

Doomsday!

Luke 21:25-33

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for April 21, 2024

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Jesus' Olivet Discourse is one of the most remarkable end times prophecies in all the Bible. We live in a world and in a culture that is obsessed with "doomsday scenarios," apocalyptic fiction, and concern about the state of our planet and our existence. As Christians, we take our environmental responsibilities seriously, because we should be good stewards of God's creation. However, Jesus' teaching tells us that nothing humans can do will destroy this earth before God's ordained time, and no human effort will save this earth once God devotes it to destruction during the tribulation period. Ultimately, we can rest assured in our safety as children of God, who will spend the seven-year tribulation safely in the Father's House in heaven.

In 1945, a special council was founded by Albert Einstein, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and a collection of other scientists who had worked on creating the atomic bomb.

The purpose of this council was to evaluate how close the human race and planet earth were to some kind of global catastrophe.

They evaluated nuclear armaments, global weather patterns, pollution, biological and technological threats.

Two years later, Einstein and the others created what they called a Doomsday Clock. Using the imagery of time running out, the closer the hands on the Doomsday Clock approached midnight, the closer the human race was to experiencing global destruction.

Based on their annual conclusions, they would set the hands on the Doomsday Clock.

The first time they set the hands of the Doomsday Clock was in 1947 and they set it at 7 minutes to midnight.

This council, now called "The Science and Security Board" continues meeting annually to determine the vulnerability of human existence and the health of planet earth.

The Board is advised by leading scientists, academic scholars, experts in various fields, including nine winners of Nobel prizes.

In 1960, they set the Doomsday Clock to 7 minutes to midnight.

In 1972: 12 minutes to midnight.

In 1988: 6 minutes to midnight.

In 1991: 17 minutes to midnight. It was evidently a good year; actually, it was the end of the cold war.

In 2002, it was moved up to 7 minutes to midnight.

In 2015, they set it at 3 minutes to midnight due to what they called “unchecked climate change.”

In 2017, it was moved to 2 minutes to midnight.

In 2024, they set the hands of the clock to 90 seconds to midnight—the closest it has ever been set.

They delivered this press statement: “The members of the Science and Security Board have been deeply worried about the deteriorating state of the world. That is why we set the Doomsday Clock at 90 seconds to midnight because humanity face[s] an unprecedented level of danger.”

In other words, the signs are everywhere; we are potentially 90 seconds away from the end of the world.

Everybody is looking for signs, even in the religious world, everything seems to be interpreted as one more sign of the end of the world.

I was typing these clock settings and numbers into my notes this past week when my three-year-old granddaughter came into my study and then noticed the little calculator sitting on my desk.

She asked if she could play with it, and I said sure—my sermon can wait. I showed her how to tap the numbers in and how to look at them on the little screen and she punched in some numbers and then left. I looked over and she had typed in 666.

Now that was a sign!

The truth is no laughing matter. The human race and planet earth are indeed on the verge of a real Doomsday; the clock has been ticking for 1,900 years that the time of God’s judgment on the human race is coming during the tribulation period.

Now, this current council and their Doomsday Clock is concerned about nuclear destruction of the planet, but the Bible tells us that at the end of the tribulation, the antichrist will lead many of the nations of the world in marching against Israel.

The population of earth is alive and just as defiant as ever.

The secretary of the United Nations said recently that the Doomsday Clock is now an alarm clock, primarily because of climate change, which is predicted to bring about the diminishing of earth's resources, like trees, water, and vegetation.

The Bible actually describes catastrophic loss of resources along with climate changes that will take place—get this—*during* the tribulation period; it's all going to happen quickly. Revelation 8 says that a third of the trees will be destroyed, which means that up to that point there are a lot of trees. Verse 7 also describes the burning up of a third of the green grass and vegetation, which up to that point is sustaining the world's food supply. Chapter 8 says that one third of the fresh water supply from rivers and lakes will be turned poisonous—undrinkable—by God's hand, not mankind's.

Get this: during the tribulation God will contaminate more water than mankind has ever polluted; God is going to destroy more trees than mankind ever planted. Chapter 8 and verse 8 tells us that a third of the ocean water will be turned into blood. Much of this will mirror in some ways the plagues on Egypt as God moved to judge that nation.

But this doomsday scenario called the tribulation will be global, and a million times more devastating.

Doomsday is coming, but not like the world fears. This council believes, as do millions of other people today, that humans will destroy the earth, that mankind should be afraid of mankind.

But according to the Bible, God is the one to be afraid of. God is the one who will deliver doomsday to humanity.

It will be catastrophic devastation as God prepares the world for the coming kingdom of His Son.

You might be thinking that I've been watching too many doomsday movies lately.

