

Jesus and the Temple of Doom

Mark 13:1-13

The current wars in the Middle East have many people speculating about end times Bible prophecy. Maybe you have been wondering or worrying that the end is near. Times of war are like that. Because we feel so unsettled during times of war, many Christians find it difficult to resist the temptation to speculate about the significance of the war as it relates to biblical prophecy and the end of the age. This has been true of Christians of every generation. When World War I broke out, some Christian leaders speculated that it was the start of Armageddon. Many Christians said the same thing during World War II. In fact, identifying the "antichrist" and predicting the battle of Armageddon sometimes seems to be an American Christian obsession, especially when war is raging in and around the nation of Israel.

Now I have mixed feelings about this trend. On the one hand I think it's good for Christians to look forward to Jesus Christ's second coming. He certainly promised to return again to this earth some day, and times of crisis remind us of His promise. It's good for us to live our lives in light of that hope. Looking forward to Christ's second coming gives us hope in the midst of despair, resolve in the midst of discouragement.

But on the other hand, spending all our time speculating about the end times can cause us to lose focus on our mission for today. There's a big difference between living our lives today in light of Christ's second coming, and living our lives totally focused on the events of the end times.

In our verse by verse study of the Gospel of Mark today we come to Jesus' Olivet Discourse or His sermon on the Mount of Olives. This is the longest teaching block in all of Mark's story, which tells us that it's pretty important. Matthew has a longer version of this teaching in Matthew 24 and 25 and Luke's version is in Luke 21. To get the complete picture of what Jesus was teaching here I encourage you to read those passages as well.

Today we will start by reading the first 13 verses of Mark 13:

- 1 Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"**
- 2 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."**
- 3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,**
- 4 "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"**
- 5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you."**
- 6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.**
- 7 But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.**

- 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.**
- 9 But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.**
- 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.**
- 11 But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.**
- 12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.**
- 13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.**

1. The Olivet Discourse (Mark 13)

Now the immediate question that comes to us as we read this chapter is, "What is Jesus talking about here?" It seems like Jesus starts this sermon talking about one thing, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple there, and He ends it talking about something else, His second coming. Look down to verses 24-27:

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

Trying to relate these two events in this chapter together--the destruction of the Jewish temple and Christ's second coming--has made this chapter notoriously difficult for Christians to understand.

A. The Preterist View--All these events have already past.

One possibility is that this whole sermon is about the Jewish revolt against Rome from 66 to 70 AD. And this event certainly appears to be where Jesus starts his sermon. Jesus gave this great message as He was seated on the Mount of Olives, looking out over the city of Jerusalem, just a day or two before His crucifixion. The sermon is His response to the statement **one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!** and the follow-up question by His disciples in verse four, **"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"**

In the simple statement in verse 1, Jesus **"went out of the temple,"** Mark is saying something very profound. Jesus did not merely walk out of the temple, He abandoned it; He would never set foot in it again. After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the last week of his life, you remember in chapter 11 that He went to the temple and looked at it. Then He came back the next day and cleared the temple of all its vile man-centered practices that had been allowed to go on there. He challenged the leadership of the temple. He warned and persuaded and

finally pronounced judgment on this center of Jewish life, trying to bring about repentance before it was too late. Now, finally, He has left the temple for good.

As they leave the temple after the series of debates in chapter 12, Jesus and his closest disciples walk onto the Mount of Olives, where they can see the whole temple structure from a distance. The temple was massive, one of the largest and most elaborate religious temples in the entire ancient world at this time. Jesus' disciples are awestruck by the sight, as they admire the great buildings. This leads Jesus to predict the temple's demise, in verse 2, **And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."**

We know from history that this was literally fulfilled in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus and his soldiers leveled the temple. After the temple was burned the Romans literally took it apart stone by stone to salvage the gold which had melted and ran into the building stones. Jesus' prediction here literally came true.

