him away to their council.” As an alternative to “council” for the translation of *synedrion*, Liddell and Scott (*A Greek-English Lexicon*) suggest a second meaning — “council chamber.” Luke seems to employ this secondary meaning of the word in the Book of Acts (4:15; 5:27,34; 6:12,15). This sense of *synedrion* to indicate “council chamber” in Luke 22:66 has already been accepted by the *New American Standard Bible*.

If this interpretation is correct, there is no reference to the Great Sanhedrin in Luke’s Gospel. The events depicted by Luke are not a trial by the supreme religious

council in Jerusalem, but an interrogation conducted by a small party of religious leaders whose core was the priestly family of Annas and Caiaphas. This same party continued to be the primary opponents of Jesus’ followers after his death (Acts 4:6).

However, if Mark was influenced by Luke, it is quite possible that Mark understood *synedrion* to mean the Great Sanhedrin. This would explain his assumption, followed by Matthew, that it was the Great Sanhedrin that questioned Jesus.

## Disagreements

This understanding of Luke 22:66 removes another problem in setting these events in their Jewish context. If Jesus was being tried before the Great Sanhedrin as Mark and Matthew seem to indicate, then according to Jewish law he would have been held two nights — the night he was captured in the garden and the next night — of which the two Gospels make no mention. The Mishnah states: “In civil cases the verdict, whether of acquittal or conviction, may be reached the same day; in capital cases a verdict of acquittal may be reached on the same day, but a verdict of conviction not until the following day” (Sanhedrin 4:1).



**Ossuary inscription,**  
יהוחנן ברת יהוחנן  
בר תפלוס הבתן הגדול  
(*Yehohanah daughter of Yehohanan son of Theophilus the high priest*).  
*Yehohanah was the descendant of a dynasty of Sadducean high priests. Her grandfather, Theophilus, was appointed high priest in 37 A.D. He was the son of the high priest, Annas, and the brother-in-law of Caiaphas, both of whom were involved in Jesus’ arrest and interrogation.*  
(Courtesy of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums)

According to Luke, this was not a trial by the Great Sanhedrin, thus Jesus need not have been held longer than the Thursday night that Luke's Gospel indicates. This also alleviates the conflict found in Mark and Matthew's accounts with the prohibition against holding a capital trial on the eve of a Sabbath or festival, the latter of which seems to be the time Jesus was held by the Jewish authorities (cf. Lk. 22:7 ff.).

Luke preserves what seems to be the correct portrayal of the interrogation of Jesus. Matthew and Mark speak of "the whole sanhedrin," an apparent ref-

erence to the Great Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:59 = Mk. 14:55). Yet they are not always in agreement on this identification. Mark's other reference to "the whole Sanhedrin" (15:1) in connection with the enquiry is not the same as Matthew's: "the chief priests and the elders of the people" (27:1).

Prof. Flusser has suggested that Matthew understood the reference to chief priests and elders to be synonymous with the Great Sanhedrin because he saw that Mark earlier (14:53) omitted "the whole sanhedrin" when he mentioned "chief priests, elders and scribes" ("A Literary Approach to the Trial of Jesus," *Judaism*, 20 [1971], 33). According to Flusser, Matthew apparently considered a second reference to the Sanhedrin to be superfluous and stylistically illogical.

Matthew does not identify the tripartite reference to be the Sanhedrin except under Markan influence in the single occurrence of Matthew 26:59. If the absence of "the whole Sanhedrin" in Matthew 27:1 is not a deliberate omission, Matthew may be in agreement with Luke against Mark concerning the identification of Jesus' interrogators. Matthew and Luke therefore

would be indicating that it was only a certain element of the Temple leadership that was in opposition to Jesus, not the entire Sanhedrin.

## Political Expediency

Does the combination of characters — elders, chief priests, scribes — clearly indicate the Great Sanhedrin as other New Testament scholars suggest? Flusser questions this and asks why the Pharisees take no part in the drama despite the important roles they play in the proceedings of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:21–41 and 22:30–23:10.

