

Our Lord's Return Study Notes

June 23, 2026

Leader—Darek Siwek

Recap—We have been discussing Volume 2, p. 152-153, second paragraph starting “In power and great glory” to the subheading “In Like Manner”—we tried to determine the order of events that Br. Russell talks about—we read Matthew 24:29-31

Leader Question/Study Guide Questions #1-4, Study Guide from 6/16/26—What is the order of events in Matthew 24:29-31? What is the suggested order of events in the paragraph starting “In power and great glory?” What is the interpretation of dark clouds? Can we connect this interpretation with specific world events?

Leader Comment—We should look at these scriptures and see if the order of events described in the paragraphs agrees with the order of events described in the scriptures—Br. Russell writes that our Lord will come with dark clouds, and those dark clouds will be an event that will cause a change of mind in people; they will recognize that something unnatural is going on and recognize the Lord's Second Presence—the dark clouds are the element that influences the world and causes this change of mind—Greek has several words for “clouds;” a word for dark clouds and bright clouds—Matthew 24:30 is the word for a white or bright cloud, not a dark one

Leader Question—How can we connect what Br. Russell describes in these paragraphs with Matthew 24:30, and does Matthew 24:30 support the idea that the dark clouds are the element that is changing the minds and behavior of the world?

Br. Russell says in his writings that there are many symbols and pictures drawn in the Bible, but there is a consistency to the way they are drawn—clouds block the light—they will block the truth and confuse people—some people from traditional churches at times read things in the Bible very literally and sometimes they think things are symbolic—clouds obstruct the light and those on the ground are not getting the message

Leader Comment—Strong's 1105 is the word for dark cloud—it only occurs once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 12:18—all other mentions of clouds in the New Testament refer to bright clouds—Matthew 24:30 says our Lord comes surrounded by a white cloud—this is a different picture, because the cloud in this verse is not the cloud that is supposed to change the world—other events are described in verse 29, work that happens before the Lord comes

Leader Question—What is the difference between what Br. Russell writes and what is in Matthew 24:30?

Matthew 24:30 refers to the clouds of heaven—they obscure seeing what is going on in this place defined as heaven—this could be the ecclesiastical heavens or other elements of society that are not clear—the “tribes of the earth” are also not clear, because they see the man coming; this can’t be the parousia, because people don’t see the parousia—the phrase “then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky” is for us, the Church, which answers the question in Matthew 24:3—Jesus leads the apostles through successive steps and then he says, now you will see a sign of my presence—the tribes of the earth will see his coming but they don’t see the evidence of him being already here invisibly—there is an element of uncertainty that accompanies his coming—this is all part of clouds obscuring what is going on in society

These are clouds that belong to our Lord, because he is coming with those clouds or on top of those clouds—they are not evil clouds belonging to this world, but clouds that signify his power

The world does not have the mechanism to see, through prophecy, that Jesus is here—they don’t have the Harvest message, so they are left with only a partial sight of evidence that leads to his return—we see an absolute return; they see what they think is evidence of his return, and that is their limit

This person has a note in her Bible for Matthew 24:30 that says the sign might have been Br. Russell and the introduction of truth at that point—Br. Russell does say in the Comments that the clouds are the Time of Trouble, but the primary sign is Christ’s righteous judgments amount the ecclesiastical systems—she has another note in her Bible that says the sign is probably Christendom losing control, which goes along with the Comments

The leader does not have the answer to this, but he sees the problem that needs to be explained

In Matthew 24:30 Jesus comes in the clouds—Revelation 14:13-14 sets the timing—it is talking about the sleeping saints being raised when Jesus returns, and Jesus returning on the white cloud at the beginning of the Harvest—the apostle asked “what will be the sign of your presence” and the context here indicates that the sign is the Harvest message that Br. Russell brought, the “meat in due season”—there are other evidences, but this is the primary sign—this brother, Peter Karavas, gave a discourse on this topic in 2018 or 2019 called “Signs of the Sun, Moon and Stars”—he presented the view that there are double applications in Matthew

24—Luke 21 (the Lord's great prophecy) focuses on the Jewish Harvest and Matthew 24 and Mark 13 focus on the Gospel Age Harvest—this can be confusing, because some of the language applies to both—the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from heaven and the sign in heaven is the first application of the period we are describing now, when Jesus is on the white cloud with the sickle in his hand; the Harvest begins—the sign of the Son of Man is the Harvest message, the epiphania sign, but there are apocalypse signs too—the Son of Man coming in the clouds has a double application as well—the question is, “what is the sign of your parousia?” Jesus doesn't say “then they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds” because the world sees all the same signs we see that indicate Jesus is present, but they say Jesus is coming (not here)—there is a double application of this—Ezekiel 38—God is revealed to many people when He defends Israel around that time frame—the other sign in heaven is the deliverance of Israel by God and the Ancient Worthies

