

The sign of the Son of man

"Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."—Matthew 24:30

Seen

Will the whole world see his "*coming*"? Yes.

[w97 5/15 p. 11 par. 8] Soon, though, Jesus will arrive "in his glory, and all the angels with him" in order to judge mankind as a whole. (Matthew 16:27; 25:31) At that time, he will reveal himself in all his magnificent glory and give to "each one" just recompense for his or her behavior. Sheeplike ones will inherit everlasting life in the Kingdom prepared for them, and goatlike ones will depart into "everlasting cutting-off."

(Matthew 16:27) For the Son of man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will repay each one according to his behavior.

(Matthew 25:31) "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will put the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left.

No More

But what about the scripture in John where Jesus says: "*the world will see me no more*"?

(John 14:19) In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.

"*See me no more*" sounds permanent. Jesus uses a similar phrase at John 16:16:

(John 16:16) In a little while you will see me no longer, and again, in a little while you will see me."

Here John quotes Jesus as saying "*you will see me no longer*", and then follows it with saying that they "will" see him again. Is that a contradiction? If you interpret "*see me no longer*" to mean "never see me again", then yes it sounds contradictory. But if you view it as in the present tense, as if to say "will not be able to see me", then no it is not a contradiction. "*No more*" and "*no longer*" do not necessarily have the meaning of "never gain". Examples:

(Judges 5:7) The villagers in Israel were no more; They were no more until I, Deb'o-rah, rose up, Until I arose as a mother in Israel.

The villagers were "*no more*", until Deborah rose up. So "*no more*" was not permanent.

(2 Kings 2:12) When he could no longer see him, he took hold of his own garments and ripped them into two pieces.

Elisha was not saying that he would never see him again, but merely that Elijah was out of sight.

And Christ himself even clarifies what he meant:

(John 16:17) At that some of his disciples said to one another: "What does he mean by saying to us, 'In a little while you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me,' and, 'because I am going to the Father'?"

(John 16:19) Jesus knew they wanted to question him, so he said to them: "Are you asking one another this because I said: 'In a little while you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me'?"

So according to Christ's own clarification it seems that John 14:19 is just saying: "In a little while the world will not be able to see me."

At John 16:10 Christ says that the reason they will see him no longer is because he is *"going to the Father"*. Once there man will not be able to see him. Why? Because he is going into that *"unapproachable light,"* where *"no man has seen or can see."* (1Tim 6:16)

Other Scriptures

What do other scripture say that touch on this topic?

(Matthew 23:37, 39) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem,...³⁹ ..., you will by no means see me from now until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in Jehovah's name!'"

(Matthew 24:29, 30) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

(Mark 13:24-26) "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,²⁵ and the stars will be falling out of heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ And then they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

(Luke 21:27) And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

(Acts 1:11) and said: "Men of Gal'i-lee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who was taken up from you into the sky will come in the same manner as you have seen him going into the sky."

(It does not say: "in the same manner as you could not see him going".)

(Revelation 1:7) Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief because of him. Yes, Amen.

All of those scriptures tell us that he will be seen again. But in what manner will he be seen?

How Seen?

(Matthew 16:27) For the Son of man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will repay each one according to his behavior.

(Matthew 24:30-31) Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to their other extremity.

(Matthew 25:31-33) “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will put the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left.

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(Revelation 1:7) Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief because of him. Yes, Amen.

Jesus is seen coming “*with great power and glory*”. How does one display “*power and glory*”? Picture a scene where you are standing on a castle wall looking out over a barren landscape. You see a single man, a king, on a horse riding towards you. Regardless of what he is wearing or the color of his horse, would that lone rider be displaying “*great power and glory*”? No. Now picture that he is leading an immense army of soldiers stretching as far as the eye can see in all directions, all dressed for war and marching in battle formation, the ground shaking from their collective footsteps. Now is the king displaying “*great power and glory*”? Most definitely yes!

Daniel saw in a vision a man coming with the clouds and the man was not obscured or hidden by the clouds:

(Daniel 7:13) “I kept watching in the visions of the night, and look! with the clouds of the heavens, someone like a son of man was coming; and he gained access to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him up close before that One.

Perhaps 2 Kings 6:16, 17 is a clue as to what will be seen by the whole earth.

