



The Cosmic Changes in the Heavens

Review

In the last chapter, I made the case that in the Olivet Discourse, Christ's understanding of the words "this generation" was based on his reading of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. Christ taught that there are two generations of Israel related to Jerusalem, its temple, and the future. There was the generation of unfaithful Jews of his day, like the Jews in Jeremiah's day, who were unrepentant and killed the prophets sent to them. Those Jews would see a destruction of their temple by the Romans in their lifetimes, similar to the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians.

But there will be another generation, their offspring, who will repent and respond to the gospel and experience the "new covenant," just as the Gentiles have. This future generation of Jews will have new hearts filled with the Holy Spirit. They will then experience the restoration of Israel, Jerusalem, and its temple in the messianic kingdom.

Paul, like Isaiah, also described two generations of his fellow Jews. The Jews of his day were largely unrepentant and hostile to Christ and the gospel. Yet, Paul foresaw a future generation of repentant Jews who will indeed believe in their Messiah, which ushers in the messianic kingdom.

All these events foretold by the prophets and confirmed by Jesus are as certain to occur on this Genesis earth as the fixed operations of

the sun and the moon. These events pertain to this earth and will not go unfulfilled as long as this earth exists.

The Cosmic Realm

The word *heaven* is sometimes used in the Scriptures to describe the Genesis cosmos or the sky and solar system. It is also used to describe God's eternal home and dwelling place. Christ ascended into the sky, but he also ascended into heaven to be with his Father. Satan and the fallen angels are described as the cosmic powers of the demonic world in the heavenly realm. Paul taught:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, *against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* (Eph. 6:11–12)

Major events in the spiritual realm can also be reflected by events in the physical realm. For example, Christ's crucifixion for our sins was a cosmic event in the spiritual realm in that it overcame Satan's power of sin and death over us. This cosmic spiritual event was reflected in the physical realm by an earthquake that shook Jerusalem the moment Christ died on the cross: "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. . . . And the earth shook, and the rocks were split" (Matt. 27:50–51).

As he was about to breathe his last breath, the sun was also darkened:

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. (Luke 23:44–45)

Christ also taught that he will literally return in the clouds when he comes again to gather his saints, just as he ascended in the clouds when he returned to his Father in the celestial realm of heaven. When he returns, the whole Genesis cosmos will be destroyed and replaced with an entirely new cosmos: "From his presence earth and sky fled

away [the Genesis cosmos], and no place was found for them. . . . Then I saw a new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 20:11—21:1).

In the Olivet Discourse, Christ taught:

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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24:29–30)

The cosmic changes occur immediately after the Great Tribulation—followed by Christ’s second coming. Based on their version of God’s endgame, there are two ways theologians interpret these verses. Some amillennialists assert that immediately after the Tribulation, Christ comes again at the end of this Genesis creation. He destroys this Genesis cosmos and takes the raptured saints to the Father’s eternal kingdom of heaven.

Premillennialists assert that Christ comes again immediately after the Tribulation to set up his 1,000-year messianic kingdom. The cosmic changes in the heavens are figurative in that they reflect the transition from Satan and the demonic host ruling this fallen world to Christ ruling this world. And the shaking of the earth reflects the transition from unrighteous men ruling the world to righteous men ruling the world. The world transitions from being ruled by Satan and his Antichrist to being ruled by Christ. The cosmic changes in the heavens are a metaphorical depiction of this major regime change.

Postrestorationism agrees with the view that there is a cosmic regime change immediately after the Tribulation when Satan is removed and Christ begins his reign over this world from his throne in heaven. But this view asserts that Christ’s second coming occurs *after* the millennium, not immediately after the Tribulation.

So how do we make sense out of these verses? Notice that the very next events that occur immediately after the Tribulation are the cosmic changes that take place when “the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” After these cosmic changes take place and Christ rules the world, “*then* will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man” on Judgment Day to rapture the saints and take them to heaven. In other words, the second coming occurs *after* this cosmic regime change in who rules this world—not immediately after the Tribulation. Let’s read these verses again with this interpretation in mind:

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 heaven, and the *powers of the heavens will be shaken* [cosmic changes in the spiritual realm]. *Then* [after these cosmic changes and Christ's reign] will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and *they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory* [the second coming on the last day]. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other [the rapture of the saints]. (Matt. 24:29–31)

Therefore, the cosmic changes in the heavens described by Christ reflect the changes in the governance of this world from Satan to Christ when he removes the demonic “forces of evil” and establishes his messianic kingdom. After these cosmic changes take place and Christ has established his kingdom, *then* the second coming occurs.

This can be outlined as follows:

- The Great Tribulation takes place during an unprecedented age of demonic humanity.
- The Tribulation comes to an immediate end when the Antichrist is destroyed and Satan and all his cosmic forces of evil are removed from this world.
- Christ then rules the world with his saints during the millennium, establishing an age of righteous humanity.
- Then, *after* his 1,000-year messianic kingdom, the second coming occurs to gather his elect on Judgment Day.

