

# The Historical Jesus: A New Source from the Arbel Cave Village

## Introduction

The purpose of Jesus Research is to fill out the messianic portrait provided by the Synoptic Gospels, and to explain those aspects that are still unclear. The so-called ‘third quest’, a term coined by N.T. Wright in 1982, has successfully brought new disciplines into this search from the fields of the social sciences, archaeology, politics, economics, religious and anthropological studies. The impact of this input can hardly be overstated, in its illumination of the Jewish, late Second Temple world into which Jesus was born, raised and became known. At the same time, James Carleton Paget observes, “It has often been chance discoveries that have moved the Quest forward, none more so than that of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. New Testament scholars are still digesting their significance, but already they have contributed greatly to our understanding of contemporary Jewish messianism, scriptural and legal interpretation, prayer, and a heap of other subjects, all directly relevant to historical Jesus research”.<sup>1</sup> So, when looking to the future, Carleton Paget hopes “for a discovery of the importance of Qumran. The field is in need of something new and primary to nudge it along. Such discoveries give clear reminders of the provisionality of scholarly conclusions. We may hope, too, for a continuing engagement with the question of Jesus’ place within Judaism, and a resistance to alternative contexts. An ongoing concern with the eschatological character of Jesus’ message is equally desirable, together with a greater sense that this may explain a whole variety of aspects of his ministry”.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, only a few years after this was written, there was a meeting of the Enoch Seminar in Camaldoli, Italy, in which a consensus was reached, among leading scholars, that the ‘Parables of Enoch’<sup>3</sup> was composed during the reign of Herod the Great and completed towards the end of the first century BCE, a mere decade or two before the public mission of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>4</sup> As a direct result, “the growing tendency to date the Parables to the turn of the era or slightly before facilitates the posing the question of influence,” observed David deSilva.<sup>5</sup> Although the question of influence was raised by a few scholars at the Camaldoli conference, no conclusions could be drawn for lack of progress on the social setting and provenance of the Parables of Enoch. Nevertheless, at the end of the conference, Paolo Sacchi was inspired to conclude “I think the Enoch Seminar could contribute to the start of what we might call the ‘fourth quest for the historical Jesus,’ which should begin with a careful study of Jesus’ milieu”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Carleton Paget, ‘Quests for the historical Jesus’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001; 150.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. 151.

<sup>3</sup> 1 *Enoch* 37-71, the book at the centre of 1 *Enoch*, also called the Similitudes of Enoch or Book of Parables, whose formal title (the first words of the text) is The Vision of Wisdom that Enoch Saw.

<sup>4</sup> The date is no longer tentative, writes Paolo Sacchi in his summary of the meeting, “The burden of proof has shifted to those who disagree with the Herodian date. It is now their responsibility to provide evidence that would reopen the discussion”, ‘The 2005 Camaldoli Seminar on the Parables of Enoch: Summary and Prospects for Future Research’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini, Grand Rapids MI/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2007; 511.

<sup>5</sup> David A. deSilva, *The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James and Jude: What Earliest Christianity Learned from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012; 134.

<sup>6</sup> Sacchi, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 512. However, the contribution of the Enoch Seminar is not qualitatively different from the third quest, and more recently the title of fourth quest was given by Paul N. Anderson to the study of the Historical Jesus from a Johannine Perspective.

James Charlesworth was even more daring in his conclusion, “The Book of Parables (1En 37-71), appears to be a Jewish work that antedates Jesus, and the author seems to imagine a connection among the Messiah, the Righteous One, and the Son of Man. The work most likely took shape in Galilee, not far from where Jesus centered his ministry. He, thus, could have been influenced by this writing or the traditions preserved in the Parables of Enoch. In this case, his own self-understanding may have been shaped by the relationship between the Son of Man and the Messiah that is found only in the Parables of Enoch. If those in the Enoch group were known as the great scholars who had special and secret knowledge, and if they lived in Galilee, then Jesus would most likely have had an opportunity to learn firsthand about their teachings through discussions and debates”.<sup>7</sup>

In 2013, James Charlesworth and Mordechai Aviam went on to propose ancient Magdala, on the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee, as the home of the author of the Book of Parables, in the light of recent archaeological findings there.<sup>8</sup> However, their arguments were not specific for Magdala, and their proposal has not been widely accepted. In his recent volume *Son of Man*, Richard Bauckham writes “We have to conclude, quite simply, that we do not know where the Parables of Enoch were written and, in the nature of the case, we are unlikely ever to know. Literature of this kind does not often disclose the place of origin. It is noteworthy that few scholars feel the need to identify a precise place of origin. In Charlesworth’s work this need obviously arises from the desire to make a connection with Jesus. From the archaeological point of view, it would be gratifying, on the basis of the archaeology, to be able to relate specific literary works to specific sites and discoveries, but (except when discoveries include texts) this is very rarely possible”.<sup>9</sup>

## Arbel Cave Village

Bauckham’s conclusion is unduly pessimistic, given that the mountain overlooking Magdala, Mount Arbel, has been identified, since ancient times, as the place where divine redemption would begin.<sup>10</sup> Since Arbel is located on the ancient tribal border between Zebulun and Naphtali, it is highly likely that its association with redemption, in both the Christian and Jewish traditions, goes back to the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-7, as we have argued elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this association is vividly expressed in the seventh century Jewish eschatological apocalypse *Sefer Zerubbabel*, which is a messianic prophecy composed in the same apocalyptic genre as the Parables of Enoch. Unless we dismiss as pure chance the convergence of Mount Arbel, with the start of messianic redemption and the genre of eschatological apocalypse, this may indeed be the right place to look for the origins of the Parables of Enoch, which is itself a messianic prophecy expressed as an eschatological apocalypse.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ‘Can We Discern the Composition Date of the Parables of Enoch’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 467.

<sup>8</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ‘Did Jesus Know the traditions in the *Parables of Enoch*’, *A Paradigm Shift*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and James H. Charlesworth, London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013; 184-191, and Mordechai Aviam, ‘The Book of Enoch and the Galilean Archaeology and Landscape’, *A Paradigm Shift*, 159-69.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Bauckham, “*Son of Man*”: *Volume One, Early Jewish literature*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2023; 131.

