

Auxiliary Sense Files | Senses of Phrases Like "Son of Man"

An Auxiliary End Time File of the Website *Jesus and the End Time*

Both the Old and New Testaments of the KJV Bible use phrases like "son of man", "Son of man", and "sons of men" in a number of different senses. The most important of these senses are described in respective headings below and followed by examples of Bible verses that illustrate their use in these senses. In order to keep this file to a reasonable size, the writer will usually include after each heading only three or four examples of Bible verses from each Testament which illustrate the use of phrases of the kind described in that heading---if there are that many. In cases in which the intended sense is not clear from a single verse, some adjacent verses will be included to show the verse in context. Because these verses have been chosen on the basis of their ability to illustrate the senses in which they use phrases of these kinds, and not on the basis of their association with the End Time, these verses may or may not appear among those shown in the Auxiliary End Time Text Files.

The senses in which the KJV Bible uses phrases like "Son of man" may be summarized as follows:

1.) The General or Anonymous Sense: When the phrase "son of man" is used with an article like "a" or "the", and with the "s" not capitalized, it may be used in a general sense in which it refers to a human being whose identity is either not specified or is beside the point. When used in this sense, the phrase "son of man" has a meaning similar to that of phrases like a man, any man, some man, etc. or, if coupled with words of negation like "no" or "none", a meaning similar to that of phrases like no man, no one, nobody, etc. Interestingly, verses of this kind often involve a person that the writer mentions twice, but that he does not seem to want to refer to using the same words. It may therefore be that the phrase "son of man" is simply a literary device that writers use to avoid repeating themselves. Examples of verses that use the phrase "son of man" in this sense are included below.

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:

Num. 23:19: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Ps. 8:4: What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Jer. 49:18: As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it.

Is. 56:1-2: 1 Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. 2 Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.

(B.) Examples from the New Testament:

The New Testament includes only a single verse, Heb. 2:6, which uses the phrase "son of man" in the sense described in the above heading. Even this verse, however, is a quotation of Ps. 8:4 above. It would therefore be fair to say that the New Testament does not include any clear usages of the phrase "son of man" in the present sense.

Heb. 2:6: But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

2.) The Plural or Collective Sense: .The sense in which plural forms of the phrase "son of man", such as "sons of man" and "sons of men", refer collectively to all men or all of mankind. When used in this sense these phrases are arguably synonymous with phrases like "them (or those) that are born of women" or "the children of men". Examples of verses of these kinds are included below.

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:

Ps. 33:13-15: 13 The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. 14 From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. 15 He ... considereth all their works.

Ps. 145:10-12: 10 All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. 11 They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; 12 To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

Ecc. 1:12-13: 12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

Jer. 32:18-19: 18 Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name, 19 Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:

(B.) Examples from the New Testament:

The New Testament includes only two verses which use phrases like "sons of men" and "sons of man", and only two verses which use the arguably synonymous phrase "them (or those) that are born of women". Because there are so few verses of these kinds, all of them will be presented below.

Mark 3:28-29: 28 ... All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: 29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:.

Matt. 11:11: Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Luke 7:28: For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Eph. 3:2-3 +3:5: 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me [Paul] to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; ... 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:.

3.) The Direct Address or Vocative Sense: When the phrase "Son of man" is used without an article, at or near the beginning of a verse, it is probably used as a form of address that calls a person's attention to the fact that he is being spoken to by God, a spirit or an angel. When "Son of man" (or "son of man")* is used in this way, it has a meaning which approximates that of words like "Man", "Earthling" or "You there...". Examples of verses that use "son of man" in this way are included below. [*If the word "son" is not the first word in a verse, as in the phrase "O son of man", the "O" not the "s" is capitalized.]

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:

The Old Testament includes over 90 verses that use the phrase "Son of man" in the above-described sense. Of these, 93 appear in the book of Ezekiel and one appears in the book of Daniel.

Ezek. 2:1-3: 1 And he said unto me [Ezekiel], Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. 2 And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me..."

Ezek. 22:23-24: 23 And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 24 Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation.

Dan. 8:17: So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.

(B.) Examples from the New Testament:

The New Testament does not include any verses that use the phrase "Son of man" in the above-described sense.

4.) The Titular or Eschatological Sense: When the phrase "the Son of man" is used with the definite article ("the") and with the "s" capitalized, it may be used as the title of the person who will come at the End Time to receive a kingdom that shall never be destroyed and/or preside over the Day of Judgment. Examples of verses that seem to use "the Son of man" in this sense are included below.

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:

The Old Testament includes only one text that seems to use "the Son of man" in the above-described sense.

Dan. 7:13-14: 13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 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, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

(B.) Examples from the New Testament:

Matt. 16:27-28: 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. 28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Mark 8:38: Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Luke 21:25-27: 25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; 26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. 27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

5.) The Self Referential or Circumlocutional Sense: When Jesus uses the phrase "the Son of man" with the definite article ("the") and the "s" capitalized, he often seems to use it as a modest and roundabout way of referring to himself (i.e., as a circumlocution for words like "I" and "me"), or as a way of speaking of himself in the third person.

Unfortunately, for present purposes, it is often not clear whether Jesus is using the phrase "the Son of man" in its self-referential sense or in its titular sense. This is because, as the person who bears the title "the Son of man", Jesus is able to use this phrase in either of these senses. In the New Testament texts that follow the writer has included the texts that he considers to be the clearest examples of texts in which Jesus uses "the Son of man" its self-referential sense.

(A.) Examples from the Old Testament:

The Old Testament does not include any texts in which a person uses "the Son of man" in a self-referential sense.

(B.) Examples from the New Testament:

Matt. 8:19-20: 19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. 20 And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Matt. 9:6: But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

Matt. 20:18: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

John 8:28: Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.