

Mark 13
June 2, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Today's chapter reading is all about the signs of the end of the age. In this context, what do you think it means in practical terms to "be on guard or watch" because we don't know when Jesus will return? [Let people engage]

Hypothetical and RHETORICAL Q: What if we knew that Jesus was returning in two months. How would our life change now? What things would be less important and what things would be more important? And if we can tag those things, can we make those changes now – because it's always a "possibility" he MAY just return in two months?! [Let people quietly ponder]

Transition: Even though this chapter is about events in the future, some of which have already been fulfilled and some have not, this text will also help us move our attention from speculating about the future so that we can live faithfully in the present. And "to successfully live faithfully in the present," we need to look at the imperatives that Jesus gives his disciples. You will discover the command to "watch or watch out" 3x, to "be on your guard" 3x, and depending on your translation, you'll see "pray" 2x. Jesus is really trying to prepare his disciples! So as we read today's passage, be thinking about changes we need to make in our life so that it will be marked more clearly by present faithful obedience to Jesus. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Signs of the End of the Age

13 As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

² "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

⁵ Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

¹²“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³ All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

¹⁴“When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) standing where it (or he) does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. ¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁷ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter, ¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. ²⁰ If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. ²¹ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ (or Messiah)!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. ²² For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. ²³ So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁴“But in those days, following that distress,

“ ‘the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;

²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4) ²⁶“At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

²⁸“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ I tell you the truth, this generation (or race) will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown

³²“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert (and pray)! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

New Testament scholars agree that Mark 13 has generated more disagreement among interpreters. The history of interpretation of this chapter is immensely complex. So let's follow Jesus' commands to "watch out, be on guard and pray!" "Lord Jesus, as we live between your resurrection and your return, give us a steadfast faith to trust you, an enduring hope to wait for you, and an abiding love to live for you until the day of your return. It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 154-158). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Jews were proud of their temple, in spite of the fact that it was built by the Herod family in order to placate the Jews. Jesus had already given His estimate of the temple (Mark 11:15–17), but His disciples were fascinated by the magnificence of the structure. Imagine how shocked they were when Jesus informed them that the building they admired so much would one day be demolished. The Jewish leaders had defiled it; Jesus would depart from it and leave it desolate (Matt. 23:38); the Romans would destroy it.

Once away from the crowds, Jesus' disciples asked Him when this momentous event would take place and what would happen to indicate it was soon to occur. Their questions revealed that their understanding of prophecy was still quite confused. They thought that the destruction of the temple coincided with the end of the age and the return of their Lord (Matt. 24:3). But their questions gave Jesus the opportunity to deliver a prophetic message that is generally called "The Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24–25; Luke 21:5–36).

As we study this important sermon, we must follow some practical guidelines. To begin with, we must study this discourse in the light of the rest of Scripture, especially the Book of Daniel. The prophetic Scriptures harmonize if we consider all that God has revealed.

Second, we must see the practical application of the discourse. Jesus did not preach this sermon to satisfy the curiosity of His disciples, or even to straighten out their confused thinking. At least four times He said "Take heed!" (Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33) and He closed the address with

the admonition, “Watch!” While studying this address can help us better understand future events, we must not make the mistake of setting dates! (Mark 13:32)

Third, as we study, we must keep in mind the “Jewish atmosphere” of the discourse. The Olivet Discourse grew out of some questions asked of a Jewish rabbi by four Jewish men, about the future of the Jewish temple. The warnings about “false Christs” would especially concern Jews (Mark 13:5–6, 21–22), as would the warning about Jewish courts and trials (Mark 13:9). The Jews would especially appreciate the reference to “Daniel the prophet” and the admonition to flee from Judea (Mark 13:14).

Finally, we must remember that this chapter describes a period of time known as “the Tribulation” (Mark 13:19, 24; also see Matt. 24:21, 29). The Old Testament prophets wrote about this period and called it “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), a time of wrath (Zeph. 1:15–18), and a time of indignation and punishment (Isa. 26:20–21). As we shall see, it is Daniel the prophet who gives us the “key,” resulting in a better understanding of the sequence of events.

In Mark 13, Jesus described three stages in this Tribulation period: (1) the beginning (Mark 13:5–13), (2) the middle (Mark 13:14–18), and (3) the events that lead to the end (Mark 13:19–27). He then closed with two parables that urge believers to watch and take heed (Mark 13:28–37). Matthew’s Gospel is more detailed but has the same basic outline: the beginning of sorrows (Matt. 24:4–14), the middle of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:15–28), the end (Matt. 24:29–31), closing parabolic application (Matt. 24:32–44).

I must point out that it is the conviction of many students of prophecy that believers in this present age of the church will be raptured by Christ and taken to heaven *before the Tribulation begins* (1 Thes. 4:13–5:11; Rev. 3:10–11). At the close of the Tribulation, they will return to earth with Christ and reign with Him (Rev. 19:11–20:6). I agree with this interpretation, but I do not make it a test of orthodoxy or spirituality.

The First Half of the Tribulation (Mark 13:5–13)

The key statement is at the end of Mark 13:8: “These are the beginnings of sorrows.” The word translated “sorrows” means “birth pangs,” suggesting that the world at that time will be like a woman in travail (see Isa. 13:6–8; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:20–23; 1 Thes. 5:3). The birth pangs will come suddenly, build up gradually, and lead to a time of terrible sorrow and tribulation for the whole world.

“Don’t be deceived.” Jesus listed the things that must *not* be taken as the “signs” of His coming. Rather, they are indications that the Tribulation “birth pangs” are just beginning. These signs are: the success of false Christs (Mark 13:5–6), nations in conflict (Mark 13:7–8a), natural disturbances (Mark 13:8b), and religious persecutions (Mark 13:9–13). They have always been with us, but since these events are compared to “birth pangs,” our Lord may be saying that *an acceleration of these things* would be significant.

False messiahs. The pages of history are filled with the tragic stories of false messiahs, false prophets, and their enthusiastic but deluded disciples. Jesus warned about false prophets (Matt. 7:15–20), as did Paul (Acts 20:28–31), and John (1 John 4:1–6). There is something in human nature that loves a lie and refuses to believe the costly lessons of the past. Mark Twain said that a lie runs around the world while Truth is putting on her shoes! How easy it is for spiritually blind people to follow popular leaders and gullibly accept their simple but erroneous solutions for the problems of life. Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived by these imposters, and that warning holds good today.

Political conflicts. He also warned them not to be disturbed by political conflicts among the nations. The Roman Empire had enjoyed a measure of peace for many years, but it would not last. As the empire decayed and nationalism developed, it was inevitable that nations would come into conflict. The “Pax Romana” would be gone forever.

