

THE STORY OF THE END-TIME CELESTIAL SIGNS

Christ's Mount Olivet teachings linked earth's final events with three celestial incidents. This is unique and unfolds progressive information about this period.

The **first** is described by Luke: "and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven" (Luke 21:11b).

- This is part of the "warning block" of signs that herald the onset of **the generation** that will see everything fulfilled (vs 32).
- Though not definitively explained, its context suggests such atmospheric calamities as tornadoes, hurricanes, cyclones.
- The disasters include earthquakes, wars, famine and pestilence (cf. Matthew 24:7).

The **second** relates to the moon not giving her light, the sun darkening and the stars "falling."

"Immediately after [a sequence phrase] the tribulation of those days shall the sun 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" (Matthew 24:29).



- This sign will be the focus of this narrative.
- Christ said that these celestial events would occur after "that tribulation," which begins when the "abomination of desolation," portrayed in Daniel, threatens God's people (cf. Mark 13:14-25).

The **third** heavenly event:

- "And then [a sequence phrase] 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 in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30; cf. Revelation 6:15-17).
- This is when the great "harvest" occurs heralded by Jesus arriving on the clouds of heaven as He makes a "great sound of a trumpet" (24:31).

The three:

1. Celestial calamities – end-time warning, countdown begins
2. Bodies of heaven change – second coming is imminent
3. Christ appears to all of humanity – His elect are drawn up together as the great harvest of the saved

Looking Forward

In Luke's record of Christ's apocalyptic discourse he quotes Him as saying: "And there shall be **signs** in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with

perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:25-26).

These celestial events are noted to be “signs” (*semeion*). They transcend something out of “the common course of nature.”¹ Those heavenly events are supernatural. It is a foreboding notice to the wicked that something terrifying is about to happen (cf. Revelation 6:12-17). To the righteous, it is the final prophetic signal – “behold I come quickly”! Intriguingly, there is in these “signs” an element of *immediacy*.

That *collective* list is instructive:

- Sun
 - Moon
 - Stars
- } Each conveys a “sign” and is associated with “for the power of heaven shall be shaken” (cf. Revelation 6:14). The natural order of celestial nature is turned aside. The laws of astrophysics are changed. A divine act is recognized.

A time gap *between* these events is not alluded to. What omen or dramatic events do these point to? Notice the sequence words, “And then.”

“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27).

Kai tote (“And then”) is a demonstrative adverb of “time.” This is the time or event that has just been under consideration. When these celestial signs appear – He comes.

Looking Back

This heavenly prophecy had its key revelation in the book of Joel. It is uncertain when this was penned. Evidence weighs in favor of the era during the 490-year probationary period of Daniel 9.² While the nation of Israel was on a timed probation, a cataclysmic end was foretold.

“Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.... And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will show 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 the terrible day of the LORD come” (Joel 1:15, 2:29-31).

The language in verses 15 and 31, “the day of the Lord” is typical language for the end of the world. It is the time when all comes to chaos and all structures of life end or God’s people are delivered. “When the prophets asserted that heavens were shaken, they implied that creation was being undone and that the world the people knew was ending.”³

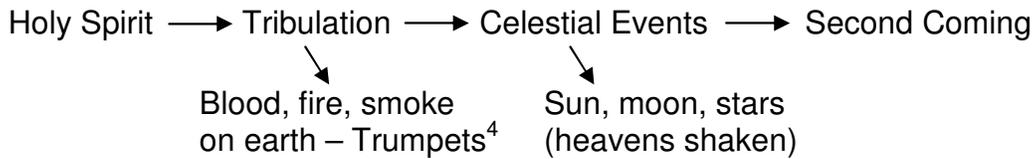
This alludes to the “desolation” which results from the transgression (Daniel 8:13) and abomination (Daniel 12:11), which Jesus urged that we review (Matthew 24:15). These

¹ *Thayers Lexicon*.

² Garrett, Duane A.; *The New American Commentary, Hosea, Joel*; (Broadman and Holman Publishers), pp. 286-294).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

celestial events are directly tied to a fixed sequence in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. When associated with Joel 2:10-11, 29-32:



As the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the twelve were standing together (Acts 2:14) and Peter “lifted up his voice, and said ...” (noting Christ’s words within that powerful discourse): “And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come” (Acts 2:19-20).



He clearly references the “prophet Joel” (vs 16) in his sermon. He also again notes that it is the time when God said that He would pour out His Spirit upon mankind (vs 17) – clearly in a special manifestation (looking forward to a period in the future beyond Pentecost!).

