

# THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN: FIVE EVENTS MATHEW 24:29–31

## ***Introduction: Jesus Christ, Return — Distress — Tribulation — Israel:***

Christ revealed exactly when He was to return — “immediately after the distress [tribulation] of those days.” The great distress [tribulation] occurs, then our Lord returns — “immediately.” (See notes Mt. 24:1-28 for background to this passage.)

1. Now note: Christ did not return immediately after the downfall of Jerusalem; therefore, what did He mean? Luke explains:

***Luke 21:23-24*** “How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Very simply, Christ said that the fall of Jerusalem was only the beginning of the distress or tribulation of the Jews. Their distress or tribulation continues until “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” The accuracy of the Lord’s words is clearly seen by simply breaking down the verses of Luke and thinking through world history since Christ.

- ⇒ There is still “great distress in the land” of Israel.
- ⇒ There is still “great wrath against this people.”
- ⇒ Many Jews still “fall by the sword.”
- ⇒ Many are still “prisoners [dispersed] in all nations.”
- ⇒ Jerusalem is still “trampled on by the Gentiles.”

No people have ever gone through such great distress or tribulation as the Jews. They are still suffering at the hands of the Gentiles (for example, World War II, where over 5,000,000 were slaughtered in less than eight years); and they shall suffer great distress or tribulation “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” It is *immediately after the great distress or tribulation of the Jews* and *after the great distress or tribulation* coming at the end of the world that the coming of Christ shall take place.

Note a very significant fact: Luke’s prophecy definitely points toward the double meaning of Christ’s words. Since the *great distress or tribulation* of the Jews in 70 A.D. (see v. 20), they have continued to suffer *great distress [tribulation]* through the present age, and they shall suffer right on through the great distress [tribulation] that is to occur at the end of the world.

2. Also note it is immediately after the “*great distress [tribulation]*” of the world (v. 21) that Christ returns (see *End Time*, Mt. 24:1-31; notes, 24:1-14; 24:15-28).
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- I. He comes immediately after the tribulation or distress (v. 29).
- II. Event 1: there will be astronomical happenings (v. 29).
- III. Event 2: the sign of Christ will appear (v. 30).
- IV. Event 3: all the nations will see Christ coming in the clouds (v. 30).
- V. Event 4: all the nations of the earth will mourn (v. 30).
- VI. Event 5: the angels will be sent forth to gather the elect (v. 31).

### **I. *Mathew 24:29 Return of Jesus Christ after the Distress or Tribulation***

The scene is immediately after the distress or tribulation (see note, Mt. 24:29-31).

**Thought 1.** There are several lessons in the words “after the distress [tribulation]” — lessons for us as well as for those who will follow Christ through the tribulation.

- 1) God is in control. He can, does and will end the trials. Note the word “*after* the distress [tribulation].” There *shall* be an end to all the trials of the distress or tribulation.
- 2) God’s people are to look to Him and hope in Him. The end of all trials is coming.
- 3) God’s people are always to be waiting and watching for the Lord’s return.

### **II. *Mathew 24:29 Jesus Christ and Astronomical Happenings***

The very first event to occur when Christ returns in glory will be astronomical happenings. The heavenly bodies — the sun, moon, stars and “the heavenly bodies” — will be affected.

Note the exact words of the astronomical happenings.

- => “The sun will be darkened.”
- => “The moon will not give its light.”
- => “The stars will fall from heaven.”
- => “The heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Very practically, such astronomical happenings occur now. The earth is sometimes darkened by dust from earthly catastrophes such as volcanic eruptions, wind storms, and smoke from huge fires. Of course, whatever darkens the sun hides the light of the moon from earth. Stars or meteorites of varying sizes fall throughout space often. “The heavenly bodies” being shaken could be the heavenly bodies outside our solar system that are called by the Bible “all the heavenly array” (Deu 4:19).

Is this what Christ meant? There is no way to know for sure; however, it is likely that this is the meaning. *But note:* His coming is going to trigger astronomical happenings worldwide and universally. The whole universe is going to be affected, or to word it in a much more meaningful way: the whole universe is going to open up and receive

Him, including the astronomical bodies; and every man is going to know beyond any doubt that He is coming in all the power and the glory of God Himself. Christ says He is coming “with power and great glory.” He is coming that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Ph 2:10-11).

He is coming, and “all the nations of the earth will [know it] and mourn [for] they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.” The words “power and great glory” convey the idea that He is coming to subject all men, to rule and reign over all the nations or nations of the earth.

Scripture definitely reveals that astronomical happenings will precede and accompany the coming of the Lord.