The idea that Jesus was abandoned by the same Jewish populace who only days earlier had greeted him so enthusiastically upon his entrance into the holy city is a distortion of the historical events. According to John, Jesus was handed over on account of

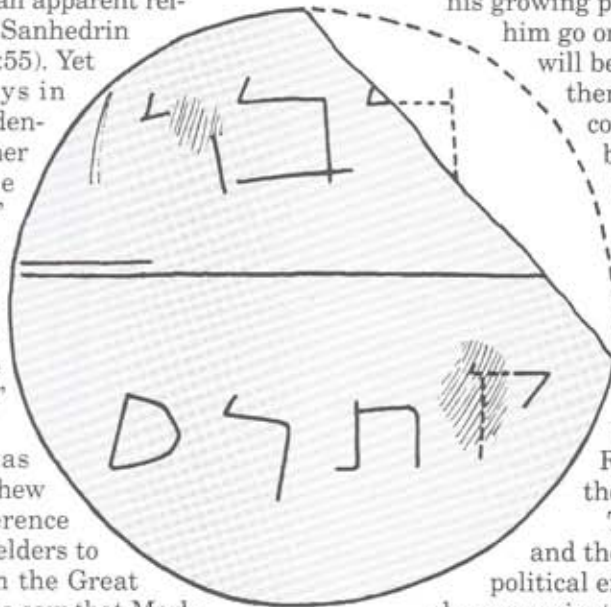
his growing popularity: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our [holy] place and our nation" (Jn. 11:48). The leading Sadducean priestly family feared that the popular Galilean teacher would spark a messianic revolt which would result in the Roman destruction of the Temple.

The act of Caiaphas and the others was one of political expediency. Their charge against Jesus before Pilate was motivated by political rather than religious considerations (Lk. 23:2). No doubt they also were motivated by self-interest to maintain the *status quo*. In their collusion with the Roman authorities they acted alone and without the knowledge of the people, which is why we find this Sadducean family concerned later that their act of complicity might become public knowledge (Acts 5:27–28).

One therefore should not exaggerate the opposition against Jesus by including the supreme religious council in Jerusalem, the Great Sanhedrin; and even less to extend it to the numerous residents and pilgrims in Jerusalem that fateful Passover. **JP**



A stone measuring weight found about 150 meters west of the Temple Mount in the "burnt house." The house was partially destroyed in the conflagration that accompanied the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The Aramaic inscription on the weight reads: דבֿר קַטְרוֹס (de-VAR kat-ROS, belonging to the son of Katros). Apparently this weight and the palatial house in which it was discovered belonged to a member of the Katros family, one of the Sadducean high-priestly families mentioned disparagingly in the Talmud. (Courtesy of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums)



# Jesus' Most Important Title

by Randall Buth

**S**on of man" is not only one of the most important phrases in the Bible, it is one of the most misunderstood and disputed. Rooms could be filled with all the books and articles written on this subject.

Translators are not immune to fascination with this phrase, and the meaning of "son of man" is a perennial topic of debate. We are keen to understand it because it is the phrase that Jesus used for himself more than any other. A full understanding of "son of man" reveals what Jesus knew about himself and increases our appreciation of how he communicated his message.

## Many Interpretations

There are many interpretations of the meaning of "son of man," and people bring to the discussion different presuppositions. If I were to ask a "common man in the church" what the Gospels mean by "son of man," he would probably respond that it refers to the humanity of Jesus. Since "Son of God" is used throughout the New Testament and refers to Jesus' divinity, then wouldn't "son of man" be the opposite and refer to Jesus' humanity? There is nothing wrong with this line of reasoning as far as logic goes, but it is based on insufficient information.

The early Greek-speaking church interpreted this phrase from the Gospels in much the same way. Ignatius, around 108 A.D., wrote that Jesus was both the "son of man" and "son of God" (Ignatius to the Ephesians 20:2). The Epistle of Barnabas, written about 90–130 A.D., makes the contrast explicit: "See Jesus, not as son of man, but as Son of God" (12:10). Consequently "son of man" was not a popular title for Jesus among members of the early church. Jesus was different from other men because he was divine, the Son of God, and that was the message the church was eager to communicate to the world.

Careful attention to the context of the Gospel passages containing "son of man" can lead to a deeper insight into what the title may mean. In Greek the phrase is *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* (*ho huios tou anthropou*, the son of the man), which some have supposed carried a prophetic connotation because "son of man" is used so frequently in the book of Ezekiel. Others recognized that it occurs in poetic passages as a synonym for "man" (e.g., Num. 23:19), and see it as nothing more than an ornate way of saying human being.