Leader Comment--Matthew 24:29 says “But immediately after the tribulation of those days...” but the tribulation is not described—after the tribulation, the sun and moon are darkened and the stars fall—this is a sign that causes fear among the people—then there is the sign of the Son of Man (not in Luke) and people are terrified, then the Lord comes on a bright cloud—the problem is that Br. Russell gives the task of those clouds in the first sentence of p. 153—the purpose of the clouds is to transform the world—we don't have those dark clouds here, so that is why we have differences between Matthew 24 and these paragraphs—but maybe the conversion of the world is not the task of the clouds

This person is doing a surface contrast between Matthew 24 and Revelation 14—this is the beginning of the Gospel Harvest—it does not go back to the First Advent, nor ahead to dealing with Israel—the clue is that Jesus has a sharp sickle; this is for harvesting in the Harvest of the Gospel Age—Matthew 24:31 says his angel gathers the elect from the four winds—both of these are in the same time frame, but the view is different—there are clouds in both, but the clouds are seen differently—we see white clouds in Revelation 14; white means righteous—this is God acting upon justice—He has the right to bring about these clouds of trouble upon our society in preparation for what is to come when the Church is completed, and Christ and his Church take full control—in Matthew 24, the clouds are what the world sees—they are seeing clouds of trouble too, but they don't know the Lord has returned and they don't know this is righteous trouble—there is a difference between seeing trouble and seeing the trouble as being righteous, which is the white cloud in Revelation 14

It is because of the clouds that every eye will discern him—in Matthew 24:15, Jesus talks about what Daniel tells us in Daniel 8-12 about the “abomination of desolation” and about the timing—Jesus takes us on a progression through the Gospel Age—in Matthew 24:14, he speaks about the time when the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, and we know that happened in the 1800s—the “abomination of desolation” was understood from 1799 forward and that brings us to 1874—in Daniel 12, with the 1260, 1290 and 1335 days, 1874 is associated with the “abomination of desolation” in verse 15—then he goes into the parallel of the closing of the Gospel Age and the Jewish Age and how this is a mystery that has to be discovered—verse 21 is an exact quote from Daniel 12:1, which brings us to the end of the age—“except those days be shortened” refers to the advent of atomic energy and military power that happened at the end of WWII—this is the great time of tribulation, and began the advent of false Christs and false prophets who became influential on radio and television, which this person believes is why Jesus said this—verse 26 reinforces the idea that we will not see him with our physical eyes—verse 27 mentions the parousia will be like a bright shining, but gradual, from the time of 1874 to the time when everyone will see—verse 29 mentions the tribulation from verse 21, spoken of by Daniel and reinforced by Jesus, pointing to the winds of war that resulted in the Holocaust, which was the catalyst for the state of Israel to come into existence—in verse 30, the word “earth” should be translated “land”—this person thinks it is talking about the tribes of Israel, not all the people—very few Jews were back in the land when Israel was established in 1948, but those who are back shall see the “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory”—they are seeing him more than ever through Jacob’s Trouble that God has permitted since 1948—in verse 31, the days are shortened because of the elect, and gathering the elect from the four winds of heaven is talking about the process of regathering the nation back to Israel—then the fig tree follows that—Jesus is giving us a sequence of events from the Gospel Age through the Harvest—the whole world is seeing it through the trouble that has come upon Israel

Volume 4, p. 599, end of the page, explains this, starting “The tribes of earth...” —Zechariah 10:12 indicates the cloud is trouble—we have changed ourselves to be spiritual, so we can see him and understand what is happening because it is written in prophecy, but the people will understand once he shakes the earth and gives knowledge to him

Leader Question--The definition of the “cloud” is the trouble—there is not enough information to pinpoint the time—we have had so many troubles since the time of Br. Russell, but we don’t see accomplished what Br. Russell writes will be accomplished—is the trouble in the past or in the future? We don’t see that pride and selfishness is destroyed, or

people changing—are we able to define this cloud of trouble in such a way that we can recognize that a certain event starts the cloud that starts the transformation of the world?