**Isa 13:10-13** *The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.*

**Isa 24:17-22** *Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth. Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls — never to rise again. In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.*

**Joel 2:30-31** *I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*

**Joel 3:15-16** *The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.*

**Mark 13:24-25** *“But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”*

**Luke 17:29-30** *But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”*

**Luke 21:25-26** *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*

**Acts 2:19-20** *I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

**Rev 6:12-17** *I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair; the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (See notes, Rev. 6:12-17)*

Note the exact words of the verses in Revelation above, for they are referring to the same event as Christ (v. 30; see Rev 6:17). Christ triggers a great earthquake on earth and astronomical happenings in the heavens above (v. 12-14). Men, great and small, are terrified and hide themselves (v. 15) and cry for immediate death instead of having to face Christ (v. 16). Why? Because they know something: “The great day of God’s wrath has come; and who can stand?” (v. 17).

The disciples had asked, “What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?” And Christ is answering them. Terrifying astronomical happenings will be a sign.

**Thought 1.** Happenings in nature should cause us to turn our attention toward God. They are reminders of the *stressful* events that are to occur in the end time. As Christ said: “Stand up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption is drawing near” (Lk. 21:28). If we look up and trust Him *now*, catastrophes and circumstances can be borne much better. His presence with us assures us of strength and endurance and victory (Heb 12:3; see 1 Cor 10:13; Mt. 28:20; see Heb 13:5-6).

### III. **Mathew 24:30** *The Sign of the Return of Jesus Christ*

When Christ returns, there will be a second event to occur — there will be *the* sign of Christ’s appearing in the heavens. What is the sign? Christ does not specifically say. There are four different thoughts.

- => Some say the sign will be a star, just like the star that proclaimed His birth.
- => Others say it will be the Shekinah glory, His glory shining forth in all the splendour and brightness of God Himself. His glory will, of course, shine forth as described; but again, Christ does not say specifically that this is the sign.

- => Some, including many of the early church fathers, believe the sign will be the cross of Christ. There is no question that seeing the cross appear in the sky universally would attract attention and signal that something is about to happen. The cross is the symbol of Christianity and points toward the purpose of God in the world more than any other single thing.
- => Many believe the sign to be simply the appearance of the Son of Man Himself (Mt. 26:64; Dan 7:13-14).

Note four points.

1. When the sign appears, “all the nations of the earth will mourn.” They know exactly what the sign is and what it means: the judgment and rule and reign of Christ. The nations (people) do not have to guess and interpret what it means.
2. When the sign appears, “all the nations of the earth mourn...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky.”
3. The Lord says that His coming will be as lightning, quick and sudden (v. 27). Will there be time for a sign other than His personal appearance?
4. The disciples had asked about the *sign*: “What will be the sign of your coming...?” (v. 3). Christ gives them a number of signs. Perhaps He is simply saying, “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear.” This would, of course, be a fulfilment of Daniel’s well-known sign of the Son of Man and His coming (Dan 7:13-14).

Whatever the sign, there is one important thing to note: everyone knows exactly what it means. God’s Son is coming to judge and to rule and reign over all the earth.

**Mat 25:31-32** *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”*

**2 Pet 2:9** *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

**2 Pet 3:7** *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*

**Jude 1:14-15** *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

**Rev 20:11-15** *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book*

*was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

**Thought 1.** There will be a sign that triggers the coming of the Son of Man. Whatever the sign is, four things are certain.

- 1) *Now* the stars point toward the eternal power and Godhead and love of God in a beautiful creation. *Then* the stars shall point toward the wrath of God.
- 2) *Now* the Shekinah glory, the glory of God, shines before men calling them to righteousness. *Then* the Shekinah glory shall shine before men consuming them for their unrighteousness.
- 3) *Now* the cross stands before the world attracting the world to God. *Then* the cross shall stand before the world condemning the world.
- 4) *Now* Christ stands before the world as its Saviour. *Then* Christ shall stand before the world as its Judge.

**Thought 2.** There are sign(s) of Christ's presence *now*. There are also signs that His return is ever so near. How much better to *mourn* and repent now than to be left with nothing but *mourning* then. The day is coming when it will be too late to turn to Christ.

**Thought 3.** Today, every man is without excuse. There are sign(s) and evidence(s) that He is the Saviour of the world, God's very own Son. Much better to have the Son of Man appear now, in a person's heart and life by faith, than to have Him appear in the skies as a person's Judge (Heb 9:27; see Jn. 3:18).

#### **IV. *Mathew 24:30 All Men will See the Return of Jesus Christ***

The third event of the Lord's return is that it will be visible to all — all the nations of the earth will see Christ's coming in the clouds with power and great glory. There are four things said in this brief prophecy.