So it makes sense that in this sermon Jesus is talking about the events of 70 AD, events that for us today are in the distant past. But is that all Jesus is talking about? Some, like Christian author R. C. Sproul believe that this whole sermon is about that event. Because of the history of New Covenant Baptist Church many of you are well aware of the preterist view that all these prophecies are already fulfilled.

The problem I have with this view is that other features of this sermon don't seem to fit the events of 70 AD very well. Like v. 24 where Jesus says that immediately after these events the sun will be darkened, the moon won't give light, and stars will fall from heaven. And mainly v. 26, where Jesus says, **"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."** Clearly that didn't happen in 70 AD unless Jesus is being really symbolic.

B. The Futurist View--All these events are in the future.

Because of the way this sermon ends, others think this whole sermon is referring to a future period of time immediately prior to the second coming of Jesus. This would make all the events Jesus talks about in this sermon still in the future not only for His disciples and for Mark's immediate readers, but for us as well. Many so-called Bible prophecy "experts" take this view. And as we have seen, the sermon certainly seems to end with Jesus Christ's second coming.

But the problem saying all of this is future is that it rips this sermon out of it's context. Since chapter 11 Jesus has been speaking about the temple that stood in His own day, that this temple would be destroyed, that it was barren like the fig tree. And this temple was destroyed in 70 AD, so to think that it's referring only to some future rebuilt Jewish temple seems farfetched. Certainly Jesus' disciples and Mark's original readers would've taken it as referring to the temple they saw destroyed by the Romans in their own time.

C. The BOTH View--Some events are past, some are future.

Others say that this section is referring to BOTH the Jewish rebellion of 70 AD and the future events surrounding Christ's second coming. In this view, Jesus starts talking about the events of 70 AD, but at some point in the sermon He transitions to the second coming. This makes better sense with the context and with how the sermon ends with Christ's return.

Matthew gives us a clue to this in the way he records the disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3, **"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** They seem to assume that the

destruction of the temple will coincide with Christ's coming and the end of the age. But we know of course that Jesus did not return **in the clouds with great power and glory** in 70 AD when the temple was destroyed. The disciples may not have known it, but they were really asking two different questions, one about the destruction of the temple that would happen in their generation, and the other about Christ's coming which we know to still be in the future.

Of course, the difficulty is figuring out when Jesus stops talking about 70 AD and when He starts talking about the second coming. Which features of this sermon lie in the distant past for us, and which features are still yet future?

Let me share with you some of my own thoughts on this. I think vv. 1-13--the section we're focusing on today--refers primarily to the Jewish rebellion in 70 AD and by application to the whole church age. Instead of giving His disciples signs of the end of the age, in these verses Jesus focuses on what are NOT signs of the end. Jesus calls false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines and suffering "birth pains," not signs. In other words, these things are simply characteristic circumstances that we're living in between Jesus Christ's first coming and His second coming. And although I believe we can expect them to get more intense as we draw nearer to His second coming--like birth contractions--the existence of these things is simply part of the age that we live in. So wars, false messiahs, earthquakes, famines, and persecutions are not signs of the end. They're signs of the times, characteristics of life in between Christ's first and second coming.

So when Mark's readers see these kinds of things happening during the Jewish rebellion, Jesus is warning them not to freak out. We know from history that these things did happen in the years leading up to the Jewish rebellion. Many false messiahs stepped up and claimed to be the Christ. And we know from Roman historians that this period of Roman history was full of conflict and crisis. There were earthquakes throughout the empire, famines in the region of Judea. And during the Jewish war against Rome the Christians were caught in the middle.

Jewish leaders persecuted Christians because the Christians wouldn't take up arms and join in rebellion against Rome. But the Romans thought Christians were part of the rebellion, so Christians were caught in the middle. Christians were hated by all. Many were arrested and tortured, as the authorities tried to get them to turn on their Christian friends and family members.

Jesus is warning people alive at the Jewish rebellion against interpreting these things as signs that the second coming of Christ is imminent. These are simply signs of the times, part of what it means to live between Christ's first coming and second coming. Things like war, false messiahs, natural disasters and persecution do not signal that the end is near, back then or today.

