

Jason Upchurch - Mark 13:24-26 - The Good News that the Temple Will Be Destroyed - Part 6

We are marching on in our look at the Olivet Discourse, Jesus's teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem. And sort of like climbing a mountain, the closer you get to the end, the more steep and difficult the terrain. That's the same for this section: the closer we get to the end, the more issues we face.

And, honestly, no matter your position on this section, it's hard. And that's okay.

Our task as Bible-believing Christians is to seek to know what the Bible says. God gave us a book with verbs and adjectives and relative clauses and genres and all the fluidities of language.

God didn't give us a picture book, or pass down these truths through word of mouth. We don't do interpretive dances to communicate predestination or youth earth creation.

We have a book with words. And God wrote **these** words down for a reason. And sometimes it takes a lot of work to do it rightly.

Now, I think most of you are familiar with my perspective: that this whole passage is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Some people think it is also talking about the Second Coming or the Rapture, but I believe this whole passage is just focused on the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century.

That's the context because Jesus is simply answering the disciples' questions. And Jesus says in **Vs 30** that all these things will take place in this generation.

Now, my view is often called a partial-preterist view. "Preter" is Latin meaning "to go before" or "in the past," so the idea is that these passages are talking about things that have gone before us, they've already happened. From Jesus's perspective they are future, but for us they are past.

There is a full preterist view which is, to state it bluntly, damnable heresy. Full preterism says that this is talking about 70AD and that there is no future coming of Jesus is glory. Jesus already came and the resurrection has already happened.

Paul warns against that view in **2 Timothy 2:17-18** because it's a grave error that puts one outside the faith. We reject that view.

Here, whatever your eschatology is, all I'm saying is that here Jesus is just talking about 70AD. I actually think every eschatology - premil, amil, postmil - could still defend their view and hold to a partial-preterist view at least of **Mark 13**.

And we've covered a lot of ground and if you've missed a sermon, I'd really encourage you to go back and read it or listen to it online because if you've missed something it's easy to not understand the flow of the argument. And I'm convinced once you just understand the simple flow of Jesus's argument it's hard not to see what he's saying.

This morning is tough section, but I think it makes sense if we simply understand that **Vss. 24-27** are all quotes from other places in the Bible that Jesus quotes in rapid fashion. He doesn't explain the meaning because he assumes that the disciples, and all the readers, will know what he's referring to.

It's like when we quote lines from a movie to our friends, we assume they're going to get what we're talking about.

I fact, has someone ever quoted a movie line to you and you had no idea what they were talking about? And you're thinking "that's a really weird thing to say right about now?" Why would you say that?

That's what happens here in the passage if you don't know Jesus is quoting stuff. It's like "why is he talking about all this stuff?"

If you don't know that Jesus is quoting passages, or don't take the time to actually look up the references and figure out what's happening in them, then when Jesus says "the sun will be darkened, and the moon not give it's light, and the stars will be falling from heaven" you might actually think he's describing something that you could go outside and watch with binoculars or a telescope or just see with your eyes.

Angels going out and gathering people is maybe a physical gathering like the rapture or the second coming.

But they're not. If we just go look these passages up we can get an idea of what Jesus is saying. Here's my contention for this one paragraph in plain language:

24-25: When Jerusalem is destroyed, spiritual and political realities will change forever.

26: When Jerusalem is destroyed, that will confirm Jesus is reigning as the Son of God in heaven.

27: When Jerusalem is destroyed, the gospel will go out into all the globe.

That's my basic thesis, so let's go. **Read 24-25**

So, after that tribulation. What tribulation? He's talking about the horrifying destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. That's the tribulation Jesus is talking about. That's the whole context of the chapter: the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus says will happen in this generation, according to **Vs. 30**.

So, after that tribulation there's this phenomenon with the sun, moon and stars.

If you've read any eschatology book from a dispensational perspective or heard a pastor preach, they would say these are literal signs you can go outside and see with your eyes.

This is the classic dispensational view. And when I say dispensational, I mean a pre-tribulational - or even a mid-tribulational - end times position that has secret rapture, then a tribulation period, then a second coming, then a 1000 year millennium, then the New Heavens and New earth.

