# Coming with the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13)

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(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

## Daniel 7:13-14:

13 *I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there <u>came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man</u>, and he came even to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him.*
14 *And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*.[1]

What did Daniel see here?
The term "son of man" (Aramaic: *bar enash*) simply denotes a human being.
Thus, a human (a man) ascends on the clouds; he is led and escorted into Yahweh's presence, and to him is given (presumably by Yahweh) great authority — universal rule that lasts forever.

*Son of Man* was Jesus' favorite self-designation, which was no doubt based on Daniel 7:13.
The fact that this verse employs similar language to some New Testament descriptions of Christ's return — his "coming on the clouds" — leads many to conclude that Daniel, too, must be describing his return.
Consider the following verses:

**Matthew 26:64** (BSB):
Jesus declared to the Sanhedrin:

> *"You have said it yourself," Jesus answered. "But I say to all of you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

**Matthew 24:30** (my translation):
In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus declared:

> *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth wail, and they shall see <u>the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven</u> with power and great glory.*

[1] I have taken the liberty of slightly modifying the ASV of Daniel 7:13.

The book of Revelation also draws on Daniel's prophecy:

**Revelation 1:7** (my translation):

*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, including those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall wail because of him. Yes. Amen!*

**Revelation 1:13** (my translation):

*And in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man, dressed in a robe extending down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest.*

**Revelation 14:14** (MEV):

*I looked. And there was a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like a Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.*

According to the standard view, Jesus will not receive his rightful dominion until his return.
Only then will the nations submit to his rule — either in the millennial kingdom or in the New Earth.

A few commentators, however, apply Daniel's prophecy to Jesus' first-century ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God. Notable among these is John Calvin. In his Commentary on Daniel he writes:

> It afterwards follows, *He came to the Ancient of days*.
> This, in my judgment, ought to be explained of Christ's ascension; for he then commenced his reign, as we see in numberless passages of Scripture.
> . . .
> Now, therefore, we understand the sense in which the Prophet [Daniel] says, Christ *came as the Son of man,* that is, like a man, *even to the Ancient of days.* For after Christ had passed through the period of his self-abasement, according to Paul (Philippians 2:7), he ascended into heaven, and a dominion was bestowed upon him, as the Prophet says in the next verse. This passage, then, without the slightest doubt, ought to be received of Christ's ascension, after he had ceased being mortal man. He says, *He was represented before God,* namely, because he sits at his right hand.[2]

That Daniel 7:13 is depicting Jesus' ascension is supported by:

1. The son of man is ascending on the clouds, not descending: "he came even to the Ancient of Days."
   And he is escorted into Yahweh's presence before being given authority:
   "and they brought him near before him."
2. In Daniel's vision, this event transpires in the time of the fourth empire — that of Rome.
   So its fulfillment cannot be in our future.
3. The similar language employed in Matthew and Revelation in connection with Jesus' return can be put down to one simple fact:
   According to Acts 1:11, Jesus would return in much the same way as he had ascended into heaven.
   The reference is to his ascension IN A CLOUD:
   Jesus ascended in the Shekinah Glory-Cloud, and he would also return in that same Cloud (Lk 21:27).
   So, we should not be surprised by the similar language used to describe both events — for both his ascension and his ultimate return in glory.

[2] John Calvin, from his Commentary on Daniel, comments for Daniel 7:13. See the Study Light website: https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/daniel-7.html.

A number of Scriptural passages can be adduced in support of the view that Daniel was witnessing Jesus' ascension and exaltation, not his Second Coming:

**Matthew 28:18-19** (MEV):
Just prior to his ascension Jesus declared to his disciples:

18 *… "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*
19 *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father …"*

**Acts 2:30-36** (BSB):
Peter's Pentecost address to the Jews:

30 *"But [David] was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that He would place one of his descendants on his throne.*
31 *Foreseeing this, David spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His body see decay.*
32 *God has raised this Jesus to life, to which we are all witnesses.*
33 *Exalted, then, to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*
34 *For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says:*
*'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand* 35 *until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."'*
36 *Therefore let all Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!"*

Peter cites Psalm 110:1 — David's prophecy concerning the rule and reign of his greater Son, the Messiah.
Peter asserts that, with Jesus' exaltation to the Father's right hand, Davidic kingship has been restored.
God's promises to David of a lasting dynasty and kingdom were then fulfilled (2 Samuel 7:11-16).
Long cut down in judgment, David's throne was finally restored — in fulfillment of numerous Old Testament prophecies.[3]