Many people have seen a connection with the "son of man" in Daniel, and stressed that the title must imply that Jesus was claiming to be the heavenly son of man seen in the vision of Daniel 7:13–14. The Daniel connection is unmistakable in Mark 14:62 where Jesus says that the son of man will be seen coming with the clouds of heaven. This is particularly interesting to Christians because it means Jesus was making a supernatural reference when he used the phrase. He was not trying to emphasize his humanity, but was referring to his heavenly origin. Daniel 7:13–14 reminds us just how powerful this implication can be:

I was having a vision in the night and I saw someone like a man [literally, a son of man], coming with the clouds of heaven. He reached the Ancient of Days and was presented to him. He was given authority, honor and kingship, and all peoples and nations of every language were worshipping him. His authority is an everlasting authority that will not pass away and his kingdom, one that will never be destroyed.

The interpretation based on a reference to Daniel is so satisfying to Christian faith that a Christian may be inclined at this point to stop and conclude that the riddle of the "son of man" is solved. In fact it is, but there is a challenge to that solution that one cannot simply ignore: many Semitic scholars



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Column XI of the Qumran Manual of Discipline. Above  $\square$ אדא (*a-DAM*), the third word from the end of line 20, a scribe has added the letter  $\eta$ . (Courtesy of the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum)

contend it historically impossible that Jesus used “son of man” as a title. These scholars argue that “son of man” cannot be understood as a title in the Gospels because in Jesus’ time it had already become normal idiom for “someone, a person” and so could not have been used as a title in either Aramaic or Hebrew.

### Aramaic and Hebrew

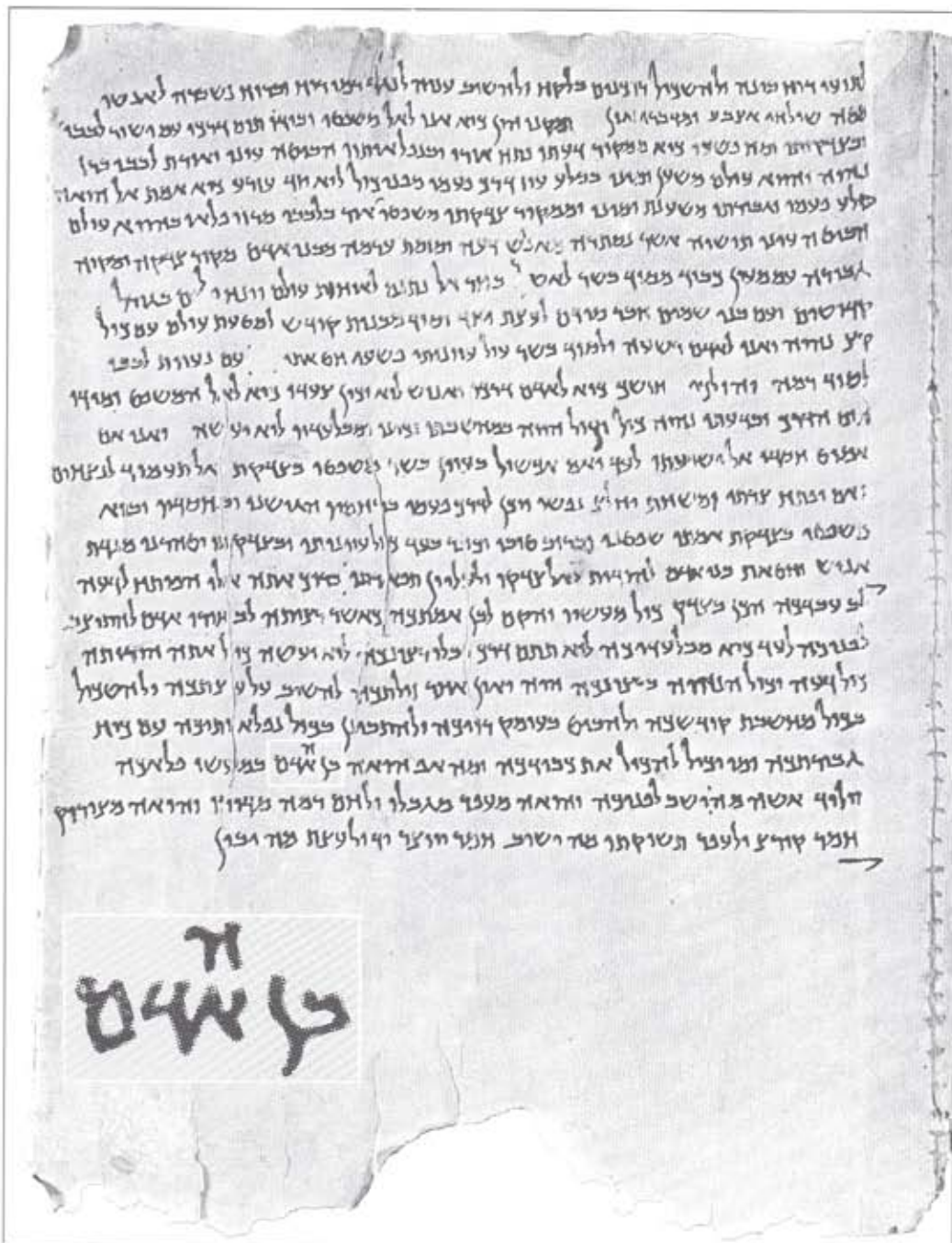
Before evaluating that claim, we must explain a few facts about Aramaic and Hebrew. In Hebrew, “son of man” is  $\square$ אדם (*ben ‘a-DAM*). It is a normal idiom in the

