

DAY 7: THE END OF THE AGE

Mark 13:1-37

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE (MARK 13:1-2) Jesus' disciples express enthusiasm for the temple. Jesus, however, is unmoved by its splendor. He announces, "*I tell you, something greater than the temple is here*" (Matthew 12:6). Jesus prophesies that the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed. And so it was. Josephus said of its destruction, "The city was so completely leveled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited" (*Jewish War*, VII, 3).

THINK ABOUT the temptation to put trust in the trappings of religion. Buildings, programs, and traditions are important, but they are temporal; only God and His kingdom are eternal. An hour spent admiring the beauty of stained-glass windows is a poor substitute for even a momentary glimpse of the King of kings.

STEADFASTNESS IN A CRUMBLING WORLD (MARK 13:3-13) Some of the disciples ask Jesus, "*When will these things be?*" Apparently the disciples see a connection between the fall of the temple and the arrival of the kingdom. They ask what will signal the beginning of the end. Jesus instead directs them to the present: "*See that no one leads you astray.*" Deceivers will arise claiming, "*I am he!*" Moreover, they will come "*in My name,*" that is, claiming the power and credentials of Christ. Birth pangs will come in the form of wars and natural calamities. False prophets, wars, earthquakes, and famine correspond to the same events foreseen in chapter 6 of the Book of Revelation.

Finally, pitfalls to faith will come through suffering. Believers will be arraigned before councils and synagogues, "*before governors and kings*"—persecuted by both religious and secular authorities. Despite appearances, however, God will not abandon His people. In their deepest crises, God will be speaking through them by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, their sufferings will afford them a chance to bear witness to Christ before people they would otherwise never have the opportunity to address. This testimony "*to all nations*" is a prerequisite for the coming of the kingdom, and suffering is the means by which it will happen (13:10). Then He concludes, "*But the one who endures to the end will be saved*" (13:13).

THE COMING TRIBULATION (MARK 13:14-23) Scholars disagree on whether this passage is a prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, the end times, or both. In any case, it foretells calamity and suffering that will befall Israel—a disaster so severe that those who must flee dare not return to their homes for any possessions. The trigger for the impending horror is "*the abomination of desolation.*" The phrase is taken from three cryptic references in Daniel to be a scandal that would defile the Jerusalem temple. The phrase is used in 2nd-century BC religious writings to describe Antiochus IV (Ephiphanes), the Syrian general who, in 168 BC, outraged the Jews by sacrificing a pig on the altar in the temple. It is probably safe to say that the offense of Antiochus was the first fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, an incomplete fulfillment that pointed forward.

A second imperfect realization of "*the abomination of desolation*" may have been the victorious Roman assault on the temple in 70 AD and the terrible moment when Titus planted his standard in the holy sanctuary. And 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 may hint at an ultimate event still to come.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN (MARK 13:24-27) Now Jesus is no longer speaking of the fall of Jerusalem, but of the end of the world and the Second Coming. "*In those days,*" the darkening of sun and moon, the falling stars, and the shaking of heavenly bodies anticipate a cosmic catastrophe. It will happen "*after that tribulation [of Jerusalem],*" says Jesus, but how long after He does not say.



These upheavals will signify the coming of Christ. The cosmos will collapse; darkness and chaos will envelop everything, just as at the beginning of time. Amazingly, Jesus talks about this specter of annihilation to instill confidence and encouragement!

"*The Son of Man coming in clouds*" is taken from the vision of Daniel 7:13. Jesus, who is now on His way to be crucified as a common criminal, will return "*with great power and glory.*" Exiles and

captives will be gathered to Him “*from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven*”—from everywhere. Biblical revelation is apocalyptic, highly symbolic, and difficult to understand, but Mark gives sufficient information to warn us to be alert and to encourage us to trust God. In His own words, Jesus holds before us two facts about His return: the power and glory of His future coming, and the promise that His elect will be gathered to Him!

THE LESSON OF THE FIG TREE (MARK 13:28-37) In the fig tree incident, Jesus uses a metaphor to teach about the nearness of the end. The fig tree loses its leaves in winter, and only late in spring do its branches grow tender and sprout leaves. When the tree is in full leaf, summer is on its way. “*This generation*” (13:30) must refer quite literally to Jesus’ disciples and other people then living. In other words, the events of 13:5-19 and the fall of the temple will happen in their lifetime. The Jews’ refusal to accept their Messiah started the countdown to that destruction. From that point on, people have been living in the last days.

Mark repeats three times that “*no one*” except the Father knows the time of the end. Consequently, the only proper response is to “*be on guard, keep awake*” (13:33). In the midst of calamity and destruction, tribulation, and persecution, when even the sun, moon, and stars are shaken, the believer can rest assured that God the Father remains in control.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. Jesus stressed the need to be alert and on guard. He did not give us “how-tos” of watching out or being on guard, as if there was a method or technique to be learned. Instead, He recommended an attitude to be maintained. To do that, we must be so close to Christ and so steeped in biblical truth that we cannot be taken in by falsehood. And we must be aware of and on guard against not only false claims but against our own susceptibility to follow leaders simply because they are “successful.” True leaders point the way to Jesus. “*For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake*” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

REVIEW: THE END OF THE AGE

12. When you think about “the end of the world,” what emotions stir within you? What challenges/encouragement do you receive from God’s Word on this subject?