Dispensationalism is a system that makes a huge distinction between Israel and the church which, in turn, affects how they view the promises of God to his people and how the end times shakes out. And it's usually in those theological camps that say we have to take this passage "literally" with regard to these signs. Now, to be fair, if we didn't know any better it sounds like something we'll see in the sky, doesn't it?

If you remember when I first started this series I gave you some homework. Do you remember that? I told you to look up the times the Bible uses the "sun, moon and stars." I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand if you did it because I don't want to cry.

The sun, moon and stars is used all over the Bible to just mean "big changes." We might say "the world is turned upside down" or "turning point in history" or something like that. Those phrases aren't literal, they're just sayings. And when it's used in the Bible it's used when God is judging a nation for sinfulness and he's going to overthrow the nation.

Turn to Isa. 13:10. In this chapter Isaiah is prophesying the downfall of Babylon. Now, it's hard to understand just how powerful Babylon was in the ancient world. It would be like if somehow the USA, Russia and China were all one country and shared military, financial and political power. Just unimaginable power. That was the world of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. And imagine if a superpower like that came crashing down. This is God's judgment on Babylon. **Read 13:9-16**

He's not talking about the second coming, he's talking destroying Babylon. These cosmic descriptions aren't literal - the earth wasn't shaken out of it's orbit. God is just saying he will make a violent end to Babylon, this absolutely wicked country.

This is just God's way of saying "I am bringing massive political judgment" and the world will be upended. And the reason for massive political judgement is because of spiritual idolatry.

Spiritual corruption and political upheaval are connected. What was the problem in Jerusalem in Jesus's day? Spiritual corruption. What was he promising would happen? The city would be destroyed.

Now, if you slowly turn page by page to **Isaiah 24** I want you to notice some of the chapter headings. God will condemn Moab (15), Damascus (17), Cush [Ethiopia, Africa] (18), Egypt (19), Jerusalem (22), Tyre and Sidon again (23). By the time you get to **Chap 24** God is unleashing his wrath on the whole world. And he uses cosmic language again to describe it. **Read 3-7, 17-23**

The world had become so wicked God was bringing judgment on all of it. Kind of like in the days of Noah when God drowned the whole world.

And he uses cosmic language to describe the judgment. The moon is confounded or dismayed. The moon is confused. And the sun is ashamed. How does a ball of nuclear explosions have shame?

It doesn't. You guys, this is just prophetic language. God will judge everyone. The world will be turned upside down.

Turn to Ezekiel 32. God here is judging Egypt and Pharaoh. And one of the things I want you to notice in these passages is the graphic nature of the judgement. When God uses this cosmic language he's pulling together all of his wrath and fury and exploding it on the nation - they're done as a nation at that point. He's not playing. We saw in Isaiah that the judgements are severe and sickening. The children die by sword, the women are ravaged.

That's why Jesus uses this language: because Jerusalem being destroyed is going to be the worst thing they've ever experienced. Buckle up for what's about to happen to Egypt. **Read 1-10**

This is severe, gruesome, overwhelming judgement. And the cosmic language he uses shows how severe the judgement is. Again, to use the phrase "all hell is breaking loose" I think is what maybe we'd use to describe this judgement.

Turn to Joel 2:10. In Joel, the Lord is now talking about the judgment of Jerusalem and Israel. **Read 6-14**

God is going to wipe out Jerusalem with incredible destruction. And it happened when Babylon destroyed her. And even then God offers his people forgiveness.

Amos 8:9 says the same thing: And on that day, declares Yahweh God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

To put it plainly: There is no record in any of these events that anything literally happened to the sun, moon or stars. That's never the point in the Bible. It's almost always used as a figure of speech for the severity of God's judgment and how the world will be changed.

Turn to Acts 2:16-21. This is the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers and they spoke in languages and the gobs of people visiting heard the Christians speak in their own language. How does Peter explain this? **Read 16-21**

Peter says "Joel said this would happen." What would happen? Cosmic signs: sun, moon and stars. Was there an eclipse that day? No. The Holy Spirit was poured out on every single believer. This was a massive shift in the way God worked among his people. It was judgement on unbelieving Israel, and had shifted his blessing to those who believe in Jesus.

