

Titles of the Lord Christ¹

The Messiah

The title “Messiah” means “anointed with oil” and means “chosen one.” In the times of the ancient prophets like David and Solomon (peace be upon them) the people of the Sons of Jacob would pour oil on the head of a person chosen to serve God and their nation. For example, normally priests and righteous kings were anointed, and prophets were sometimes anointed as well. The pouring with oil symbolized the fact that God poured his Spirit on these individuals to empower them to fulfill their responsibilities as his servants. In the Torah and other books of the prophets, it is the chosen king from the line of the Prophet David (peace be upon him) who is most often called “a messiah”. In the Psalms of the Prophet David, there are several psalms about the king of the Sons of Jacob that make it clear that as God’s chosen one or “the Son of God” he is responsible for establishing God’s justice and peace on earth. This means rescuing victims of injustice, especially the poor. God promised the prophet David the king that one of his descendants would always be king. But after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, the kingdom of David and his descendants appeared to be ended. But the people of the Sons of Jacob expected that God would keep his promise and restore the kingship to David’s line, bringing the awaited Messiah to reign in justice forever.

The Spiritual Son of God (Son of God)

This expression is used frequently in the Noble Gospel, and it has mostly been translated in Arabic as “the Son of God,” but it absolutely does not indicate procreation; God forbid! The use of the term “son” in this title was metaphorical, being derived from the fact that when a king appointed a successor or viceroy, he would call him his son, whether or not there was any blood tie involved. What was signified by the title was not kinship, but rather the conferring of authority. In this sense, it is possible to say that the title “Son of God” in the Gospel refers to the high king who all other kings must submit to, and who was appointed by God to be his deputy or viceroy— his beloved visible representative on earth. The

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Roman emperor viewed himself as filling that role, so he reserved the title for himself. The kings of Egypt (the Pharaohs) also took this title to refer to themselves, also using the title “Beloved of the god so-and-so” to show their close relationship with that god. For the Jews, the Son of God was the awaited Messiah, the Chosen One descended from the line of the prophet David to be king over the Sons of Israel (Sons of Jacob). But the Gospel reveals to us that the Son of God is appointed as ruler of God’s creation forever. For more information on this title, please refer to the glossary of names and terms.

The Spiritual Son (The Son)

Even though those who heard our Lord Jesus were aware of titles such as “Son of God” (meaning the Spiritual Son of God), “Son of David” (that is, heir of the throne of David), and Son of Man (which means the Lord of Humanity), they did not understand well what the Lord Christ meant when he used the title “the Son” (that is, the Spiritual Son). It is likely that they considered that this was a short version of a longer title. Since our Lord Jesus only rarely used the titles “Son of David” and “Son of God,” it is most likely that the term “the Son” is a short form of “Son of Man,” which was our Lord Jesus’ preferred title for himself. The Lord Christ used this abbreviated title, it seems, in some contexts when he spoke of himself and God and was quickly switching back and forth in referring to the two of them, so that use of a longer title would have been difficult. In this reading we employ the term “the Spiritual Son” instead of the term “the Son”.

Heir of the Kingdom of David (Son of David)

As mentioned above, God had rewarded the prophet David (peace be upon him) for his obedience and promised him that one of his descendants would always rule the Sons of Jacob. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, the kingdom of David and his descendants seemed to be ended, but some people hoped for a restoring of the kingship to David’s line. They thus awaited the appearing of one they called “the Heir of David”, through whom the restoration of the kingdom would come about. Many Jews understood the expression “the Kingdom of God” in a bigoted way, because they felt that the kingdom was restricted to them alone, but the Lord Christ through his teaching sought to broaden their understanding of the promised divine Kingdom and show that God’s concern was for all peoples on earth. He did this partly by using the title he preferred for himself, “the Lord of Humanity.”

Lord of Humanity (Son of Man)

For the most part, our Lord Jesus avoided calling himself “Messiah” and “Son of David”. He also told his disciples not to call him by those titles. This was to avoid perpetuating the narrow, nationalistic connotations that these titles carried in the minds of the Jews of the first century AD. The Lord Christ and his disciples also avoided openly using the title “Spiritual Son of God” (Son of God) for the same reason, and also because they wished to avoid conflict with the Roman authorities, since this was a title which the Roman emperor reserved for himself alone, and anyone else deigning to use it would be considered guilty of high treason. It was only toward the end of his proclamation— when the time for his crucifixion was drawing near— that our Lord Jesus began to call himself “Messiah” and “Son of God” more openly.