No, I've just been studying **Luke 21** lately—with you.

Doomsday just so happens to be the theme of a sermon Jesus is delivering on the Mount of Olives.

We've been studying the Lord's predictions here in **Luke 21, and I invite your attention there** again.

We arrive today at verse 25, where Jesus looks well down the road and begins to predict what will happen during the tribulation period, following the rapture of the church.

Jesus effectively answers the question: what will happen when doomsday arrives? What happens when the clock strikes midnight and the judgment of God's wrath begins to fall?

Well, let me tell you ahead of time, the global catastrophes that Jesus is about to describe have nothing to do with global warming, polar melting, nuclear bombing, or earth polluting mankind.

It doesn't come from mankind at all; it comes from God's miraculous orchestration of judgment.

And mankind will know that it comes from God. I'll show you that in a moment.

Now I want to divide our study today into three sections; **we'll call this first section:**

Cosmic Fallout

Jesus says here in verse 25:

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth ... the roaring of the sea and the waves. ... For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Luke 21:25-26

You could call this cosmic chaos and it'll be like nothing ever seen before.

Jesus says here in **verse 25 that there will be signs in sun and moon and stars.**

Now people today read all sorts of messages from the alignment of stars in the sky.

Well-meaning Christians go to Genesis 1:14 where we're told that the stars were given for signs. Then they come up with all kinds of prophetic fulfillments from constellations and star movements.

But the word "signs" doesn't refer to sources of direction or wisdom and certainly not any kind of influence over someone's life or personality or destiny.

A "sign" means that the stars are simply evidence of their Creator; they are a signal, a symbol, of His power.

The same word was used for the plagues of Egypt where Moses told the people of Israel that the plagues were "signs" from God (Deuteronomy 29:3). They signaled the judgment of God.

Astronomy is a wonderful science dedicated to discovering the far reaches of the universe.

But astrology is a different matter entirely. It's the belief that stars have power over your life and mine. And this goes all the way back to Babylon and the Chaldeans who first developed the zodiac.

They divided the stars into sections and gave life-determining meaning and influence to each section.

I saw on the internet just the other day a chart suggesting that people with a certain sign of the zodiac should marry someone with a different specific sign of the zodiac—their signs would determine what kind of marriage they would have.

Today, 1 out of 3 Americans believe to some degree that the stars have influence over them; that they somehow give guidance for somebody's decisions in life.

Americans alone are now spending more than \$2 billion a year on what is called, "mystical services"—horoscopes, tarot cards, palm reading, and more.

It was in 1930 when the first newspaper astrology column was commissioned, right after the stock-market crashed. Then again, after the financial collapse of 2008, there was a surge in mystical services like horoscopes and astrology.

I read one article recently where astrologists were receiving phone calls from Wall Street bankers asking for advice. One astrologer said, "Everything people relied on was falling apart and people wanted to know, 'What's going on in my life? Nothing makes sense?'"

Christine Smallwood, "Astrology in the Age of Uncertainty," The New York Times (10-21-19)

Rather than look to the Scriptures, people are looking to the stars.

Well, Jesus has just predicted the end of astrology. A day when the sun and moon and stars effectively turn against mankind. Their cosmic patterns become disturbed and erratic.

Horoscopes will be meaningless as the light of stars is diminished. The prophet Joel describes these days of tribulation by writing that the sun and moon will grow dark and the stars will lose their brightness (Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15).

Mankind has searched every avenue within nature for wisdom and direction; mankind has deified mother nature and the cosmos; the universe is now supposedly able to hear you and answer you, your words spoken into the universe create your reality.

The real issue here is that mankind would rather go to the stars than to the Savior.

But when doomsday arrives, God is going to turn out the lights.

I looked down at my desk calendar the other day and saw in print that today is National Earth Sunday and tomorrow is Earth Day.

So, I went online and looked up Earth Day.

There was way too much to read. But I read enough to shudder at all the religions of the world that are deceived and defiant against a Creator God, effectively giving creative power to earth.

All around the world today, tens of millions of people are holding ceremonies and religious services revolving around Earth Sunday. There are earth-themed sermon starters for pastors; I looked at some of them and they didn't fit with Luke 23. There's even a pulpit pledge to sign and to urge you as a congregation to use less plastic.

There are Sunday school materials for children; I watched one animation video for children with earth drawn like a little man and he's holding up a sign that says, "Save me!"

There are songs written for congregations to sing, whether you're a Buddhist or a Baptist, a Muslim or a Methodist.

The Presbyterian Church USA has resources that will "spark meaningful discussions in your church, and action steps to address the plastic crisis in your life."

The lyrics of one leading song for churches to use on this Sunday, which I listened to, ended by calling us all "to fall in love with the earth."