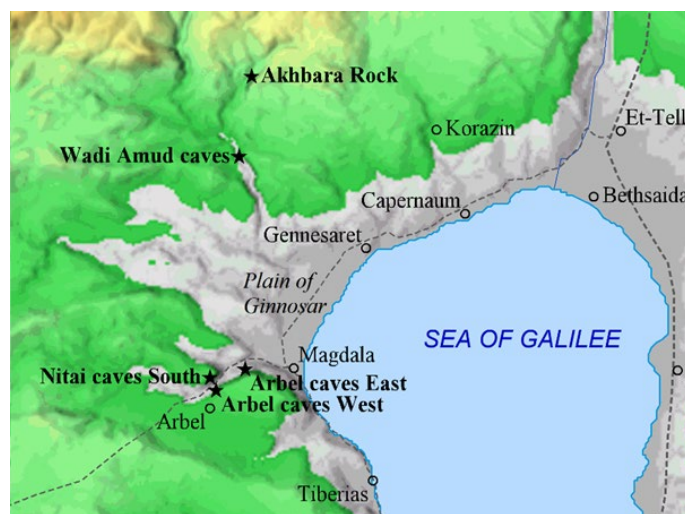
<sup>10</sup> “For centuries it was believed that the redemption of the Jewish people would begin near the townlet of Arbel, perched on a cliff in lower Eastern Galilee”, Zvi Ilan, ‘Reviving a 2,000-Year-Old Landmark’, *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/89, 61.

<sup>11</sup> See my essay at [https://www.academia.edu/117758795/Redemption\\_Begins\\_at\\_Mount\\_Arbel](https://www.academia.edu/117758795/Redemption_Begins_at_Mount_Arbel) .

<sup>12</sup> Uzi Leibner states it like this: “These data indicating the continued existence of a large Jewish settlement here, apparently into the Early Islamic period, can explain the frequent references to Arbel in the *piyyutim* and in eschatological literature from the Early Islamic period. Moreover, it appears more than a coincidence that the War of the End of Days and the beginning of the redemption are attributed in these genres to the area of Arbel, which was a focus of zealot military activity in the distant past and whose dominant Jewish settlement remained in existence uninterrupted

So, in August 2019, my wife and I visited the Arbel National Park, 2 kilometres southwest of Magdala and made a ‘chance discovery’ hiding in plain sight. Apart from scattered clusters of man-made caves along the two kilometres of exposed cliff, the National Park embraces the ruins of two ancient population centres: 1) an ancient town and synagogue on the Plain of Arbel, just as it starts to slope down into the valley of Arbel stream (see Arbel on the map below) and 2) the ruins of a dense collection of more than 100 man-made caves carved into the cliff, adjacent to a huge natural cave, 60 metres long, and once fortified by an ancient wall (labelled ‘Arbel caves East’ on the map).

In 1989, Dr Zvi Ilan was the first Israeli archaeologist to investigate these sites, which he identified as the town of Arbel and the Arbel cave village respectively. From coin and ceramic finds, he dated the foundation of the town of Arbel to c. 120 BCE and that of the Arbel cave village to c. 100 BCE. Around the same time, a demographic shift is observed in the archaeological record of the whole area, indicating the replacement of a Syrophenician population by Jews from Judaea. Indeed, it is well known that Galilee was conquered and annexed by the Hasmonean king Aristobulus in 103 BCE, opening up this area to migration from Judaea and the south. Regarding the unique collection of caves that he named the Arbel cave village, Zvi Ilan was intrigued not only by the many cisterns and *miqva’ot* he found there, but also by the huge, fortified cave, which he intended to excavate. This work was not even started, sadly, for he died the following year. No further archaeological investigation has been carried out at the Arbel cave village, except for an archaeological ground survey conducted by Uzi Leibner (1999-2004), in the part of Eastern Galilee that includes the ruins of the Arbel cave village and the town of Arbel.<sup>13</sup>



Map of the Plain of Ginnosar with the cave sites to the north and south  
(created using Bible Mapper 5.0)

Arbel and the surrounding area have a remarkable history. Josephus (*JW* 1:304-307)<sup>14</sup> tells us that it was the scene of violent conflict during the Civil War (40-37 BCE), when Herod’s army camped on Mt. Arbel for several months in 38 BCE, in order to expel the cave-dwelling ‘brigands’

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from that distant past to the time of those genres’ creation”, Uzi Leibner, *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Galilee*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 127, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009; 264, while at the same time admitting that a part of the puzzle was missing, “The question of what led to the connection between traditions about the redemption or the War of the End of Days and the Arbel Valley and during what period that occurred, is unclear”, op. cit. 264, n.132.

<sup>13</sup> Sites 35 and 39 respectively in Leibner, *Settlement and History*, 237 and 242.

<sup>14</sup> The works of Flavius Josephus are abbreviated as follows: *JW* refers to his *Jewish War* and *Life* to his *Autobiography*.

who were making life impossible for the Arbel residents. From this, we learn that Herod had allies in Arbel whom he came to help, although the people of this region were well-known for their loyalty to the Hasmonean dynasty, and to their recently enthroned king, Mattathias Antigonus, Herod's arch-rival. From the mention of deprived and dispossessed 'brigands', it can be inferred that there was also a social crisis here—a lack of sufficient resources—even though it was a region blessed with abundant water and fertile land.

From these historical references, the results of Leibner's archaeological survey and from our interpretation of certain outstanding features of the Arbel cave village, we have proposed a new hypothesis: that Arbel and the surrounding area was settled and farmed by Essenes, and that the Arbel cave village itself was built and occupied by a male Essene community from around 100 BCE, at about the same time the Essenes settled at Qumran. All this is presented in the first chapter of our book.<sup>15</sup>

Naturally, we then started to wonder whether there is evidence of scribal activity in the Arbel cave village, as at Qumran. No pens, inkwells or scroll-jars have yet been found, or even looked for, but only 30 kms away from Arbel, Lake Huleh (originally called Lake Semechonitis) was then the largest habitat of papyrus outside Egypt. The innovative use of papyrus in this area could explain why 'writing with ink and papyrus' was included among the teachings of the rebel angel *Penemue* (*IEn* 69:8-11), and raise the suspicion that the Parables of Enoch (*IEn* 37–71) may have been composed here.