1. It is the Son of Man who will come. Christ claims He is the Son of Man, God's very own Son, the Ideal Man, the Perfect Man, the Son of God incarnate in human flesh (see *Jesus, the Son of Man*, Mt. 8:20). In that day, there will be no doubt about who He is (see Mk. 14:61-62). Right now, He is recognized only by believers, but then He will be recognized by all men. It will be unmistakable: He is the Son of Man.
2. All the nations of the earth will see His coming — visibly. How will everyone on earth, a round planet, see Him all at once? It is useless to speculate how God's power *works* (effects) any miracle. The point Christ is making is that His return will be

visible and that every man on earth will see Him and acknowledge Him to be the Son of Man (see Rev 1:7). (Note: the light — the great splendour and brightness — of the Lord's glory can easily be manifested throughout the universe and surround the earth when He returns.)

3. Christ will come in the clouds of the sky. In Scripture, clouds are often associated with God.

***Psa 18:10-12** He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning.*

***Psa 104:3** And lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.*

***Isa 19:1** An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.*

***Dan 7:13** "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 the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence."*

When Jesus departed this earth after His resurrection, He departed in a cloud, and it was foretold that He would return in a cloud (Acts 1:9-11). Christ clearly says that He is going to return in a cloud and every eye will see Him come in the clouds of heaven. There is a strong claim here, a claim to be the God of the clouds.

4. Christ will come with power and great glory. There are at least two points being stressed in this fact.
  - a. Christ will come in the full dignity of His person. He will not come as a babe in a manger who lives through the stages of life to secure salvation for man. He will come with power and great glory. He will come in all the omnipotence and glory of God, revealing just who He is.
  - b. Christ will come as a Judge to execute justice upon the earth. He will come to rule and reign in His rightful position as Sovereign Lord over the earth.

**Thought 1.** Every man will acknowledge Christ to be the Son of Man. There will not be a single exception.

=> Now, there is *voluntary* acknowledgement; then, there will be *involuntary* acknowledgement.

=> Now, there is *wilful* confession; then, there will be *enforced* confession.

=> Now, there is a *loving* appeal; then, there will be the *condemning* judgment.

*Acts 17:31* “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

*Rom 2:16* This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

*Phil 2:9-11* Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

*1 Pet 1:17* Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

## V. *Mathew 24:30 Mourning at the Return of Jesus Christ*

The fourth event is that all the nations of the earth will mourn when Christ returns in power and great glory. Why? Because they will see beyond any question that Christ is the Son of Man. They will realize that they ignored, neglected, rejected, abused and cursed Him. They will know that they have missed His salvation and that they are now to be judged. There is a picture of this great mourning in Revelation where “all the peoples of the earth...will mourn because of Him” (Rev 1:7). They wail and mourn because of the terrible judgment which is to be inflicted upon them.

Very simply, Christ is going to return, and every eye will see Him and know beyond any question that He is the Son of Man. The worldly will mourn because He comes as Judge; the elect will rejoice because they are to be gathered together with Him.

**Thought 1.** Every man has a choice. He mourns now, or he shall mourn when Christ returns. A man experiences a godly sorrow that leads to repentance now, or he shall experience a worldly sorrow that leads to eternal sorrow when Christ returns (see *Godly Sorrow and Worldly Sorrow*, 2 Cor 7:10).

*Acts 2:38* Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 8:22* Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

*2 Cor 7:10* Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

*Ezek 18:31* Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?



## **VI. *Mathew 24:31 Angels at the Return of Jesus Christ***

The fifth event of the Lord's coming is that the angels will be sent forth to gather the elect. There are four points made in this verse.

1. Christ will send forth *His* angels. He is God, the Lord of the angels. They are His; He is over them. They are at His beck and call to carry out His sovereign will. This' again is a claim to deity.
2. Christ will send forth His angels with "a loud trumpet call." The trumpet was used to call an assembly of the people together. This is probably the meaning here. (See 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Th. 4:16.)
3. The angels will gather together the Lord's elect. Only the elect will be gathered at this point. The elect may be but a few when compared to the mass of humanity. But there will be a remnant of genuine believers scattered all over the earth, a remnant who will have endured to the end. They will be saved (v. 13. See Mt. 20:16; 22:14.)

As Christ said:

**Luke 17:34-35** *"I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."* (see Mt. 24:40-41)

4. The elect will be gathered from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. The meaning is this: the elect will be scattered all over the world; they will be everywhere, in all nations of the world (see Deu 4:32; Rev 7:9). As Christ had just said:

**Mat 24:14** *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony unto all nations; and then the end will come."*

**Thought 1.** There is one glorious hope for every believer, whatever his generation and the trials of it:

**Titus 2:13-14** *While we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

**Thought 2.** The angels are subject to Christ; we, too, should be subject to Him. The angels do His sovereign will; we, too, should do His sovereign will. If we administer His will now, we shall be in that select company in that glorious day.

**Thought 3.** Not a single believer will be missed when Jesus returns. No matter where we are or how isolated and lonely and forgotten, we may feel, He is coming for us. ■