Natural disasters. War often leaves famine in its wake (2 Kings 25:2–3; Ezek. 6:11). Famine is also caused by man’s abuse of the environment, or it can be sent by God as a judgment (1 Kings 17:1). There have always been earthquakes, and some are evidences of God’s wrath (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). Since natural disasters have many causes, it is dangerous to dogmatically make them “the signs of the times.”

“Don’t be discouraged!” Not only were the believers to take heed and avoid the deceivers, but they were also to *take heed to themselves* (Mark 13:9–13). Why? Because they would face increasing opposition and persecution from sources both official (Mark 13:9–11) and personal (Mark 13:12–13). It was important that the believers use these experiences as opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ. Persecution would begin in the local Jewish courts, but it would move to the higher courts where governors and kings would be involved. You see a similar development recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 4–5; 7; 12; 16; 21–28).

But persecution would only result in proclamation! The believers would suffer *for His sake* and in that way declare His Gospel. “We multiply whenever we are mown down by you,” said Tertullian to his persecutors. “The blood of Christians is seed!” While I do not think that taking the Gospel to all nations (Mark 13:10) is a *condition* for our Lord’s return, it is certainly Christ’s commission to His people (Matt. 28:19–20). The “end” here means “the end of the age,” the Tribulation period.

It would not be easy for these “common people” to face courts, governors, and kings; but Jesus assured them that the Holy Spirit would minister through them whenever they had opportunity to witness (Mark 13:11). This passage should not be used as an excuse or a crutch for poorly prepared preachers. It is an encouragement for all believers who sincerely want to witness for Christ and honor Him (John 14:26; Acts 4:8). If we are walking in the Spirit, we will have no trouble bearing witness for Christ when the opportunities arrive (John 15:26–27).

We can understand official persecution, but why would friends and family members create problems for believers? (see Micah 7:4ff; John 15:18–27) You would think that Jewish families in particular would be loyal to each other. But the Christian faith was looked on as heresy and blasphemy by both the Jews and the Gentiles. Twice daily, orthodox Jews affirmed, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord!” (Deut. 6:4) The Jew who said “Jesus is Lord!” blasphemed and was worthy of death. Rome expected its citizens to declare “Caesar is lord!” or suffer the consequences. Thus, families and friends would be torn between their loyalty to their “ancient faith” and their nation, and their devotion to loved ones.

The real cause for persecution is stated in Mark 13:13, “for My name’s sake.” If we identify with Jesus Christ, we can expect the world to treat us the way it treated Him (John 15:20ff). You can belong to all sorts of weird religious groups today and not suffer much opposition from family and friends, but the minute you bring the name of Jesus into the picture, and share the Gospel, somebody will start to oppose you. His name is still hated.

Do not interpret Mark 13:13 as a condition for salvation, for it applies primarily to witnesses during the Tribulation. In any period a person lives, if he is truly born again, God will love him (John 13:1; Rom. 8:35–38) and keep him (John 10:27–29; Rom. 8:29–34). Since “the end” in Mark 13:7 means “the end of the age,” that is likely what it means in Mark 13:13. During the

Tribulation, the true believers will prove their faith by their faithfulness. They will not give in to the godless pressures of false religion (Rev. 13).

The Middle of the Tribulation (Mark 13:14–18)

The phrase “abomination of desolation” comes from the Book of Daniel and refers to the idolatrous pollution of the Jewish temple by the Gentiles. To the Jews, all idolatry is an abomination (Deut. 29:17; 2 Kings 16:3). The Jewish temple was defiled in 167 B.C. by the Syrian king Antiochus IV (also called “Epiphanes,” meaning “illustrious”) when he poured swine’s blood on the altar. This event was predicted in Daniel 11:31. The temple was also defiled by the Romans in A.D. 70 when they captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. However, these events were but anticipations of the final “abomination of desolation” prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11.

In order to understand Daniel 9:24–27, we must remember that the Jewish calendar is built on a series of sevens. The seventh day of the week is the Sabbath, and the seventh week after Passover brings Pentecost. The seventh month brings the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. The seventh year is a Sabbatical year, and after seven Sabbatical years comes the Year of Jubilee.

Daniel saw seventy weeks, or periods of seven years, divinely determined for the Jews and for their Holy City, Jerusalem. This period of 490 years began with the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. permitting the Jews to return to their land and rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4). Why must the city be restored? Because 483 years later (×), Messiah would come to the city and give His life for sinners.

Now we must do some simple calculating. Most historians agree that Jesus was born in 5 B.C.; for Herod the Great was still living at the time, and he died in March, 4 B.C. If our Lord died at about the age of 33, that would take us to A.D. 27 or 28, and this would be 483 years after 445 B.C. when the decree was given!

We have accounted for 483 of Daniel’s 490 years, but what about the remaining 7 years? Daniel 9:27 assigns them to the Tribulation period that we are now studying. (Note that Dan. 9:26 also predicts the destruction of Jerusalem—by the Romans, commentators conclude—but these two events must not be confused.) “The time of Jacob’s trouble” will last seven years.

But what signals the beginning of this awful seven-year period? The signing of a covenant between the nation of Israel and “the prince that shall come” (Dan. 9:26). This “prince” is the coming world dictator that we usually call “the Antichrist.” In the Book of Revelation, he is called “the Beast” (Rev. 13–14). He will agree to protect Israel from her many enemies for seven years, and will even allow the Jews to rebuild their temple and restore their ancient liturgy and sacrifices. The Jews rejected their true Messiah but will accept a false messiah (John 5:43). However, after three and a half years, Antichrist will break this covenant, invade the temple, set up his own image, and force the world to worship Satan (see 2 Thes. 2:1–12; Rev. 13). This is Daniel’s “abomination of desolation,” and it will usher in the last half of the Tribulation period, a time known as “the Great Tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). Note in Mark 13:14 that Mark’s parenthesis is for *readers* at a future time, not *hearers* when Jesus gave this message. This message will have special meaning to them as they see these events taking place.

Jesus gave a special warning to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Judea: “Get out as fast as you can!” This same warning applied when Rome attacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (See Luke 21:20–24, and remember that Daniel 9:26 predicted the invasion.) What happened in A.D. 70 foreshadowed what will happen in the middle of the Tribulation. Dr. Harry Rimmer used to say,

“Coming events cast their shadows before. Straight ahead lies yesterday!” The warnings in Mark 13:14–18 do not apply to believers today, but they do remind us that God’s people in every age must know the prophetic Word and be prepared to obey God at any time.

The Last Half of the Tribulation (Mark 13:19–27)

In the Book of Revelation, the last half of the Tribulation is called “the wrath of God” (Rev. 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). During this time, God will judge the world and prepare Israel for the coming of her Messiah. It will be a time of intensive judgment such as the world has never seen or will ever see again. In it, God will be working out His purposes and setting the stage for the coming of the Conqueror (Rev. 19:11ff).