On closer examination, the text of the Parables of Enoch does indeed evoke several other topographical features of the Arbel cave village: 1) the description of the 'dwellings of the righteous' in heaven (*IEn* 39:4-5; 41:2; 48:1; cf. *Jn* 14,2) resembles more the individual hewn habitations in the cave village than the communal 'hollow place' in a rock, in the original description (*IEn* 22:1,9); 2) the 'ropes of the righteous' as a metaphor for trust in God's name (*IEn* 61:3; cf. 46:8) seems to have been modelled on the actual ropes used to reach the higher caves in the cave village, and 3) the rebel angels' descent on Mt. Hermon, mentioned twice in the text (*IEn* 39:1-2; 64:1-2), would have been an important reference point for the author, constantly made present by the magnificent views of Mt. Hermon, 70 kms distant in a northeasterly direction.

But there is more compelling evidence that the Arbel cave village was the home of the author of the Book of Parables. Firstly, the author can be identified as a full member of an Essene community, because his unique literary act of recording and preserving the names of the rebel angels (*IEn* 69:1-12) represents his adherence to one of the oaths of Essene membership (cf. *JW* 2:142). Secondly, the author's description of the eschatological war (*IEn* 56:5–57:3) is taken to be based on an eyewitness account of the Civil War projected into the future, and is therefore used for dating the text to Herod's reign. However, it can also be used to locate the author to a place overlooking the Plain of Ginnosar, which perfectly matches the location of the Arbel cave village. Finally, the social crisis leading to brigandage in this area coincides precisely with a rapid doubling of the population in Eastern Galilee, between 60–50 BCE, as revealed by Uzi Leibner's archaeological survey, which in turn is best explained by massive internal migration and overpopulation caused by the 'Judaean land settlement' of Pompey and Gabinius (63-54 BCE). The resulting oversaturation of productive land, coupled with private ownership of large tracts, including the entire plain of Ginnosar, more than

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<sup>15</sup> John Ben-Daniel, *The Essenes of Mount Arbel and Jerusalem: Origins, History and Influence*, Qumranica Mogilanensia series 20, Mogilany, Poland: Enigma Press, 2023; 7-36. The first chapter can also be accessed at: [https://www.academia.edu/76987839/The\\_Arbel\\_Cave\\_Village\\_Remains\\_of\\_an\\_Essene\\_Commune](https://www.academia.edu/76987839/The_Arbel_Cave_Village_Remains_of_an_Essene_Commune).

adequately explains the social setting of the Parables of Enoch and its uniquely judgmental stance against ‘the landowners’. All this amounts to persuasive evidence that the author of the Book of Parables was an Essene who lived at the Arbel cave village in the latter part of the first century BC.<sup>16</sup> It was a time of great messianic expectation<sup>17</sup> and what he wrote was an ascent apocalypse conveying a messianic prophecy.

In composing the Parables, the author showed deep familiarity with the Book of Watchers (1 *En* 1–36), which was the first, and the foundation, of a whole family of apocalyptic writings. On this basis, it would be reasonable to infer that he and his community at Arbel were part of a larger movement that articulated the apocalyptic worldview and produced apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic literature in all its variety. With some justification, one could even suggest that the Parables of Enoch was not the only literary product from this community, but that Arbel under the Essenes became a centre of apocalyptic expression in late Second Temple times.

## Overview of the Parables of Enoch

The Parables of Enoch is a messianic prophecy which predates the public ministry of Jesus by about 25 years.<sup>18</sup> The seer Enoch is taken up to the divine throne room in heaven where he describes the preparations for the final judgment by a human figure variously called the ‘Chosen One’, the ‘Righteous One’, and the ‘Anointed One’ (i.e. the Messiah). This divinely appointed figure, also frequently referred to as ‘that Son of Man’ or ‘this Son of Man’, is revealed as the saviour of the righteous (*1En* 48:4-7, 61:1-13, 62:13-16), before sitting in judgment over the wicked angels and impenitent peoples of the earth (*1En* 62–63). The profile of this messianic figure is drawn from several biblical sources: the ‘one like a son of man’ in Daniel (Dn 7,13-14), the anointed king in the Psalms (Pss 2, 110; also Is 11:1-5), the chosen and righteous servant in Isaiah (Is 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12; 61:1-3) and the timeless presence of divine wisdom (Prov 8:22-31; Sir 24,1-3). Through its allusions to these biblical texts, the messianic profile at the centre of the Parables of Enoch constitutes a multifaceted representation of the role and mission of a divinely chosen person, who is both the saviour and the judge of human beings.

Generations of scholars and churchmen have been struck by the correspondence between the messianic figure at the centre of the Parables of Enoch and the various New Testament reports on the life and sayings of Jesus Christ. Only recently, however, have they been able to study this correspondence in depth, thanks to the efforts of a few dedicated language experts and textual critics.<sup>19</sup>

## Jesus and the Parables of Enoch

According to the evidence in the Gospels, it is now clear that Jesus Christ personally adopted the title ‘Son of Man’ as his preferred messianic designation and used it frequently in the setting of

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<sup>16</sup> A more comprehensive presentation of the evidence can be found at:

[https://www.academia.edu/50310427/The\\_Parables\\_of\\_Enoch\\_1Enoch\\_37\\_71\\_Provenance\\_and\\_Social\\_Setting](https://www.academia.edu/50310427/The_Parables_of_Enoch_1Enoch_37_71_Provenance_and_Social_Setting).