Cosmic Changes According to the Prophets

These figures of speech related to the cosmic changes in the heavens and on the earth metaphorically describe God's judgment on demonic humanity and the cosmic changes in who rules this world. This is borne out by many Old Testament visions and prophecies. Christ probably expected us to understand his teachings in the light of these prophecies. The prophet Joel, for example, used similar language to describe God's judgment on the world at the end of the Tribulation when he ushers in the messianic kingdom:

The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining [cosmic changes in the heavens and on the earth]. The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it [the battle of Armageddon]? . . . Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. The LORD answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations [the messianic kingdom].” (Joel 2:10–19)

Notice the striking parallels to Christ’s teaching:

Joel taught: “The sun and the moon are darkened.”

Jesus taught: “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.”

Joel taught: “The stars withdraw their shining.”

Jesus taught: “The stars will fall from heaven.”

According to Joel, this is followed by the messianic kingdom, when Israel is restored and experiences an abundant life on this earth—the end of the world.

Also notice the striking parallels between Joel’s prophecy and John’s vision of the cosmic battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19:

Joel taught: “The Lord utters his voice *before his army*, for his camp is exceedingly great.”

John taught: “Then I saw heaven opened, . . . a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . . And the *armies of heaven*, . . . were following him on white horses.”

Joel taught: “He who executes *his word* is powerful.”

John taught: “From *his mouth* comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.”

Like Joel, John described *a cosmic battle in heaven* between Christ and Satan or “the powers of the heavens.” John also described *a cosmic*

battle on earth between Christ and his army of saints against the Antichrist and his human armies on the earth. According to John, the conclusion of *this cosmic battle in heaven and on earth* leads immediately to the 1,000-year messianic kingdom described by Joel.

The prophet Haggai used similar language to describe God's cosmic judgments on this world as the transition to the inauguration of the Messiah's reign over this earth:

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land [cosmic changes in the heavens and on the earth]. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. . . . And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts [the messianic kingdom]. (Hag. 2:6–9)

Daniel envisioned this cosmic regime change as well:

But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away [Satan and his Antichrist], to be consumed and destroyed to the end [in the lake of fire]. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under *the whole heaven* [the cosmic change in dominion] shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High [during Christ's reign]. (Dan. 7:26–27)

The cosmic changes described by the prophets reflect a cosmic regime change from Satan as the ruler of this dominion of darkness to Christ as the ruler of this world. The world goes from being characterized by strife, war, injustice, and unrighteousness under Satan's dominion to being characterized by peace, justice, and righteousness under Christ's dominion.

One of the most extraordinary prophecies in the Bible that deals with these cosmic forces of evil in the spiritual realm can be found in Isaiah, which describes the cosmic release of Satan and his demonic host during the Great Tribulation. This results in a great deal of evil on the earth. Isaiah alluded to Satan's subsequent imprisonment as described in Revelation. He even alluded to Satan's final release after Christ's millennial reign. With the help of Revelation, one can understand this prophecy:

For the windows of heaven are opened [Satan is released], and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken [cosmic forces of evil on the earth]. The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it [the extreme evil during the Tribulation], and it falls, and will not rise again [the Tribulation comes to an end]. On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, [Satan and his demons] and the kings of the earth, on the earth [the Antichrist and the kings with their armies that follow him]. They [the demonic host of heaven] will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison [Satan and the demons are seized, bound, and thrown into a pit, which is sealed], and after many days [one thousand years] they will be punished [after Satan's final release, he and all demons will be captured and thrown into the lake of fire]. Then [Isaiah returns to describing Christ's reign] the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed [cosmic regime change], for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem [Christ's reign], and his glory will be before his elders [resurrected saints who sit on thrones as ruling elders]. (Isa. 24:18–23)

Isaiah's prophecy can be outlined as follows:

- “The windows of heaven are opened” when Satan and his cosmic forces of evil are released on the earth.
- “The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken” when extreme transgression occurs during this period of demonic activity.
- The demonic forces of evil are then imprisoned.
- Cosmic changes to the sun and moon reflect the cosmic regime change when “the Lord of hosts reigns” over the earth with his elders.
- After many days (one thousand years), Satan is released for a short time, but then he is eternally punished in the lake of fire.

Isaiah, Joel, Haggai, and Daniel all used similar language as Jesus to describe the cosmic changes in the heavens and on the earth to reflect this incredible regime change. The Antichrist is destroyed, Satan is

removed from this world, and Christ establishes his reign as the true King and Lord of this restored Genesis earth. Christ described this change of governance as truly earth-shattering.

When Christ referred to the cosmic changes that take place immediately after the Great Tribulation, he was referring to these prophecies being fulfilled during his reign as the Messiah *before* he comes again on the last day to take his followers to heaven.

Summary

Jesus taught that immediately after the Great Tribulation comes to an end, there will be a cosmic change in rulership over this world from Satan to Christ when the messianic kingdom is realized on the earth. After Christ has established his messianic kingdom, then he comes again on the clouds at the end of the age to literally destroy this Genesis cosmos, gather his elect, and take them to his Father's eternal kingdom of heaven.