Rather, the Lord Christ (his peace be upon us) preferred to refer to himself indirectly by the title “Lord of Humanity” a title with a literal form in Greek which correlates to “son of man”. He was probably referring to the prophecy by the prophet Daniel where he says: “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 God the Possessor of Eternity and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7: 13-14). In this prophecy, “son of man” refers to a savior whom God will choose to rule over all the people of the world. He is also the one who will judge them as appointed by God on Judgement Day (see John 5:27).

The Teacher

Though the Lord Christ preferred to refer to himself indirectly as “Lord of Humanity”, his disciples did not call him that while he was still with them, and only rarely did they use that title for him after he returned to heaven. While he was with them, they usually addressed him using “Teacher” or a similar term of respect appropriate for the mentor of a group of disciples or apprentices. Our Lord Jesus normally told his disciples to hide his true identity until the time was appropriate to speak of it.

Our Master or Our Lord

Aside from “the Messiah”, the most popular title for our Lord Jesus as used by his followers after his resurrection, was “Lord”. They understood this to mean that the Lord Christ was “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36) and not merely the Savior or King of the Jews.

This title had a powerful meaning to those living in the Roman Empire, since the Emperor himself was called “lord” (much more often than he was called “Son of God”), and the first followers of our Lord Christ were harshly persecuted for calling him by this title. They were accused of treason against the Roman government for “professing allegiance to another king named Jesus.” (Acts 17:7).

The name of God “Yahweh” in the Hebrew language from the books of the ancient prophets was translated in Greek with the word “kurios”, normally without a definite article. The title of Christ as “Lord” used the same word in Greek, but normally with a definite article, so there is definitely a distinction between the usages in Greek, a distinction which was maintained in translations of the Noble Gospel into languages like Aramaic. Unfortunately many translations of the Noble Gospel in Arabic do not show the distinction of meaning found in the Greek text, and so call our Lord Jesus “*ar-rabb Yasua*.” This is an imprecise translation of the Greek.

The Holy Messenger of God

This title for the Messiah highlights his complete devotion to God, particularly with reference to the unique mission for which God consecrated him and sent him into the world.

The Coming One

This was another title used for the awaited Messiah, used for example by Martha the sister of Lazarus to refer to our Lord Jesus (see John 11:27). The Samaritans had a similar title for the promised savior, calling him “the one who is coming” (see John 4:25).

The Word of God

“The Word of God” is a title for our Lord Christ in the revelation recorded by the Apostle John. The Jews were familiar with the phrase as referring not only to God’s means of self-revelation to humans, but also to his creative and sustaining power by which he created all things as Creator and Sustainer. In the Psalms the beginnings of this concept are found: “By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made.” (Psalm 33:6) In the two or three hundred years before the birth of Christ, we find in some holy texts the portrayal of God’s Word or his Wisdom as if it were a person, and this image of the Word of God became well-known. Every week in the synagogues, people heard the Aramaic Targums, or translations of the Hebrew Torah and writings of the prophets. In these translations, God’s Word appears as a form through which God manifests

himself, through whom God created the world and through whom he intervenes in the world, communicates with mankind, and reveals himself. God through his Word created the light on the first day of creation. Where the Hebrew text says that God appeared to the prophet Solomon, the Aramaic translation says the God's *memra* 'Word' appeared to him and spoke with him. Other Jewish writings that were circulated just before the time of the Lord Christ spoke of God's Word healing and preserving those who trust in Him.

The Apostle John sometimes abbreviated the title to simply "the Word". In so doing, he provided a point of contact for the Greeks, whose philosophers used the term "the Word" to refer to the underlying principle of natural order that pervaded the universe. In this way John revealed to both these groups that "the Word" is not a mere impersonal force; rather, the Lord Christ is himself the eternal Word of God, the one through whom God created the world and continues to sustain it, and the one who, having become a human being, makes God's glory visible in the world.