<sup>17</sup> There appears to have been a general expectation that the Messiah would appear early in the first century, due to the Essene interpretation of Daniel’s 490-year scheme, see Roger T. Beckwith, ‘The Year of the Messiah: Jewish and Early Christian Chronologies, and their Eschatological Consequences’, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian*, Boston and Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001; 217-75; especially: “Essene expectation must have reached fever-pitch towards the end of the first century B.C., with the eschatological war already overdue, and the Messiahs of Levi and Israel expected in the last of Daniel’s 70 weeks, between 10 B.C. and A.D. 2”, op. cit. 265.

<sup>18</sup> The scholarly consensus converges on a date around the turn of the millennium, i.e., 1 BCE.

<sup>19</sup> The text was preserved down the centuries only by the Ethiopian Church, and in the Ge’ez language.

eschatological judgment.<sup>20</sup> As it happens the Parables of Enoch is the only known writing from the Second Temple period that identifies the ‘(one like a) son of man’ in Daniel (Dn 7:13-14; cf. *IEn* 46:1-3) as the ‘Messiah’ (or ‘Anointed One’ in *IEn* 48:10, 52:4, cf. Ps 2:2, 110; Is 11:2-4, 61:1-3) and assigns him the divine role of eschatological judge (*IEn* 61–63).<sup>21</sup> So, due to the novelty and uniqueness of the association of ‘Messiah’ with the epithet ‘Son of Man’ and the end-time judgmental role in both sources, the Jesus sayings in the Gospels and the Parables of Enoch, it is almost certain that Jesus Christ identified himself with the Messiah Son of Man described in the Parables of Enoch.

In support of this assertion, the synoptic Gospels confirm that Jesus also identified himself with the other two messianic designations in the Parables of Enoch, the ‘Chosen One’ (*IEn* 39:6, 40:5, 45:3-4, 49:2-4, etc; cf. Is 42:1-9; 49:1-7) and the ‘Righteous One’ (*IEn* 38:2, 53:6; cf. Is 50:8, 52:13–53:12), both of which are used synonymously with ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Messiah’. The Gospels represent Jesus as the subject of these titles by showing him as the authentic fulfillment of their original profiles in the book of Isaiah (e.g., Mt 11:2-6; Lk 7:18-28; Mt 12:18-21; Mk 10:45; etc).<sup>22</sup> In this way, Jesus not only reveals his familiarity with the Parables of Enoch, and its unique representation of the ancient Hebrew texts, but also his intention to fulfil its messianic prophecy to the fullest extent. By implication, the same text can provide insight into the messianic consciousness of Jesus himself, and how he interpreted his mission as Messiah Son of Man.

This makes the Parables an invaluable source for the scholarly reconstruction of the historical Jesus,<sup>23</sup> although first it is necessary to demonstrate, with as much certainty as possible, that Jesus had direct contact with the text of the Parables and that it did actually influence him.

#### 1. Direct Contact:

Arbel was only a day’s walk from Nazareth, where Jesus passed his early years, so it would have been easy for him to visit the Essene community at the Arbel cave village. Josephus informs us that selected young men were accepted by Essene communities for up to two to three years before having to take the oath of membership<sup>24</sup> and, furthermore, that Josephus availed himself of this opportunity

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<sup>20</sup> The term ‘Son of Man’ occurs 84 times in the New Testament and 81 of those are in the Gospels, where it is found as a self-reference on the lips of Jesus. It is almost never used by anyone addressing or referring to Jesus (other titles are used, such as ‘Son of God’, ‘Christ’, ‘Lord’ and ‘Saviour’, but never ‘Son of Man’). After the end of the first century CE, the meaning of the term ‘Son of Man’ changed and was used to refer to Christ’s human, as opposed to his divine, nature. According to the rules of dissimilarity (the unique use of this title by Jesus himself and by none of his followers) and multiple attestation (its occurrence in sources of diverse origin), the use of this title by Jesus, in reference to himself, is now deemed to be authentic. In Matthew’s Gospel alone it is used in the context of eschatological judgment at 10:23, 13:41-43, 16:27-28, 19:28, 24:27, 24:30-31, 24:37-39, 24:44, 25:31-32, 26:64. For the rationale behind the Jesus’ use of the Son of Man title, see [https://www.academia.edu/111586920/Reframing\\_the\\_Son\\_of\\_Man\\_Debate](https://www.academia.edu/111586920/Reframing_the_Son_of_Man_Debate).

<sup>21</sup> There may be others, but none have survived. As we will see, other factors make it almost certain that Jesus was influenced by the Parables of Enoch.

<sup>22</sup> The titles can therefore be understood as verbal cues to the roles described in Isaiah. But Isaiah’s descriptions were prophecies of a real person who would have an effective role on earth. So, by embracing the prophecies of Isaiah, among others, the Parables of Enoch was also referring to a real person who would appear physically, *in persona*, on earth, at a certain time. He is not just a heavenly figure seated upon the throne of judgment. This is particularly evident in *IEn* 48:4-5, 7 and 62:7. Unless the “Chosen One” appear physically he cannot properly support, enlighten, console or be worshipped as saviour in all nations (*IEn* 48:4-5, 7; cf. Lk 2:32, Acts 13:47; 26:23), nor can he be revealed and recognized as Messiah (*IEn* 62:7; cf. Mt 16:16-17 et par.). Neither, as the “Righteous One” (*IEn* 38:2, 53:6; cf. Is 53:12), can his sacrificial death atone for the sins of the many (e.g., Mk 10:45). The historical incarnation of the heavenly figure in the Parables of Enoch is therefore demanded by the immense biblical significance of the titles attributed to him.

<sup>23</sup> Not just the historical Jesus, but also the suprahistorical Jesus of Christian worship, see n. 44 at the end of this essay.

<sup>24</sup> Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War* 2:137-142 and also 1QS 6:13-23.

to learn about the Essenes when he was 16 years of age (c. 55 CE).<sup>25</sup> It is eminently possible that Jesus joined the Essene community at Arbel, as an adolescent, in order to pursue his devotion to Scripture (cf. Lk 2:41-52), while advancing in “wisdom, and age and favor before God and man” (Lk 2:52). This would have the virtue of explaining how he came to have a profound grasp of Essene discipline, hermeneutics and worldview, despite the absence of any record of contact with the Essenes of Qumran.<sup>26</sup>

It is now widely accepted that the Book of Parables was written at the turn of the era, within a few years of the birth of Jesus. Jesus would have been eligible to stay as a guest in the Essene community, as a teenager, between 10-15 CE., at a time when the Parables of Enoch was still fresh in the minds of the community. It would have been recited and discussed among the members and the author of that work could still have been alive. These considerations are sufficient to assert ‘external plausibility’ for the young Jesus of Nazareth to have personally, and directly, encountered the Parables of Enoch, and even its author.