If we look at Matthew 24:29, it speaks of the sun and moon being darkened immediately after the tribulation, and then we will see the sign of the Son of Man—in Matthew 24, the word “tribulation” appears twice; in verse 9 it is the Gospel Age tribulation and the tribulation the saints went through for 1260 years, being persecuted by the antichrist—this ended in 1799, and the time of the end begins; that is the end of the 1260 years, and then the Lord returns in 1874—this person believes the darkening of the sun and moon and stars applies to the epiphania period during the Gospel Age harvest, which applies to the sunlight of the gospel being obscured—in liberal churches, the Bible is viewed as fable and the Mosaic sacrifices as barbaric—the stars falling from heaven refers to a lack of respect towards the apostles’ teachings—the sign in heaven is the Harvest message—but there is another tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24 and Daniel 12:1, and this time of trouble began in 1874 in the ecclesiastical heavens when the truth message emerged—the Photodrama of Creation caused earthquakes in the heavens when the theological beliefs were disrupted, then came the world wars and the Great Depression, etc.—Daniel talks about a time of trouble since there never was—these were world-wide problems and still apply, but the great tribulation time is broken up into two periods; summer (Harvest and fig tree) and winter—in Revelation 14, Jesus throws in a sickle to begin the Harvest of the wheat, but there is a second sickle that ties in with the apocalypse and the end of the time of great tribulation, after the treading of the winepress, which is in the future, and the worst part of the tribulation—then the world will see the Son of Man coming and Israel being delivered and the Ancient Worthies being resurrected—the world will understand Jesus is here—it is hard to pull together all these points and make it easy to understand

Leader Question—Are we able to say that the cloud will come with hail and fire and consume selfishness and prejudices and say the events accomplish these things? Or do we think it is sometime in the future that these things will be accomplished, but we cannot say exactly what kind of trouble it is? The problem is defining what world event would accomplish what Br. Russell says needs to be accomplished—he says that is the task of the cloud, but so far we have not seen this happen on a scale that changes the world

Question—What paragraph is this question coming from?

The bottom of p. 152, “Many recognize the glory and power...”—then on p. 153, Br. Russell continues to describe the task or accomplishment of those clouds, and after that the world will recognize the king

This person does not think the clouds will recede until the Church is complete—Matthew 24 is a prophecy, based on time—Jesus is answering the question from the disciples, but he’s talking to the Church throughout the Gospel Age—the concept is chronological—Jesus says, “...when you see the abomination of desolation...let the reader understand,” the Church didn’t understand this until we read it in the Volumes at the time of the Harvest message—if we contrast this with verse 30, this is the same time; it is the Harvest message telling us about the parousia—we are enlightened by prophecy, not by looking out the window and seeing that the Lord has returned—it is prophecy that tells us—the Harvest message pointed us to those prophecies by which we could determine that Jesus returned; these two verses are in lockstep, timewise—what happens after those things are also things that happen in the Harvest; coming out of Babylon, gathering the elect from the four winds, the fig tree—these two verses are locked in time but encompass a different perspective about what we see happening as a result of Jesus’ return—Jesus is talking directly to us

Just as many people died from the Spanish flu as in WWI—the world sees that there is trouble, but they are blinded to the fact that this is Jesus’ work—they wonder why God isn’t doing something, they think He has lost control and Satan has taken over—He is doing something, He is still in control, cleaning things up and getting rid of the old order so new things can come in

The term “clouds” in these paragraphs is plural—we have heard explanations for several events that have occurred over the last 150-200 years, at about the time when Christ returned—there is not one event that contributed to the trouble—after Jesus’ return in 1874, there have been multiple troubles that have come upon multiple groups of people—there were events that triggered financial trouble, religious trouble, moral issues that have torn apart society, political issues that are tearing apart the world—there are clouds in multiple facets of society

Leader Comment—Br. Russell writes that the troubles he defined as a cloud have to accomplish a special task, to remove the pride, selfishness and prejudice from people and somehow convert the world, to change hearts and minds—so far, all of the multiple troubles we have seen have not accomplished this

Much of that is in the future—it does not happen right at Christ’s return; it is a future process that does not happen anywhere near 1874

This person is going back to the first question about the different words for clouds—the word for “cloud” that is used in Joel 2:2 is the same word in the Septuagint as is used in Matthew 24:30—this person does not know any other way to find out which Hebrew word is equivalent to Greek but to look at the Septuagint—but God does not work instantaneously—He is not in a rush to get things done; He does things by His own timetable, over which mankind has no control—Jesus was taken up in a cloud (the trouble that came upon Israel in Jesus’ day) and he says in like manner, we will see him return—70 AD was thirty-five years after Jesus left but that is the blink of an eye to God—Petah Tikva was established in Israel in 1878, and the Israelis have had nothing but trouble ever since; they have lived with constant threat for the last 100+ years—this word can also mean clouds of trouble, not just pretty white fluffy clouds

