

WHEN THE STARS FELL

By

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Prophetic speculators are often looking for signs in the heavens to find fulfillment of figurative statements of Scripture. One much abused scriptures is the statement of Jesus in His discourse on Mt. Olivet: (Matt. 24:29–30a).

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven”

Every eclipse of the sun or moon, each unusual configuration of the planets, and every report of UFOs (unidentified flying objects) bring new speculations of the fulfillment of this text. But a careful reading of Scripture shows that such events have nothing to do with biblical prophecy.

The Bible is its own interpreter, and in the book of Genesis is found the meaning of such references to the sun, moon and stars. Joseph had a dream that the sun, moon and stars all came and bowed down to him (Gen. 37:9–10). Although Joseph was only seventeen years old, his family understood the meaning of his dream. His father asked, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and you mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?” They understood that the sun, moon and stars represented authority and rule, and they are used in this way throughout the Old Testament.

Isaiah speaks of the destruction of the city of Babylon (Isa. 13:1) in these terms: **“For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause it light to shine.”**

Concerning the destruction of Edom, Isaiah writes (Isa. 34:4–5): **“And all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their hosts shall fade away, as the leaf fades from off the vine, and as a fading leaf from the fig tree, for my sword has drunk its full in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.”**

The same terminology is used in speaking of judgment on Tyre and Egypt (Isa 23; Ezek. 32:7–8). In Judges, where “the kings came and fought,” it also says “the stars fought from heaven” (Judges 5:19–20). Both expressions refer to the same event, meaning that the stars are the kings.

God used the same language in Joel’s prophecy, where he speaks of **“wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah comes”** (Joel 2:30–31). This prophecy is quoted by Peter in his explanation of the events of Pentecost. He said, “this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16–21). Peter went on to speak of Christ being raised from the dead, and that since He was now exalted to sit on David’s throne, He had poured forth the holy spirit. From Joel’s prophecy Peter cites two things: the giving of the holy spirit and the

great judgment against Israel which was to come in 70 AD. The sun, moon and stars of the once glorious nation of Israel were judged and cast down.

The same kind of figurative language is used in rev. 6:12–17, where the sixth seal of judgment is opened, and John writes that “...the sun became black...and the stars of the haven fell unto the earth...and the heaven was removed as a scroll...” This is clearly a judgment upon earthly rulers and has nothing to do with planets and other heavenly bodies.

In all these passages, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel and Revelation, the language describing the sun, moon and stars is figurative, and the meaning clearly established the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:29 as also figurative and a description of the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel in 70 AD and **not the second coming**.

But what of the “sign of the son of man in heaven” in verse 30? **“And then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”** Note that this is not a sign in heaven, but it is a sign of **“the son of man in heaven.”**

Again, we need to see how this apocalyptic language is used in the Old Testament. Some of the same expressions are used in Daniel, chapter 7 verses 13–14.

I saw in the night, visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations and languages should sever him: this dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Daniel writes of Christ coming on “clouds of heaven,” but the coming is **to God**, to receive power and glory at the right hand of God. Peter explained that the miracles of Pentecost took place because Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God. Daniel’s prophecy, as well as that of Joel, had been fulfilled. This is the same thing Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24:30.

Later on Jesus was to express the same thing to the high priest: “Henceforth you shall see the son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). The words, “sitting at the right hand of power,” rule out the idea that this refers to the second coming. Here Jesus is saying the same thing He said in Matthew 24 and the same thing Daniel wrote in Daniel 7, that Jesus was to ascend to the throne at the right hand of God, where He would have “all authority...in heaven and on earth” as promised in Matthew 28:18.

“The first act of this enthroned king was to send the Holy Spirit to God’s people, and the second was to send destruction on Israel. He came ‘in the clouds of heaven’.” (Dallas Meserve in *The Olivet Discourse*). Historians have pointed out that never in all history has there been such a complete destruction of a nation as the destruction of Israel, 67–70 AD. The ramifications are still felt even today. What greater sign of Christ in Sovereign power could be imagined?

Just four verses later in His discourse in Matthew 24 (Vs. 34), Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.” **These things include** false Christs, vss. **5, 23–26**; wars and rumors of wars, vs. **6**; famines and earthquakes, vs. **7**; persecution, vs. **10**; false prophets, vs. **12**; the

“abomination of desolation,” vs. **15** (Compare Luke **21:20**); escape to the mountains, vss. **16–20**; great tribulation, vss. **9, 21–22**; Christ’s exaltation and the destruction of Israel, vss. **29–30**. Clearly He said that *all these things were to take place in that generation*, the generation in which they were living.

Then beginning with verse 36, Jesus spoke of His second coming and the end of the world: “But of that day and hour knows no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the son, but the Father only.” It was important for the Christians to have definite clues regarding the fall of Jerusalem, in order that they might escape and live to present the gospel to the world. In fact, they did escape to Pella, and not one perished in the horrible destruction of Jerusalem. But at the second coming Christ Himself will separate His people from all the rest of the world in the great judgment event, for the second coming and the judgment are at the same time. We don’t need to know the date; we only need to be faithful to him and therefore ready at all times. If death comes before He does and we die in faith, then he will raise us up from the dead to receive immortality.

Jesus was precisely accurate in foretelling the judgment on Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. We can also rely on His accuracy with regard to the second coming: it will be without signs and without warning.

“Therefore be you also ready; for in an hour that you think not the Son of man comes” (Matt. 24:44).

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