

The Gospel of Mark

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Chapter 13

This is a difficult chapter to exegete and many expositors have demonstrated that difficulty by trying various ways to interpret what Mark reports. Some think that Jesus erroneously predicted the end of the ages but I cannot support that thesis! Some think that Mark wrote in a rather convoluted fashion between the destruction of Jerusalem and the End Times. We will take it verse by verse and try to understand what God is teaching us through the writing of Mark. We are not certain where and when these events occurred as He seems to have left the temple but we do not know if this chapter exactly chronologically occurs after the previous chapter discussion.

Mark 13:1-3

*As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples *said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" (2) And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down."*

This exclamation by one of His disciples reminds me of Peter's comments about building a place for each of the people who were seen at the transfiguration. I can't help but wonder if the person was Peter again. The temple had been rebuilt by Herod the Great since the second temple built by Zerubbabel had badly deteriorated. The courtyard had been greatly enlarged to about 400 by 500 yards for the Jews coming for the festivals. The temple covered about 1/6 the area of the city of Jerusalem. The stones were massive as reported by Josephus to be 25 cubits long, eight cubits high and twelve cubits wide. The comment by the disciple was then appropriate for a country boy! The reply by Jesus was startling and would be fulfilled in 70 A.D. All the buildings on the temple platform and the temple itself were utterly destroyed by the Roman general Titus. Today even the exact location of the original stones is disputed. Perhaps Jesus said this now is because they had been speaking of the function of the fig tree and other items being to fulfill the way God designed them for their function. The temple was not to reflect the glory of the builders but of God and the people were not functioning there according to His will. Since their meaning was being perturbed they would have to be destroyed much as the Tower of Babel.

Mark 13:3-9

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, (4) "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (5) And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. (6) "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. (7) "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. (8)"For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (9) "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.

Jesus is now on the Mount of Olives with the first four disciples He called into service. They referred would have included more than just what Jesus had predicted regarding the destruction of the temple. They expanded the question to include all these things and surely they are referring to the End Times. Jesus told them of many things that will happen that people would interpret as the End but He said that such were just the beginnings. Jesus warned them not to be misled in verse five. In the intervening 2000 years many people have tried to tell people that the end was coming but it has not yet come. We hear the same warnings today. Jesus told them in verse seven that wars and rumors of wars will happen as part of God's plan but that does not mean the end is near. He even tells them of nations warring against each other, kingdoms against kingdoms, earthquakes, and famines. However all of these events are just the beginnings of the birth pangs of the Kingdom of God. In verse nine Jesus warns them to be alert for they will suffer persecution at the hands of the religious courts. They will be flogged openly in the synagogues and stand before rulers to testify of Him to them. Clearly this event will occur soon so they must be prepared to stand firm for Him.

Mark 13:10-13

"The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. (11) "When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. (12) "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. (13) "You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

Mark then tells that Jesus said before the End comes the gospel must be preached to all the nations so the Gentiles must be reached. Then Mark switches to the event that will shortly occur and that is their arrest. Jesus promises them that the Holy Spirit will guide them in the proper response to the questioning. The Bible lets us know of some such situations:

- Acts 6:10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit

with which he was speaking.

- Acts 7:55-56 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; (56) and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Jesus then tells them that the gospel will cause divisions among the families as also reported by Luke:

Luke 12:51-53 *"Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; (52) for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. (53) "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. "*

Jesus tells them that everyone will hate them because of His name and we see such irrational hatred today also. But Jesus exhorts them to endure all of that persecution for they will be saved. Saying that they endure to the end refers to the end of their physical existence and not to the End of the Age. Of course they will not be saved from the persecution but they will be saved from the wrath of God:

- John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
- 1Thess 5:9 "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Mark 13:14-18

"But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (15) "The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; (16) and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. (17) "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! (18) "But pray that it may not happen in the winter.

This must not refer to the End Times for nobody can escape the judgment of God. Jesus must then be referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. The abomination is then probably the Roman army with its flags as they entered the temple area. This prophecy was remembered by the Christians when Jerusalem was put under siege. They left the city and lived in a city nearby (Pella in Perea) where they rekindled Christianity.

Mark 13:19-23

"For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. (20) "Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life

would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. (21) "And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; (22) for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. (23) "But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

Many exegetes think that now the temporal reference shifts to the End Times. However I am not so sure that is correct. The section starts with "for" and that seems to connect this section with the previous section that obviously concerns the fall of Jerusalem. The fall of Jerusalem was horrible. The next group starts with "but" and that seems to be the transition point in Mark's letter. The siege of Jerusalem was a horrible event in history. The Jews began the revolt as the Zealots raged against Rome thinking that this would encourage the coming of the Messiah. The emperor Nero sent his famous general Vespasian with a large force to Palestine. He started the siege in 67 A.D. from the Syrian port town Ptomemais with an army of 60,000 men. But Nero had killed himself so the general stopped the war and returned to Rome. After the quick failures of three more emperors, Vespasian took over in the year 69 A.D. and restored order to the empire.