Even in the midst of His wrath, God remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2); and for the sake of His elect, He shortens the days of the Tribulation. (The “elect” refers to Israel and the Gentiles who believe during the Tribulation. See Rev. 14.) To “shorten the days” means that He limits them to the three and a half years already determined and stops on time.

Satanic deception will continue to the very end, and false Christs and false prophets will lead people astray. In fact, they will even do miracles (Matt. 7:21–23; 2 Thes. 2:9–12; Rev. 13:13–14). So deceptive will be these miracles that even the elect will be tempted to believe their lies. Of themselves, miracles are not a proof of divine calling and approval (Deut. 13:1–5). The final test is the Word of God.

The Tribulation period will climax with the appearing of terrifying signs in the heavens and worldwide chaos on the earth (Luke 21:25–26). These signs, which have been predicted by the prophets (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10; 3:15), will prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. It will be a revelation of His great glory (see Dan. 7:13–14; Mark 8:38) as He comes to establish His rule on the earth (Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7).

Mark 13:27 describes the regathering of Israel from the nations to which they have been scattered throughout the world (Deut. 30:3–6; Isa. 11:12; Jer. 31:7–9). They will see their Messiah and trust Him, and the nation will be created in holiness and glory (Zech. 12:9–13:1; 14:4–11). That there is a glorious future for Israel is stated by Paul in Romans 11.

Jesus did not want His disciples to get so involved in the prophecies of the future that they would neglect the responsibilities of the present; so He closed the Olivet Discourse with two parables. (Matt. 25 adds three other parables—the bridesmaids, the talents, and the sheep and goats.) Note that the first parable (Mark 13:28–31) emphasizes knowing that His coming is near, while the second parable emphasizes *not knowing* the time of His return. Is this a contradiction? No, because they were addressed to two different groups of people—the first, to the Tribulation saints, and the second, to all believers of every age.

The fig tree has a special association with the nation of Israel (see Mark 11:12–14, but note that Luke 21:29 adds “and all the trees”). Most of the trees in Palestine are evergreens and do not change dramatically with the seasons. Not so the fig tree; it is one of the latest to leaf out in spring, so its shoots are an indication that summer is indeed near.

As Christian believers today, we are not looking for “signs” of His coming; we are looking for Him! But people living during the Tribulation will be able to watch these things occur and will know that His coming is near. This assurance will help them to endure (Mark 13:13) and to be good witnesses.

We think of a “generation” as a body of people living at the same time in history. But to what “generation” was Jesus referring in Mark 13:30? Not the generation then living in Judea, because they did not see “all these things” actually take place. Perhaps He meant the generation living

during the Tribulation period. But since the Tribulation covers only seven years, why refer to an entire generation? For that matter, several different generations live together during every period of history.

The Greek word translated “generation” can also mean “race, stock, family.” On several occasions, Jesus used it to refer to the Jewish nation (Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19); and that is probably how He used it in Mark 13:30. The chosen nation, God’s elect, would be preserved to the very end; and God would fulfill His promises to them. His Word will never fail (Josh. 21:45; 1 Kings 8:56; Matt. 24:35). We as believers do not depend on signs; we depend on His unchanging Word, the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19–21).

The Parable of the Fig Tree cautions Tribulation saints to watch and to know the “signs of the times.” But the Parable of the Householder warns *all of us today* (Mark 13:37) to be alert, because we do not know when He will return to take us to heaven (1 Cor. 15:51–52). Like the householder in the story, before our Lord went from us back to heaven, He gave each of us work to do. He expects us to be faithful while He is gone and to be working when He returns. “Take heed, watch and pray” is His admonition.

To “watch” means to be alert, to stay at one’s best, to stay awake. (The English name “Gregory” comes from this Greek word translated “watch.”) Why must we stay alert? Because nobody knows when Jesus Christ will return. When He was on earth in His humiliation, Jesus did not know the day or hour of His coming again. Even the angels do not know. The unsaved world scoffs at us because we continue to cling to this “blessed hope,” but He will return as He promised (2 Peter 3). Our task is to be faithful and to be busy, not to speculate or debate about the hidden details of prophecy.

Watchfulness has nothing to do with going to heaven. It is purely a matter of pleasing Him, hearing His loving commendation, and receiving His reward (Matt. 25:14–30). There is no suggestion here that, when He returns, Jesus will take only the faithful to heaven and leave the others on earth to suffer the Tribulation. His family is one, and He is now preparing a home for all of them, even the least worthy (John 14:1–6). We go to heaven because of His grace, not because of our faithfulness or good works (Eph. 2:8–10).

The Christians who read Mark’s Gospel eventually had to face intense persecution from Rome (1 Peter 4:12ff), and this particular message must have brought comfort and strength to them. After all, if God is able to help His people witness during the Great Tribulation, the worst persecution of all, then surely He could strengthen the saints in the Roman Empire as they faced their fiery trial.

While Christians today will not experience the terrible sufferings described in this chapter, we will have our share of persecution and tribulation in this world before the Lord returns (John 16:33; Acts 14:22). But the warnings of this message in Mark 13 may be applied to our own lives: “Take heed that you are not deceived” (Mark 13:5, 23); “Take heed that you do not become discouraged and quit” (Mark 13:9); “Take heed, watch and pray” (Mark 13:33).

“And what I say unto you, I say unto all, ‘Watch’ ” (Mark 13:37).

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 166-173) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

D. Jesus’ prophetic Olivet Discourse to His disciples (chap. 13) (Matt. 24:1–25:46; Luke 21:5–36)

This chapter, known as the Olivet Discourse as Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives, is the longest unit of His teaching recorded by Mark (cf. Mark 4:1–34).

Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (13:2) which prompted the disciples to inquire about the timing of “these things” (v. 4). Apparently they associated the destruction of the temple with the end of the Age (cf. Matt. 24:3). In reply Jesus skillfully wove together into a unified discourse a prophetic scene involving two perspectives: (a) the near event, the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70); and (b) the far event, the coming of the Son of Man in clouds with power and glory. The former local event was a forerunner of the latter universal event. In this way Jesus followed the precedent of Old Testament prophets by predicting a far future event in terms of a near future event whose fulfillment at least some of His hearers would see (cf. Mark 9:1, 12–13).

This indicates Jesus anticipated a period of historical development between His resurrection and His second coming (cf. 13:10; 14:9). Nearly two millennia have passed since the fall of Jerusalem, and the end has not yet come. This prophetic information was set within a framework of (a) warnings against deception and (b) exhortations to vigilant obedience during the intervening time of missionary outreach, persecution, and socio-political upheavals. There are 19 imperatives in 13:5–37, and in each case the hortatory element (second person verbs: vv. 5b, 7a, 9a, et al.) arises out of Jesus’ instruction about the future (third person indicative verbs: vv. 6, 7b–8, 9b–10, et al.). The verb “be on guard” (*blepete*) occurs four times at significant points throughout the discourse (vv. 5 [“Watch out,” NIV], 9, 23, 33). This was to encourage His followers to maintain steadfast faith and obedience to God throughout the present Age.