language and simply means “a human being, a person, somebody, anybody.” The Aramaic  $\square$ אָדָם (*bar ‘e-NASH*) has exactly the same meaning. Both the Hebrew and Aramaic phrases are attested in the Bible, and both are used today in Israeli Hebrew. An idiomatic translation of Daniel 7:13 would read, “. . . someone like a human being, coming. . .”

In the Greek synoptic Gospels the phrase “son of man” always occurs with “the,” while in Hebrew and Aramaic the phrase is usually without “the.” Many Semitic scholars argue that in Aramaic or He-

brew “the son of man is lord of the Sabbath” would be understood as a general claim that “any human being is lord of the Sabbath.” They feel that in Jesus’ day the definite article had already become weakened. In Eastern Aramaic dialects dating from the fourth–sixth century A.D., the word “the” lost much of its definiteness, which to some extent is also true of the generic article of Western Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew. In the Aramaic dialects, “the” often occurs in the phrase “the son of man” in the sense of “a.” Others argue that in Aramaic “the son of man” means “a certain man.”

There may be evidence that in the Hebrew of Jesus’ time “the son of man” was a normal idiom for “man/someone.” We find an interesting scribal addition to the text of a first-century B.C. Hebrew Dead Sea Scroll. The text reads: “Who can comprehend your glory, and what is man [ $\square$ אדם, *ben ‘a-DAM*, a son of man] compared with your wondrous works? Of what value in your eyes is one born of woman?” (Manual of Discipline 11:20-21). The scribe has corrected the text by adding  $\eta$  (*ha-*, the) above the line to change *ben ‘a-DAM* to *ben ha-‘a-DAM*.



בן־הָאָדָם, the son of man). This may indicate that “the son of man” in the sense of “a human being” was a normal idiom of the scribe who was copying the scroll.

Some have looked to the Aramaic and Syriac (an Aramaic dialect) translations of the New Testament for clues to the background of “son of man.” Neither the Syriac Peshitta, Christian Palestinian Aramaic nor Old Syriac translate *ho huios tou anthropou* into normal Aramaic. The translators knew that the normal idiom would not fit. So the Christian Palestinian texts and Old Syriac used בְּרֵהּ דְּאָנְשָׁא (be-REH de-NA-sha’, a particular man’s son; literally, his son of the man). We can assume that Jesus did not use such an Aramaic phrase for two reasons: first, it is not natural Aramaic and there is no clue as to why unnatural Aramaic would be used; second and most strongly, its puerile sense does not fit any of the Gospel contexts. The only thing that the Aramaic translators have done is to make the Aramaic sound as bad as the Greek.