## 2. The Question of Influence

The next step is to present evidence that Jesus was indeed influenced by the content of the Parables of Enoch. A high degree of influence can be established if, and only if, the original document has at least one unique feature which appears in the work of a later author, or in the expression of the person who is suspected of having been influenced by it, or both, as in this case of an author (the Evangelist) describing a person (Jesus Christ). A common feature that is ‘unique’ (i.e., not known to have been transmitted by any other source up to that time) and explicable only in terms of ‘direct relationship’ (i.e., first-hand, not second or third hand) is highly likely to represent a significant degree of “influence”. As explained above, the unique feature of the Parables of Enoch which comes directly through Jesus, according to the sayings attributed to him in the Gospels, is the association of ‘the Anointed One’, i.e., the Messiah, with the designation ‘Son of Man’, and with the role of eschatological judge. This combination of designations and roles is unique to the Parables of Enoch and to Jesus of Nazareth, making it highly likely that Jesus was influenced by that text.

There is indeed a striking temporal and geographical match between the date and place of the composition of the Parables of Enoch (c. 1 CE), the age at which Jesus could have visited the community at Mount Arbel (c.10-15 CE) and its proximity to his home in Nazareth. As we have seen, direct and prolonged contact with the Essenes of the Arbel cave village is consistent with Jesus’ evident familiarity with Essene customs, hermeneutics and apocalyptic worldview, and the influence of the messianic prophecy in the Parables of Enoch is evident in Jesus’ identification with the roles of the messianic figure at the centre of that prophecy, variously called the ‘Chosen One’, the ‘Righteous One’, the ‘Anointed One’ (or ‘Messiah’) and ‘that/this Son of Man’.

## Enoch as Son of Man

The precise way by which Jesus came to identify with ‘that/this Son of Man’, in the Parables of Enoch, is not known, but this important detail may have been conveyed in the final chapter of the Parables of Enoch, in chapter 71. This chapter describes a scene in which Enoch, the righteous scribe and seer, ascends to the highest heaven and is transformed into ‘that Son of Man’, whom he had

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<sup>25</sup> Josephus Flavius, *Life* 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus, the Essenes, and Christian Origins: New Light on Ancient Texts and Communities*, Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2018; and, on a more popular level, John Bergsma, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Revealing the Jewish Roots of Christianity*, New York: Image, 2019.

previously seen and described in earlier parts of the book (*IEn* 71:13-14; cf. *IEn* 46:1-3). If Enoch had long ago been appointed to this role, according to the apotheosis described in chapter 71, then Jesus would appear to be mistaken in adopting the term ‘Son of Man’ in reference to himself.

There are four ways of approaching this suspiciously incongruent chapter: the first is by common sense, the second is with tradition history, the third is by literary criticism and fourth is with theological discernment.

1. The first approach leads to the overwhelming conviction that Jesus was correct in taking the term Son of Man to himself, because it has passed the test of time and a large proportion of the world’s population nowadays identifies him with that messianic title and role. On the contrary, very few people are even aware that Enoch was also appointed to that exalted position, so the claim that he is ‘that Son of Man’ appears to have been short-lived. The reason for this is not hard to discern, for Enoch’s apotheosis in chapter 71 results in his identification with the heavenly figure whom he had objectively seen and described previously in the visions granted to him. We are supposed to believe, apparently, that the Messiah Son of Man whom Enoch had been seeing and describing in heaven was Enoch himself, though he failed to recognize this fact until he was belatedly informed in chapter 71.<sup>27</sup> To the uncomplicated mind, it is not a mystery when a person cannot recognize himself, either on earth or in heaven, but rather it is a mental aberration or a literary fiction. Even the most learned theological reasoning cannot give a satisfactory explanation for this bizarre merging of Enoch’s identity with that of the heavenly Messiah Son of Man.<sup>28</sup>

2. The second approach focuses on relevant ‘history of traditions’ research presented at the Enoch Seminar meeting at Camaldoli, Italy in 2005. By studying the titles and roles of the Patriarch Enoch in the earliest traditions about him and tracing their trajectory up through the centuries to those of his exalted counterpart Metatron of Talmudic times, Andrei Orlov made an important observation on the relation of this trajectory to the profile of Enoch in the Parables of Enoch: “As I researched this transition from Enoch to Metatron, it became more and more clear to me that the roles and titles found in the Book of Parables do not represent a crucial link between the roles and titles of Enoch and the roles and titles of Metatron. Thus, a glance at the roles and titles of the seventh antediluvian hero from the point of view of the Metatron tradition, as with the earlier Enochic texts, indicates discontinuity rather than continuity”.<sup>29</sup>

For William Adler this is Orlov’s main finding: “as in other cases, the Book of Parables is the outlier. Elsewhere in 1 Enoch, Enoch is diviner, primeval sage, expert in secrets, scribe mediator, and heavenly priest. And the titles applied to him bear some discernable relationship to at least one of these functions (mainly that of a scribe). In the Book of Parables everything is different. Here the titles “Righteous One,” “Anointed One”, “Chosen One” and “Son of Man” refer to a preexistent enthroned figure, only ambiguously connected with the Patriarch himself. Unlike the titles found in other parts of 1 Enoch, they do not appear to originate in Mesopotamian tradition. Rather they are connected with motifs from Jewish scriptures. Used almost interchangeably, these titles do not bear

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<sup>27</sup> Bauckham compares chapter 71 to the solving of a murder mystery (“*Son of Man*”, 80). The result may be shocking or surprising, but there were small hints in the text preparing the perceptive reader for this bizarre denouement. The implication that the author’s intention was to entertain his readers by maintaining suspense until the end points to a category mistake. My view of the author’s intention is very different and follows in the text.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., John J. Collins, *The Sceptre and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2010; 201, where Collins dismisses James VanderKam’s attempt to provide a spiritual explanation for this odd situation.

