

Falling Stars – Matthew 24:29

By Elder Keith Ellis

"Immediately after 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

Back in 1983 I visited Colorado to vacation. I was with my wife and another couple. We decided to sleep in the mountains one evening. I recall the altitude was about Seven thousand feet. At night it seemed as though you could reach up and touch the stars. This particular evening was clear and beautiful. Late that evening there was not a cloud in the sky, yet there was a lightning storm. This went on for about an hour. As we watched this amazing event, we were about to be in for a treat. All of the sudden the sky lit up with what appeared to be falling stars. There were literally thousands of them. At this point my heart seemed to melt within me and I shouted "*praises God.*" I thought, "*This is it, this is the end of the world.*" The above title text came immediately to my mind. This was during a time in my life when I was young in the faith. And I had a literal view of Matthew twenty-four verse twenty nine.

Even though this was an amazing experience, later that week I discovered I had witnessed a meteor shower. At the time I literally thought the world might come to an end at that very moment. I was leaning totally upon the literal interpretation of this text in Matthew. I really did not understand what context meant and why it should make a difference.

Back then, and even today, I could ask almost anyone from main stream Christianity what the phrases "*the stars shall fall from heaven*" and "*the powers of the heavens shall be shaken*" meant and ninety nine percent would tell me this indicated the end of time and of the world. Though the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking in Matthew twenty-four probably did not perceive the phrases in the same manner.

This particular verse is perhaps one of the most popular verses in the Bible used to support the prevalent "*end of time*" doctrine. Most often it is preached in a manner to strike fear in the hearts of the unsuspecting child of God. However we must remember the time context of all the verses uttered by Jesus before verse thirty four. How that all the things which He spoke of would see their completion before that very generation passed away. Now we know the literal stars did not fall from their place in the firmament. And we know the sun and the moon are still in place. These facts coupled with the time context forces us to consider

the symbolic interpretation of the text. When we consider the style of the language used in this text the outcome will be quite different than the literal interpretation.

Matthew twenty-four is not the only place where this style of writing is used in the Bible. This style of language (God inspired) flows from Genesis to Revelation. Consider king David, a man after God's own heart. He was inspired of God to pen some beautiful language for us to consider.

"Praise ye The Lord. Praise ye The Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise ye him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens."

Psalms 148:1-4

From the onset one is inclined by his very nature to consider this verse in the literal sense. This language is highly symbolic. Now even though the literal heavens declare the glory of God and show the majesty of His creation, they were not made in the image and likeness of God as man was. I believe therefore the praise of man is intended here by king David and not the natural creation only, but the spiritual also.

The heavens have reference to the church under the law and under grace. This is where we are organized to worship and praise God. Above all places, this is where God desires that we praise Him, in the church. When we are in the Spirit on The Lord's day we are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ. (See Ephesians 2:6) This is where we can praise Him in the heights. In the church through the Spirit, we renew our strength and can mount up with wings as eagles. (See Isaiah 40:31) Next David says for God's angels to praise Him. This design's those who bear the message of God, whether angelic beings or man. (Pastors or ministers) Any message which God sends whether positive or negative (our perception) in content will always praise God. (I will go into detail about this in chapter twenty seven of this work.)

Next David speaks of the sun praising God. God had committed His Oracles to the Jews. The law (God's word) of Moses. This was to be a light to the Jewish world. The law as given by God glorified and praised God. This law was representative of God's power or authority towards his people upon the earth. David says in another place, "*thy word is a lamp unto my feet.*" This was all the light (spiritual) any of the Jews had until the time Jesus came on the scene. Even though it was a lesser light than that of Christ Jesus, it was still the only light the Jews had. This is **the sun** under consideration in our text. There is one thing we must keep in mind concerning this light. It was only given to the Jews. When God cut off the Jews, then the light or sun was to be darkened. The greater light of Christ Jesus would replace and outshine the light which the law emitted. There was now no glory in the law by reason of the glory which excelleth. (See 2 Corinthians 3:10-11) As the kingdom of the grace of God was being preached in this great reformation its light shined brighter and brighter. At the same time the light of the law diminished as each day passed. (See Hebrews 8:13) The light of the law was focused upon the Jews only. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. This light is not to Jews only, but also to Gentiles. Now Christ fulfilled this law to the jot and tittle. In other words He

crossed every ‘t’ and dotted every ‘i.’ He left nothing concerning the law unfulfilled. He is the greater light which the law foreshadowed. Jesus says that His light shined into darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. The former stewards of God’s law, who rejected the light of God, were to be cast into outer darkness. (See Romans 3:2, Acts 7:38 & Matthew 8:12, 22:13)

