

Jesus and the Temple of Doom Mark 13:1-37

Speaking of special dates, we're looking at two dates the next two weeks: The destruction of the Temple, and "That Day" – the return of Christ.

I had some fun with the title (ht: Ben Witherington). We're not talking about [Indiana Jones](#), but about what Jesus says about the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This section is often called "The Olivet Discourse" because of the location of Jesus' teaching. It's about *the future*.

Let me prepare you. Some of you will hear my sermon and say, "This makes sense. Thank you, Pastor Tony." But a few of you who come from certain traditions will say, "I don't know Pastor. That's really different from what I've been taught." (A third group will say, "Whatever. Let's eat").

Let me say a few words about difficult passages like this one.

Lane: "**In the gospel of Mark there is no passage more problematic than the [this one].**" It's never encouraging to read that on a Monday morning as you look to the next Sunday!

- **Two Christians, who love Jesus and his church, who believe that the Bible is God's Word, will have different takes on certain passages.**
- **It's okay to have a different angle on Mark 13 than me.**
- **Some of my best friends disagree with me on passages like this one. You know what, we're still best friends!**

Let's remember a few things:

(1) The big stuff we know. Jesus will return! That's not up for debate!

(2) We long for that return!

- **"I'm not on the planning committee; I'm on the welcoming committee."**

(3) This is a conversation among friends, not enemies, so let's discuss it charitably.

- The creeds and the confessions that we quote leave room for debate on the minutia.
- We have various end time views represented in this church. That's fine.
- This is not a **salvific issue**.
- We can discuss it, but we should never divide over the minutia.

Pray

Many people are interested in the future.

- French Quarter: "We will tell your future for free!" ... It doesn't look good!
- *Left Behind* (16 books). **Seven reached #1 on NY Times.**
 - **Over 65 million have been sold total.**
 - **If you could bundle *Ordinary* with one of these, my book would be one of the best sellers of all all time!**

Big Idea

I don't want to disappoint people who have a particular love for end time prophecy, but my contention is that **the majority of the verses in Mark 13 actually do not refer to the end times, but the destruction of the temple/Jerusalem in AD 70.**

- That's not just me; but a vast host of conservative NT scholars!!!
- Jesus does speak of the end times, but it's a small number of verses.

I know I may have just taken a lot of fun out of some your lives!

- This is a hobby for many Christians.

- It's not uncommon to hear End Times enthusiasts to make apocalyptic statements every time something big happens in the world.
- They read these as **"signs of the times."**
- The real "signs" in Mark 13 were concerning the times between Jesus' death and the fall of the temple in AD 70.
- Of course there are lessons for believers at all times to learn, but **we shouldn't expect these signs to help us figure out what's going on in the Middle East right now.**
- These signs have happened.

Two Reminders for Studying Mark 13:

1. **Historical Context.** We can't disconnect Mark 13 from the rest of Marks' gospel.

- We must remember *when* this text was given and *why* it was given.
- Remember the **temple context of Mark 11-12:**
- Mark 13 is **the culmination of Jesus' teaching about the temple.**
- There will be a religion without a temple.
- In Mark 11-12, Jesus entered the temple, turned it upside down, predicted its end, and debated with the religious leaders in the temple. Now, he and his disciples leave and are sitting at a spot where you can see it clearly at the Mt of Olives.
- Further, it's imperative that we put ourselves **in the shoes of 1st century believers.**
- **The destruction of the temple would have felt like the end of the world.**
- What people do with **Mark 13 is read it in one hand, with a newspaper in the other,** and they think, **"I wonder what this says about Russia, or Libya, or the earthquake in Italy, or about Ahmadinejad."**
- **I understand that impulse.** But that's **NOT** the starting place.
- The starting place is with the **historical context – always.**

2. **Mark's Purpose.** This text was NOT given so we could predict the exact details of the end times in the future. It's **NOT** a horoscope.

Mark's purpose then and now is to inspire present faithfulness.

- We should be asking questions like, **"Am I living faithfully before this coming King?"** Am I ready to for whatever happens this year or in ten years?" **"Am I prepared for the return of Jesus?"** Am I certain of eternal life?"

**Jesus prepares us for whatever the future may hold,
and we have great assurance regarding the future because we know in whom we trust.**

Exhortations and Warnings Regarding Present Faithfulness

- There are **17 imperatives** in this text that **exhort the readers to faithfulness, inspire hope, and assure the fainthearted.**
- **End time speculations disrupted the life of the Thessalonian church,** and Paul had to rebuke them. And it can do so today.
- We can be assured that Jesus will return and when He does, we will be glad to have lived on mission, rather than playing with a Rapture index, totting up all the earthquakes, wars, and natural disasters to gauge the timing of it.

