

“Eschatology”
(Part 37: The Olivet Discourse, Part 4)

V. The Olivet Discourse.

D. What will happen after the tribulation (vv. 29-31).

1. Review.

- a. The Olivet Discourse follows on eight curses the Lord pronounced against the Jews for their rejection of Him (Matt. 23:13-31).
 - (i) It was not done vindictively, but with great sorrow, as evidenced by His lamentation following, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:37-38).
 - (ii) To further show His mercy towards them, He was intending to send even more prophets, wise men and scribes, and that for at least three reasons:
 - (a) Graciously, to call them to repentance.
 - (b) To gather His elect out of Israel.
 - (c) But knowing how they would respond, to allow them further to fill up the cup of God’s wrath.
 - (1) They would kill some and crucify others; some of them they would scourge, and others they would persecute from city to city (v. 34).
 - (2) That upon them would fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth (v. 35).
 - (iii) The result would be their house would be left desolate (v. 38): this is what Jesus goes on to describe in chapter 24.
 - (iv) Jesus said the time of fulfillment was near: “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (v. 36).
- b. The signs that this destruction was approaching would be false Messiahs, wars, rumors of wars, famines, plagues and earthquakes, persecution and betrayal, false prophets, lawlessness, natural affections dying out, and the Gospel being preached to the whole world (vv. 4-14): all of which happened before 70 AD.
- c. The sign that judgment had come was the abomination of desolation: the armies of Rome marching against Jerusalem (vv. 15-28).
 - (i) This would mark the beginning of the desolation of the holy city and the holy Temple.
 - (ii) When they saw this, they were immediately to run or they would be trapped in the city, or the county, and would suffer with those being judged (vv. 15-20).
 - (iii) Jesus said there would be a great tribulation upon the Jews, greater than anything that had ever happened to any people, or ever would again (vv. 21-22).

- (iv) This happened when God sent His ministers of divine justice in the person of the Roman armies to put an end to the corruption of His covenant people: “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (Matt. 24:28).

2. We come now to what Jesus said would happen following the tribulation.

“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 the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (vv. 29-30).

a. This section more than any other might tempt us to think that Jesus was referring to His Second Coming and not to the destruction of Jerusalem.

- (i) The sun and moon are darkened; the stars fall from the sky; Jesus appears to be coming in the way the angels said He would return (Acts 1:11).

- (ii) Here’s where we need to remember the time frame to bring us back to what He was speaking about, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (v. 34).

- (a) Whatever He was referring to must have taken place at or around 70 AD – the length of one generation from the time He spoke these words.

- (b) Consider also the word “immediately”: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days.” Jesus was still speaking of the judgment on Israel in 70 AD.

b. What was Jesus referring to?

- (i) If you were here for the study in the book of Revelation, you’ll remember that the NT authors – or in this case the speaker – draw on OT imagery to get their point across, since this is what their audience would be familiar with.

- (ii) Imagery regarding changes in the heavens has to do with God’s judgment on a nation, specifically overthrowing a political power. Here are two examples:

- (a) The first is a prophecy pronounced against Babylon in the days of Isaiah, “The oracle concerning *Babylon* which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw . . .

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.

Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger” (Isa. 13:1, 9-13).

- (1) It begins with Babylon, but then includes other nations, which wasn’t unusual with prophecies regarding judgment.

- (2) But so we don’t lose sight that it was pronounced primarily against Babylon, Isaiah continues in verse 19, “And Babylon, the beauty of

kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."

(3) Consider verse 10, "For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light."

(4) The darkening of the sun, moon and stars was a sign of judgment by God against Babylon.

(b) The second example comes from Ezekiel 32:2-8, where there the Lord foretells His judgment against Egypt. "Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him, 'You compared yourself to a young lion of the nations, yet you are like the monster in the seas; and you burst forth in your rivers and muddied the waters with your feet and fouled their rivers.' Thus says the Lord God, 'Now I will spread My net over you with a company of many peoples, and they shall lift you up in My net. I will leave you on the land; I will cast you on the open field. And I will cause all the birds of the heavens to dwell on you, and I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with you. I will lay your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your refuse. I will also make the land drink the discharge of your blood as far as the mountains, and the ravines will be full of you. And when I extinguish you, *I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land,*' declares the Lord God" (Cf. also Isa. 34:1-10; Jer. 4:14-24; and Joel 2:10-11).

(1) In both of these examples, judgment was accompanied by the darkening of the sun, moon and stars.

(2) Was this a literal darkness? Most likely this is symbolic or figurative language.

(A) God placed the sun, moon and stars to give light on the earth for times, seasons and directions. They are a sign of blessing. In His judgment, He takes away that light and brings darkness.

(B) Or it may refer to the nation itself, as it does in Joseph's dream in Genesis 37. There Israel is symbolized by the sun, moon and eleven stars (v. 9). Israel is represented in Revelation as a woman who is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and with a crown of twelve stars on her head (12:1). The darkening of these celestial light bearers could simply be referring to judgment on the nation they represent.

(C) Or the darkness might have been literal, such as when our Lord was crucified, the sky became dark and the sun didn't give its light as a sign of judgment against the sin He was bearing for us.