Leader Comment--The Polish word for “cloud” here refers to a light, bright, fluffy cloud—there are two words for “clouds” in Greek, one which indicates a bright cloud and one which indicates a dark cloud, which is the one quoted earlier in Hebrews—but when we read in the Old Testament about the Day of the Lord and God coming in judgment, it is always a dark cloud; so maybe there is a place in Matthew 24 for a dark cloud, and the bright cloud belongs to Christ—dark clouds belong to the judgment of God—the bright cloud is an attribute of our Lord, his government that comes with peace, not the dark cloud of judgment—maybe the white cloud designates future events and the dark cloud is separate, indicating happenings from before—Br. Russell may be writing about the dark cloud that is supposed to happen before in God’s judgment of the world, and then comes the government of our Lord as a bright cloud—this may be a way of reconciling what Br. Russell writes in the paragraph with Matthew 24:30

Revelation 14:14 is Jesus, sitting on a white cloud—sitting on something indicates control—John is seeing this, and John is the Church class in the flesh—Jesus is controlling everything that will transpire between now and when the Church is complete, all the trouble before society is consumed—this is a very important element for the Church class to keep in mind—the clouds that happen during the Gospel Age are the same cloud—we don’t need to see them as two different clouds; they are the same cloud from two different perspectives—we see them as righteous because we know the reason for the trouble—the world just sees the trouble, so the clouds are dark—they don’t understand it

P. 153, first paragraph

Leader Question—The verses quoted at the beginning of this paragraph; when do we think this will happen? The world does not yet recognize Jesus—would this happen at the end at

the final event in Revelation 19 when the Lord destroys the beast, false prophet and the kings of earth? In what way will the people on earth recognize him? Some think that the saints of the Old Testament will be resurrected and this is why people will recognize that something will happen—what are our thoughts on this? What has to happen on earth for people to recognize our Lord and his reign?

The end of Psalm 83, Ezekiel 38 and 39 all have the same bottom lines—Israel is gathered into their own land, God has “poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel”—there is a progression—people are studying the Bible more since 1948 and they understand that God has brought Israel back to the land—people are slowly understanding that God is in control—Jeremiah 30:11—this does not mean that the nations will be destroyed, but that God will turn them around to understand, through Israel, that God is sovereign—millions of people are waking up to become Zionists—they recognize that God has brought Israel back and is making them prosperous

The Ancient Worthies will return before mankind is resurrected, and with the technology today the news will spread fast—then shortly thereafter will be the resurrection of the dead, and those living at that time will see this and be swept off their feet in awe

In the phrase “they will see the Son of Man coming in great glory,” the word “see” can be translated several ways; to see with the mind, to perceive, to know; and in Matthew it is translated “to take heed”—the world will perceive that Jesus is coming because they will see the trouble around them—the verses listed in the Chat (not recorded) tie clouds with darkness during the period when Jesus returns—it makes sense that these are connected with the clouds in Matthew 24:30, and the context supports this because the sun, moon and stars are darkened

Leader Comment—People will have to discern at a certain moment that the Lord is present because his power will govern the whole world, but the leader wondered if we had an idea about how this recognition will happen—people will have to learn that there is a new government and new rules—something will show them that this is the case

Br. Russell is talking about a double application, although he didn’t use that terminology—people’s eyes will be opened because of the Ancient Worthies being resurrected and God delivering Israel—this is how this person would harmonize Br. Russell’s statements and Matthew 24—there are two perspectives, a double application—his comments are broad enough to cover from the epiphania to the apocalypse

One of the main things that will open people's eyes is the deliverance of Israel—they will be in an impossible situation where they can't possibly win—the entire world will be against them—God will deliver them and that event will open people's eyes

This is a good question, because we see the gap between what the world understands and the recognition of God's intervention in current events—at some point there will need to be a direct communication that the world is governed by a new king—the verses brought out in this discussion and by Br. Russell are a guide for us, so we can realize that the resurrection will happen and people will experience this powerful miracle and be charged with responsibilities—there will be a point, beyond doubt, where men who have not seen God will understand and experience the fact that He is king—the belief will be much easier then because they will be confronted by what they can see—looking at it from a philosophical point of view, it will be such a turning point—exactly how it will happen is for us to search and discern, but it is a very exciting thought

Question—When God delivers Israel and the Ancient Worthies are on the scene and the resurrection has taken place, is it correct to say Satan will be bound at that point? Because otherwise he could just tell people that they were sleeping and never really died

Yes

After the Church class and the Great Company are gone, Satan is completely bound so the restitution blessings can flow uninterrupted—people will have a real chance to do good things

Leader Question--We all wait for this moment, but the Bible doesn't exactly describe how the whole earth will recognize the Lord—Revelation 19 ends in a battle—this person assumes that the fire destroys everything that was before and it is time to start something new, and the new has to be somehow announced—will this announcement be manifested by the resurrection, or will it be something more? We have the picture of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, but the leader is not sure exactly what this means for the world—we have some information, but not enough to translate these things into exact events—this is still a mystery for us

Next time—P. 153, subheading "In Like Manner"