His son, Titus, took over the campaign against the Jews and was the hand of God in the punishment of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple. The siege began in April of 70 A.D. with 80,000 men. The Zealots responded with rage and inflicted considerable damage among the Romans. The crucifixion of hundreds of prisoners even engaged them more. But the famine began to take a huge toll as thousands died daily and a woman even roasted her own children. In July the castle of Antonia was surprised and taken by night. Daily sacrifices ended July 17 because everyone was needed for defense. The last sacrifice at the altar of burnt offerings was the slaughter of thousands of Jews crowded around it. Titus is recorded as trying to save the temple as a trophy of victory but his soldiers were inflamed by the events and could not be kept from its destruction as they also wanted the golden treasures. The temple was burned to the ground on August 10, 70 A.D. that is supposedly the same day that the first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The ground was nowhere visible as it was covered with corpses and there was even more blood than the fire. Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege, of which a majority were Jewish, and that 97,000 were captured and enslaved. The Romans planted their eagles on the shapeless ruins over against the eastern gate and offered their sacrifices to them. This fulfilled the prophecy of the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place.

As stated above, many Christians remembered the Lord's admonition and fled the doomed city in time to the city of Pella in the Decapolis, beyond the Jordan, where King Herod Agrippa II opened a safe asylum for them. The

church was reconstructed there without its Jewish base. After this time and events mankind would no longer look at Christianity as a sect of Judaism but treat it as a new and peculiar religion. However Christianity still had its roots in the OT and Christians were now seen as spiritual descendants of Abraham: *"Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."* (Gal 3:7)

Mark)3:24-27

"But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, (25) AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. (26) "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. (27) "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

The transition to the End Times certainly begins at this point as the predicted tribulation has ended. The Greek word used for "but" is "*alia*" and is a very strong word. Mark's quotation is from Isaiah 13:10 and other OT verses use similar language (Isa 24:23; 34:4; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15). The words are Hebrew poetry and it is difficult to know if they are to be taken literally or symbolically. Mark may be using phenomenal language as we know that the End Times will be accompanied by celestial occurrences that are literal: *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up."* (2 Peter 3:10) However Mark is quoting Jesus as He refers to the actual Parousia and not some years leading up to that event. These verses do not support any tribulation period as perceived by some popular writers.

Mark 13:28-32

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. (29) "Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. (30) "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (31) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (32) "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

We learn from our observations of nature when seasons are going to change. But the signs like the fig tree are indications of the promise and not a clock. We should also be warned about the coming end by the warnings of our Lord.

The meaning of verse 29 depends upon what is meant by "these things". Such could refer to the fall of the city of Jerusalem or the events preceding the end of the age. Verse 30 is difficult to interpret for such will depend upon the meaning of "this generation" and what are "all these things". Do "all these things" refer to the same "these things" of verse 29? We need to look at the parallel passages in Luke and Matthew:

- Luke 21:29-36 *Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; (30) as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. (31) "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. (32) "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. (33) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (34) "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; (35) for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. (36) "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. "*
- Matt 24:32-42 *"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; (33) so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. (34) "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (35) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (36) "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (37) "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (38) "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (40) "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. (41) "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken .and one will be left. (42) "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming*

In a way we have an advantage of having 2000 years of history past these writings. Also since we know that Jesus would not have been totally wrong about His prophecies, we know that He was not telling them that the Parousia would occur before they died. The disciples would have remembered that He told them when they saw the fall of Jerusalem they would know that He spoke the truth and that indeed the KOG was near. Many attempts have been made to understand "this generation" such as the Jewish race but it seems best to

take it at face value to mean His generation. Certainly all His disciples (except Judas) would have seen the fall of Jerusalem and that awful tribulation. When He states that heaven and earth will pass away He is referring to all created things for there will be a new heaven and earth. Perhaps a good way to understand this passage is to remember that God's time is not the same as our time. The events of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension are one event in the mind of God and the remaining event, the Parousia, is also a part of that sequence. So, these five events are all connected and ever since the incarnation people have been living in the last days. The promise of God is that the Parousia is a promised event that will occur in His chosen time and nobody will escape the judgment of God and all of His people will live with Him forever. We must remember the last words of Jesus on this topic as He told His disciples to mind their own business and go about His work:

Acts 1:6-8 "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; (8) but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"

Mark 13:33-37

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. (34) "It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. (35) "Therefore, be on the alert--for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning-- (36) in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. (37) "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

It is a mistake to spend a lot of time trying to know the date of the End but it is not a mistake to know that it will come about. Our alertness to knowing that it could come at any time should just make us all the more intent to do what God calls us to do now so that our judgment will not include our not having done what He has clearly told us to do. This parable is somewhat like the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) and the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12-27). God has given each of His children specific gifts and talents that are designed to be used according to His will. All of His children will then face a judgment (except not for salvation) so knowing that the Parousia will come should be our charge to obey quickly:

- 2Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
- 1Cor 3:10-15 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise*

master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. (11) For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. (15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

- *Matt 12:36-37 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting/or it in the day of judgment. (37) "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*
- *Rom 14:10-12 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (11) For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." (12) So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.*

Note carefully that in verse 37 Jesus is quoted as warning everyone, not just the disciples. So even after 2000 years we should all obey this command to be on the alert. This is a charge to a soldier who is on duty and all Christians are on duty serving the Lord Jesus Christ.