#1: Big Picture: Trust in the Promises of Christ (13:1-37)

Two Certainties:

- (1) The Temple/Jerusalem will be destroyed.**

(2) Jesus will return.

The Destruction of the Temple is a clear marker in history.

- Roman/Jewish Wars began around 66 AD.
- Titus, the son of the emperor Vespasian, laid siege to the city in AD 67-70 AD.
- In the summer of 70, he breached the cities defenses, destroyed the city, and burned the temple to the ground, with not one stone left on another.

Matthew 24:3 – “Tell us, when will these things [temple] be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age [return of Jesus]?” So there were **two questions**. Jesus answers the first question and then makes the transition to talk about the second question.

These two things are NOT simultaneous, as some of the disciples may have thought.

So which verses apply to the destruction of the temple, and which with the return of Jesus?

6 Views (A Rough Sketch)

1. vv. 1-2 = destruction of the temple // vv. 3-37 = end times
2. vv. 1-37 = des. of the temple (Gould, Hatina, N. Wright)
3. A dual fulfillment throughout the chapter, esp in vv 5-23 (Cooper, Akin)
4. vv. 1-31 = des. of temple // vv. 32-37 = unknown time of the end (France, DeYoung)
5. vv. 1-13 = des. of the temple // vv. 14-23 = great tribulation before Jesus' returns // vv. 24-27 = the return // vv. 28-31 = des. of the temple (fig tree) // vv. 32-37 = unknown time of the end (Edwards)
6. vv. 1-23 = des. of the temple // vv. 24-27 = return of Jesus // vv. 28-31 = des. of the temple (fig tree) // vv. 32-37 = unknown time of the end (Lane, Witherington, Garland, Stein, Platt, Dever. Majority view.)

These are wonderful Bible teachers with different views on how to parse it out, but almost everyone understands that two events are in view.

My View (view 6): Jesus is preparing his disciples for the immediate future primarily (though his words are relevant for every generation), and therefore, these words are mainly about the Fall of Temple/Jerusalem. But Jesus uses this shocking prediction to point to an even more shocking event – His return in vv 24-27; 32-37. The little apocalypse (Jerusalem) precedes the climatic one.

Explanation of the Whole Chapter in 3 Parts

Part 1: Introduction: The Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple (1-4)

V. 1: The beauty of the temple awes the disciples. The Temple was impressive.

Herod expanded the second temple to about twice the size of Solomon's (it was like a “third temple”). It was considered one of the wonders of the Roman world.

- Josephus: “To approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white.”

V. 2 – The shocking prediction! These were massive stones! Some found are 40 feet long!

- This was an extraordinary prediction.
- We have no other prophets predicting this during this time. Only Jesus.
- It would take an incredibly powerful event for this to happen. And it did.

V. 3-4 – These verses are important for understanding what follows. Notice the disciples' question.

- The connection with Jesus' pronouncement about the destruction of the temple in verse 2 and the phrase "**these things**" in verse 4 ties what follows to the immediate future, not the end times.
- Some of his disciples ask, "When will "these things" take place? **What are "these things?"** The things concerning the destruction of the temple.
- This phrase, "these things" is picked up with the lesson of the fig tree in verse 29.

Part 2: Warning of General Trouble & Specific Destruction of Jerusalem (5-23)

Below is the structure of verses 5-23, which form a clear unit.

- A – Deceivers (5-6) – within the normal course of history
- B – Wars and Natural Disasters (7-8)
- C – Persecution of Believers (9-13)
- B¹ – War in Judea: Specific Signs/Instructions Re the Fall of Jer. (14-20)
- A¹ – Deceivers (21-23) – (esp before the destruction of Jerusalem)

A, B, C are "NON-SIGNS."

- They're NOT the signs of the end.
- They are normal realities in a fallen world, & realities that the disciples had to be ready for immediately!
- They needed to be especially ready for **persecution!**

Jesus doesn't want his disciples to lose their head after he leaves them.

"watch out" // "be on your guard."