<sup>29</sup> Andrei Orlov, ‘Roles and Titles of the Seventh Antediluvian Hero in the Parables of Enoch: A Departure from the Traditional Pattern’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 110-136, quote from 134.



any clearly identifiable connection with the roles Enoch plays in the Parables. “The Book of Parables,” writes Orlov, “refuses to depict in any way Enoch’s participation in various offices that stand behind his titles.” Enoch is called “Son of Man” in the Parables, but as Orlov points out, he “in no way attempts to execute the offices pertaining to this and the other titles.” Perhaps Orlov’s most surprising finding is what he does not find, namely a connection between the Enoch of the Parables and the exalted Enoch found in the later traditions about Enoch-Metatron”.<sup>30</sup>

For those who claim that chaps. 70:3-4 and 71 of the Parables of Enoch are an integral part of the book, making sense of this “departure from the traditional pattern” is not easy. Adler suggests it represents an attempt to “mainstream” the figure of Enoch by giving him an importance that is closer to known Biblical sources, but then admits that does not seem to have succeeded. The exalted titles attributed to Enoch in the Parables are “dropped almost entirely in the Merkabah tradition”, according to Orlov. Adler concludes that “a potentially promising path in the “Enoch trajectory” ends up a dead end.”<sup>31</sup> Although neither Orlov nor Adler discuss the alternative conclusion, it does make better sense of their observations: it is that chaps. 70:3-4 and 71 of the Parables of Enoch are not an integral part of the book, but are a later addition, and the figure of Enoch was never intended to receive the titles and roles that are attributed to ‘that Son of Man’ in the rest of the book. Furthermore, if these verses were removed from the Book of Parables, Enoch would return to his traditional role as a scribe of heavenly mysteries, and the Parables could then be readmitted to a place in the “Enoch trajectory”.

3. The literary critical approach has been applied in recent decades by various specialists in the field, most effectively in the studies of Knibb, Nickelsburg and Collins.<sup>32</sup> Their literary dissection of the text of the Parables exposes inconsistencies in style and content between chapter 71 and the rest of the Book of Parables, as it has come down to us in the surviving Ge’ez manuscripts. Their works all point to the conclusion that chapter 71 was a later addition, a kind of appendix, to the original document. Without knowing Ge’ez, I must rely on these scholar’s authority and expertise, but nevertheless find their conclusions amply supported by another observation on the incongruity of chapter 71 in its present form.<sup>33</sup> After an obvious conclusion to the main body of the text written in the third person (*1En* 70:1-2), thus mirroring the opening verse (*1En* 37:1), Enoch returns to relate—in the first person—how, at the end of his life, he was finally taken up to the highest heaven, where he undergoes a total transformation to become, incredibly, that same divine ‘Son of Man’, whom he had seen and described in the previous chapters. However, since there is no explanation how, in his divinely exalted state, he then managed to communicate his heavenly experience back to earth, the reader is left ‘up in the air’ with the impression this whole chapter is an afterthought, artfully composed by another hand.

At the end of his masterful commentary on the Parables of Enoch, Nickelsburg writes: “In conclusion, the three parables and chap. 71 differ from one another in their recasting of material from the Book of Watchers. The three parables and chap. 71 differ from one another in their portrayals of

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<sup>30</sup> William Adler, ‘A Dead End in the Enoch Trajectory: A Response to Andrei Orlov’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 137-142, quote is from 137-38.

<sup>31</sup> Adler, ‘A Dead End in the Enoch Trajectory’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 142.

<sup>32</sup> John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2010; 196-205; ‘Enoch and the Son of Man: A Response to Sabino Chialà and Helge Kvanvig’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 216-237; George W.E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 37-82*, Hermeneia Series, Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2012, 320-332; Michael Knibb, ‘The Structure and Composition of the Parables of Enoch’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 62-63; and the bibliography given there.

<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to George Nickelsburg (*1 Enoch* 2, 322, 331) for this observation.

the function of the Son of Man. Finally, some elements of both 70:3-4 and 71:3-4 are best explained as additions to the body of the Parables. If these sections, and especially chap. 71, are additions to the three Parables, there are no grounds for asserting that the “author(s)” and first transmitters of the Parables believed that the Righteous One / Chosen One, Anointed One / Son of Man was or would be the ancient Patriarch Enoch”.<sup>34</sup>

This unavoidable conclusion has not gone unchallenged by scholars intent on demonstrating the coherence of chapter 71 with the rest of the text, but their dependence on verbal and thematic connections is unpersuasive, given that substantial harmonization has occurred due to textual adjustment and transmission through several languages, over two millennia, starting with the redactor who appended chapter 71.

4. The theological approach to Enoch’s apotheosis in chapter 71 of the Parables of Enoch is profound and provides material for further reflection. Without presuming influence one way or the other,<sup>35</sup> Daniel Boyarin was struck by the resemblance between the elevation and divinization of Enoch in *1 Enoch* 70-71 and the ascension and glorification of Jesus narrated in the Gospels. Agreeing that chapters 70-71 represent a strand of tradition different from that of the main part of the Book of Parables, Boyarin concludes that the fusion of both parts “helps illuminate the cultural, religious context in which the Gospels were produced”.<sup>36</sup>

Peter Schäfer takes the matter further by stressing that, quite apart from the inconsistencies in style and content between chapter 71 and the rest of the Book of Parables (also known as ‘Similitudes’), there is an even more glaring incongruity in its theology: “the Son of Man–Enoch in chapters 70-71 is indeed a human being who becomes God, or rather godlike, but the Son of Man in the main part of the Similitudes is certainly not a God who became human, came down to earth and then returned to heaven. Still, it is precisely the incarnation that is missing in the Similitudes”.<sup>37</sup>

There appears to be a theological void between the divine and pre-existent Son of Man, who manifests himself in a ‘theophany’ to the human Enoch in *1 Enoch* 37-70, and the human Enoch who supposedly became divinized as ‘that Son of Man’ in the ‘apotheosis’ of *1 Enoch* 71. Theologically it is a *non-sequitur*: Enoch cannot become the pre-existent and divine Son of Man, unless that Son of Man first becomes incarnate in his human form. However, this divine ‘condescension’ is nowhere to be found in the Parables of Enoch, or in any other strand of contemporary Jewish tradition. The only place the innovative concept of ‘divine incarnation’ is to be found in Second Temple literature is in the Gospels’ account of Jesus Christ, who remains the unique historical incarnation of the Son of Man.

