

Matthew 10:23

“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

I. Where did the title “Son of Man” come from and what does it mean?

Only in the Gospel of John does Jesus *occasionally* refer to Himself as “*the Son of God*”, and He *never* refers to Himself as “*the Son of David*.” Instead, Jesus most often refers to Himself as “*the Son of Man*”. Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man, but while He was here on earth on one else ever referred to Him in this way (Son of David was more likely). So why did Jesus refuse to call Himself the Son of David (though He *was* the Son of David; Mat. 22:41-45)? Well, Jesus knew that people had a lot of wrong ideas about the Son of David and so He didn’t want to encourage their misguided expectations by referring to Himself as the Son of David. So then where did Jesus get the title “Son of Man”? And what is the meaning of this title? We see first of all that Jesus took the title “Son of Man” from Daniel 7:13-14.

- ✓ Daniel 7:13-14 – “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven *there came one like a son of man*, and *he came* to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

By using the title “Son of Man” (instead of “Son of David”), Jesus could avoid encouraging the false expectations of the crowds. The people did not connect Daniel’s “son of man” with the promised Messiah. On the other hand, for anyone who had read Daniel and put two and two together, “Son of Man” would still be a pretty obvious pointer to Jesus’ exalted status!

II. How did Jesus use the title “Son of Man”?

Jesus would often refer to Himself as the Son of Man with no other connections to Daniel’s vision (“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” – Mat. 8:20). People probably wouldn’t have put this together with Daniel’s vision. Sometimes, Jesus would refer to Himself as the “Son of Man” in connection with His coming sufferings (“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death” – Mat. 20:18). Once again, the connection with Daniel’s vision is not obvious – except for those who already know who Jesus is. Sometimes, Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” in connection with His power and authority (“The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – Mat. 9:6; “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” – Mat. 12:8). In these places, it’s a little easier to put two and two together. But there were many times that Jesus *explicitly* referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” in light of the heavenly picture of Daniel chapter seven. That’s why it is especially important that we understand Daniel’s heavenly vision!

III. What is the meaning of Daniel's vision and how is it fulfilled in the New Testament?

After seeing the rise and fall of four earthly kingdoms, Daniel sees one like a Son of Man *coming on the clouds of heaven* to the Ancient of Days and being presented before Him. After the son of man has come to the Ancient of Days, He is given everlasting dominion and glory and a kingdom so that all nations on the earth might (eventually) serve Him. So we get the picture of a coronation ceremony taking place in heaven in which *a human being(!)* actually *comes* on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, is crowned the King, and given all authority in heaven and on earth. What does this mean? And when was it fulfilled? In the New Testament, we see this royal “coming” of the Son of Man when He ascended into heaven after His resurrection from the dead and was presented before the Ancient of Days.

- ✓ Acts 7:55-56 – But [Stephen], full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and *the Son of Man* standing at the right hand of God.”

As Stephen spoke these words he no doubt had in mind the vision of Daniel. The Apostle John also had Daniel's vision in mind in Revelation chapter one:

- ✓ Revelation 1:12-18; 2:26-27; 3:21 (cf. 3:7) – Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw... *one like a son of man* [exact quote of Daniel], clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades... The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations... *even as I myself have received authority from my Father*... I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, *as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*”

When the Son of Man *comes* into heaven it is a picture of His coming into His royal authority and kingdom.

- ✓ Luke 23:42 – And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you *come* into your kingdom.”
- ✓ 1 Peter 3:21-22 (cf. Mat. 28:18; Rev. 12:5, 7-10) – Jesus Christ... has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers *having been* subjected to him.
- ✓ Hebrews 10:12-13 – When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, **he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting/[reigning; 1 Cor. 15:22-26, 51-54; Ps. 110:1-2] from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.**
- ✓ Cf. Eph. 1:20-23; 4:7-10; Acts 2:32-33; 5:30-31; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2; Col. 3:1; Rom. 8:34; Phil. 2:9-11

So we see that in Daniel, when the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven, He is definitely *not* coming to this earth. Instead, one like a Son of Man comes into the heavenly throne room of the Ancient of Days and sits down with the Ancient of Days on His throne! In the New Testament, we see this fulfilled in the ascension and exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God.