I believe that the closest we get to a sign of the end of the age comes in v. 10, where Jesus says, "**the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.**" Before the end of the age can come, the good news of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. So I think vv. 1-13 refers to the entire church age, with special reference to the events of 70 AD.

Now I think vv. 14-23--which we'll look at next week--refers to both the Jewish rebellion AND the future tribulation period. I think Jesus uses a layering technique in those verses where he uses language to refer to multiple events.

Let me give you just one modern day example of a phrase referring to more than one event. How many of you have heard the phrase, "The day that lives in infamy"? If you're an American who's over 55 years old you probably thought of

December 7, 1941, the day the Japanese attacked pearl harbor. But many people have used the same phrase to describe the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Both events have been called "the day that lives in infamy." Pearl Harbor and September 11th are similar events, with both being unexpected, both leading us to war, both resulting in the deaths of thousands of Americans. So which event does the phrase "the day that lives in infamy" refer to? It depends on what you mean, because it can be legitimately applied to both.

I think this is how vv. 14-23 refers to both events, as we'll see next week.

Finally, I think vv. 24-31 refers primarily to the second coming of Jesus Christ. I'm simply not persuaded at all by people who try to say that the sun being darkened, the stars falling from the sky, and everyone seeing Christ coming in the clouds is all symbolic. That seems to stretch the language to the point where it no longer means anything.

Now if I'm on the right track in how I'm reading this, it appears to me that Jesus is trying to restrain his followers from speculating when the war breaks out. Jesus wants to prevent His disciples from focusing on the future so much that they're no longer living in the now. So rather than giving us teaching that encourages us to speculate, Jesus is giving us teaching focus on our mission.

2. Principles For Living Until Jesus Comes

In our text today Jesus gives them two commands, two directives, to help them with the hopes and fears which stand behind their question. The first command is in Mark 13:5; the second in verse 9. He uses the same word in both commands, which is translated in the Greek, "to see," or "to notice." First, he tells them, "**Take heed that no one deceives you.**" Second, he says, "**watch out for yourselves,**" (literally, "see yourselves; take heed to yourselves").

Jesus always taught for practical application. It's all throughout this chapter. In verse 5 Jesus says: '**Take heed**'. Again in verse 23, He says: '**Take heed**'. In verse 33 He says: '**Take heed**'. In verse 7 He says: '**Do not be troubled**'. In verse 13 He says: '**Endure**'. In verses 18 and 33 He says: '**Pray**'. In verse 9, verse 33, verse 35, and verse 37 He says: '**Watch**'.

There is a practical application to prophecy - and I'm sad to say that in many evangelical circles today, much study on these matters is simply idle speculation about when Christ will come and preoccupation certain signs of the times. Often people are full of prophetic head knowledge, but their life remains unchanged. That was never the Holy Spirit's intention in giving us prophetic truth, it was always with a practical application. It was not given to satisfy our curiosity, it was given to engender holiness of life and watchfulness - as we do not look around us for signs, but we look for the Saviour who will come for those who believe in Him.

Now from these first 13 verses I think we can find some important principles for living today. Here's the first principle: **Don't Be Impressed By Appearance.**

One of Jesus' disciples was impressed with the wonderful stones and wonderful buildings of the temple. The square footage of the temple courts could hold twelve football fields (Edwards 387). Josephus says that some of the stones used to build the temple were sixty feet long. Archeologists have discovered one temple stone in Jerusalem that's forty-two feet long, eleven feet tall, fourteen feet deep, and over a million pounds (Edwards 387) The sheer size and splendor of the Jerusalem temple created the illusion of permanence, but those stones and

buildings had not only served their purpose they were also being misused by the Jews.

The rest of the New Testament teaches that the disciples themselves were becoming the foundation of a far more wonderful temple, made not of stone and mortar but of flesh and blood (Ephesians 3:19-22), a place where God dwells in us by His Holy Spirit.