In Mark’s narrative, the Olivet Discourse is a bridge between Jesus’ controversies with the religious authorities (11:27–12:44) and the Passion narrative (14:1–15:47) which culminated in His arrest and death. It disclosed to His disciples that the religious establishment which opposed Him and would eventually condemn Him to death would itself fall under God’s judgment.

1. SETTING: JESUS’ PREDICTION OF THE TEMPLE’S DESTRUCTION (13:1–4) (Matt. 24:1–3; Luke 21:5–7).

13:1. As Jesus **was leaving the temple** area (*hierou*; cf. 11:11) probably on Wednesday evening of Passion Week (cf. the introduction to 11:1–13:37) **one of His disciples** addressed **Him** as **Teacher** (cf. 4:38; 9:5) and with awe and admiration called attention to the **massive stones** (lit., “Behold, what manner of stones”) and the **magnificent buildings** in the temple, that is, the sanctuary itself with its various courts, balconies, colonnades, and porches.

The Jerusalem temple (not fully completed until ca. A.D. 64) was built by the Herodian dynasty to win Jewish favor and to create a lasting Herodian monument. It was considered an architectural wonder of the ancient world. It was built with large white stones, polished and generously decorated with gold (Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews* 15. 11. 3–7). It covered about 1/6 of the land area of old Jerusalem. To the Jews nothing was as magnificent and formidable as their temple.

13:2. Jesus’ response was a startling prediction of the total destruction of **all these great buildings**. The whole complex would be completely leveled—literally, “**stone will certainly not** (*ou mē*) **be left** here upon stone.” Jesus’ use of the emphatic double negative (*ou mē*) twice stressed the certainty of His words’ fulfillment.

This ominous prediction is the sequel to Jesus’ judgment on the misuse of the temple (cf. 11:15–17; Jer. 7:11–14). As in Jeremiah’s day so again the destruction of the temple by a foreign power would be God’s judgment on rebellious Israel.

This prediction was fulfilled literally within the span of a generation. In A.D. 70, after the temple area was burned contrary to Titus' directives, he ordered his Roman soldiers to demolish the whole city and level its buildings to the ground (Josephus *Jewish Wars* 7. 1. 1).

13:3–4. Going across the Kidron Valley to the top of **the Mount of Olives** (cf. 11:1a), **Jesus** and His disciples sat down **opposite the temple**. The Mount of Olives rises about 2,700 feet above sea level but is only about 100 feet higher than Jerusalem. West of the mount lay the temple and the city.

The four disciples Jesus called first (cf. 1:16–20) **asked Him privately** (*kat' idian*; cf. 6:32) for more information about His prediction. Only Mark recorded their names. Often in Mark a question from the disciples introduced a section of Jesus' teaching to them (cf. 4:10–32; 7:17–23; 9:11–13, 28–29; 10:10–12).

The disciples' question, perhaps voiced by **Peter** (cf. 8:29), is expressed in two parts: (a) **When will these things** (destruction of the temple [13:2] and other future events [note the pl.]) **happen, and** (b) **What will be the sign that they** (lit., “these things”) **are all about to be fulfilled?** The verb “fulfilled” (*synteleisthai*, “be accomplished”) denotes the final consummation, the end of the present Age (cf. v. 7; Matt. 24:3).

Having only the perspective of Old Testament prophecy (e.g., Zech. 14), the disciples saw no long interval between the temple's destruction and the end-time events climaxing in the coming of the Son of Man. They assumed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple were some of the events at the end of the present Age and would inaugurate the messianic kingdom. They wanted to know *when* this would happen and *what* visible sign would indicate that fulfillment was about to take place.

2. PROPHETIC DISCOURSE IN JESUS' ANSWER TO HIS DISCIPLES' QUESTIONS (13:5–32)

The conditions associated with the impending local crisis of Jerusalem's fall foreshadow those connected with the worldwide end-time crisis. Thus Jesus' words, relevant to His first disciples, remain so for all disciples who face similar conditions throughout this Age.

He first answered their *second* question regarding “the sign” (v. 4b) in two ways: negatively, by warning them against false signs of the end (vv. 5–13), and positively, by stating the notable event that inaugurates unparalleled tribulation and by describing the Second Advent (vv. 14–27). Then He answered their *first* question regarding “when” (v. 4a) in a parable (vv. 28–32).

a. His warnings against deception (13:5–8) (Matt. 24:4–8; Luke 21:8–11).

13:5–6. **Watch out** (*blepete*, “take heed, be on guard”) is a call to vigilance repeated throughout the discourse (cf. vv. 9, 23, 33; v. 35 has a different verb). **Jesus** warned His disciples to be on guard against messianic impostors. **Many** false messiahs (cf. v. 22) **will** arise in crisis times, making use of His **name** (His title and authority), **claiming, I am He** (lit., *egō eimi*, “I am”). This claim to deity is expressed in the formula of God's own self-revelation (cf. 6:50; Ex. 3:14; John 8:58). They **will** lead **many** people astray (cf. Acts 8:9–11).

13:7–8. Second, Jesus warned His disciples against misinterpreting contemporary events such as **wars** and natural disasters as indications that the end is at hand. They were **not to be alarmed** and thereby diverted from their work whenever they would **hear of wars** (sounds of

battle close at hand) **and rumors** (lit., “reports”) **of wars** far away. It is necessary (*dei*, by divine compulsion; cf. 8:31; 13:10) that these things come about. They fall within God’s sovereign purposes, which include permitting wars as a consequence of human rebellion and sin. **But the end**—of the present Age and the establishing of God’s rule on earth—**is still to come** (lit., “is not yet”).

This is confirmed (*gar*, “for”) and expanded: **Nation will rise** (lit., “shall be raised,” i.e., by God; cf. Isa. 19:2) in armed aggression **against nation**. In addition **there will be earthquakes and famines**, suggesting divine judgment. Yet **these** (“these things”) **are just the** (lit., “a”) **beginning of birth pains**. The words “birth pains,” the sharp pains preceding childbirth, picture divine judgment (cf. Isa. 13:6–8; 26:16–18; Jer. 22:20–23; Hosea 13:9–13; Micah 4:9–10). They refer to the period of intense suffering preceding the birth of the new Age, the messianic kingdom.

This emphasis—“the end is still to come” (Mark 13:7d) and “these [things] are the beginning of birth pains” (v. 8c)—suggests that an extended period of time will precede “the end.” Each generation will have its own wars and natural disasters. Yet all these events fall within God’s purposes. Human history is heading toward the birth of the new Messianic Age.

b. His warnings about personal dangers while under persecution (13:9–13) (Matt. 24:9–14; Luke 21:12–19)

These “floating sayings” (cf. their use in other contexts: Matt. 10:17–22; Luke 12:11–12) are linked by the word *paradidōmi* (“to hand over,” Mark 13:9, 11 [“arrested,” NIV], 12 [“betray,” NIV]). Jesus probably said these words several times, not just here on the Mount of Olives. His purpose here was to prepare His disciples for suffering because of their allegiance to Him.

