

Matthew 24:29-31

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Jesus finishes the answer to the second question about the sign of His coming. Jesus will gather His elect, shake the powers of the heavens, and come to earth on the clouds of glory. He will be seen by those on the earth, and the tribes of the earth will mourn.

The parallel gospel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 13:24-27 and Luke 21:25-28.

In this section of commentary, we will look at the third and final precursor event that Jesus told His disciples would indicate that His return was soon. The first precursor was the Abomination of Desolation, as spoken of in the biblical book of Daniel. The second precursor He gave them is known as “The Great *Tribulation*” also spoken of in Daniel.

This is part of Jesus’s Olivet Discourse, which began with Him answering three questions from the disciples regarding future events while He sat on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem. Their questions seemed to stem from Jesus’s statement that the temple would be torn down stone by stone. This is what they asked:

1. When will these things happen?
2. What will be the sign of your coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Jesus answered these questions in reverse order.

Previously Jesus answered the disciples’ third question and told them that *the sign of the end of the age* would be that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations (Matthew 24:14).

This passage concludes *His* final remarks about their second question.

His ultimate answer for this second question—What will be the sign of your coming?—would essentially be “You won’t need a sign to know that I have come. It will be unmistakably apparent!” (Matthew 24:27). Nevertheless, Jesus gave three signs or precursors which would indicate *His* return was soon.

The first precursor that Jesus gave signaling the nearness of His return was “The Abomination of Desolation” as spoken of in the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15). The second precursor was “The Great *Tribulation*” of three and a half years of global misery (Matthew 24:21). The third event that Jesus told *His* disciples would precede His coming was the Darkening of *the sun, moon, and stars* (Matthew 24:29):

But 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.

The *tribulation of those days* Jesus speaks of here is the three and a half years of global misery that Jesus called the “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21). The visible evidence of Jesus’s return will not occur until *after the great tribulation* that He described in Matthew 24:21-28. It will happen *immediately after those days* of unparalleled distress are complete.

The beginning of *the three and a half year Great Tribulation* is signaled by the Abomination of Desolation spoken of in Daniel (Matthew 24:15). The end of *the Great Tribulation* is the darkening of *the sky*. Together these three events serve as precursors that *the Son of Man’s* return to earth is rapidly approaching.

Jesus’s return to earth being spoken of in this passage appears to be in addition to another return of Jesus which will be a return to meet believers in the air. Unlike Jesus’s return to earth after the end of the Great Tribulation, which will take place only after these signs, the return of Jesus in the air can occur at any time. ([Please see commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 for more on this topic](#)).

In using the phrase “abomination of desolation,” Jesus is referencing Daniel 12:11. Daniel 12 indicates that there is an important time that lasts seventy five days past the three and a half years, or 1,260 days, of the Great Tribulation. Daniel went on to say that there will be a special blessing for those who “keep waiting and attain to the 1,335 days.”

It could be that Jesus’s return will be *immediately* after the *tribulation of those days* or near the 1,335th day. It could also be that many of the other predicted signs (such as the ones described in this passage) will occur during the time between the end of the *great tribulation* on day 1,290 and day 1,335 (Daniel 12:11-12). This is supported by the phrase indicating that the cosmic disturbances occur *immediately after the tribulation of those days*. The Great Tribulation appears to be 1,260 days, but Daniel 12 speaks both of 1,290 days as well as 1,335 days. This clue is intriguing, but not clear. Perhaps it will be clear to those who live in those times.

What is clear is that *immediately after the tribulation of those days* and prior to Jesus’s return there will be substantial cosmic disturbances.

First, *the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky*. The prediction of the darkening of *the sun, moon, and stars* are referred to in a number of Old Testament passages, including Isaiah 13:10; 24:23; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10, 2:31; 3:15; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zephaniah 1:15; and Zechariah 14:6. The New Testament book of [Acts 2:19-20](#) also speaks of *the sun* being darkened, quoting the Old Testament book of Joel 2:30-31, which says:

“I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood.”

This particular prophecy was first fulfilled when Jesus was crucified. And it was referenced by the Apostle Peter in his sermon explaining to the Jews what they were witnessing at that time, when the Holy Spirit was being poured out (Acts 2:14-21):. It is not unusual, however, for prophecies to be fulfilled more than once. This was the case with the prediction of the *Abomination of Desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel*, which clearly had to have at least two fulfillments (1) Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C. and 2) just before *the great tribulation* begins at the end of the age) and possibly other fulfillments (Pompey’s capture of Jerusalem in 60 B.C and Titus’s demolition of the temple in 70 A.D.).

The New Testament book of Revelation also predicts the darkening of *the sun*. Revelation was written by the Apostle John in his old age, well after Jesus ascended (Acts 1:9). John was also named by Mark as being among the disciples who asked Jesus about these events, when He taught them on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3).

Revelation 6:12 describes God’s judgment proceeding from the breaking of the “sixth seal” of a heavenly scroll, and includes a prediction that *the sun* will become “black as sackcloth of hair.” And Revelation 6:13 describes “the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.” These are all similar descriptions to what Jesus said would happen *immediately after the tribulation*.

