

## The Olivet Discourse: Jesus' Return and Signs of the End Times

### Mark 13:24-27

Mark 13:24-27 - *"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; <sup>25</sup> the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven."*

### Background Notes

The Olivet Discourse is one of the great sermons of our Lord's ministry. It was given to the disciples during the last week of our Lord's earthly ministry. As the name implies, it was given on the Mount of Olives, which overlooks the Temple area and the city of Jerusalem. The Olivet Discourse was given in response to two questions that the disciples asked (v4): *"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"* The Lord's answer to *when* will all these things take place starts in verse 28 (in our next Talk).

In Mark 13:1-27, the Lord was answering the question about the *signs* of the End Times. He gave the disciples a list of general signs that would characterize history, including the present and right up to the End Times. He also gave specific signs that would indicate that the End Times had arrived. One of those specific signs was the setting up of the *abomination of desolation* in the Temple area (v14). This indicates that a future Temple will be built in Jerusalem, and the sacrificial system will resume. That will be a specific sign of the End Times.

Verse 19 says that one of the definite signs of the End Times will be a time of Tribulation on earth - like no other tribulation this world has ever seen before. It will be far greater in intensity and worldwide devastation than any other time of trouble in the history of the world. Another specific sign of the End Times will be an increase of false prophets and false "christs." Further signs of the Lord's return are cosmic disorders (v24-25).

### Doctrinal Points

#### 1. The Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by worldwide signs.

Verse 26: *"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."* The Lord then answered the disciples' question about the sign of His return. They wanted to know the sign of the Second Coming and the End

Times, and the Lord gave them several signs. He gave them general signs that would characterize history right up to and into the End Times, but he also gave them some specific signs.

The sign of the setting up of the *abomination of desolation* would be a sign particularly for Jewish believers, but the Great Tribulation and the cosmic disorders are worldwide signs. Verses 24-25: *“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”* At the end of the Tribulation, right before the Lord returns, there will be cosmic disorders.

Matthew 24:29 says that these cosmic signs will come **immediately after** the tribulation of those days. *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”* The fact that the cosmic disorders come immediately after the Tribulation and directly precede the return of the Lord indicates that these events have not yet happened – they are still future. Some Christians believe that the events predicted in the Olivet Discourse were all fulfilled in 70 AD, when the Roman armies overran Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. But that idea simply cannot be correct. Cosmic disorders and the return of the Lord **did not** take place immediately after the events of 70 AD! The cosmic signs will take place shortly before the Lord returns.

In verse 25 the powers in the heavens that are shaken may involve more than physical forces and disturbances. Spiritual forces of evil may be involved as well. Revelation 12:7-9 speaks of the spiritual forces of evil being shaken in the last days: *“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”* So very possibly, then, the cosmic disorders of Mark 13:24-25 involve spiritual forces as well as physical. Worldwide signs will precede the Second Coming of our Lord to this earth.

## **2. The Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by worldwide evangelism.**

Verses 26-27: *“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.”* If the elect are gathered from all directions and from the farthest part of the earth, this means that the message of Christ will have been preached around the world. Worldwide evangelism! Whether or not the Gospel will be preached to everyone who has not heard before the Lord takes his Church out of this world, we don't know. In fact, the Lord could come to take His Church home to Heaven today! But before the Lord returns to this earth in power and glory, there will be worldwide evangelism.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Let's get ready for the biggest party this world has ever seen.

Verse 27, again: *“And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.”* The “farthest part of the earth and the farthest part of heaven” would seem to indicate that all believers of all time will be present when the Lord returns to this earth in power and glory to set up His Kingdom. Old Testament believers will be there in their resurrected bodies. The Church will be there. All believers - members of the Church, the Body of Christ – we will be there in our resurrected bodies! The martyrs of the Tribulation period will be there. The believers who survive the Tribulation period will be there. The elect angels will be there. What a time that will be! It will be a **great party** - right? Let's get ready for the biggest party this world has ever seen!

### 2. Let's distinguish between the signs of the End Times.

We've seen several definite signs of the End Times that the Lord gave in the Olivet Discourse. One of the signs was that the false christs and the false prophets would be able to do signs and wonders. *“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (v22). The parallel passage in Matthew 24:24 says they are able to do **great** signs and wonders.

Well, if one of the signs of the End Times is that the false prophets and false christs will do signs and wonders, then we need to be able to distinguish between truth and deception. The fact that someone is able to do signs and wonders doesn't mean that those signs and wonders are of the Lord. Indeed, it may be a sign that those “prophets” are **not** of the Lord - their power is not of God! Verse 22 indicates that it can be very deceptive – so much so that even “the elect” are almost deceived! So let's distinguish between the signs of the end times.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, the Lord spoke about some of the false prophets of the End Times. Matthew 7:21-23 says, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, (namely, in the future) ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* Think of what the Lord was saying: that there will be people able to do signs and wonders, even using the name of Christ, but He will not know them. Notice He didn't say they couldn't do the signs and wonders – they will indeed do miraculous signs and wonders – but those people will not belong to Him. He said, *“I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you...’* Not “I once knew you, but now I don't.” No. **“I never knew you.”** Then he will say, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!”

In the Olivet Discourse the Lord taught that one of the signs of the End Times would be false christs - false prophets who will be able to do signs and wonders. And they will do them in the Name of Christ, but the power will not be of Christ. It will definitely be supernatural power, but it will be demonic power. It will not be of God. But it will be very deceptive, because even "the elect" are almost deceived (v22)!

That should be a warning to us, to learn how to recognize false prophets. Let's distinguish between the signs of the End Times.