

June 6, 2010

**THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN:  
ASTRONOMICAL EVENTS  
MATTHEW 24.29-35**

*In answer to the disciples questions concerning the destruction of the Temple, the sign of his coming and the end of the age, Jesus explains what will happen within the generation concerning all of these things. In 24.29-35 Jesus speaks specifically about his coming and what will happen when he comes.*

**1. THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN (29-31)**

***Astronomical events (29):*** “the tribulation of those days” - specific reference back to what he has been talking about. Involves the Jews but is focused on the Christians suffering (cp. 24.9).

Persecution of Christians “triggers” all of these events with the Jews. This is the Jews final rejection of Jesus.

Received a 40-year reprieve as space to repent at the cross (i.e., “Father forgive them”). But Israel as a culture (i.e. embodied in leadership) is rejecting Jesus and must be destroyed. They are choosing to remain in that old creation which is passing away.

Mt’s emphasis on recording Jesus’ words: “heaven” (cf. vv. 29, 30, 31, 35). Heaven is not simply the resting place for those who have died (though there is truth to that).

Mt’s interpretation of Jesus’ words “kingdom of heaven” (instead of “kingdom of God” as other Gospel writers). Use of “heaven” emphasizes that which governs the world; i.e. the world authority structures.

Kingdom of heaven = humanity organized under the lordship of Christ who will be seated in heaven ruling. The earth lives under the authority of the one whose throne is in heaven (cf. Isa 66.1; the highest heaven).

“Firmament-heaven” - created on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day (Gen 1.6-8); filled with heavenly bodies—sun, moon, & stars—on 4<sup>th</sup> day (Gen 1.14-19); not simply “the sky” (as in some translations). Birds, e.g., fly in the sky, but they fly across the face of the firmament, not *in* the firmament.

Purpose of sun, moon, & stars - govern the world (Gen 1.16); they are for signs and festival times, days and years.

Man is created to rule (i.e. take dominion) and learns from the governors/rulers of the universe (i.e. the heavenly bodies). Man is to grow up to govern all these things in/from heavenly places.

Man does this as he matures. Governments are described in Scripture in terms of these heavenly bodies b/c man rules in heavenly places. All authorities are put in place by God to rule the world (cf. e.g. Rom 13.1).

God speaking of people in astrological terms: Gen 15, the promise to Abraham that descendants would be like the stars. Many in number? Yes. But also rulers.

E.g. - Gen 37 - Joseph’s dream that the sun, moon, & 11 constellations/stars would bow down to him. Jacob’s reply: “Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” (Gen 37.10) Joseph then becomes the *de facto* ruler of the world in Egypt and the family comes and bows down to him.

Heaven and the heavenly bodies in Scripture symbolize governments. When we understand this in biblical context, we can then understand how all of this was fulfilled within a generation of Jesus’ words (24.34).

What Jesus is saying here is that within a generation the present structures that govern the world will be coming to an end.

Why doesn’t he just say that? He is emphasizing the cosmic significance of this event; the significance of this event in terms of the way God has ordered the world or defines history.

Familiar biblical language. Cf. Isa 13.1ff. Prophecy concerning Babylon being taken over by the Medes. Babylon has a special place in God’s ordering of the world (Dan 2, 7). Their destruction has cosmic significance.

Cf. also Isa 34.1-4 - fall of many enemy nations spoken of in terms of “hosts of heaven,” etc.

Cf. Ezek 32 - prophecy concerning Egypt (cf. Ezek 32.7)

Cf. Joel 2.1-10, 30-31 - Judah and the same language.

What government structures in 24.29? Could refer to Jerusalem alone. Temple/Tab is a copy of heavenly realities (Heb 9); it is "heaven on earth" with cherubim and stars (i.e. the seven lights of the lampstand). It is the place of God's throne, and thus, the center of the world.

Jerusalem in Revelation: the "great city (Rev 11.8; 16.19). It is this city that "reigns over the kings of the earth (Rev 17.18); "Babylon the great" (Rev 17.5), indicating that she is a world power.

Jer 4.23-31 - When Judah is destroyed, it is spoken of as a de-creation. Judah/Jerusalem is a microcosm of the whole world. To destroy her is to destroy the whole created order.

Broader reference: At the time of Babylonian captivity (7th-6th c. BC), God set up a new world structure (revealed in Dan 2, 7). Jerusalem and God's people are situated within this new empire structure that begins with Babylon and ends with Rome in the days of Jesus.

Oikoumene - the empire structure. It is an old creation governing structure. It is coming to an end.

Dan 2 - the rock cut out of the mountains w/o hands hits the statue at the feet and brings it all down. Dan 7 - One like the Son of Man ascends to the Ancient of Days and the kingdom (i.e. the one given to the empire) is now given to him.

They have the responsibility of protecting God's people. Each one in succession forsakes that responsibility and God ends their rule. Last one to do it is Rome in AD 64 under Nero.

Rome exists for another 350 years or so, but God's purpose for them in relationship to his people in the old creation structures is now over. They are just like all of the other nations b/c the Son of Man now has all authority in heaven and earth.

Summary: when Jesus speaks about the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its radiance, the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being shaken in v. 29, he is speaking about the present old creation structures that rule the world being overturned.

The empire and Jerusalem with its Temple are seeing their last days in the present world structure. A new day is dawning. A new season is arriving. A new sun, moon, and stars are being created in the form of Jesus and his people. We are new creation.

*Response: 1. Through the Scriptures God not only gives us specific ways we should and should not live, but he also gives us perspective.*