The expression *and the powers of the heavens will be shaken* likely refers to other cosmic disturbances, in addition to the darkening of heavenly bodies. This could mark a beginning to the literal fulfillment of Jesus’s statement later in this discourse: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). This expression about *the powers of heaven* being *shaken* could also refer to the angelic and demonic *powers* of the spiritual realm. These powers are at war with one another in the cosmic conflict—of which earth and humanity are a small but central battlefield (see commentary on [Psalm 8](#), as well as [Daniel 10:10-14](#)). This expression about *the powers of the heavens* could also refer to both the celestial bodies throughout our solar system and universe, as well as the spiritual *powers*.

After *the sun, moon, and stars* darken, the second part of these cosmic disturbances will occur next.

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky.

The sign of the Son of Man likely refers to what Jesus has just told *His* disciples in Matthew 24:27, “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” John described an event in Revelation that could be describing this appearance of Jesus returning to earth:

“The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”
(Revelation 6:14)

It is interesting to note that the reaction of the “kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man” on the earth when Jesus returns is that they “hid themselves in caves” to hide themselves from the presence of the “wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:15-16). They apparently know and recognize it is Jesus, but attempt to hide rather than to repent, similar to Adam and Eve’s reaction when God appeared in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned (Revelation 6:16; Genesis 3:8).

In Luke’s parallel account, Jesus said in addition to the signs of *the sun, moon, and stars*, there will be a “roaring of the sea and the waves” (Luke 21:25).

As these things occur all the vanities of this world will be revealed for the “hebel” (vapor) that they are (Ecclesiastes 1:2; James 4:14). Jesus said when the skies melt and all the things of earth vaporize, *then all the tribes of the earth will mourn*. The phrase *all the tribes of the earth* refers to all the peoples, nations, and kingdoms throughout the entire world.

The apparent reason these *tribes will mourn* is because their kingdoms, with their power, riches, and glory have come to an end (Revelation 6:15-16; 18:9-19). And *they will mourn* because it will be apparent to them that they have made themselves enemies of The All-Mighty King, who is now come to judge the earth and its wickedness.

The prophet Zechariah describes a different mourning relating to Jews. In a passage regarding a defense and restoration of Jerusalem, there will be among the Jews of Israel an outcry of grief as from a parent lamenting the loss of their first born. They will “look on Me whom they have pierced” and “mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son” (Zechariah 12:10-11). This will be because God has poured out upon “the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplication.” This could be a fulfillment of Paul’s prediction that “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).

Therefore, even though *All the tribes of the earth will mourn*, it appears that some will *mourn* because they are defeated and await His judgment, while others will mourn because they realize what they have done, and come to repentance. Irrespective of which camp they are in, all will see Jesus:

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

All the tribes of the earth will see what Daniel saw in his vision,

“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.”
(Daniel 7:13-14)

This is the moment that will usher in the reality that the Apostle Paul described to the Philippian church,

“So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
(Philippians 2:10-11)

Jesus ended *His* answer to the disciples’ second question about *the sign* of His coming by telling them: *and 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.*

The Son of Man will send forth His angels to sound the great trumpet. A trumpet is used to blast a sound that summons people from afar. This great trumpet will gather together His elect. The term, His elect refers to all the people who have believed in Jesus as the Son of Man and Son of God. They were known and chosen by Him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). When the great trumpet is sounded by His angels, every living believer on earth will be gathered together along with those believers who have already died.

All who have believed upon Jesus will be in heaven, and live in the presence of Jesus forever (John 3:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:19). Also, all believers will be judged for their deeds, to determine what rewards they receive (Matthew 5:12,46, 6:2,4-6,16-18; 10:41-42;16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; Revelation 11:18; 22:12). But the period of judgement will end, and all tears and sorrow will be erased (Revelation 21:4). The culmination of all these events is when heaven comes to earth, and God dwells with His people on a new earth (Revelation 21:1-3). All believers will be gathered together to dwell with God on this new earth.

Jesus’s expressions *from the four winds* and *from one end of the sky to the other* are both ways of saying that His people will be gathered across the entire earth. The first expression, *from the four winds*, is similar to our contemporary expression “the four corners of the earth.” The second expression, *from one end of the sky to the other*, is similar to the Biblical expression indicating the unlimited reach “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). Jesus used both expressions as a way of emphatically assuring that every single believer, no matter where they are, will be gathered *together with the Son of Man in glory*. This likely emphasizes that this includes God’s people from all times and all places upon the earth.

Again, it was fitting that Jesus shared about *His* return to earth, while sitting on the Mount of Olives with *His* disciples, because the Mount of Olives is the very spot from which Jesus, the Messiah, *the Son of Man* will soon ascend to heaven, after His death and resurrection (Acts 1:9) then later return to earth:

“In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.” (Zechariah 14:4)

This concludes Jesus’s answer to *His* disciples’ second question asking Him “what will be *the sign of Your coming?*” (Matthew 24:3). *His* answer was that they would not need a *sign* because when He returns everyone will know (Matthew 24:27). But He gave them three precursor events to *His* coming so they would know that *His* return was near. These events were the Abomination of Desolation (Matthew 24:15); the Great *Tribulation* (Matthew 24:21); and the Darkening of *the Sun, Moon, and Stars* (Matthew 24:29).

From here Jesus continued in *His* Olivet Discourse to answer the first question the disciples asked Him, which was, “When will these things happen?”

Biblical Text

²⁹ “But 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. ³⁰ 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. ³¹ And 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.