IV. Can Jesus “come” in different ways?

In all of the verses that we will look at in this study, the word for “come” is “erchomai”. When one like a son of man comes to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, the word for “come” is *erchomai* (LXX). And *erchomai* just means plain old “come”. So Jesus can “come” to the Ancient of Days at His ascension (“One like a son of man... came to the Ancient of Days” – Dan. 7:13). Jesus can “come” to this earth when He returns at the end of the age (“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will **come** in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” – Acts 1:11). Jesus can “come” to this earth in the incarnation and His birth as a baby (“[Your fathers] killed those who announced beforehand the **coming** of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered – Acts 7:52). Jesus can “come” to His people in the gift of the Holy Spirit (“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will **come** to him and make our home with him” – John 14:23). Jesus can “come” to His churches in judgment (“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will **come** to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent – Rev. 2:5). So when it comes to *erchomai*, only the context can tell us in what way Jesus *comes* (we can’t just assume that it’s one coming or the other).

Now there is another word that always and only refers to the second coming (return) of Jesus to this earth. That word is “parousia” (coming). And Parousia doesn’t just mean plain old “coming.” It has the idea of “presence” or “appearing”. That’s why it’s an especially good word for the second coming of Jesus to this earth. We’ll learn more about that word when we get to Matthew 24 because Matthew 24 is the *only* place in all the Gospels where we find the word Parousia. And in Matthew 24 the parousia (second coming) of Jesus is a different thing than when Jesus *erchomais* (comes to the Ancient of Days).

V. Four test passages (When does the Son of Man come?)

Now let’s look at four passages in Matthew and decide from the context what kind of “erchomai” (coming) they are talking about. (We will obviously look more closely at these passages when we come to them later on.)

- ✓ Matthew 26:63-64 – The high priest said to [Jesus], “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, ***from now on*** [contra NIV] ***you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.***” [cf. Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:66-69]

Did you notice that the language here comes straight from the book of Daniel? And we know from Daniel and from the entire New Testament that the Son of Man is already seated at the right hand of power *because* He has already **come** to the Ancient of Days on the clouds of heaven. Luke simply says: “From now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power

of God”. “From now on” doesn’t mean at some time in the distant future (contra NIV). “From now on” means at the very least, “from this generation forward” (from *now* on *you* will see). The meaning is unmistakable. Jesus is talking (at least primarily) about the coming of the Son of Man to be seated at the right hand of the Ancient of Days in power and glory. That’s why He could say “from now on”.

- ✓ Matthew 16:28 – Truly, I say to you, ***there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.***” (cf. Mark 9:1 – “Until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power; Luke 9:27)

Once again, do you see the connection with the language of Daniel? This verse is not talking about the second coming of Jesus to this earth, but rather about Jesus’ coming to heaven to receive glory, honor, power, and authority from His Father. This prediction is followed by the Transfiguration when Jesus’ face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light (17:1-2). In the Transfiguration, the disciples saw a picture of the exalted Jesus after His ascension (this is the same Jesus that John saw in his vision at the beginning of the book of Revelation!) So when the disciples see the Son of Man coming, it’s a sneak preview of the authority and power that He receives when He comes to the Father.

- ✓ Matthew 24:30, 34 – Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth [land] will mourn, and they will ***see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory***... Truly, I say to you, ***this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*** (cf. Mark 13:26, 30; Luke 21:27, 32)

Did you see again how Jesus is using the exact language of Daniel? But in Daniel’s vision, where is the Son of Man coming to on the clouds of heaven? He is coming to the Ancient of Days (not on earth, but in heaven). And when does Jesus say that the Son of Man will come? – Within that very generation. In light of the grammar and in light of how this phrase is used everywhere else in the NT, “*this generation*” can *only* refer to the generation that was alive in Jesus’ day.

- Matthew 11:16-19 (cf. Luke 7:31-34) – But to what shall I compare ***this generation?*** ... John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon.” The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”
- Matthew 12:41-42 (cf. Luke 11:29-32) – The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with ***this generation*** and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with ***this generation*** and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.
- Matthew 12:45 – So also will it be with ***this*** evil ***generation.***
- Matthew 23:29-36 (cf. Luke 11:47-51) – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered

between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon ***this generation***.