And it was so massive it can only be compared to the overthrow of major nation states in the OT.

So all that to say, sun, moon and stars is not literal. It's just an expression in the Bible for judgment on a people, usually because of spiritual depravity.

By the way, this same language is used in **Revelation 6:2, 8:12**. It's not literal, as many things in Revelation are not literal.

Now, while we're here I also want you to look at **Vss. 30-36**. What Peter is about to say is that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit because he is seated on the throne in heaven. This will be really important in a few minutes. **Read 30-36**

God raised up Jesus, exalted him to his right hand - that was his ascension going to the Father, seated on David's throne forever. Remember in **2 Sam. 7** God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on David's throne? Who Was he talking about? Jesus. When did that happen according to Peter in **Vss. 30-33**? In his resurrection and ascension.

Just tuck that away. Let's go **back to Mark 13. Read 13:24-25**

So what is Jesus saying? He's saying that there is going to be a massive shift in the spiritual and political world when Jerusalem is destroyed because of God's judgement. Worship of Yahweh is no longer centered on a place or physical building. God will dwell in his people.

The point is not looking up in the sky for signs. You know all those books about how many Blood Moons there are and what to do when the sky goes dark., I'm telling you you can just use those to light your camp fire because they have nothing to do with the Bible.

The point is when Jerusalem is destroyed the earth will be turned upside down.

1) **24-25**: When Jerusalem is destroyed, spiritual and political realities will change forever.

Physical Jerusalem will never again be the place where Christians gather to worship God. We worship him neither on that mountain or at any specified spot because he is worshipped in Spirit and in what? Truth. **John 4**.

2) **26**: When Jerusalem is destroyed, that will confirm Jesus is reigning as the Son of God in heaven. **Read 26**

"Jason, how do you get that out of this verse?" Now, I'm going to tell you this is the hardest verse in the whole chapter. By the way, I think this paragraph is the hardest no matter your view. But just to state plainly: I don't believe this is talking about Jesus's Second Coming returning visibly in glory.

I believe Jesus is saying that when Jerusalem is destroyed, that will be a sign confirming that he ascended into heaven and is reigning on the throne of God in glory.

Jesus's coming is not down from heaven to earth, but he's coming from earth into heaven in glory. And that happened - like Peter said - at the ascension when he was exalted.

Remember how I said this whole paragraph is a series of quotes from the OT? This is from **Daniel 7. Turn there**. In **Daniel 7** we have a vision of one like the Son of Man. This is a vision of Jesus coming to the Father in heaven to receive a Kingdom. Remember in **Acts 2** we read that David didn't ascend to the Father, who ascended? Jesus to the right hand of God. **Read 9-12**

So what's happened? Daniel has a vision of heaven. This is God on the throne in heaven in full power and glory. He is surrounded by the millions and millions of angels and souls. He is the center of all things and he is the Judge. The books are open as he looks around. What books? Well we see in other places these are proverbial records of people and their deeds. So he sits in judgement, the books are open and he's holding court.

What about these beasts in **11-12**? They are various rulers that Daniel has seen in visions throughout the book. Their identity isn't important. What is important is that the greatest of the beasts have been destroyed by God, but some will still have authority for a time. I think that time is from the ascension of Jesus until his Second coming.

But watch what happens next. **Read 13-14**

Who is this talking about? Jesus. Jesus is the Son of Man. Jesus comes **to** the Ancient of Days. And comes to the Ancient of Days on the clouds of heaven. And he is given a Kingdom, and glory, and people of all nations will worship him.

He came on clouds into heaven in glory to receive a Kingdom. When did this happen? At his ascension, like Peter says.

Acts 1:9: And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Where'd Jesus go? Heaven. On a cloud. Stay with me.

When Jesus is talking about the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory he's not talking about coming to earth. He's talking about coming to heaven to the Father.

This is the only other reference in the Bible to the Son of Man coming on clouds in power and glory. And he's not coming to earth. He's coming to the Father in heaven. And when he does this, all the people of the earth - not just Israel - begin to worship him.