Next David says for the moon to praise God. The moon is a lesser light. It is also reflected light. In other words there is something else which generates the light which we see on the surface of the moon. The festivals which God ordained for the children of Israel to observe gave off light. These feasts portrayed actual events which Christ would fulfill. They told the story of God’s redemptive plan for mankind. (See Leviticus chapter 23) Each year as these feasts were carried out the people were reminded of their sin nature. The promises of God in salvation were brought to bear in these yearly festivals. Even so, these feasts were only types and shadows of the true, Christ Jesus. These Jewish feasts were governed by the calendar which God established in the Law of Moses. The timing of these feasts, or festivals was carried out each year according to the phase of the moon. Because the moon takes twenty nine and one half days to make a complete cycle the feast would not come on the exact same day of the year like most of our holidays do. For example, have you ever wondered why Easter was not on the same Sunday each year? The reason is because Passover is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of Nissan. The first day of Nissan is determined by the first new moon in the spring of the year. According to our Julian calendar it does not come on the same day each year. Actually we as Christians observe Easter on the first Sunday after the Passover. This is generally referred to as the feast of first fruits. Christ being the first fruits from the dead. (See Leviticus 23 again). This is why Easter is observed on a different Sunday each year. So we can see the feasts are guided or determined by moonlight. When David speaks of the moon praising God, this is what he has reference to. The feasts under the law showed forth the glory of God from year to year. Yet Jesus was to be the fulfillment of these feasts. When Jesus says “*the moon shall not give her light,*” He is saying the feasts, which are types and shadows will cease. The reason they will cease is because He is their fulfillment. When God made an end to the temple and its services, the Jewish festivals were not to be observed again with the blessing and authority of God. Hence, *the moon not giving her light*. If the feasts are kept under the law today, they are performed in spiritual darkness and without the blessing of The Almighty.

Next David mentions the stars of light praising God. Today we think of “*movie stars*” as those who stand out among the crowds of the world. They are popular figures well known or liked for their acting ability. The children of God are also referred to as stars. They are not like the stars in Hollywood who stand in the fading spotlight but for a moment. The stars of God are given eternal glory which shall never fade away. Many places in scripture the children of God are mentioned in connection with the stars of heaven.

I will allow the following verse to answer this part of David’s Psalm and to give a good practical example of the uses of this type of language. We will also see a variation in the application.

Jacob had a son named Joseph. God foretold the future provisions He had made for Jacob (Israel) and his family through Joseph's dreams. The second dream which Joseph had is of particular interest to our present study. Let's look at it.

"And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, what is this dream thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?"

Genesis 37:9-10

Notice how Jacob immediately recognized what the language of "*sun, moon and stars*" meant by asking "*shall we all bow down to thee to the earth?*" Of course the story goes that they did indeed do this some years later in Egypt. Yet at the time he heard Joseph's dream he denied such would take place. This was a time before there was a written law or an organized worship of God. Here the sun represents Jacob's headship or leadership of his family, the children of Israel. He was the father and active instrument of Joseph's natural life and light and the one who supported it. The moon here refers to Rachel. She was the passive instrument in Joseph's natural life, the weaker vessel and had a lesser rule over the family, just as the moon projects a lesser light. The stars designed the children of Israel, Joseph's brothers. Joseph was the twelfth child of all the children of Israel. In his dream he mentions eleven stars bowing down to him. Here Joseph is obviously the twelfth star. All these represented the authority and kinship in the life of Joseph. They did not mean the literal sun, moon and stars would bow down to worship Joseph. This type of worship is due only to God and Christ. However, Joseph was a type of Christ. We know the literal heavens show forth the glory of God. This verse, like the one in Psalms, is highly figurative in its nature. In light of this passage in Genesis, let me offer the following concerning verse twenty nine of Matthew twenty-four.