The Peshitta translator used בְּרֵא דְּאָנְשָׁא (be-RA’ de-NA-sha’, the son of the man). This fails for the same reasons as the Christian Palestinian and Old Syriac translations. Together, the differences in the three Aramaic translations confirm that they are not preserving a usage from Jesus. Rather, they are trying to translate a Greek phrase that they may not understand but know does not equal their normal idiom “son of man.”

### Third-Person Reference

A side issue concerns the fact that Jesus referred to himself in the third person: “the son of man” — rather than in the first person: “I.” Scholars are divided regarding the significance of this. Some say that Aramaic *bar ʿe-NASH* was a very polite way of referring to oneself. However all the examples of this phrase being used by a speaker to refer to himself also include mankind in general. Thus, when a speaker refers to himself and says “a/the son of man can do such and such,” he is saying that a human can do such and such and that he is included in humanity.

Palestinian Aramaic dating from post-third century A.D. attests a special phrase for a speaker referring exclusively to himself: הָהוּא גַבְרָא (ha-HU’ gav-RA’, that man) and הָהוּא אַתְתָּא (ha-HI’ ʿe-te-TA’, that woman). Both phrases are idiomatic ways of saying “I” or “you.”

Some scholars have reasoned that if “son of man” cannot be a title in Aramaic or

Hebrew, then those passages in the Gospels which are only understandable as titles must be secondary creations of the church and not real sayings of Jesus. From such a perspective, only those sayings where the meaning “mankind in general” and/or “I” fit the context are viewed as authentic.

But this whole approach stumbles on one major fact. Since the Greek-speaking church did not understand or approve of the title “son of man,” it could hardly have invented the title and attributed it to Jesus.

Jesus must have developed it, but that brings us back to the beginning. What did Jesus say in Hebrew or Aramaic, and what did it mean? How could he have used “son of man” as a title?

What is needed is a solution from Aramaic or Hebrew that can explain the Gospel texts in which Jesus uses “son of man” as a title. We then can investigate what special information that solution communicates.

### Mishnaic Hebrew

In the time of Jesus three languages were used in the land of Israel: Hebrew, the tribal language; Aramaic, the business language and former prestige language of government; and Greek, the current prestige language of government. Since the turn of this century, Jewish scholars have been pointing out that Mishnaic Hebrew was alive and well during the Second Temple period, for example, M. H. Segal, “Mishnaic Hebrew and its Relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review Old Series XX* (1908–9), 647–737. After the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Bar-Kochba letters, New Testament scholars have had to make room for this wider sociolinguistic picture. Those that have accepted the evidence from the Oral Torah, which is in Mishnaic Hebrew, have recognized that much or most of Jesus’ teaching would have been in this colloquial Hebrew. And this is what permits a full solution to the puzzle of the expression “son of man.”

If a man were speaking Hebrew and used the Aramaic phrase *bar ʿe-NASH* in the middle of his speech, his listeners would immediately recognize that the phrase was **not** the idiom “son of man, person, someone,” but something different, a title, something capitalized or in quotes. But that is only the beginning of what the speaker

**Jesus made a very strong messianic claim when he said that he was the “son of man.”**

would be communicating.

Jews of the first century were conversant with the Holy Scriptures and knew them in the original languages. Most of the Jewish Scriptures were written in Hebrew, but a few sections are in Aramaic. Genesis and Jeremiah each contain a sentence of Aramaic, Ezra has about three chapters in Aramaic and Daniel is about half Aramaic. What is especially significant is that Daniel 7 is in Aramaic, and that the **only** example of the Aramaic *bar ʿe-NASH* in the Bible is in the passage Daniel 7:13–14. A Hebrew speaker would have been able to use *bar ʿe-NASH* and point unambiguously to the mysterious man in heaven of Daniel 7.

An English reader should not be distracted by the use of two languages in one conversation. Jews were bilingual for several hundred years, and many rabbinic stories change from Hebrew to Aramaic and back. With “son of man, *bar ʿe-NASH*,” we are only talking about “loan words,” much the same as one can say *adios* to some *hombre* in an American cowboy movie.

We can test this hypothesis of the use of an Aramaic phrase in Hebrew speech by looking at the passage in the Gospels where Jesus is first reported to have used the title “son of man.” In Matthew 9:6, Mark 2:10 and Luke 5:24, Jesus defends his healing of the paralytic and forgiving of sins by stating: “. . . that you may know that the son of man has **authority on earth** to forgive sins. . . .”