(2 Kings 6:16, 17) But he said: “Do not be afraid! For there are more who are with us than those who are with them.” ¹⁷ Then E-li’sha began to pray and say: “O Jehovah, open his eyes, please, that he

may see.” Immediately Jehovah opened the attendant’s eyes and he saw, and look! the mountainous region was full of horses and war chariots of fire all around E-li’sha.

Perhaps the skies will be filled with the army of angels that accompany *"the son of man"*. Not every person will see Jesus himself, but all will see the part of his army that fills the sky above them, which is the sign that marks his *"coming"*. That would surely cause all of the wicked *"tribes of the earth"* to *"beat themselves in grief."*

The Sign

Only Matthew 24:30 mentions a *"sign of the Son of man"*, and since the parallel scriptures just state that he will be seen coming in the clouds, it seems to me that *"the sign of the Son of man"* is his angelic army in the skies above us. The visible angels that fill the skies would cause the one looking to "see" or realize that Christ has also come.

Also note that it does not say "[**then**] *they will see the Son of man coming*" but it says **"and they will see the Son of man coming"**, showing that his *"coming"* is not after the sign, but during it or part of it. Perhaps if Matthew 24:30 was translated this way it would better convey the meaning of the verse:

*"Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven [**causing**] all the tribes of the earth [**to**] beat themselves in grief [**because**] they see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*

What Next?

What happens when Jesus comes on the clouds with *"all the angels"*?

(Matthew 16:27) For the Son of man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will repay each one according to his behavior.

(Matthew 24:29-31) “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to their other extremity.

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glory. ²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from earth's extremity to heaven's extremity.

(Revelation 1:7) Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief because of him. Yes, Amen.

When?

When does he come in "*glory*" and do all of those things?

(Matthew 24:29) "Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

(Mark 13:24) "But in those days, **after** that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

Tribulation

So he comes "*with power and great glory*" after "*that tribulation*". But what is the tribulation those scriptures speak of? Is it "*the Great Tribulation*" of Revelation 7:14?

(See my article "*The Great Tribulation - Discussion*" regarding what tribulation Matthew and Mark are referring to.)

After the Great Tribulation

Are those scriptures describing what will occur after Armageddon? No. The things that Jesus is described as doing after the Great Tribulation at his coming, occur before Armageddon. What follows Armageddon is Christ's millennial reign, at which point the wicked will have already been destroyed.

Current JW teaching is that Armageddon is part of the Great Tribulation, which means that saying "after the great tribulation" is the same as saying "after Armageddon". How can he come to judge and separate the sheep from the goats "after Armageddon" when at that point there will be no wicked to separate out and no "*tribes of the earth*" to "*beat themselves in grief*"?

It seems to me that Armageddon is not part of the great tribulation but a separate occurrence that follows it since the things that occur at Armageddon occur "after" the Great Tribulation has ended and not during it.

The Ones

What about Revelation 7:14?

(Revelation 7:14) So right away I said to him: "My lord, you are the one who knows." And he said to me: "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

That scripture is talking about the great crowd. Since the remnant are not collected to heaven until after the Great Tribulation then they also "*come out of the great tribulation*". Does that contradict the words "*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation*" as if they are the only ones who "*come out of the great tribulation*"? No. From looking at the original Greek it seems to me that Revelation 7:14 is merely pointing out that the great crowd are the "ones" who "*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" Also remember that punctuation marks like the comma after "*great tribulation*" were added much later. A more literal translation of the original Greek would be:

"These are those coming out of the tribulation the great and they washed the robes of them and made white them in the blood of the lamb"

In other words:

"These coming out of the great tribulation are the ones that have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

They are singled out as the "ones", not because they are the only ones to come out of the great tribulation, but because they alone "*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*". Many others also come out because it is after the Great Tribulation has ended that the chosen ones are gathered to heaven, the sheep and goats are separated, and the tribes of the earth beat themselves in grief. So the remnant, the great crowd, the goats, and the wicked tribes all come out of the Great Tribulation. But the goats and the wicked tribes do not make it through Armageddon, showing that it is a separate occurrence.

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At Matthew 24:3 the disciples asked Jesus what the sign will be of his presence.

(Matthew 24:3) While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately, saying: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?"

For details on that subject see my article "Presence".

What do *you* think?

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