It is therefore highly significant that the author has chosen to adapt the words of Enoch’s commissioning in a subtle, almost imperceptible way, to indicate the incarnation has already taken place in him: “*You (are) that Son of Man who was born for righteousness, and righteousness dwells on you, and the righteousness of the Head of Days will not forsake you*” (*1 En* 71:14).<sup>38</sup> He has

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<sup>34</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch* 2, 332.

<sup>35</sup> Even though more and more studies are uncovering the influence of the Book of Parables on various parts of the New Testament, and its sources, it should be said that Boyarin, for reasons best known to himself, often denies the possibility of influence, going so far as to write “the Gospels are certainly not drawing on the Similitudes...”, and “Since there is no reason in the world to think these two texts influenced each other...”. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, New York: New Press, 2012; 82-95, quotes are from 94 and 95.

<sup>36</sup> *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, 82-95, quote is from 94.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Schäfer, *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity*, Princeton: Princeton Press, 2020; 49-53, quote is from 52.

<sup>38</sup> This passage and the next are quoted from the commentary of Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch* 2, 321. As noted by Nickelsburg in his comments on *1 En* 71: 13-14: “The present passage is the only one in the Parables that refers to the Son of Man being “born””, *1 Enoch* 2, 328.

clearly modelled this pronouncement on the words of the angel of peace to Enoch in a very similar context, earlier in the text: “*This is the son of man who has righteousness, and righteousness dwells with him, and all the treasures of what is hidden he will reveal*” (*IEn* 46:3).

Nevertheless, to state that the divine and preexistent “Son of Man was born” would have been blasphemous to the Jewish mind at that time (cf. *Jn* 8:58-59),<sup>39</sup> unless the ‘incarnation’ was, by then, a familiar concept among the hearers and readers. As this seems to be case, it is reasonable to infer, firstly, that the author was addressing a Christianized audience after the Church had been established and, secondly, that he was well acquainted with the Church’s proclamation of Jesus Christ’s incarnation and divinity. In this early Christian context, the author’s focus on the part of Enoch’s afterlife that most resembled the ascension and glorification of Jesus Christ indicates that his main concern was to describe the ‘divinization’ of Enoch in chap. 71 in such a way as to reassign the role of the ‘Son of Man’ from Jesus Christ to Enoch. As a result, Enoch’s ‘divinization’ scene (*IEn* 71:9-17) not only represents a divine aggrandizement of Enoch and his followers, but also a direct challenge to those Christians, and Essene converts to Christianity, who were attributing the ‘Son of Man’ role to Jesus Christ. With a few hundred carefully chosen words, the account of Enoch’s divinization in chapter 71 refuted the identification of Christ as the ‘Son of Man’, because Enoch had supposedly been appointed to that role long before.

In all four approaches presented above, chapter 71 is revealed as a tendentious addition to the original text of the Parables of Enoch. It is, in fact, a carefully crafted ‘anti-witness’ to the Church’s claims about Jesus.

## The ‘Anti-Witness’ of Chapter 71

In all likelihood, Christian leaders became aware of this challenge when the Parables of Enoch, originally written by a single author and issued as a separate document,<sup>40</sup> was published in the compilation now known as *I Enoch*, along with several additions and interpolations from other hands, including chapter 71. Since the Q source of Matthew’s Gospel shows familiarity with the Noahide interpolations (*Mt* 24:37-39; *Lk* 17:22-37), but Mark’s Gospel does not, the date of the new Enoch corpus would have preceded Matthew’s Gospel. Allowing time for editorial work and copying, and taking account of the disorder caused by the first Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE), it would be reasonable to date this ‘new edition’ of *I Enoch* to the decade before the Jewish Revolt, which was indeed a time of heightened tension between traditional Judaism and the Early Church—tension that led to the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Church, in 62 CE. It would therefore be reasonable to date chapter 71 of the Parables of Enoch to the period between 55 and 65 CE.<sup>41</sup>

We can go further and speculate on how and why chapter 71 was composed. One plausible suggestion is that when Jesus of Nazareth set out to fulfil the messianic prophecy announced in the Parables of Enoch,<sup>42</sup> he created a split in the Essene movement, between those who accepted him as the Messiah Son of Man and became Christians (cf. *Acts* 2:41; 6:7), and those who did not. Some of

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<sup>39</sup> See also Israel Knohl, *The Messiah Confrontation: Pharisees versus Sadducees and the Death of Jesus*, Eng trans by David Maisel, Philadelphia PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2022; 73-87, 108.

<sup>40</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *I Enoch* 2, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *I Enoch* 2, 20, 71.

<sup>42</sup> I have made the case already at:

[https://www.academia.edu/88575655/The\\_Rise\\_and\\_Fall\\_of\\_the\\_Parables\\_of\\_Enoch\\_IEn\\_37\\_71\\_John\\_the\\_Baptist\\_Jesus\\_of\\_Nazareth\\_and\\_John\\_of\\_Patmos](https://www.academia.edu/88575655/The_Rise_and_Fall_of_the_Parables_of_Enoch_IEn_37_71_John_the_Baptist_Jesus_of_Nazareth_and_John_of_Patmos).

the older members may have remembered Jesus personally from the time he spent at their Arbel community during his teens, 40-55 years before.

