

**Mark 13:24-32 is part of the Olivet Discourse, which contains the apocalyptic teachings of Jesus. These words of Jesus pertain to particular future events and are split into three parts: the immediate concerns of the Temple destruction in 70 AD, the cosmic eschatological events of His second coming, and finally, a parable and warning about the unpredictability of these events.**

**24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light."**

Jesus begins by referring to the future days of tribulation described in Mark 13:14-23, which speaks of a very real cataclysmic event that will affect Judea in the near future. It will include a desecration of the Temple and such suffering that has not been seen "from the beginning of the creation which God created until now" (Mark 13:19). Jesus then describes the cosmological signs related to this event. "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light." This echoes Old Testament prophetic language.

The Prophet Isaiah says: "*Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.*" (Isaiah 13:9-10)

And again in Ezekiel 32:7-8: "*When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness upon your land, says the Lord GOD.*"

And again in Joel 2:10-11: "*The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great; he that executes his word is powerful. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?*"

There is one supernatural example of the sun being darkened during the day at the crucifixion recorded in the Gospels, but that passage would not line up with the timeline Jesus gives, as the tribulation has not happened yet. This is most likely referring to the siege of Jerusalem, which lasted several months (tribulation) and the destruction of the Temple (the desolating sacrilege) by the Romans. Josephus records that the Romans set significant portions of the city, including the Temple, ablaze. The destruction of such a densely populated and fortified area would have released massive amounts of smoke into the air, obscuring sunlight and contributing to a foreboding atmosphere.

**25 "And the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."**

Jesus continues with the cosmological signs, now including stars. We may understand stars as just lights in the sky, but in the ancient context, this passage has deeper meaning. Job 38:7: During the creation, *"the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,"* suggesting a connection between stars and divine beings. The Greek word used for "falling" is *piptō*, which literally means to descend from a higher place to a lower. Its most common usage, when things descend in an orderly way, is in reference to worship: *"They fell down and worshiped him"* (Matthew 2:11). This could indicate the descent of angelic beings and would line up with the eyewitness testimony of the Jewish-Roman war.

*"Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet that continued a whole year... So these publicly declared that this signal foreshadowed the desolation that was coming upon them. Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the one-and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared ... which I suppose would seem a fable, were it not related by those that saw it ... before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities."* (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 6.300-309)

Jesus then says, *"the powers in the heavens will be shaken."* In Dr. Michael Heiser's work (*The Unseen Realm, Reversing Hermon*), he argues that the "powers in the heavens" could refer to spiritual beings associated with the divine council or fallen powers—what Paul refers to as "principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12). This relates to the order of dominion since the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis, with details clarified in Deuteronomy 32:8-9.

*"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage."*

In the future event Jesus refers to, the powers and dominions will shift. No longer will the nations outside of the promised land be under the powers established in Genesis 11. God the Father is gathering back all His children that He disinherited, and the events of 70 AD signify the definitive conclusion of the Old Covenant, firmly establishing the independence and permanence of the New and Eternal Covenant.

## **26 "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."**

Drawing on Daniel 7:13–14, Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man, who will come *"in clouds with great power and glory."* This emphasizes His divine authority and the universal scope of His mission. The "they" in verse 26 seems to be directed toward those who rejected Jesus, as the following verse refers to the "elect," contrasting with this group. Although from our perspective, seeing the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory sounds like a magnificent sight, for those that rejected Him, this would be a terrifying event. If the context is correct and these future events refer to the siege and Temple destruction, then Jesus'

opponents did see this, though to their eyes, they only saw the cataclysmic event. In Luke 17:22, Jesus clarifies to His disciples that they will not see these events: "*The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it,*" meaning they will not experience the suffering of the tribulation.

Eusebius mentions in his *Ecclesiastical History* that Christians in Jerusalem, forewarned by Jesus' prophecy, fled the city before its final destruction in 70 AD. He refers to a key sign that triggered their escape: the Roman army's temporary retreat. This retreat gave the Christians the opportunity to flee to the city of Pella, located in the region of Perea, across the Jordan River, where they were spared from the subsequent horrors of the siege.