- Mark 8:11-13 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does ***this generation*** seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to ***this generation***.”
- Mark 8:38 – For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in ***this*** adulterous and sinful ***generation***...
- Luke 17:24-25 – [The Son of Man] must suffer many things and be rejected by ***this generation***.
- Acts 2:40 – And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from ***this*** crooked ***generation***.”

So in what way can we say that the Son of Man came on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory within the lifetime of those who were listening to Him speak? Well, the primary point must be His triumphant coming *to the Father* to receive all authority in heaven and on earth.

- ✓ Matthew 10:23 – When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, ***you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes***. [No parallels in Mark or Luke]

Now is Jesus talking about His second coming to this earth at the end of the age or is He talking about His coming to the Father to receive power and authority? All four of these passages talk about the coming of the Son of Man and use language that most *naturally* means that the Son of Man will “come” within the lifetime of many of the people who were listening to Him speak (“From now on you will see...”; “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see...”; “This generation will not pass away until [they see]...”; “You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes”).

- ✓ Cf. John 1:50-51 – Jesus answered [Nathanael], “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, ***you will see heaven opened***, and the angels of God ascending and descending on ***the Son of Man***.”

VI. When the Son of Man came to the Ancient of Days in heaven and received power and authority, what were the *earthly* signs of this *heavenly* coming?

One earthly sign of the heavenly coming of the Son of Man is the advance and spread of His kingdom in the evangelization of all the nations.

- ✓ Matthew 28:18-20 – And Jesus came and said to them, “***All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations***... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Another earthly sign of the heavenly coming of the Son of Man (related to the last) was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

- ✓ Acts 2:33-36 – ***Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God***, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, ***he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing***. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” ***Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ***, this Jesus whom you crucified.

But now there is one more very important earthly sign that the Son of Man has come to the Ancient of Days and received the Kingdom. This sign is the destruction of Jerusalem and especially the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. (Mat. 24). How is the destruction of Jerusalem a sign of the coming of the Son of Man into His heavenly authority and glory? Well first of all, we need to see that the destruction of Jerusalem was the result of God’s wrath against Israel for their treatment of His Son.

- ✓ Matthew 23:29-38 – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers [by their crucifixion of Jesus]... so that ***on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth***... Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation... see, your house is left to you desolate.
- ✓ Luke 21:20-24 – When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near... These are days of ***vengeance***, to fulfill all that is written... For there will be great distress upon the [land] and ***wrath*** against this people.
- ✓ Matthew 21:33-42 – “When the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them... And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they... paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”

The destruction of Jerusalem and especially of the temple was a vindication of Jesus and a public and visible sign that He had come to the Ancient of Days and was exercising His heavenly authority and power – now in the destruction of the very city that had put Him to death. Now let’s go back to Matthew 10:23.

VII. What does it mean when Jesus says: “Truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes”?

Remember how we’ve seen that Matthew often takes stories or sayings that are spread out in Mark and Luke and collects them all together in one place (5-7; 8-9)? Well, there’s a good portion of Matthew chapter ten that we actually find in Matthew 24 (vv. 9-10, 13), Mark 13 (vv. 9-13), and Luke 21 (vv. 12-19) where Jesus is talking about the sign of the coming (erchomai) of the Son of Man *in the Destruction of Jerusalem*. So what does Jesus mean when He says that His disciples will not have gone through all the towns of Israel (cf. Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8) before the Son of Man comes? We have already seen that the first thing He is saying (or assuming) is that the disciples will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days and is given all authority in heaven and on earth. But in light of the connection with Matthew 24, we can assume something more specific. I believe that when Jesus talks about the Son of Man coming (to the Ancient of Days), He means it (at the very least) as an “omen” of the judgment that will be soon to follow. We find more support for this conclusion by comparing Matthew 10 with Matthew 23.

- ✓ Matthew 10:17, 21, 23 – Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and FLOG YOU IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES... Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and *have them put to death*... ***When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next***, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before ***THE SON OF MAN COMES***.
- ✓ Matthew 23:29-36 – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? *Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill* and crucify, and ***SOME YOU WILL FLOG IN YOUR SYNAGOGUES and persecute from town to town***, so that ***ON YOU MAY COME ALL THE RIGHTEOUS BLOOD SHED ON EARTH***... Truly, I say to you, **all these things will come upon this generation.**

The Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days, receives all authority in heaven and on earth, and then exercises this authority and **proves** His coming to the Father by bringing destruction on the city that rejected Him *and* that persecuted all of His messengers (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17, 40; 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 9:23-24; 12:1-4). In the destruction of Jerusalem, the exalted Son of Man brought upon that city all the righteous blood shed on earth, “from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah”. In the destruction of Jerusalem, the exalted Son of Man was vindicated as the city that put Him to death now mourned over it’s own destruction. But there is more!