Now don't misunderstand. I love the beauty and complexity and design in nature; but it leads me to marvel at my Creator, to love my Creator and to revere His amazing handiwork.

And in the meantime, we should be good stewards of the earth which God created for us. There's nothing wise or right about dumping plastic garbage into the ocean or being cruel to animals or trashing the environment.

The trouble is: mankind has adopted an attitude of sovereignty so that we are the ones to save the planet.

Beloved, God is going to destroy this planet. Just read your Bible, then He's going to make a new one at the end of His millennial kingdom—that new heavens and earth will be unspoiled by sin and will be outfitted for eternity—for us to explore and enjoy forever (Revelation 21). We will enjoy nature and God's creation like we can't imagine.

But for now, mankind has turned away from God the Creator and in their idolatry of Mother nature—Romans 1 tells us—mankind worships the creature rather than the Creator.

And Jesus is predicting here that one day God will turn their idols of nature against them with horrifying effects.

When the tribulation period begins and doomsday arrives, let me tell you, that will be the end of Earth Day.

The idols of nature will crumble under the judgment of God.

Now what happens during this cosmic fallout, according to the predictions of Jesus Christ?

We'll call this second section of the Lord's sermon:

Global Panic

Go back to the middle of verse 25 again where Jesus says:

"... and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves."

Luke 21:25

Evidently, the changes God brings about in the moon and the sun create seismic changes in the tides.

The **waves**, Jesus says, are **roaring**; they will be massive, and along with the mega earthquakes **Jesus predicted back in verse 11**, there will no doubt be one tsunami after another. These could be the Lord's reference here to these terrifying waves.

Frankly, we can't imagine the combination of these events: astral debris from falling stars—literally on fire from entering the earth's atmosphere—pummeling planet earth with the power of nuclear bombs, one tsunami after another—a passage in Revelation predicts one third of all the ships and boats in the world will be destroyed—food distribution systems now destroyed, famine and disease quickly spreads worldwide.

During these seven years of tribulation, it will be cosmic chaos and global panic.

Jesus says further in verse 26:

"People fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

Luke 21:26

In the parallel description in Revelation chapter 6, John the apostle gives us more details about this period of time; he writes:

There was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth. ... The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Revelation 6:12-17

Doomsday has arrived.

Now the human race realizes this is the wrath of God. The tense of the verb translated "their wrath has come" indicates they understand that all of what has been happening so far, beginning with global famine and nations at war, was all a part of God's wrath.

But they still won't repent. So, they run and try to hide. They'd rather hide in a cave rather than surrender to Christ. They'd rather pray to the rocks than run to the Rock of Ages.

But God in His mercy will still give defiant mankind more time to believe.

And that leads to the third and final section of this part of the Lord's sermon, following seven years of cosmic fallout and global fear.

We'll call it:

Divine Fulfillment

And the sight of what happens next will lead many to do just that, as Jesus explains in Luke 21:27:

"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Luke 21:27-28

Now is this redemption a reference to the rapture? Jesus is coming on a cloud here; the "Son of Man" is a prophetic title for the Messiah.

So, what is this "redemption" that is "drawing near"?

You can circle the words "drawing near" and then draw a line down to **verse 31** where Jesus says:

“So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

Luke 21:31

The millennial kingdom of Christ on earth is near; it's just around the corner. Which means that doomsday won't last forever, the tribulation period won't last forever.

Jesus says to these people who have come to faith in Christ after the rapture and during the tribulation—the Lord gives them specifically these encouraging words, and with other passages of Scripture—here's what He's saying:

“When you see this cosmic fall out and you're surrounded by global panic, it won't be long before I return to earth, defeat the nations, throws Satan into an abyss and then sets up My millennial kingdom.”

And note this fact here: the entire world will see the Son of Man—the Messiah—returning. Not just believers.

One of the evidences that the rapture will occur before the tribulation is that the rapture will take place in the twinkling of an eye, in a split second, experienced by believers only as we are taken up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:52).

But this arrival of the Lord here in **Luke 21**, this isn't sudden. The world of believers and unbelievers see Him coming, this is a slow descent, so to speak, as Jesus descends, verse 27 says, ***with power and great glory.***

And the reference here in verse 27 that Jesus is coming in a cloud, I believe is a reference to that great pillar of cloud in the Old Testament that signified the presence of God to the Israelites.

Jesus isn't coming here *for* the church, He is coming *with* the church to defeat the defiant nations, regather Israel, and set up His earthly kingdom.

Now Jesus delivers a short parable here in verse 29:

And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.”

Luke 21:29-32

What generation? The generation who sees and experiences doomsday, that generation will be the same generation that sees the return of the King.

Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on Luke (Zondervan, 2012), p. 474

This is all going to take place in a relatively short period of time.

By the way, there is an implicit promise here to the Jewish people. They're not going to be completely destroyed during the tribulation.

Satan and the Antichrist will not succeed in wiping them off the face of the earth.

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Courageous (Victor Books, 1989), p. 102

A remnant of Israel, representing all twelve tribes—Revelation informs us—will survive, believe in Christ, and the promises of God to the nation will be literally fulfilled.

Now verse 33, what a wonderful conclusion this verse makes to our study today:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Luke 21:33

Get this here.

Jesus is placing His words on equal footing with the Old Testament Scriptures. Every word spoken by Jesus—every prediction made by Jesus—will come true.

R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume Two (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 303

It's ironic to me that at the same time our world is convinced that some kind of doomsday is coming, the church has decided to keep quiet about it.

The world has set the clock at 90 seconds to midnight. 90 seconds to doomsday. The problem is, they're looking at the wrong issues.

The world needs your testimony now, more than ever, of God's coming judgment and safety found in Christ alone.

Let me tell you, now is a good time to warn your world that wisdom isn't found in a star, but in the Savior. The only place to hide from the judgement of God, as that old hymn says, is in the:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood
From Thy wounded side which flowed,

Be (for my) sin the double cure,
Save from wrath and make me pure.

Saved from the wrath of God we've studied here, and made pure, forever forgiven by the blood of Christ.

No matter where they set the hands on that Doomsday Clock, we who believe are safe from the judgment and the wrath of God forever.

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Study Guide

Sermon Summary:

This message focuses on the tribulation period as described in Luke 21 and Revelation. This era will be marked by cosmic and global upheaval, underscoring the sovereignty and judgment of God.

While it is our duty to care for the earth, ultimate sovereignty over the earth and its future rests with God. The Scriptures clearly state that God will create a new heaven and earth, unmarred by sin and designed for eternal enjoyment. This truth redirects our awe and worship towards the Creator rather than the creation.

Jesus prophesies about a time that will be filled with unprecedented natural disasters and cosmic disturbances. These events are not random but are divinely orchestrated as signs of God's impending judgment. The roaring seas, massive tsunamis, and celestial upheavals serve as a stark reminder of God's control over the universe. These signs are meant to lead humanity to repentance, yet, as Scripture reveals, there will be those who continue to defy and deny God.

The fear and foreboding that will grip humanity are a direct consequence of the divine shaking of the heavens. This period will not only be a physical unraveling but also a spiritual revelation, as people come to realize the futility of their idols and the unshakeable power of God.

The divine fulfillment of this prophecy will culminate with the glorious return of Christ. This event will not be hidden or mystical but visible to all, marking the definitive establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The return of Christ brings hope and redemption to those who have turned to Him, fulfilling His promises, and demonstrating His faithfulness.

Key Takeaways:

- The tribulation period serves as a profound reminder of the reality of divine judgment. The catastrophic events described in Scripture are not merely symbolic but are indicative of God's active involvement in the affairs of humanity and His righteous judgment against sin. This understanding calls us to a life of holiness and urgency in proclaiming the gospel.
- Even during judgment, God's mercy is evident. The refusal of humanity to turn to God despite clear signs is met not with immediate destruction but with opportunities for repentance. This tension between justice and mercy invites us to appreciate the depth of God's love and the seriousness of His call to repentance.

- The second coming of Christ is a central doctrine that offers hope to believers. It is a visible, powerful, and glorious event that vindicates the faithful and fulfills God's promises. This future event shapes how we live today, fostering a mindset of watchfulness and anticipation.

Discussion Guide:

Bible Reading: Revelation 21:1 / Luke 21:25-26 / Revelation 6:12-17

Observation Questions:

1. What specific events are described in Luke 21:25-26 and Revelation 6:12-17 that indicate cosmic and global upheavals?

Interpretation Questions:

1. In Luke 21:25-26, why are the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, along with the distress of nations, significant for understanding the end times?
2. What does the imagery of the sun turning black and the stars falling from the sky in Revelation 6:12-17 suggest about the nature of God's judgment?

Application Questions:

1. Reflecting on Luke 21:25-26, how can you live in a state of readiness for God's plans, rather than being overwhelmed by fear or uncertainty?
2. Given the dramatic events described in Revelation 6:12-17, what practical steps can you take this week to strengthen your faith and trust in God's sovereignty over the universe?
3. Can you identify any "idols" in your life that might be taking precedence over your reverence for God, especially considering the cosmic signs mentioned in the Scriptures? How can you address this?
4. What is one way you can encourage someone this week who is struggling with fear about the future, using the truths from these passages?