13:9. With the admonition, **Be on your guard** (*blepete*; cf. v. 5), Jesus warned His disciples to be alert against wrongful retaliation under persecution. They would **be handed over** for trial **to the local councils** (lit., “sanhedrins”), local Jewish courts held in the synagogues. **And** they would be publicly **flogged**, that is, beaten with 39 strokes (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24), **in the synagogues** as heretics (cf. Mishnah *Makkoth* 3. 10–14). Because of their loyalty to Jesus Christ they **will stand** (lit., “be made to stand”) **before** Gentile civil authorities, that is, provincial rulers (cf. Acts 12:1; 23:24; 24:27), **as witnesses to them** (cf. comments on Mark 1:44; 6:11). Their witness to the gospel during their defenses would become, in God’s final judgment, incriminating evidence against their persecutors.

13:10. **The gospel must** (*dei*, “out of [divine] necessity”; cf. v. 7; 8:31) **first be preached** (“proclaimed”) **to all nations** (emphatic word position in Gr.), all peoples worldwide (cf. 11:17; 14:9).

In proclaiming the gospel the disciples would be persecuted but they must not despair and give up. Despite all opposition, it is a priority in God’s plan for this Age and will be accomplished in accordance with His purposes. It is the responsibility of each generation (cf. Rom. 1:5, 8; 15:18–24; Col. 1:6, 23). But preaching the gospel worldwide does not require or guarantee its worldwide acceptance before or at the end of the Age (cf. Matt. 25:31–46).

13:11. **Whenever** the disciples **are arrested** (from *paradidōmi*; cf. v. 9) **and brought to trial** for preaching the gospel, they are **not** to be anxious **beforehand about what to say** in giving a defense. They are to speak **whatever** God (implied) gives them to say **at** that moment (cf. Ex. 4:12; Jer. 1:9). **The Holy Spirit** would do the **speaking**; He would enable them to say the right things at the right times with boldness despite their natural fears. This assistance, however, did not guarantee acquittal.

13:12–13. Opposition will come through official channels (vv. 9, 11) and also through close personal relationships. It will be so severe that family members—**brother** versus **brother**, **father** versus **child**, and **children** versus **parents**—**will betray** (from *paradidōmi*; cf. vv. 9, 11) each other to hostile authorities, thereby causing Christian members to be **put to death**. Because of their allegiance to Jesus (lit., “on account of My name”; cf. v. 9), His disciples will be hated continually by **all men**, that is, all kinds of people, not just hostile authorities or family members (cf. Phil. 1:29; 3:11; Col. 1:24; 1 Peter 4:16). **He who stands firm** (lit., “he who has endured,” viewing one’s life as completed), who has remained loyal to Jesus Christ and the gospel (cf. Mark 8:35) **to the end** (*eis telos*, adverbial phrase; an idiom meaning “completely, to the limit”; cf. John 13:1; 1 Thes. 2:16) of his life on earth, **will be saved** (cf. Mark 8:35; 10:26–27). This “saved” one will experience God’s salvation in its final form—glorification (contrast usage in 13:20; cf. Heb. 9:27–28). Perseverance is a result and outward sign, not the basis, of spiritual genuineness (cf. Rom. 8:29–30; 1 John 2:19). A person genuinely saved by grace through faith (cf. Eph. 2:8–10) endures to the end and will experience the consummation of his salvation.

These words of warning were pertinent to Mark’s Roman readers who were threatened by persecution for their allegiance to Jesus. Such suffering could be more readily endured when viewed in the context of God’s plan for worldwide evangelism and vindication. (Cf. comments on Matt. 24:13.)

c. Jesus’ portrayal of the coming crisis (13:14–23) (Matt. 24:15–28; Luke 21:20–24)

Jesus then answered the disciples’ second question (Mark 13:4b) positively (vv. 14–23).

Some interpreters limit the events of this section to the chaotic years preceding Jerusalem’s fall (A.D. 66–70). Others relate them exclusively to the Great Tribulation at the end of this Age. But the details suggest that *both* events are in view (cf. Matt. 24:15–16, 29–31; Luke 21:20–28). The conquest of Jerusalem is theologically (not chronologically) attached to the end-time events (cf. Dan. 9:26–27; Luke 21:24). The expression “the abomination that causes desolation” is the link between the historical and eschatological perspectives (cf. Dan. 11:31 with Dan. 9:27; 12:11). These “near” tribulations foreshadowed the “far” Tribulation of the end time.

13:14. The sign that “these things” were about to be fulfilled (cf. v. 4b) was the appearance of **the abomination that causes desolation** (lit., “the abomination of desolation”; cf. Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15), **standing where it does not belong**, a reference to the temple sanctuary. More precise identification may have been politically dangerous for his readers. Mark’s exhortation, **Let the reader understand**, was a decoding signal urging them to recognize the significance of Jesus’ words in light of their Old Testament context (cf., e.g., Dan. 9:25–27).

The word “abomination” denoted pagan idolatry and its detestable practices (Deut. 29:16–18; 2 Kings 16:3–4; 23:12–14; Ezek. 8:9–18). The phrase “the abomination of desolation” referred to the presence of an idolatrous person or object so detestable that it caused the temple to be abandoned and left desolate.

Historically, the first fulfillment of Daniel’s prophetic use of the expression (Dan. 11:31–32) was the desecration of the temple in 167 B.C. by the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes. He erected an altar to the pagan Greek god Zeus over the altar of burnt offering and sacrificed a pig on it (cf. apocryphal 1 Maccabees 1:41–64; 6:7; and Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews* 12. 5. 4).

Jesus’ use of “the abomination of desolation” referred to another fulfillment—the temple’s desecration and destruction in A.D. 70. **When** (lit., “whenever”) His disciples, those present and

future, **see** this desecration take place, it is a signal for people **in Judea** to escape **to the mountains** beyond the Jordan River in Perea.

Josephus recorded the occupation and appalling profaning of the temple in A.D. 67–68 by Jewish Zealots, who also installed a usurper, Phanni, as high priest (Josephus *Jewish Wars* 4. 3. 7–10; 4. 6. 3). Jewish Christians fled to Pella, a town located in the Transjordanian mountains (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3. 5. 3).

The events of 167 B.C. and A.D. 70 foreshadow a final fulfillment of Jesus' words just prior to His Second Advent (cf. Mark 13:24–27). Mark used the *masculine* participle “standing” (*hestēkota*) to modify the *neuter* noun “abomination” (*bdelygma*; v. 14). This suggests that “the abomination” is a future person “standing where he (NIV) does not belong.”