**Psalm 110:1-2** (BSB):
1 *The LORD said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."*
2 *The LORD extends Your mighty scepter from Zion: "Rule in the midst of Your enemies."*

Psalm 110:1 is by far the Old Testament verse that is most frequently cited or alluded to in the New Testament.[4]
The New Testament authors clearly regarded it as having been fulfilled in Jesus' ascension and exaltation.
Verses 5-7 of this psalm show the Davidic king / Messiah exerting his power to take possession of the Gentile nations, destroying all who oppose his rule.

Note that David's heirs ruled as God's "son", on God's throne, over God's kingdom.
See 1 Chronicles 17:13-14; 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chronicles 9:8.

[3] See Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11-12 (= Acts 15:16-17); Micah 5:2-5a. See also Luke 1:32-33.
[4] See Matthew 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-34; 5:31; 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; cf. Revelation 3:21; 22:1, 3.

These truths are further emphasized in Psalm 2.

**Psalm 2:2, 6-9** (MEV):

> [2] *The kings of the earth set themselves, … against the LORD and against His anointed, …*
>
> [6] *"I have installed My king on Zion, My holy hill."*
>
> [7] *I will declare the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are My son; this day have I begotten you.*
> [8] *Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession."*
> [9] *You will break them with a scepter of iron; you will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."*

According to Paul in Romans 1:4, the Resurrection proved that Jesus was the Son of God — the messianic King promised in Psalm 2.

In Psalm 110, the messianic King is invited to rule alongside Yahweh in the heavenly Zion (110:1-2).
So also here in Psalm 2, Messiah is installed on Mt. Zion (2:6), by which is meant the heavenly city.
In other words, Messiah was always to reign from heaven. He would rule over the earth but not upon it.[5]

Note that in Psalm 2:8 all nations are given to Jesus as his reward and inheritance.
This is in complete agreement with Daniel 7:14 and Matthew 28:18.

As aforementioned, John Calvin referenced Philippians 2.
After his self-abasement, Jesus was exalted to the highest position, far above all rule and authority:

**Philippians 2:6-11** (BSB):

> [6] *Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*
> [7] *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
> [8] *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross.*
> [9] *Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names,*
> [10] *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
> [11] *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

There are many others passages that assert Jesus' present reign over the world.
God's kingdom has come (Mt 16:27-28; Mk 9:1; Lk 21:31; Revelation 11:15).
Jesus rules providentially, judging and disciplining the nations as he deems necessary (Rev 12:5; 19:15; Ps 2:9).
Ultimately, he will win the nations to himself through the gospel (Ps 86:9; Rev 15:4).
The new heaven and earth over which Christ presently rules is characterized by ever-increasing "righteousness" (2Pet 3:13).

[5] Indeed, Jesus is prohibited from ruling on the earth because of the curse placed on his ancestor Jehoiachin (Jer 22:24-30).
Nor can be serve as a priest on earth, because he originates from the tribe of Judah, not Levi (Heb 7:13-17; 8:4).

Note that Paul understood his apostolic mission in terms of calling the nations to the obedience that comes from faith — to bring God's rule to bear on individuals and nations alike.
He states this three times in his epistle to the Romans — in 1:5; 15:18; 16:26.
Almost certainly Paul has in mind with these statements the promises of Psalm 2.
(Paul further understood his role of calling the nations as an extension of the work of the Lord's Servant — see Acts 13:47; Isaiah 49:6).
Because Jesus is enthroned in heaven and the nations belong to him, the success of the gospel is guaranteed.[6]

## Conclusion

Daniel 7:13-14 foretells Jesus' ascension and exaltation to God's right hand, wherein he was granted universal and everlasting dominion over the nations of the world.

[6] The promise made to Abraham of blessing for the nations is fulfilled through the gospel — see Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:8, 14.

## Appendix: The Son of Man coming on the clouds in Matthew 26:64

Here we have Jesus' declaration to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

**Matthew 26:64** (BSB):

*"You have said it yourself," Jesus answered. "But I say to all of you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

Four Questions:

1. What is Jesus stating here?
2. What is the meaning of coming on the clouds of heaven?
3. How would those in the Sanhedrin "from now on" see Jesus?
4. How would they see him both seated in heaven and descending in the clouds at the same time?