**27 "And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."**

After the destruction of the Temple, the Son of Man will send out His angels to gather His "elect" (*eklektos* in Greek), which literally means those picked out, chosen. In the New Testament context, it is used for Christians themselves, who are called this. The angels will gather them from the four winds. In the Old Testament, the "four winds" are frequently used as God's mechanisms to manipulate creation. For example, in Daniel 7:2, the four winds of heaven stir up the great sea. In Ezekiel 37:9, the four winds are called to breathe life into the dry bones, showing God's ability to restore and revive life itself. In an abstract sense, the four winds seem almost like an allusion to the Holy Spirit, an invisible force that God uses to shape the world to His will. In this case, it seems to proceed from the Son of Man. Considering the teachings on baptism as a receiving of the Holy Spirit this is very coherent. The angels will gather the elect, and this range will encompass the entire world, as established by the final line of the verse.

**28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near."**

Verse 28 begins with Jesus' fig tree parable. Jesus routinely uses agricultural parables in His teachings. Since divine things can be mysterious and confusing, His audience requires information to be fed to them in a form they understand. He relates the development of the fig tree in response to the times and seasons. Although it might not apply one-to-one to the situation at hand, it does speak to the subtle but real responses people and objects have in relation to the times they are in. Nothing in creation exists in a vacuum independent of itself; all things respond to their surroundings.

**29 "So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates."**

Now Jesus relates the parable to the lives of His listeners: when you see the events Jesus has described, you will know that the Son of Man is near—more specifically, His "day." The tribulation event is at the very gates, meaning it is about to begin. If you can recognize the cycle

of fig trees as it pertains to the seasons, you should be able to recognize the signs preceding the day of the Son of Man.

**30 "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place."**

This verse is the most solid indicator that the events Jesus is talking about refer to 70 AD, rather than to some far-off future event—even from our present day. Jesus explicitly states that this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. This means that those He is speaking to will still be alive during the events that are to unfold. N.T. Wright (in *Jesus and the Victory of God*) and Craig Keener (in his *Bible Background Commentary*) highlight that this phrase has a temporal focus, affirming the imminence of the events tied to 70 AD.

**31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."**

Jesus contrasts the transient nature of the created world (heaven and earth) with the eternal permanence of His words. While the cosmic order may be disrupted or destroyed (as seen in apocalyptic imagery throughout the Gospels), His message, grounded in the truth and authority of God, remains unshaken.

If we consider the earth as it was at that time, referring back to Genesis and Deuteronomy, it was ordered in a particular way, along with the powers of heaven and their authority. This order will pass away, but Jesus' clarification that His words will not emphasizes that this divine reorganization is not temporary, but permanent.

The earth, according to the Hebrews, was centered around the Temple, and the heavens pointed forward to the Messiah. With the Temple destroyed and the Messiah already present, the earth and heavens have passed away. For the Gentiles, the earth was centered around their own temples, and their heavens were focused on the worship of either fictitious deities, fallen angels, or mythologized men. This will also pass away, but the words of Jesus will remain, and, as we can see in our own day, they have.

N.T. Wright discusses how this statement affirms the kingdom of God's spiritual and eternal nature, as opposed to a physical, political kingdom that might be subject to destruction or decay.

**32 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."**

Jesus here reveals that the day or hour is not known by anyone—not even by Himself or by the heavenly host. Only God the Father knows the timing. The Catholic Church recognizes the mystery of Jesus' divine and human natures. According to the Church's teaching, Jesus is both fully God and fully man. As God, Jesus is omniscient, meaning He knows all things, including

the time of the end. However, as man, He voluntarily chose to limit His knowledge in some aspects during His earthly ministry. This passage is seen as an expression of Jesus' self-emptying (kenosis), where He freely chose not to reveal the time of the end (cf. Philippians 2:6-7). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, while Jesus is fully divine, He also embraced the limitations of human nature in His earthly life to fulfill His mission, including in terms of knowledge and temporal limitations (see CCC 472).