The destruction of the Temple was a sign that the kingdom rule of the Son of Man had come, “who entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself [the greater and more perfect tent], now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb. 9:24; cf. 9:11). The writer of Hebrews is talking about the destruction of the Temple and the end of animal sacrifices when he says:

- ✓ Hebrews 8:13 – In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to *vanish away*.

So this final destruction of the earthly temple was a sign of the fact that the Son of Man had entered into the heavenly temple and so all authority in heaven and on earth now belonged to Him.

Conclusion

What, then, is the application of Matthew 10:23 to us today? There are two points, one of which is the urgency of the mission.

When they persecute you in one town, *flee to the next, for* truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Don't waste your time in places where they prove themselves stubborn and obstinate and hardhearted. When they persecute you in one town, move on to the next because the coming of the Son of Man is soon to be revealed in the destruction of Jerusalem.

- ✓ Acts 2:40 – And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “*Save yourselves from this crooked generation.*”

Even today, we need to feel the urgency of our mission because “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Judgment day is coming. As we have seen a couple of times already (9:37-38; 10:9), there is need for diligence and haste in the work of evangelism! But I want to end by focusing on another application of this verse.

When *they persecute you* in one town, *flee* to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before *the Son of Man comes*. It's as though Jesus is saying: “You will be persecuted by men. And when you are persecuted you must flee. But remember, the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, and then He will bring about your *vindication*. The point is not that we take delight in the judgment of those who stubbornly refuse to believe our message and who even persecute us and put us to death. Jesus did not take delight in the destruction of Jerusalem (He mourned over the destruction of Jerusalem! – Luke 19:41-42; cf. Acts 7:54-60). But it was good and right for Him to be vindicated in this way. So the point is this: Since the Son of Man has come to the Ancient of Days and received all authority in heaven and on earth, we too can know that our vindication is certain. We won't be vindicated by taking our own revenge (Rom. 12:19-21), but rather by the judgment that the Son of Man will bring upon all those who have persecuted us for His name's sake.

- ✓ Revelation 19:1-3 (cf. 19:11-21) – After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

The Son of Man has come! He has come on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days. Picture it! He has received the kingdom – He has all authority in heaven and on earth. And this means that we can be comforted in the midst of persecution, because we know that one day, we too will

be vindicated when Jesus returns to this earth and judges all those who have persecuted us for His name's sake.

Teaching our Children

Q. Jesus often referred to Himself as “the Son of Man.” Where did this title come from?

A. This title came from the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Q. In the vision Daniel had, what did he see “one like a Son of Man” doing? What was happening?

A. See Daniel 7:13-14 (I. A.)

Q. How was Daniel's vision fulfilled in the NT? When did the Son of Man come on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days?

A. The Son of Man “came” to the Ancient of Days when He ascended into heaven and was given all authority in heaven and on earth. (See Scriptures under III. B.)

Q. What are three earthly and visible signs that prove that Jesus has come to God's throne?

A. ~ The spread of the kingdom through evangelism (See Matthew 28:18-20 under VI. A.)

~ The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (See Acts 2:33-36 under VI. B.)

~ The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple 40 years after Jesus ascended (See Scriptures under VI. C.; cf. Mat. 24:1-35)

Point out how Jesus was vindicated (proved to be right) by the destruction of the city that killed Him and the end of Israel's temple and sacrificial system (cf. Heb. 9:11, 24).

Q. We know that Jesus has already come to the Ancient of Days on the clouds of heaven. How can this comfort us when we are being persecuted?

A. ~ We can know that one day Jesus will return to this earth and judge all those who have persecuted us for His name's sake. ***We will be vindicated!*** – (Just like Jesus' disciples were vindicated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple)

~ See Rev. 19:1-3 under Conclusion B. 2.

~ (This does *not* mean that we have a vengeful attitude or that we take joy in the suffering of those who have hurt us – see Luke 19:41-42, Acts 7:54-60, & Rom. 12:19-21)