It is clear that Jesus is here speaking against the background of Daniel 7. The reference to “authority” recalls one of the main themes of that passage, and the explicit mention of “earth” becomes understandable as a contrast to the supernatural setting of the Daniel vision. If Jesus were only contrasting “human beings” with “God,” he would not have had to say “on earth.” The best explanation for why earth is mentioned is that the Danielic heavenly “son of man” is the background that Jesus assumes his audience to understand. Jesus then brought in “earth” as part of the new, salient information in his communication. The position in the sentence of the clause “on earth” also supports this interpretation. By using the Aramaic *bar ʿe-NASH*, Jesus was able to signal this background unambiguously. His hearers clearly were perceptive enough to follow, since they already had objected to his simpler passive statement, “Your sins are forgiven.”

We may conclude that Jesus used the Aramaic *bar ʿe-NASH* to refer to the heaven-

ly person of Daniel 7, that he was able to use “son of man” as a title in Hebrew speech, and that the audience was able to understand him.

## Common Thread

This solution — an Aramaic phrase used as a title in Hebrew speech — has been discovered independently by several scholars. The author came to the above conclusions while working on Gospel translations in Africa. Dr. Robert Lindsey had previously come to the same conclusion, and the Jerusalem School members all hold similar views.

Here and there I have met others with such views, however it needs to be mentioned that not only is the above linguistic solution not accepted by a majority of scholars, but they do not even discuss it. This should change as people become more conscious that **three** spoken languages existed side-by-side in first-century Israel.

There is a common thread uniting the views of those who think that Jesus signalled Daniel 7 by using the Aramaic *bar ʿe-NASH* in the middle of Hebrew speech. Anyone who holds this view must assume that Jesus spoke or taught in Hebrew much of the time. That Jesus used Hebrew a significant amount of the time is a sociolinguistic conclusion that has a growing number of supporters in New Testament scholarship, but one that is still a minority opinion.

## Translation

A translator also must ask how this whole discussion will affect translation. If he simply translates *ho huios tou anthropolou* (based on the Aramaic *bar ʿe-NASH*) as “the Son of Man,” he may inadvertently communicate to his audience the opposite of what the Gospels teach. A reader might think, for instance, that the Son of Man is someone other than Jesus, since many cultures do not commonly have speakers refer to themselves with third-person titles. Even scholars have argued that Jesus referred to someone else, although that cannot be consistently maintained throughout the Gospels or in light of the known Jewish practice to allow such third-person use.

The other serious miscommunication would be to suggest that the title focuses exclusively on the humanity of Jesus. As seen above, the title does mean “man” but refers to a special “man in heaven.” A translator must test the reactions of readers in his target audience, and if the above two

*The articles in this series present insights into the Gospels that affect the translation process, and show how a knowledge of the Gospels’ Semitic background can provide a deeper understanding of Jesus’ words.*

*מֵתוּרְגֵי מָן (me-tur-ge-MAN) is a Hebrew word meaning translator. It specifically refers to sages in rabbinic times who translated the synagogue Torah readings into Aramaic or Greek for the assembled congregation.*

pitfalls occur then he needs to remedy the situation.

Several options are open. One is to translate woodenly but use a footnote and explain the usage when it is first encountered in a Gospel. This works well in societies that have been literate for generations and are accustomed to footnotes. It also has the advantage of preserving a continuity with earlier translations in that and other languages. A second option is to translate woodenly and use a glossary to explain the title. A third option is sometimes used in societies that are newly literate and do not have access to help materials. In such a situation, where the translation must communicate and stand on its own, it is sometimes best to have Jesus say, "I, the Man of Heaven. . .," or "I, the Man that the prophet Daniel spoke about. . ."