This person is the end-time Antichrist (Dan. 7:23–26; 9:25–27; 2 Thes. 2:3–4, 8–9; Rev. 13:1–10, 14–15). He will make a covenant with the Jewish people at the beginning of the seven-year period preceding Christ's second coming (Dan. 9:27). The temple will be rebuilt and worship reestablished (Rev. 11:1). In the middle of this period (after 3½ years) the Antichrist will break his covenant, stop temple sacrifices, desecrate the temple (cf. Dan. 9:27), and proclaim himself to be God (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thes. 2:3–4; Rev. 11:2). This launches the terrible end-time events of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 6; 8–9; 16). Those who refuse to be identified with the Antichrist will suffer severe persecution and be forced to flee for refuge (Rev. 12:6, 13–17). Many—both Jews and Gentiles—will be saved during this period (Rev. 7) but many will also be martyred (Rev. 6:9–11).

13:15–18. When this crisis breaks, the person **on the roof of his house** (cf. 2:2–4) must not take time to **go** inside to retrieve any possessions. The person working out **in the field** must not take time to **go back** to another part of the field or his house **to get his cloak**, an outer garment that protected against cold night air.

Jesus expressed compassion **for pregnant women and nursing mothers** forced to flee under such difficult circumstances. He exhorted His disciples (cf. 13:14) to **pray that this** (lit., “it”; cf. v. 29)—the coming crisis necessitating their flight—**will not** happen during the **winter**, the rainy season when swollen streams would be difficult to cross.

13:19. The reason their flight was urgent and hopefully would be unhindered is that **those** (lit., “those days”) **will be days of distress** (lit., “will be a tribulation,” *thlipsis*; cf. v. 24) **unequaled from the beginning of Creation until now ... never** (*ou mē*; cf. v. 2) **to be equaled again**. At no time in the past, present, or future has there been or will there be such a severe tribulation as this.

This unprecedented distress was true of but not restricted to the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Josephus *Jewish Wars* preface; 1. 1. 4; 5. 10. 5). Jesus looked beyond A.D. 70 to the final Great Tribulation (*thlipsis*; cf. Rev. 7:14) prior to the Second Advent. This is supported by these facts: (a) Mark 13:19 echoes Daniel 12:1, an end-time prophecy; (b) the words “never to be equaled again” indicate that another crisis will never be like this one; (c) “those days” link the “near” future with the “far” future (cf. Mark 13:17, 19–20, 24; Jer. 3:16, 18; 33:14–16; Joel 3:1) (d) the days will be terminated (Mark 13:20).

13:20. **If the Lord** (*Yahweh* God; cf. 12:29), **had not** already decided in His sovereign plan to **cut short** (terminate, not reduce the number of) **those days** (lit., “the days”; cf. 13:19), **no one would survive** (*esōthē*, “would be saved”; cf. 15:30–31), that is, be delivered from physical death; this is in contrast with 13:13. **But** God set limits on the duration of the end-time Tribulation, because **of the elect**, those redeemed during “those days,” **whom He has chosen** for Himself (cf. Acts 13:48). While all this proved true indirectly in A.D. 70, the language of this

verse suggests God's *direct* intervention in judgment, an unmistakable characteristic of the end-time Tribulation (cf. Rev. 16:1).

13:21–22. **At that time** (*tote*, “then”; cf. vv. 26–27) in the middle of “those days” (cf. v. 19) of severe affliction and flight, **if** someone should claim that **the Christ** (Messiah) was **here** or **there**, His disciples were **not to believe it** (the fallacious claim, or possibly “him,” the person), and turn aside from taking refuge. Jesus explained that many **false Christs** (messiahs; cf. v. 6) **and false prophets** would **appear and perform** miraculous deeds that would seem to validate their claims. Their purpose would be **to mislead the elect** (cf. v. 20), believers in the true Messiah. The clause **if that were possible** shows that they will not succeed.

13:23. Again Jesus exhorted His disciples, **Be on ... guard** (*blepete*; cf. vv. 5, 9) for deceptive pitfalls in crisis days.

d. Jesus' portrayal of His triumphant return (13:24–27) (Matt. 24:29–31; Luke 21:25–28).

13:24–25. The word **But** (*alla*) introduces a sharp contrast between the appearance of false messiahs who will perform miraculous signs (v. 22) and the dramatic coming of the true Messiah **in those days** (cf. vv. 19–20; Joel 2:28–32) **following that distress** (*thlipsin*, “tribulation”; cf. Mark 13:19). These phrases indicate a close connection with verses 14–23. If these verses apply exclusively to the events of A.D. 70 then Jesus Christ should have returned shortly thereafter. That He did not return then supports the view that verses 14–23 refer to both the destruction of Jerusalem and the future Great Tribulation before Christ will return.

A variety of cosmic disorders involving **the sun ... moon**, and **stars** will immediately precede the Second Advent. Jesus' description is fashioned from Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4 without His quoting exactly from either passage. This vividly refers to observable celestial changes in the physical universe.

The last statement—**the heavenly bodies** (lit., “the powers that are in the skies”) **will be shaken**—may refer to: (a) physical forces controlling the movements of the celestial bodies which will be thrown out of their normal course, or (b) spiritual forces of evil, Satan and his cohorts, who will be greatly disturbed by these events. The first view is preferred.

13:26. **At that time** (*tote*, “then”; this Gr. word is also used in vv. 21, 27 though the NIV does not translate it in v. 27) when the cosmic events just mentioned have taken place, **men** (generic, “people”) living on the earth then **will see the Son of Man** (cf. 8:31, 38) **coming in clouds** or “with clouds.” The “clouds of heaven” signify divine presence (cf. 9:7; Ex. 19:9; Ps. 97:1–2; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30b). He will exercise **great power and** display heavenly **glory** (cf. Zech. 14:1–7). This is Jesus' personal, visible, bodily return to the earth as the glorified Son of Man (cf. Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7; 19:11–16). Jesus described it in the familiar but elusive language of Daniel 7:13–14. His triumphant return will bring an end to the veiled nature of God's kingdom in its present form (cf. comments on Mark 1:15; 4:13–23).

13:27. Also at that time (*tote*, “then,” omitted in the NIV; cf. vv. 21, 26) the Son of Man **will send** forth (cf. 4:29) **His angels** (cf. 8:38; Matt. 25:31) **and gather His elect** (cf. Mark 13:20, 22) **from the four winds**. The “four winds” means from all directions, a reference to people living in all parts of the world, as emphasized by the last two phrases (v. 27). None of the elect will be left out. Though not stated, this would appear to include a resurrection of Old Testament saints and believers martyred during the Tribulation (cf. Dan. 12:2; Rev. 6:9–11; 20:4). Nothing is said here about those not among the elect (cf. 2 Thes. 1:6–10; Rev. 20:11–15).