(iii) Next, Jesus tells His disciples, **"The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see**

the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (v. 30).

- (a) Jesus said that there would be another sign after that destruction, a sign that everyone would see: the sign of His coming.
 - (1) Jesus had already told His disciples to beware of those who would rise up claiming to be the Christ – that they should not believe them.
 - (2) The reason was His coming would be clearly seen. “For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day” (Luke 17:24).
 - (3) That coming, as we’ve seen, would be a coming in judgment; *and when He will have brought that judgment upon the Jews, it would then be clear to all men that He has come and that He is truly the Messiah.*
 - (4) John Lightfoot, a Hebrew scholar and Bible expositor during the time of the English Puritans, whose commentaries are still widely used today in Reformed circles, wrote, “Then shall *the Son of man* give a proof of himself, whom they would not before acknowledge: as proof, indeed, not in any visible figure, but in vengeance and judgment so visible, that all the tribes of the earth shall be forced to acknowledge him the avenger. The Jews would not know him: now they shall know him, whether they will or no, Isaiah 26:11. Many times they asked of him a *sign*: now a *sign* shall appear, that he is the true Messiah, whom they despised, derided, and crucified, namely, his signal vengeance and fury, such as never any nation felt from the first foundations of the world” (*Gospels*, Matt. 24:30).
- (b) The fact that Jesus portrays Himself as coming on the clouds is figurative of His coming in judgment.
 - (1) When the Lord would come in judgment against a nation in the Old Testament, He often described Himself as riding on the clouds of heaven.
 - (A) Isaiah wrote regarding God’s judgment on Egypt, “The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord *is riding on a swift cloud* and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them” (Isa. 19:1).
 - (B) Ezekiel writes, “For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near; *it will be a day of clouds*, a time of *doom* for the nations. A sword will come upon Egypt, and anguish will be in Ethiopia; when the slain fall in Egypt, they take away her wealth, and her foundations are torn down. Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword” (Ezek. 30:3-5).
 - (C) After David experienced the Lord’s deliverance from Saul, he wrote, “He rode upon a cherub and flew; and He sped upon the wings of the wind. *He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him, darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds*, hailstones and coals of

fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows, and scattered them, and lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them” (Psalm 18:10-14; cf. also Lam. 2:1).

(D) Did the Lord literally come down on a cloud to help David? We don’t read anything about them in the historical parts of the Old Testament where this deliverance is recorded.

(E) This is figurative language to describe the Lord’s judgment and deliverance. Clouds are figurative of divine majesty. They often symbolize a stormy destruction (Gentry 362).

(2) The same is true regarding what Jesus said to His disciples.

(A) After the high priest said to Jesus, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God,” Jesus answered, “You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:63-64).

(B) When Jesus said this, He was addressing the whole assembly. The word “you” here is plural.

(C) Did that assembly see Jesus come on the clouds? No, but many of them saw the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

(D) Jesus said all the tribes of the earth would see His coming and mourn. **“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (v. 30).**

(E) The word “tribes” most often refers to the Jews in the New Testament, who were divided by tribes; the word “world” here can also be translated land. All the Jews saw this destruction, and they mourned.

(F) Compare Revelation 1:7, which we saw was referring to God’s judgment in 70 AD, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”

(iv) The last thing Jesus tells His disciples in this section is that **“He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (v. 31).**

(a) Was Jesus referring to the rapture of the church and the resurrection of the dead?

(1) Because it sounds very similar to what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4, many people believe it is. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (vv. 16-17).

- (2) But He can't be referring to His Second Coming.
 - (A) These things were to happen "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29).
 - (B) These things would happen before that generation passed away (v. 34).
- (b) He was most likely referring to the evangelization of the furthest reaches of the world.
 - (1) Trumpet imagery has to do with gathering.
 - (A) This is how the tribes of Israel were gathered in the Old Covenant. "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing *of trumpets*, a holy convocation'" (Lev. 23:24).
 - (B) "Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. He established it for a testimony in Joseph when he went throughout the land of Egypt. I heard a language that I did not know" (Ps. 81:3-5).
 - (2) The word "angel" can be used for human messengers. It doesn't always refer to angelic beings, "When the *messengers* (*i.e.*, angels) of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?'" (Luke 7:24).
 - (3) Lightfoot explains it in this way, "When Jerusalem shall be reduced to ashes, and that wicked nation cut off and rejected, then shall the Son of man send His ministers with the trumpet of the Gospel, and they shall gather His elect of the several nations, from the four corners of heaven: so that God shall not want a Church, although that ancient people of His be rejected and cast off: but that ancient Jewish Church being destroyed, a new Church shall be called out of the Gentiles" (JFB).
- (c) Again, language similar to that of the Second Coming is used here because a similar thing is happening.
 - (1) When Jesus tore down the typological kingdom of Israel, He blew the trumpet to send His ministers out to gather His elect people into His New Covenant kingdom, no longer exclusively Jewish, but now including the Gentiles.
 - (2) On the final day when Christ comes back, He will summon all His people, the living and dead, with the sound of a trumpet, to gather them together for the final judgment (1 Thes. 4:16).
 - (3) Next week, we'll see Jesus again emphasize the importance of His disciples being ready to avoid this judgment that would take place within one generation.