This is stunning. The Greek states (Acts 2:17) that that Spirit would be given to “all flesh” or “all mankind.” This suggests that the whole world will be drawn into a **convicting decision**. Could this be the time when the earth is driven into two classes – the righteous and the wicked? The weight of evidence suggests that knowledge to base convicting decisions on has reached “all flesh.” The Spirit then brings all to a personal eternal decision. If this is so, and the weight of evidence suggests it is, God’s people will have an amazing responsibility to teach special truths.

- “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand” (Daniel 12:10).
- “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31-32).
- Right at the end something dramatic draws the whole world into two divisions.

In putting these clues together, the very end of time is in view. There is a tenacious interest in the events of 1755, 1780 and 1833 related to the Lisbon earthquake, darkening of the sun and moon and the falling of the stars. Those helped to propel the advent movement into existence. But the anticipated return of Jesus didn’t occur. This means that that was a minor application with a greater explicit occurrence to come. It is vital to grasp another timing issue directly related to all this. All events were to be witnessed by one generation. “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done” (Mark 13:30).

The Sixth Seal

There is another major prophecy, often glossed over, that immediately precedes the second advent. It relates to the sixth Seal. We are at the end of human history in this Seal.⁴ A parallel of the shaking of the heavens is repeated in the seventh Trumpet (11:13, 19) when the mystery of God is finished (Revelation 10:7) and the seventh Vial Plague (16:18-21). In each case there is a judicial response against the wicked with eternal rewards for the righteous following.

- This Seal and Christ's many end prophecies again tie to predictions given long ago.
- "And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling *fig* from the fig tree" (Isaiah 34:4).

There is another associated event or sight during the celestial events – earthquakes. They are omens that judgment will be executed (Joel 2:1-2, Micah 1:3-4, Naham 1:3-6, Zechariah 14:4-5) as part of the "day of the Lord" imagery. History ends with the eternal deliverance of God's people at the second coming. At this time:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The moon turns to blood2. The sun is darkened3. Stars fall | } Earthquake – the Judge is coming – Christ comes ("hide us" – Revelation 6:16) |
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These "signs" portend that all chances for repentance have now past. The darkness of the sun reveals that shortly "the Lord God giveth them light" (Revelation 22:5).

- "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11).
- These are words of duality and finality.
- "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

There is a reward based upon a judicial process. This point in time, as these celestial signs unfold, not only convey the pending eschaton – but that judicial wrath is about to replace patient mercy.

When the "powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matthew 24:29; cf. Mark 13:25, Luke 21:26), it is associated with the earthquakes. The earth and its heavens seem to cry out, "I've had enough." God's people will feel the same!

"Never since man was created had there been witnessed such a manifestation of divine power as when the law was proclaimed from Sinai. 'The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.' Psalm 68:8. Amid the most terrific convulsions of nature the voice of God, like a trumpet, was heard from the cloud. The mountain was shaken from base to summit, and the hosts of Israel, pale and trembling with terror, lay upon their faces upon the earth. He whose voice then shook

⁴ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 398.

the earth has declared, **‘Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.’ Hebrews 12:26.** Says the Scripture, **‘The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation;’ ‘and the heavens and the earth shall shake.’ Jeremiah 25:30; Joel 3:16.** In that great coming day, the heaven itself shall depart ‘as a scroll when it is rolled together.’ Revelation 6:14. And every mountain and island shall be moved out of its place. ‘The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.’ Isaiah 24:20”⁵

When those celestial bodies morph into signs, the earth shakes: “There is a mighty earthquake, ‘such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.’ Verses 17, 18. The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness are swallowed up by the angry waters. Babylon the great has come in remembrance before God, ‘to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.’ Great hailstones, every one ‘about the weight of a talent,’ are doing their work of destruction. Verses 19, 21. The proudest cities of the earth are laid low. The lordly palaces, upon which the world’s great men have lavished their wealth in order to glorify themselves, are crumbling to ruin before their eyes. Prison walls are rent asunder, and God’s people, who have been held in bondage for their faith, are set free”⁶

Tribulation – Powers of Heaven Shake { Celestial Signs } Jesus Comes
 Earthquakes }

“Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty” (Isaiah 13:6). “Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.” “In that day a man shall cast the idols of his silver, and the idols of his gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth” (Isaiah 2:10-12, 21).

Those signs in the heavens and earth are the final heralds of Christ’s celestial debut into earth’s space. The prophetic sequence and context **do not** present them as anticipatory signs to warn earth’s inhabitants. They immediately precede Christ’s coming. As so many events, like throwing coals to the earth (Revelation 8:5) – the wicked receive judicial wrath but the saints are immeasurably blessed.

In that time of horrible darkness comes this celestial drama. Then, when the sun is darkest, the Sun of righteousness arises out of the east and the best day in human history dawns!

⁵ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 340.

⁶ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 636.

