

Protection in Tribulation

When we started into Mark 13 a couple of weeks ago, I warned you that it is a very contested passage. Many good Bible scholars disagree on their interpretation of its details. Is it future? Is it past? Is it both? How should it matter to me?

. But I just want to remind you of the purpose of this passage. God didn't give us Mark 13 so that we can fanatically speculate about its meaning, nor did he give it so that we could simply ignore and pass it off as too confusing. In this passage, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple for our comfort and endurance. God gave us Mark 13 so that we would remain watchful and working to advance the gospel. Jesus will return to visibly claim his throne in glory before the watching world. He will come again and judge between the righteous and the wicked, the living and the dead, and we, who are His, are called to be ready. That's the main theme of the whole chapter: watchfulness.

I have outlined of the chapter like this: verses 1-13 cover the "birth pains" – the troubles and persecutions that the church will face; next, verses 14-23 present a special time of tribulation; third, verses 24-27 present Christ's return; and finally, verses 28-37 instruct us about what we are to be doing as we wait for our Lord's return.

Follow along in your Bibles as I read **Mark 13:14-23**:

- 14 "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' ; spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**
- 15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.**
- 16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.**
- 17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!**
- 18 And pray that your flight may not be in winter.**
- 19 For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.**
- 20 And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.**
- 21 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it.**
- 22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.**
- 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.**

As we saw last time, the setting for this chapter is Jesus' prediction that the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed, verse 2, "**Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**" Peter, James, John, and Andrew then ask Jesus "**Tell us, when**

will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" (13:4). Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple to prove that He is the Son of God and to help His followers to persevere in the trials they would face.

Today in v. 14-23, Jesus predicts the coming tribulation in Jerusalem in order to protect His people. In this passage, we see three ways God protects his people. The first is through the prophecy of Scripture.

I. God protects his people through the Prophecy of Scripture (14-19)

The abomination of desolation

Look at verse 14, **"So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' ; spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**

What is this abomination of desolation? Jesus gives us the clue when He says, **"spoken of by Daniel the prophet."** There are four passages in Daniel that either use the phrase **'abomination of desolation,'** or similar language. They are 8:13-14, 9:25-27, 11:31, and 12:9-12. Teachers differ (usually according to millennial position) on how to interpret these passages.

Are all four speaking of the same event? Is the abomination of desolation the same each time? *Abomination* means something blasphemous, something detestable, something abhorrent to God. *Desolation* means to destroy or devastate.

We can all agree from Daniel that whatever precisely it is, it is something really bad, so terrible that it signifies a great catastrophe of judgment.

That certainly what Jesus means, for His message is, "Get out! Run for your lives!" in verse 14-18 Jesus says, **"then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter."**

This is not your ordinary run-of-the-mill catastrophe. This is not just the normal troubles that Christians will face. This is a significant event.

The Jews believed this was fulfilled some 400 yrs after Daniel's prophecy when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, ruler of the Seleucid Empire came to Jerusalem in 168 BC and set up a shrine to Zeus in the temple and sacrificed a pig there. After this abhorrent desecration of the temple he then virtually destroyed it. He so defiled the Temple that the Jews abandoned it until a successful rebellion defeated Antiochus and his successors.

By bringing Daniel's prophecy into his own prediction, Jesus must be teaching that the abomination of desolation has at least a second fulfillment. It was fulfilled in 168 BC with the actions of Antiochus but will be fulfilled again in the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Why do I think that? Because of the context in this chapter. That is what Jesus is predicting and in v. 30 Jesus says that this generation will not pass away until these things take place. So where is this happening and how would the disciples and Mark's audience understand when it would take place?

1. Well, we know from v. 14 that it is in Judea.
2. From Matthew's account we know the Abomination of Desolation is personified as standing in the holy place. This could be the temple but also the holy city Jerusalem, Zion the city of God. Mark says it is "**standing where it ought not.**"
3. And from Luke's account we know that this happens when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, In the same context Jesus says in Luke 21:20, "**But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.**" If you put all of this together you see that one fulfillment of the abomination of desolation occurs when Jerusalem is besieged in the context of Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple. We know from history that Rome laid siege to Jerusalem in 67 AD and destroyed the temple about 3 yrs later during the generation of the disciples and Mark's audience.

We also find that in 68 AD Jewish Zealots took control of the Temple and desecrated it by allowing robbers into the Holy of Holies and by committing murders in the Temple itself. In response to their rebellion in 70 AD, Titus the Roman general destroyed the Temple and city and entered the Holy of Holies and removed many sacred items to be used in his victory procession.

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish author and historian who wrote a 200 page eye-witness account called "The Wars of the Jews" about the Jewish revolt (66-70 a.d.) and the fall of Jerusalem.