Imagine I called up my parents in the Tri Cities and said "I'd like to come visit you guys this weekend." Which way am I heading? I'm heading south. So I go visit them for a couple days. And while I'm packing up to come home I text my wife, "Hey, I'm coming home." Now which way am I traveling? North. But in both instances I'm coming. So when we say we're coming somewhere the question is: which direction?

Daniel makes it clear that the direction of coming - when Jesus uses this language - is not from heaven to earth. The direction of Jesus's coming is from earth to heaven to receive a throne.

There will one day be a coming of Jesus from heaven to earth - but the NT authors usually use a different word for that. So that's not what he's talking about because in the very next paragraph Jesus says this is accomplished in this generation.

Okay. So I think the coming of Jesus on the clouds is him coming into heaven. Now, you should be asking a big question.

"In **Mark 13** Jesus says you'll **see** the Son of Man coming on the clouds." It's a visual thing. That means it has to be the Second Coming. Ah, not so fast. **Turn to Matt. 24:29-31**

I'm going to show you 2 passages in Matthew that I think will help. In Matthew's version he says that what people will see is not Jesus coming; what they will see is a sign. And as a result of seeing the sign all people will go, "Oh no, Jesus is reigning." **Read 29-30**

So same context as Mark. Matthew just adds the crucial tidbit that what they see is a **sign**. They don't see cosmic things. He's bringing in the language of the previous verse.

We could say "Then will appear the sign **that** the Son of Man is in heaven. That's the idea.

So put this together: When Jerusalem is destroyed like Babylon, Egypt, Damascus and even Jerusalem in the past - when the sun, moon, and stars all proverbially died - it will be a sign that Jesus is actually reigning in heaven. That Jesus came to the Ancient of Days and really is the Son of Man like he said.

The destruction of Jerusalem is the sign to all people in all the world that Jesus came into heaven with power and great glory, just like Daniel said.

When Jerusalem is destroyed in this generation, which was a completely absurd idea. But when it happens that will be the sign, the proof that Jesus has come into heaven in power and glory like Daniel said.

You say "But it says they'll see him." The idea that they'll see the proof that it happened. Not that they'll literally see him - but they'll see the sign that he is really the Christ, Son of God. Jerusalem being destroyed is the great "I told you so" of Jesus from heaven.

Now, if that sounds like a stretch, turn to **Matt 26:62-68**

This is Jesus on trial before Caiaphas. And if you remember, they can't get their false witnesses to agree about a charge against Jesus. They've arrested him, but they can't make any crime stick because their false witnesses are getting their stories mixed up. It's embarrassing. So they turn to Jesus to try to get him to incriminate himself. And he does. And look at how he does it. **Read 63**

This is the issue: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Will you acknowledge that? And Jesus says "Absolutely!" **Read 64-68**

What did Jesus just say that sends them over the edge? He said you'll see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Is he talking about the Second Coming? No. They won't see the second coming because they'll be dead by then and they'll all be in hell anyway.

What did many of those people see in just 37 years that would prove Jesus is reigning on the throne in heaven, seated at the right hand of power like Daniel said?

They saw their beloved city torn to pieces. They saw no stone left upon another. They saw the sign that proves that Jesus is the Son of God, Son of Man, seated at the right hand of power. They didn't physically see that reality of Jesus in heaven.

But they saw the one sign that proved it.

Think about signs in the Bible for a minute. Signs usually happen **after** the event they signify, not before.

Baptism is a sign. Does it occur before or after salvation? After.

Circumcision was a sign. Did it occur before or after the promise? After.

When God told Moses to go lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses asked for a sign. You know God said?

"I will be with you and this will be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God in this mountain [Sinai]." **Exo. 3:11-12**

The sign for Moses was years later when he was standing there by Mt. Sinai with 3 million people. God's signs usually come after the reality.

The sign that Jesus has gone into heaven, to the ancient of days, is that his wild prophecy of Jerusalem being destroyed in 1 generation came true. The sign is not up in the sky, the sign points to what happened when Jesus was lifted up into heaven.

When the people see Jerusalem destroyed, it will confirm Jesus is reigning.

Pray