If you're a Christian, you of all people should know that nothing in your life is rock solid except your relationship with God. You might lose your family, your finances might collapse, your health might fail. Your children might turn away from you, your spouse leave you, your job fire you. All these things are nothing more than shifting sand. Only Christ is our solid, immovable rock. So be sure you're rooted in him, that your confidence is solidly placed in him.

Beware of Speculating During Times of Crises

Look again at the commands in these verses. In v. 5 Jesus says "Take Heed," "be prepared." V. 7 says "**do not be troubled**," or "don't be caught unprepared." Some think that these commands are permission to speculate, to chart out the last days, even to the point of identifying the antichrist, setting dates, and pinpointing the battle of Armageddon. But that's exactly the opposite of what these commands mean.

Jesus is telling us to be clear headed and sober minded in times of turmoil and crisis.

When my daughter is home alone she notices every single noise in the house, every creak in the floor, every bush blowing in the wind, every squeak in the walls. Her imagination runs wild, and she is sure some crazed axe murderer is trying to get in.

She is certainly paying close attention. But I don't believe she is thinking clearly. Her imagination and fears cause her to read into every creak and squeak. I believe the same kind of thing happens to Christians during times of world crisis, like the wars going on right now in the Middle East.

By telling us to be watchful and to not be alarmed, Jesus is warning us to not let our imaginations get the best of us. We can't live in the "what ifs" of the future, but we've got to live for the today that God has given us.

Now I can't stand up here and say that these current conflicts and turmoil in Israel definitely won't have any implications for the end of the age, because I'm not Jesus. But I can say that Jesus warns us against letting our imagination get the best of us in times like these. Let's not be like that fearful child sitting at home alone, reading into every squeak and creak we hear.

Let's live for Jesus today, not in the "what ifs".

Focus On the Great Commission

Finally, we see here that **TURMOIL AND OPPOSITION WILL NOT PREVENT US FROM FULFILLING JESUS CHRIST'S GREAT COMMISSION.**

Look again at v. 10: "**The gospel must first be preached to all nations.**" First before what? First before the end comes.

The Great Commission is Jesus Christ's marching orders for His church.

Things like wars, false messiahs, earthquakes, famines and persecution are like the contractions of a woman in labor, not signs that the end is near. I've seen my

wife Kathy go through labor three times. Each time, as the birth got closer, the contractions grew more intense and closer together, until finally the baby was born. Sometimes when a woman in labor isn't progressing fast enough, they put her on a drug that induces labor, making the contractions faster and harder.

When Christians speculate about the second coming instead of focusing on the Great Commission they're like a woman trying to self medicate herself with a labor inducing drug. And that might be fine for the labor and delivery room, but it won't work with the labor pains Jesus is talking about here.

Jesus has given us a task to do, a mission to live by, marching orders to carry out. Listen to what Jesus said, **"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:7-8).

Listen to what he else He said, **"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (Matthew 28:18-20).

And again in John 20:21, **"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."**

We should not be alarmed by turmoil and persecution. In fact, God can actually use turmoil and opposition to further the gospel. In the book of Acts Jesus told his church to scatter throughout the Roman Empire after His resurrection, but they stayed in Jerusalem instead. So God allowed a persecution to break out in Jerusalem, and that scattered the disciples to other places. God used persecution to prod Christians to fulfill their orders.

During times of turmoil people are more open to the good news of Jesus Christ. As we watch this war broadcast into our homes on CNN and Fox News, many people feel as if the world is spinning out of control. We have a message of hope that's real, a message that's anchored in God. If there's any time for us to be bold in sharing that message, it's now.

We should look forward to Christ's second coming, but we can't live in the future. We need to live in the present in light of the future.

What are we to do with a message like this? First, I would encourage anyone here who has never received Jesus as Savior to come to Him and be saved today.

Second, I would call all true believers to examine their hearts. Are you committed to Jesus, even to the point of death?