The Old Testament often mentioned God's regathering of dispersed Israelites from the remotest parts of the earth to national and spiritual unity in Palestine (Deut. 30:3–6; Isa. 11:12;

Jer. 31:7–9; Ezek. 11:16–17; 20:33–35, 41). At the time of the Second Advent Israelites will be regathered around the triumphant Son of Man, judged, restored as a nation, and redeemed (Isa. 59:20–21; Ezek. 20:33–44; Zech. 13:8–9; Rom. 11:25–27). Also all the Gentiles will be gathered before Him (Joel 3:2) and like a shepherd He will separate “the sheep” (the elect) from “the goats” (Matt. 25:31–46). These redeemed Jews and Gentiles will enter the millennial kingdom, living on the earth in natural bodies (Isa. 2:2–4; Dan. 7:13–14; Micah 4:1–5; Zech. 14:8–11, 16–21).

Identifying “the elect” in this context as Gentiles and Jews who come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah *during* the final Tribulation period (cf. Rev. 7:3–4, 9–10) is compatible with a pretribulational view of the Rapture of the church, the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–53; 1 Thes. 4:13–18). Since the church will be spared from God’s final judgment on the earth (cf. 1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9–11; Rev. 3:9–10), the church will not go through the Tribulation. This preserves the imminence of the Rapture for present-day believers and gives added emphasis to Jesus’ exhortation, “Watch!” (cf. Mark 13:35–37) But since Jesus’ disciples had no clear understanding of the coming church (cf. Matt. 16:18; Acts 1:4–8), He did not mention this initial phase of God’s end-time program separately.

Some interpreters, however, hold to a posttribulational view of the Rapture. They identify “the elect” here as the redeemed of all ages—past, present, and future. This requires the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the Tribulation and together with all living believers they will be caught up (raptured) to meet the returning Son of Man who descends to the earth at that time. Thus the church, the body of Christ, *remains* on earth during the Tribulation period, is supernaturally protected as an entity through it, is raptured at the end of it, and immediately returns to the earth to participate in the Millennium. But in light of the preceding discussion on Mark 13:17 and the following discussion on verse 32, the pretribulational viewpoint is preferred.

e. His parabolic lesson from the fig tree (13:28–32) (Matt. 24:32–36; Luke 21:29–33).

13:28. The disciples’ first question (v. 4a) was, “When will these things happen?” Jesus exhorted them to **learn a lesson** (lit., “the parable”; cf. introduction to 4:1–2) **from the fig tree**. Though the fig tree was sometimes used as a symbol for Israel (11:14), Jesus did not intend such a meaning here (in Luke 21:29 the words “and all the trees” are added). In contrast with most of Palestine’s trees, fig trees lose their leaves in winter and bloom later in the spring. Thus whenever the stiff, dry, winter **twigs** become **tender**, softened due to the rising sap, and **leaves** appear, then observers **know that** winter is past and **summer is near**.

13:29. This verse applies the lesson of verse 28. Whenever **you** (emphatic position in Gr.), the disciples in contrast with others, **see these things** (cf. vv. 4, 23, 30), the events described in verses 14–23, then **you know that** the impending crisis (cf. v. 14) **is near** in time, in fact, **right at the door**. This was a common figure for an imminent event. If alert to these events the disciples have sufficient insight to discern their true meaning.

The unstated subject of the Greek verb “is” could be rendered “He” (the Son of Man) or preferably **it** (“the abomination that causes desolation,” v. 14).

13:30–31. With solemn introductory words (**I tell you the truth**; cf. 3:28) Jesus declared that **this generation will certainly not** (*ou mē*, emphatic double negative; cf. 13:2) come to an end **until** (lit., “until which time”) **all these things** (cf. vv. 4b, 29) **have** taken place. “Generation” (*genea*) can refer to one’s “contemporaries,” all those living at a given time (cf. 8:12, 38; 9:19), or to a group of people descended from a common ancestor (cf. Matt. 23:36). Since the word

“generation” is capable of both a narrow and a broad sense, it is preferable in this context (cf. Mark 13:14) to understand in it a double reference incorporating both senses. Thus “this generation” means: (a) the Jews living at Jesus’ time who later saw the destruction of Jerusalem, and (b) the Jews who will be living at the time of the Great Tribulation who will see the end-time events. This accounts best for the accomplishment of “all these things” (cf. vv. 4b, 14–23).

Jesus’ assertion (v. 31) guarantees the fulfillment of His prophecy (v. 30). The present universe will come to a cataclysmic end (cf. 2 Peter 3:7, 10–13) **but** Jesus’ **words**—including these predictions—**will never** (*ou mē*; cf. Mark 13:2, 30) **pass away**. They will have eternal validity. What is true of God’s words (cf. Isa. 40:6–8; 55:11) is equally true of Jesus’ words, for He is God.

13:32. Though it will be possible for some to discern the proximity of the coming crisis (vv. 28–29), yet **no one knows** the precise moment when **that day or hour** will arrive (cf. v. 33) except **the Father. Not even the angels** (cf. 1 Peter 1:12) **nor the Son** know. This openly expressed limitation on Jesus’ knowledge affirms His humanity. In His Incarnation Jesus voluntarily accepted human limitations, including this one (cf. Acts 1:7), in submission to the Father’s will (cf. John 4:34). On the other hand Jesus’ use of “the Son” title (only here in Mark) instead of the usual “Son of Man” revealed His own awareness of His deity and sonship (cf. Mark 8:38). Nevertheless He exercised His divine attributes only at the Father’s bidding (cf. 5:30; John 8:28–29).

The words “that day or hour” are widely understood to refer to the Son of Man’s second coming (Mark 13:26). But that event will climax a series of preliminary events. In light of Old Testament usage and this context (vv. 14, 29–30) it is preferable to understand “that day” as referring to “the day of the Lord.”

The “day of the Lord” includes the Tribulation, the Second Advent, and the Millennium (cf. Isa. 2:12–22; Jer. 30:7–9; Joel 2:28–32; Amos 9:11; Zeph. 3:11–20; Zech. 12–14). It will begin suddenly and unexpectedly (cf. 1 Thes. 5:2), so no one except the Father knows the critical moment.

In the pretribulational view of the future (cf. comments on Mark 13:27) the coming of the Lord for His own (the Rapture) will occur before the 70th week of Daniel. The Rapture is not conditioned by any preliminary events. It is therefore an imminent event for each generation. The Parable of the Absent House Owner (vv. 34–37) along with Matthew’s corresponding account (cf. Matt. 24:42–44) support this view. It precludes all date-setting and lends urgency to Jesus’ exhortations to be watching and working till His return.