- **Watch out for deceivers (5-6) – "I am He" (cf., 14:62)**
- **Don't freak out when you hear of wars (7-8a) – There always happening**
 - "This must take place" – It signifies nothing more than human sinfulness.
- **Don't freak out about earthquakes and famines (8b)**
- **"Beginning of birth pangs" (8c) – A time of suffering. Prepare yourself for the long haul!**
- There would be deceivers, calamities, and persecution in their generation – and every generation.
- **He wants them to know that history has not run amok; these kinds of events are common in a troubled world; and God reigns over all of it.**
- **The disciples had hoped that Jesus would set up his Messianic kingdom.** But that wasn't the plan.
- **They would learn in just a few days how relevant Jesus words would be.**

Persecution (9-13)

- These words were about to be very relevant for the disciples!
- **Acts.** There's remarkable relationship between vv 9-13 and the **book of Acts.**
- It's as if Luke is saying to us when we read Acts, **"This is happening!"**
 - **Brought before councils, Beaten in synagogues** (9a-b; 2 Cor 11:24-25a; Acts 5:40; 22:19)
 - **Standing before governors/kings** (9c; eg., Sergius Paulus, Felix, Festus, Agrippa II Acts 23-26)
 - **Preaching the Gospel among the nations** (10; Acts 1:8)
 - *Nations* here is the non-Jewish World (ie., the Roman world). They preached the Gospel in the whole world – beyond Judea – to Rome.
 - **"first" (13:10) – meaning before the destruction of the temple.** It happened in Acts.
 - It's going to the whole world (Col 1:6, 23; Rom 15:19, 23).
 - Acts 8:1 – the Gospel spread because of persecution
- **Words given to them by the Spirit** (11; eg., Stephen, Acts 6-7)

- **Division of family (12; cf., Lk 12:50-53; Mic 7:6)** – persecution would come even within the family.
- **Hated by all (13)** – because they preach the gospel (cf., John 16; 1 Pet 4:13-17)
- **Endure to the end of your life (13b)** Perseverance is a major theme throughout the NT (Heb 12:1-2)! I'll return to this.
- **Not only will the disciples endure these types of afflictions things, but so will Jesus, as he will be betrayed, handed over to the Sanhedrin, brought before the governor, would be a victim of false testimony, would be savagely mocked, and then killed.**

The issue for the disciples is not how can they learn the timing of the end times, but **how will they respond under pressure?** Will they renounce him in persecution?

B¹ - The specific sign of the fall of Jerusalem is given to them in verses 14-20.

- The main reason for believing this about the destruction of Jerusalem, not the end of the world is simple: **the geographical and cultural specifics point to the war in Judea, not the end times.**
- If verse 14 is instruction is *not* specifically for those in Judea, but about the whole world, then this is confusing.
 - **V. 14b: How do we flee Judea? How do we flee to the mountains?**
 - **VV. 15-16: Who would be anxious about retrieving their valuables if this were the end of the world? But this kind of instruction makes sense if it is about those in Judea.**
 - **VV. 17-18: What difference would it make if a lady were pregnant or if it were winter? But if this is a relevant in AD 70. Winter was the rainy season, and who would want to flee when pregnant?**
 - **V. 19** – Jesus uses prophetic hyperbole to communicate that it's going to worse than you can imagine. **Josephus reports gruesome accounts of famine, cannibalism, and wholesale slaughter during the siege.**
 - **V. 20** – **The Lord will be gracious in the mist of this destruction.** It won't last very long. He will care for His people. This little note highlights His sovereignty.
 - **VV. 21-23** – He returns to the topic of deception. **Deceivers will exist in every generation (4-5), and there will be many before the fall of Jerusalem claiming to the Christ.**
- **14: When are they supposed to flee?** When they see the **"abomination of desolation" (14).**
- What does this mean? It's difficult.
- Many see this as someone like Paul's "Man of Lawlessness" in 2 Thess 3-4, who appears before the coming of the Son of Man.
- I don't read it like that.
- The allusion seems to be **insider information that the original audience of the Gospel understood.**
- It refers to some specific **first-century phenomenon** related to the war against Rome when it made sense to flee to Jerusalem.
- Whatever it meant, **the people knew what it meant.**
- The phrase comes from **Daniel 11:31**, "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation" (f., Dan 8:13; 9:27; 12:11).
- **Israel had already experienced what the author of 1 Maccabees identifies as the abomination of desolation under the tyranny of Antioch Epiphanies in 168BC.**
 - He desecrated the temple by **erecting an altar to Zeus, sacrificed a pig, made the practice of Judaism a capitol offense...**