Once the Jews of Jesus day had utterly rejected Him as Messiah, the twelve tribes of Israel, the stars of heaven, were to fall from their blessed estate and were to be scattered to the four corners of the earth. *These were the stars which fell from heaven.*

The powers of heaven, or God's authority on the earth were to be shaken. The Levitical priesthood, the doctors of the law, the scribes and Pharisees, Rabbi's and those who sat in the Sanhedrin or Israel's political body all saw their demise in the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the *shaking of the powers of heaven*. To that time they were the representatives of God upon the earth. But not any longer.

Just as Jacob understood Joseph's dream, we should understand the language of Jesus in Matthew chapter twenty-four. The Bible is a spiritual book written to spiritual people. Jesus clearly states to those on the outside all things are done in parables. (See Mark 4:34 & Matthew 13:11-13) These things we have been writing about are a mystery to a lot of people. But to those who have had Christ revealed to them from above, these things are understood by study and rightly dividing the word of truth.

In context with our subject we find Jesus uses the same style of language which Joseph had in his dreams. If we look at Matthew twenty-four verse twenty nine in this manner we can see the reality of its fulfillment.

Now Jesus also mentions 'heaven' in the singular: "the stars shall fall from heaven." And He mentions the 'heavens,' plural when He says the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. It is helpful to consider these differences when looking at verse twenty nine.

Paul had an out of body experience. We hear a lot about them in today's time. He spoke of being caught up to **the third heaven**, paradise, hearing things which are not lawful to be uttered. (See 2 Corinthians 12:1-4) This paradise was probably the same one Jesus went to on the day of His crucifixion. This must be the eternal heaven. Notice Paul did not mention seeing anything, but heard things not lawful to utter.

The point being, if there is a third heaven, it follows a second and a first heaven must precede the third. More than likely the second heaven is associated with the church. And the first heaven dealt with the law dispensation. And further, the firmament or sky is often referred to as the 'heaven' or 'heavens.' The Greek dictionary gives five different renderings for the word "heaven." So it should tell us not to take the word meaning for granted. These facts must be kept in mind when reading text such as the one in Matthew twenty-four. Let's look at the following verse.

"Another parable spake he unto them; the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."
Matthew 13:33

Please indulge me for a moment. Here Jesus says the kingdom is like unto leaven. Usually leaven, in scripture, symbolizes sin. But here is a symbol of something positive. It causes the meal to expand or to rise. First of all the woman spoken of here is the church. As you may have noticed when referring to the church I often speak of it as the "*New Testament church*." Until now I have not used the term "*Old Testament church*." However we may like to think about it, the church existed on the other side of the cross. This is what was being reformed, the church. (See Hebrews 9:7-10) You cannot 'reform,' or "form again" something which has not previously existed.

The apostle John in the book of Revelation speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. (See Revelation 21:1-2) The word heaven here in the Greek is 'ouranos' and means specifically, "*the gospel*." The writer of the book of Hebrews says something very interesting about those under the Old Covenant. He verifies the fact that they had the gospel preached unto them. (See Hebrews 4:2) This gospel was the first or Old Covenant. This gospel was given in types and shadows. Many things were hard to be understood. This first heaven is where the woman hid the first measure of meal. The first measure did not allow the kingdom to expand beyond the nation of Israel. The passing away of the law dispensation signified the passing away of the first heaven and earth. (See Revelation 21:1 again) John said he saw a new heaven and a new earth coming down from God out of heaven. This is the second heaven and where we

abide today. This is where the woman (the church) hid the second measure of meal which causes the kingdom to expand. This time the measure of leaven was greater. It allowed the kingdom to expand beyond the nation of Israel to the Gentile nations. This is the dispensation of grace. Under this dispensation the gospel message is revealed to many more people than under the first heaven. During the grace dispensation the things of God are better understood, though not completely. The number three signifies divine completeness. Once the kingdom reaches this stage it will certainly '*rise*' in the bodily resurrection to its glorified state. This stage is the eternal stage. The church (militant) will be glorified and united together with the entire elect family of Christ. In this state there is complete or perfect knowledge and understanding of the things of God. (See 1 Corinthians 13:12) Here, in the third heaven, we will physically behold and see Christ as He is. In this state, we will be completely satisfied. (See 1 John 3:2) This is the third heaven, when the church reaches immortal glories where the whole kingdom will leavened, or reach its glorified state and earthly completion.

I will elaborate on these points in the last three chapters of this writing. Please remain patient with me. But we have shown all of which Christ spoke was fulfilled before AD70 and before the generation of Peter, James, Andrew and John passed away.