Jesus made a strong messianic claim when he said that he was the "son of man." As a phrase "son of man" means "man," but as a title it refers to the heavenly being of Daniel 7, to that person who is "like a man" but something much more. When one looks at all the depth of relationships implied in that term, one can appreciate the power of Jesus' favorite designation of himself. It is a title pregnant with the incarnation, God becoming Man. **JP**

## Bibliography

Two commonly quoted articles concerning this subject are: "ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου" by Carsten

## Transliteration Key

### Hebrew & Aramaic Consonants

א	— ' (silent)
ב	— b
בּ	— v
ג	— g
ד	— d
ה	— h
ו	— v
ז	— z
ח	— h (voiceless guttural — no English equivalent)
ט	— t
י	— y (or silent)
כ	— k
כּ	— k (like ch in the Scottish loch — no English equivalent)
ל	— l

מ	— m
נ	— n
ס	— s
ס'	— c (voiced guttural — no English equivalent)
פ	— p
פּ	— f
צ	— ts (like ts in nets)
ק	— k
ר	— r
ש	— sh
שׁ	— s
ת	— t

\*This is the form of the letter when it appears at the end of a word.

### Vowels

The consonant א, a silent letter,

is used above or before each vowel as a point of reference.  
 א — a (like a in father; rarely like the o in bone)  
 א, א — a (like a in father)  
 א — e (sometimes like e in net, sometimes like e in hey, and sometimes somewhere in between)  
 א, א — e (like e in net)  
 א, א — i (like i in ski)  
 א, א, א — o (like o in oh)  
 א, א — u (like u

in flu)  
 א — e (sometimes barely audible like e in happening, at other times as long as e in net; also can be silent in which case we transliterate with nothing)

### Diphthongs

א — ai  
 א — oi  
 א — ui

### Greek

Greek words are transliterated according to the Society of Biblical Literature system.

Colpe in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), VIII, pp. 400–477, and "The Use of *bar nash* / *bar nasha* in Jewish Aramaic" by Geza Vermes in Matthew Black's *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 310–328.

Two articles related to the sociolinguistics of first-century Israel are "Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century" by Chaim Rabin in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, eds. Shmuel Safrai and Menahem Stern (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), II, pp. 1007–1039, and my "Language Use in the First Century: The Place of Spoken Hebrew in a Trilingual Society" in *Notes On Scripture In Use*, 12 (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1987), 25–42.

## Readers' Forum

(continued from page 2)

(II Chron. 15:8; 24:12). In English we speak of a new moon because the moon renews itself each month. Reflecting this fact, the Hebrew word for month (חֹדֶשׁ, *HO-desh*) derives from the same root as חָדָשׁ (*ha-da-SHAH*).

All this serves to illustrate once again how helpful it can be to get back to more Hebraic terminology and a more Hebraic perspective.

— David Bivin

**In Matthew 24**, Jesus says that when the residents of Judea see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, they should flee to the mountains and pray that their flight not be in the winter or on a Sabbath (verse 20). I can understand winter, but why did Jesus say that one should pray that his flight not be on a sabbath?

— A reader in Jerusalem, Israel

The biblical prohibition against working on the Sabbath, as interpreted by the rabbis, included carrying burdens (Mishnah, Shabbath 7:2). If one had to flee on the Sabbath he would be forced to leave behind nearly all of his possessions. One

would not be permitted to take any money, would be allowed to carry only enough food for three meals and a maximum of 18 different pieces of clothing (Mishnah, Shabbath 16:2,4).

To illustrate the severity of this prohibition, if a man's house caught fire on the Sabbath, he was not allowed to carry water to put out the fire and he could save only enough food from the house for three meals. Compare the story recorded in Tosefta Shabbat 13:9 about the fire that broke out on the Sabbath in the courtyard of Joseph ben Sammai who lived in the Lower Galilee. Not only would he not extinguish the fire, but he was so strict in his observance of the commandments that he would not allow the soldiers of a nearby Roman army camp to put out the blaze even though they had come at their own initiative and thus would not have caused him to violate Jewish law. (See "The Centurion and the Synagogue," *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE*, January/February 1990.)

— Shmuel Safrai

*JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE* welcomes the opinions of readers. Although space is limited, we will use Readers' Forum to share as many of our readers' comments and questions as possible.

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**T**he Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research (מכון ירושלים לחקר האוונגליונים (הסינופטיים) is a consortium of Jewish and Christian scholars who are studying Jesus' sayings within the context of the language and culture in which he lived. Their work confirms that Jesus was a Jewish sage who taught in Hebrew and used uniquely rabbinic teaching methods.

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