- Since Jesus mentions Judea and uses this phrase from Daniel, he seems to be mentioning some horrible event **in the temple** that was not ultimately fulfilled during the reign of Epiphanies, but would be something like it, led by someone like him. That was a foretaste of the fall of Jerusalem.
 - Some say yes, that's correct. But Mark is saying this type of thing will happen again at the return of Jesus. In other words, there's kind of a triple fulfillment. I'm not persuaded.
- The editorial comment of Mark, "**Let the reader understand**" is a call for readers to use wisdom and discernment regarding this event.
 - The Abomination could also be a reference to **Titus**.
 - More likely, it's a reference to the **Zealots** (John of Gishala and Eleazer) who occupied the temple precincts during the last years of the war in AD 67-68, **in which they roamed the temple, including the holy of holies, and even murder in the temple. As a sick joke, a guy named Phanni was invested as the high priest.**
- **At any rate, many Christians were able to escape, unlike the rest of the Jews, because they remembered Jesus' words to flee.**

Big picture: Jesus words can be trusted!

The temple was destroyed, and Jesus will return!

Part 3: The Coming of the Son of Man and the Warnings to Watch (24-37)

The transitions between the immediate future and the distant future are clear (at least to me!).

VV 24-27: The Coming of the Son of Man (look at next week)

- The topic changes abruptly.
- The transition from AD 70 (vv. 14-20) and the return of Jesus in verse 34 is self-evident.
- After "that tribulation" – the destruction of Jerusalem – something different will happen.
- The fall of Jerusalem was tribulation – a mini one.
- But a bigger one is coming. The world dissolves, Christ returns, and God's people are gathered.
- **This would not happen in the lifetime of the disciples.**

VV 28-31: The Fig Tree Lesson

Jesus returns to his original question about "**these things**" related to the destruction of the temple/Fall of Jerusalem.

- **One can see the evidence of the coming destruction of Jerusalem as surely as one can tell that a budding fig tree means summer is near.**
- Jesus' prediction about the temple will come true.
- Some things that humans believe are at the center of the universe may disappear from the face of the earth.
- **But one cannot see the warning signs of the coming of the Son of Man, for He will come because it is hidden.**

Notice "this generation."

- This is a big argument against the idea that all these verses in 1-37 refer to the end times.
- **Jesus didn't return in the disciples' generation.**
 - So was Jesus wrong? – That's the liberal view.
- But if Jesus is referring to the temple, then it makes perfect sense.
 - This generation did see fall of Jerusalem.
 - **27X in the Gospels: "this generation" refers to the current generation (DeYoung; cf., Mark 8:12).**

- o The clearest and best explanation of “this generation” is that it refers to **those living in the days of Jesus.**

VV 32-37: No One Knows the Day or the Hour

“that day” and “that hour” and the idea that “know one knows” clearly refers to the return of Jesus, not the destruction of the temple/Jerusalem.

- If the whole chapter is about the signs of the times, but then Jesus says, “Know one knows – not even Me” then this makes no sense!
- But if the previous signs refer to the events of AD 70, these words in verses 32-37 make perfect sense.
- So don't buy the books like *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*.
- NO ONE KNOWS! (I think sales plummeted!!).
- Jesus gives another parable about being faithful and alert in light of the end (34-37), which we will look at next week.

Summary:

1. Verses 1-23 refer to the events surrounding the Fall of the Temple/Jerusalem
2. Verses 24-27 refer to the return of Jesus
3. Verses 28-31 refer to the events surrounding the Fall of the Temple/Jerusalem
4. Verses 32-37 refer to the unknown time of Jesus' return.

Application

Don't miss the massive word of assurance: **verse 31.**

Jesus' Words will not pass away!

However you divide this text, one thing is certain:

You can trust Jesus' words.

- The temple was destroyed.
- He will return.
- Every word He says will come to pass! He's not like Deceivers.

#2: Practical Instruction: Endure Hardship through Christ (13:5-13)

So is that it? Should we say, “Well, this is all fulfilled in AD 70, and we can't know the end when Jesus will return, so let's go home.” Not so fast!

I want to complete our time by considering the application in verses 5-13.

Jesus gives some important, practical instructions to the disciples, but not just his disciples, but for **every Christian living in a hostile world, in every age.**

The Summary is in verse 13: Endure! Persevere until the end of your life!

- **Not works based righteousness.** Not earn your salvation.
- **True saving faith is persevering faith** (1 Cor 15:1-3)
- It's the kind of faith we read about in **Hebrews 12:1-2.**
- “Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10)

4 Exhortations

1. Endure in a World of Deceivers (5-6)

- Every generation will have religious imposters.
- But there's only one Christ!
 - Acts 5:36-37 – Theudas, and Judas the Galilean started a movement, had some followers, but the leaders died and everyone scattered.
 - Others in Acts: Simon Magus (8:9), Bar Jesus (13:6), an Unnamed Egyptian (Acts 21:38)
 - Josephus and Eusebius confirm that there were many imposters during these early days.
 - Jude and 2 Peter speak of many of these false teachers...
 - Also Matt 7:15; John 10:12-13; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Jn 2:19

Application: Don't believe them! Trust in the Real Christ!