Here's just a summary of what one commentator described took place during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem:

1. Hostility had been growing among the Zealots as they took on a number of thieves and murderers into their bands. Jerusalem was their final stronghold and it soon began to war against itself.
2. The Zealots began to torture and kill those opposed to them, as many as 12,000 nobles in one day. Those who tried to escape had their throats cut and were left to rot in the streets and soon the bodies were so numerous, that they had to be thrown over the walls.
3. The Romans gave opportunity for surrender but the Zealots refused. Soon famine set in. Storehouses were burned and water reservoirs were polluted. People not only sold their homes but their children as well to obtain food. They ate from the public sewers, cattle and pigeon dung, leather shields, hay, clothing, and things that scavenger dogs would dare not to touch! Unbelievable forms of torture were inflicted on those suspected of hiding food.
4. Those who tried to leave the city to hunt for food but were captured by the Romans were crucified in plain sight of the city walls, often at the rate of 500/day.
5. Josephus reports the activity of numerous false prophets who misled the people and contributed to their demise.
6. Finally after 3 yrs of this, the wall was breached and the city and temple were set aflame. They killed so many that Josephus said the fire was quenched with blood.
7. All told, almost 100,000 Jewish survivors were sold into slavery. Others were consigned to die in the gladiatorial exhibitions or were selected to be paraded in Titus' triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. According to Josephus,

more than 1,100,000 died during the siege of the city! The destruction was so complete that not a stone of the temple was left standing on another, just as Jesus had prophesied in v. 2.

So already we see that this prophecy of Daniel has been fulfilled in two separate events that were similar in nature. And I believe there is good reason to believe that the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the future.

I agree with the many Bible Scholars who believe that the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, together with the predictions of Jesus here, and Paul in 2 Thessalonians--that some of this is yet to be fulfilled in the future. I believe that the tribulation of the Jews under Antiochus, and the destruction of Jerusalem under the Romans prefigure an even greater tribulation period that happens before Jesus returns to the earth.

I am also among those who believe that the Lord will save His church from the wrath to come, that we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Now of course we don't have time to look at all those scriptures today, but let's remember why Jesus told us these things.

Protection for his followers

Remember that this prophecy was a warning by Jesus to disciples and Christians that if they found themselves in Judea when this was happening that they would have time to get out.

It is interesting to note that when Josephus recorded that 1,100,000 Jews were killed during the siege and 100,000 enslaved, not one of them were listed as Christians. Years later another historian, Eusebius would write: *"But before the war, the people of the Church of Jerusalem were bidden in an oracle given by revelation to men worthy of it to depart from the city and to dwell in a city of Perea called Pella. Once the holy men had completely left the Jews and all Judea, the justice of God at last overtook them, since they had committed such transgressions against Christ and his apostles. Divine justice completely blotted out that impious generation from among men (Eccl Hist III.v.3)."* Jesus made this prediction, He gave this prophecy of Scripture to protect His people. The Christians in Jerusalem were able to flee in time because of the prophetic warning recorded in God's Word.

Not only does God protect his people through the prophecy of Scripture, he also protects them by his sovereign governance.

II. God protects his people by his Sovereign governance (19-20)

God shortened the days

Verse 19: **"For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days."**

God works both within believers to enable them to persevere and He works sovereignly over the world stage to save His elect. God actively worked within the course of history, according to His sovereign plan to control the days, to control the amount of tribulation that would occur in order to spare the lives of those who remained...a remnant from Jerusalem. God actively works within the

course of history to govern and control to keep His promises to Israel. God is at work, limiting the number of days of the tribulation and for God to be active in this way requires that God be in control of nations and swords and fire and famine and decisions of men.

Nothing happens to us that is outside of God's control. Even in the worst possible atrocities, and this tribulation is clearly one of them, God is working every detail according to His perfect plan to fulfill His perfect promises and purposes for the good of His elect people.

David Platt told the story of a Romanian pastor named Josef Tson who was imprisoned for his faith in Christ. Tson recounted a time he was interrogated by six hostile men. He said to one of them: *What is taking place here is not an encounter between you and me. This is an encounter between my God and me. . . . My God is teaching me a lesson [through you]. I do not know what it is. Maybe he wants to teach me several lessons. I only know, sirs, that you will do to me only what God wants you to do—and you will not go one inch further—because you are only an instrument of my God.* He said later, that “Every day from there on after I saw those six pompous men as nothing more than puppet's in my Father's hands! God's sovereignty over every aspect of his situation emboldened Josef Tson to stand firm in the face of persecution and to faithfully bear witness to the name of Christ. Only the confidence in God's sovereign governance can give us that kind of faith.

So, God protects his people through the prophecy of Scripture and by his sovereign governance, but he does so third, through faithful teaching.

III. God Protects his people through faithful teaching (21-23)

Our faithful teacher

Jesus had already warned his disciples not to be led astray. Now in v. 21-23 he warns them again: **Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.**

Trust in His protection

Jesus faithful teaching; His prediction and its fulfillment proves all that He is and all that He has done. If He has predicted such atrocities so as to save His followers from unimaginable horrors can He not be trusted with everything else He taught?

Can He not be trusted with your life? Jesus is the Son of God, who created all things. He came to this earth because there was a problem: mankind had rebelled against God, they have placed themselves under His wrath, and there is nothing they could do to reconcile themselves to God. Jesus came to do what we could not: to live a perfect life, and to sacrifice that life by dying on the cross as a substitute for sin. He rose to prove that eternal reconciliation to God can be given to those who turn away from their sin to follow Him. Though we all deserve eternal tribulation, He offers deliverance to all those who do not place their hope in buildings that burn, but in resurrected Son of God who saves the souls of God's chosen people. God offers His protection to you, in the same way he did Jesus' disciples. Will you trust in him?