Response to Question 1:

Jesus' response to Caiaphas is literally "You have said".

The YOU is singular; Jesus is addressing Caiaphas only.

Jesus intends: *You said it, Caiaphas!* Or: *That is your way of putting it*.

His subsequent declaration to the entire Sanhedrin derives from two Old Testament prophecies:

"The Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power" is harking back to **Psalm 110:1**.

There, the royal son of David is invited to sit at (and rule from) Yahweh's right hand — the place of highest honor. This (human) descendant of David is invited to co-rule alongside Yahweh himself!

He is given power and authority to judge and rule over the nations.

"The Son of man … coming on the clouds of heaven" harks back to the prophecy of **Daniel 7:13-14**.

But whereas in Daniel he is ascending into Yahweh's presence to be invested with divine authority, here, having been granted that authority, the Son of Man is descending on the clouds as he comes to judge his accusers.

To all intents, both prophecies are affirmations of Jesus' deity.

Response to Question 2:

First-century Jews familiar with the Old Testament would have understood *clouds* as connoting deity:

1. To ride on the clouds is uniquely God's prerogative (Dt 33:26; Ps 104:3; also Psalm 68:4, 33, NET, NIV).
   God rides on the clouds as he personally descends in his mobile throne-chariot on his way to visiting men and nations in judgment (Ps 18:9-12; Isa 19:1; Nah 1:3).
   The thunder is said to be God's voice and the lightening the arrows that rout his foes (Ps 18:9-14; 29:3-9).
   Accordingly, the Day of the Lord, when he comes in judgment, is a day of clouds and thick darkness and gloom (Eze 30:3; 34:12; Joel 2:2; Am 5:20; Zeph 1:15).
   In Ezekiel 1 and 10, cherubim are the bearers of God's throne-chariot (cf. 1Chr 28:18; Ps 18:10).
   And in Daniel's vision "[God's] throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze" (Dan 7:9, BSB).
2. They would also have recalled the Shekinah, the Cloud associated with the presence and glory of God.[7]
   The Cloud served to veil the glory of God within, for no one can see God and live (Ex 33:20; 1Tim 6:16).
   God himself was present in the Cloud in the desert, and his glory within was evident (Ex 16:10; 24:15-17).
   God descended in the Cloud to speak with Moses (Ex 34:5; Num 11:25).

[7] From R.C. Sproul: "According to the Old Testament, the shekinah was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The shekinah was a radiant cloud or brilliant light within a cloud that signaled the immediate presence of God."
See: https://www.ligonier.org/blog/witnessing-christs-glory/.

God also descended in the Cloud when the people misbehaved (Num 12:5; 14:10; 16:19, 42).
God's glory in the Cloud filled the tabernacle and temple (Ex 40:34-35; 1Kgs 8:10-12; cf. Eze 10:4).
In all these instances, no visible form was observed, for God cannot be seen.

Response to Question 3:
Just how would the Jewish leaders "from now on" see Jesus seated in heaven and coming on the clouds?
The answer is that, in events soon to transpire, they would begin to perceive that Jesus was truly the One he had claimed to be — that he was now ruling alongside Yahweh and actually judging them!
The following would provide indisputable proof:
Miraculous signs at Pentecost (Ac 2:3-4); the apostles' boldness (Ac 4:13); further signs and wonders (Ac 5:12; 6:8); Stephen's vision (Ac 7:56); the mass-turning of the Gentiles to Israel's God; finally, the calamities to befall their own nation, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem and loss of their temple.
But in all of these events Jesus himself would not literally be seen by the Jewish leaders.[8]

Response to Question 4:
Jesus is both seated and descending in judgment at the same time.
As explained in my Response to Question 2 (above), he is seated in his mobile throne-chariot, and it is in this chariot that he comes down to visit his enemies in judgment.

**Conclusion**
Jesus' return on/with the clouds, here in Matthew 26:64 as also in Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:11; and Revelation 1:7; 14:14, is an affirmation of his deity:
He would return with divine power and glory.
Like Father, like Son!

[8] Not all of these events were witnessed by Caiaphas personally, since he died ca. 46 AD. However, several other rabbis who were present at Jesus' trial did live to witness them all, including the Jewish War of 66-70 AD.