Quite apart from any religious objections they may have had against Jesus Christ, or against his followers, the non-Christian Essenes would have been outraged at the Church's divisive impact on their community. A re-unifying response was needed and the author of chapter 71 answered this need by composing the extra chapter and inserting it at the end of the Parables of Enoch. By identifying the antediluvian scribe Enoch as the Messiah Son of Man, chapter 71 not only blocked the Christian claim that he was Jesus Christ, but also reclaimed the Parables of Enoch for the non-Christian Essenes.

However, in order to replace Jesus by Enoch, the author of chapter 71 had to explain how Enoch, a mere human being, had assumed the identity of the Messiah Son of Man, whom he had just described as a divine and preexistent individual in the heavenly visions granted to him. He achieved this objective by describing Enoch's 'divinization' in a way that resembled, in outline, the ascension and glorification of Jesus Christ. But why would he stop with the outline? It is possible, though unprovable, that the author also appropriated, from Jesus, the unique wording of the divinization experience in *1En* 71:14. If this was the case, the divine words addressed to Enoch by the Almighty, "*You are that Son of Man who was born for righteousness...*" (*1En* 71:14, cf. 46:3), could indeed be a reflection of the actual words addressed to Jesus, after he had heard the messianic prophecy of the Parables. These words would therefore represent the divine calling received by Jesus and informing him that he was the divinely chosen Messiah Son of Man. Understanding Jesus's adoption of the title 'Son of Man' as the result of a divine calling would explain the strength of his radical, 'inborn' identification with 'that Son of Man' in the Parables of Enoch, and his modification of this expression into a personal title, as it appears in the Gospels.

If it sounds too far-fetched to assume that the divine words addressed to Jesus were remembered by the author of chapter 71, then we should imagine what a memorable event it must have been, around 10-15 CE, for the Essene community at Arbel to learn that one of its young guests had experienced a divine calling of this import, directly related to their own messianic prophecy in the Parables. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that, for the reasons mentioned above, a member of the same Essene community decided to write chapter 71 in order to rally his fellow members around Enoch and prevent their conversion to Christianity. He may have had other reasons for writing this chapter, such as opposition to the way the early Christian Church was developing at that time (c. 55-65 CE),<sup>43</sup> and this was his attempt to impede its progress.

The Christian response ensured the Parables of Enoch was eventually removed from every Christian institution, resulting in the loss of this important Christological key,<sup>44</sup> until its rediscovery

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<sup>43</sup> Essenes were strict observers of the Law and would have been reluctant to admit new converts from paganism without imposing on them every aspect of Jewish Law. Those on the periphery of the Christian movement may even have wanted to separate themselves entirely from the Church, because of the entry of unobservant, uncircumcised, ritually impure pagans.

<sup>44</sup> Several modern scholars have extolled the Parables of Enoch for its significance in understanding the principal elements of Christology, which in turn helps to bridge the gap between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of Faith. For example, Joel Marcus quips "With apologies to Voltaire, we may say that if the Enochic Son of Man had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent him to explain the Son of Man sayings in the Gospel" (*Mark 1-8: A New Testament Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27, New York: Doubleday, 2000, 530). Similarly, Crispin Fletcher-Louis writes that the Enochic Son of Man is "of inestimable significance for the understanding of both the *origins* and the *shape* of "Christological monotheism". On the matter of origins, it offers an obvious and straight-forward explanation of Christ devotion: the earliest Jewish believers worshipped Jesus because they believed he truly was, as he had claimed to

in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, carefully preserved by the Ethiopian Church. Under these new conditions, even chapter 71, which was written to refute the Church's proclamations, turns out to be a reluctant and somewhat contrary witness, an 'anti-witness', to the incarnation, ascension and glorification of Jesus Christ.

## Summary and Conclusions

The discovery of the ruins of an ancient Essene settlement at the Arbel cave village, of the same size as Qumran and established at the same time, contributes significantly to the portrait of the historical Jesus emerging from biblical research, especially to his so-called 'missing years'. Since ancient times, Arbel has been associated with the start of divine redemption and so it is no coincidence that the messianic prophecy expressed in the Parables of Enoch (*IEn* 37–71), composed around the turn of the first millennium, can also be traced to the Arbel cave village. Owing to the proximity of the Arbel cave village to Nazareth and the well documented hospitality of the Essenes for approved male adolescents, it is entirely plausible that Jesus of Nazareth was received as a guest during his late adolescence. A prolonged encounter of this kind would explain Jesus' known acquaintance with the Essene apocalyptic worldview, discipline and biblical interpretation. It would also explain the evident influence of the Parables of Enoch on his messianic awareness and mission, including his selection of the nearby lakeside area for the start of his public ministry. The evidence points to Jesus being the fulfilment of the messianic prophecy of the Parables of Enoch, in his person, in a way that explains the exalted Christology of the Early Church and bridges the gap between the historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith.

The question of how Jesus was made aware of his messianic mission was raised after discovering that the final chapter of the Parables of Enoch (chapter 71) was a later addition based on the ascension and glorification of Jesus and then applied retrospectively to Enoch. Understanding this chapter as an 'anti-witness' to Jesus Christ, composed and inserted by an antagonistic member of the Essene community, we conclude that the wording of Enoch's divine vocation in 1 *Enoch* 71:14 reflects the wording of the divine calling originally addressed to Jesus. This would explain his modification of the oft repeated expression 'this/that Son of Man' to the title 'Son of Man', and his personal adoption of this title as his preferred messianic designation, as reported in the Gospels.<sup>45</sup>

John Ben-Daniel,  
Old City Jerusalem.  
Pentecost, 2024

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be, the (preexistent) Son of Man they had been waiting for" (*Jesus Monotheism, Volume 1. Christological Origins: The Emerging Consensus and Beyond*, Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2015, 180). The quotations of both these authors are taken from Charles Giesen's 'The Importance of the Parables of *IEnoch*', 64-65 and 55 respectively.

<sup>45</sup> For the reason why this unique and personal title would have served him well, to conceal his messianic identity until his mission was complete, see [https://www.academia.edu/111586920/Reframing\\_the\\_Son\\_of\\_Man\\_Debate](https://www.academia.edu/111586920/Reframing_the_Son_of_Man_Debate) .