3. JESUS’ EXHORTATION TO VIGILANCE (13:33–37) (Matt. 24:42–44; Luke 21:34–36).

13:33. Because no one knows **when** (cf. v. 4a) **that time**, the appointed time of God’s intervention (“that day,” v. 32), **will come**, Jesus repeated His admonition, **Be on guard!** (*blepete*; cf. vv. 5, 9, 23) and added, **Be alert!** (*agrypneite*, “be constantly awake”)

13:34–37. The Parable of the Absent House Owner, unique to Mark, reinforces the call to constant vigilance and defines it as a faithful fulfillment of assigned tasks (cf. Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27).

Before **going away** on a journey the Owner put **his servants** (collectively) **in charge of** carrying on the work of **his house**. He gave **each one his own task** and ordered the doorkeeper who controlled all access to the house **to keep watch** (*grēgoreite*, present tense; cf. Mark 13:33).

Jesus applied this parable to His disciples (vv. 35–37) without distinguishing between the doorkeeper and the other servants. They all are responsible to **keep watch**, to be alert to spiritual

dangers and opportunities (cf. vv. 5–13) **because** no one knows **when** (cf. v. 33) **the Owner** (*kyrios*) **of the house**, who indirectly represents Jesus Himself, **will** return. The night represents the time of the Owner's (Jesus') absence (cf. Rom. 13:11–14). He could return at any time, so they should be constantly watching in view of the danger that **if** (lit., “when”) the Owner, Jesus, **comes suddenly**, He should **find** them **sleeping** (spiritually negligent), not watching for His return. Such vigilance is the responsibility not only of the Twelve (cf. Mark 13:3) but also of every believer in every generation during this present Age. Believers should be watching and working (cf. v. 34) in light of the certainty of His return, though its time is unknown except to the Father.

The reference to the four watches corresponds to the Roman system of reckoning time. **The evening** was 6–9 P.M.; the **midnight** watch was 9 P.M. till midnight; **when the rooster crows** was the third watch (midnight till 3 A.M.); and **dawn** was 3–6 A.M. (These names of the watches were derived from their termination points.) This differs from the Jewish system of dividing the night into three watches. Mark used the Roman system for his readers' benefit (cf. 6:48).

Church, C.L. (1998). *Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 441). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

DESTRUCTION COMING (13:1–13)

Jesus' teaching on the destruction of the temple/Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of man in Mark 13 are difficult to untangle. Despite this difficulty, two primary pastoral emphases are clear in the warnings to beware of deception and to be prepared for Christ's return. The disciples' amazement at the temple complex demonstrated they did not appreciate the prophetic acts of 11:12–21 and prepared for Jesus' prediction of the utter destruction of Jerusalem's temple. Notable among events preceding the destruction of the temple is the appearance of messianic pretenders. Believers are warned not to be taken in by such pretenders or to mistake “the beginning of the birth pains” for God's judgment on Jerusalem.

Acts and Paul's letters witness that the events related to the early Christian community in 13:9–13 were fulfilled before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Paul, for example, was beaten in synagogues five times (2 Cor. 11:24), testified before governors (Acts 18:12–13; 24:1–2; 25:7–8) and kings (Acts 9:15; 26:1–2). And he was accused of spreading the gospel throughout the known world (Acts 17:6; see Rom. 15:19). Peter and others bore Spirit inspired witness (Acts 4:8–22).

AN EVENT WITHOUT EQUAL (13:14–37)

The events of 13:14–23 concern the Roman campaign against Judea. “Never to be equaled again” in verse 19 suggests an event within human history rather than its conclusion. The “abomination that causes desolation” refers to the defiling of the temple. As before, Jesus cautioned believers about false messiahs and false prophets. In the midst of judgment, God “has shortened” the days of war for the sake of believers (“the elect”).

The events surrounding the coming of Christ belong to a time after the destruction of Jerusalem. The coming of Christ in power and glory (see 9:1) is an event whose cosmic repercussions echo Old Testament descriptions of the coming of God for judgment (for example, Isa. 13:10; 34:4). Jesus here emphasized His coming to save the elect.

The fig tree lesson is likely a warning to be prepared for Christ's coming, though "this generation" suggests that the destruction of Jerusalem was in view. "That day," which was unknown even to the Son, is the time of Christ's return. Christians' duty in the interim is to perform assigned tasks rather than speculate about God's timetable. The church must not repeat Israel's failure to be found fruitless when visited by Christ (see 11:12–21).

Leavell, L.P. (1972). Mark. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 629-630). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Coming Events (Mark 13:1–37)

The passage—All 37 verses of Mark 13 compose what has been called "the little apocalypse." This great discourse is a difficult passage to understand for a number of reasons. One is that it is written in veiled language. Also, Jesus pointed here to the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and the second coming of Christ all in one passage! These words were written for comfort and hope. By observing carefully, this chapter may be separated in such a way as to understand that to which Jesus was pointing. In 13:1–4 the obvious reference is to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Between verses 2 and 3, it appears that Jesus and the disciples have left the main part of the city and walked over to the nearby Mount of Olives. Sitting there and looking across the valley at the Temple, they continued the same discussion.

In verse 4 the four apostles, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked specifically when those events would take place and by what sign they would be accompanied. Rather than answering directly, Jesus dealt with some other matters of vital importance first (13:5–8). He warned them against any who might claim to have special insight, and then warned against false Christs.

The next section (13:9–13) describes the era leading up to A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem. The predictions in verse 9 actually came to pass in Acts. Tension within an individual home was also predicted. This would be especially true of a Jewish home divided over loyalty to Christ. The latter portion of verse 13 points out that the genuinely saved are those who endure. Pseudo-believers may turn back and forsake what they once claimed. The true believer will be faithful to the end.

The matters discussed in 13:14–23 obviously do not fit the end of the world and the second coming. They do have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. These verses underscore the necessity of haste. Those in the city are to flee to the country. Those watching the approaching army from the housetop should not reenter the house for possessions, but flee directly to safety. The plowman in the field is not to take so much time as to pick up his cloak. The expectant mothers and those with young children will face dire circumstances. Except for the Lord's elect, the Christians, it would have meant disaster for everyone. Yet because of his people, God made these days short in duration. Jesus also forewarned them that these events were not to be construed as his return.

The next section (13:24–37) refers to the ultimate end of the age and the coming of Christ. It is a dramatic portrayal of his coming.

In 13:28–30 Jesus reverted again to the destruction of Jerusalem. Some hold that Jesus made an error in verse 30, thinking he would return again in a short period of time. This does not get support if we read verse 32. The thing that did occur in that generation, which they lived to see, was the fall of Jerusalem within 40 years.

Again in 13:31–37, our Lord points to his return. Since there is no time schedule given, we are to spend our time taking heed, watching, and praying. The positive assurance of our Lord’s return is based upon the total fulfilment of his prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. The first has already been done. The second remains to be done, yet we are to be busy in the meantime.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 13. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

© 2024 Lee Ann Penick