- *Jim Jones, David Koresh or whomever...*
- Don't believe anyone promoting a version of Jesus not found in the Bible
- Truly trust in Christ, the real Christ.

2. Endure in a World of Trouble (7-8)

"In this world you will have trouble..." (John 16:33)

"through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)

• Military Conflict and Political Upheaval (13:7-8)

The 40-year period between this discourse and 70 AD was especially bloody.

- 20K Jews killed in Caesarea
- 13K Jews slaughtered in in Scythopolis
- 50K slain in Alexandria
- 10K killed in Damascus
- Rumors of more wars abounded
- Tacitus: Conflicts in Germany, Africa, Gaul, Armenia
- This Great Tribulation was a historical reality

• Earthquakes and Famines

- Acts 11:28 – famine in the whole world
- 3 known famines in the reign of Claudius
- Paul and Silas – Acts 16
- Other Earthquakes: Crete, Smyrna, Rome, Laodicea, Colossae
- All these things happened within forty years of Jesus' death.
- What Jesus predicted took place.
- The book of Acts shows a lot of it!

3 Responses to Trouble

A. Response 1: Don't be afraid (7)

- Don't read the apocalyptic scenarios into every news story!
- Don't believe every doomsday scenario you hear.
 - Earthquake in Italy
 - Kim Jong, Aqua Velva Jad, Putin, what's going in the Middle East, etc.
- These signs of the times are in every generation: war, famine, earthquakes, false teaching...
- Don't you find it amazing that in every generation you can read about these "signs of the times"? No generation can say,
 - "I never heard of a famine."
 - "I never knew of an earthquake."
 - "There was no fighting."
 - Wars? What wars? I didn't know there was a war.
 - Why, I didn't even hear of a rumor of a war!
 - "There was no false teaching."

- These are constant problems in a fallen world.
- Jesus words? **Don't freak out.**
- **Jesus is the Lord of history!** "These things must take place." He's in control!
 - We shouldn't live with a false expectation of a world without suffering.
- **Sometimes Christians turn into alarmists. We shouldn't.**
 - We aren't alone. Jesus is with us.
 - **Jesus knows suffering not merely because he knows all things, but because he himself endured suffering. Don't be afraid.**

B. Response 2: Weep/Show Compassion/Pray

- We are called to weep with those who weep.
- We are called to show compassion to the suffering.
- We are called to pray – especially for leaders that peace may reign.

C. Response 3: Examine Your Heart

- Every month we hear of earthquakes, tsunamis, wars, etc. What should we learn?
- These events often bring up what agnostics refer to as "the problem of evil."
- But in Luke 13 Jesus says when you see these things, you should **consider "your problem of evil."**
- **Luke 13:1-5:** Regarding Death of Galileans at the hand of Pilate, and the falling of the Tower in Siloam, leaving people dead. What did Jesus say?
 - Don't think they were worse sinners (Lk 13:2, 4)
 - He says, "Such will happen to you unless you repent." (13:3, 5)
 - There's a lot we could say about tragedies in the world, but one thing we should hear is this: His gracious plea to repent.
 - Worse things will happen to those who don't repent.
 - **Don't be afraid of Isis. Be afraid of not repenting before a holy God.**

3. Endure in the Face of Persecution (9-10, 12-13)

- The reality of persecution was relevant for the disciples and us.
- 2 Tim 3:12
- Persecution follows proclamation.
- Persecution often advances the mission (Phil 1:12ff)

4. Endure by the Spirit's Help (11, 13b)

- "Don't be alarmed" (7)
- Don't be anxious (11)
- This is how we endure: the Spirit's help!
- Matthew 28:18-20; Heb 13:5
- These disciples: Martyred, exiled, but helped throughout
- Not a hair on your head will be touched apart from me

These were uneducated, powerless guys who would give witness (1 Cor 1:26; Acts 4:13). How would they do it? By the help of the Spirit.

Through our union with Christ, we have power. The Spirit will help us.

#3: Blessed Hope: Long for the Return of Christ (13:24-27; 32-37)

Next week!

I think these three words are the big take-ways:

Trust.

Endure.

Hope.