

## Mark 13:1-37 - Waiting for the End

Do you think we talk too much or not enough about 'the end of the world' as a church? Why?

### Read Mark 13

It's important to appreciate that the broad context of this block of teaching is Jesus' prediction that the temple would be destroyed (v2), and the question from the disciples about '*when will these things happen? and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?*' (v3-4). The disciples think that Jesus is predicting the end of the world and the establishment of his kingdom, whereas Jesus wants them to understand that whilst there is a connection, they are separate realities. Clearly Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple, given the context (v2-4), and yet he is also clearly talking at some points about his return in glory to judge and save at the end of time (v26-27). The challenge for us is to understand which parts of Jesus' speech relate to these two events, and what connection (if any!) does Jesus see between them?

The main clue is that Jesus uses the phrase 'these things' in connection with the destruction of the temple, whereas, he uses a phrase from the Old Testament prophets – 'that day' or 'those days' – to speak of 'the end'.

### These Things

*In verses 5-8, what are 'these things', and what does 'these things' taking place NOT mean? What does this tell us about the connection between the destruction of the temple and 'the end'?*

*What do Christians need to be careful of during 'these things'?*

*What significance should we give to political and natural turmoil throughout history? (and what shouldn't we!?)*

### Those Days / That Day

In verses 28-31 Jesus says 'these things' will happen soon, and his followers will be able to see signs of it happening. In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple will come within a generation.<sup>1</sup>

*In contrast, what can we know about the timing of 'that day' – the day when Jesus returns (v32-33)?*

*What does Jesus say will happen 'in those days'? (v24-27)*

*What is Jesus' advice to us now regarding that day? (v33-37)*

*What do you think it looks like for a Christian to 'be alert' like this in day-to-day life? What would it look like to be found 'sleeping'?*

### The Great Tribulation

In between Jesus talking about 'these things' (the destruction of the temple) in v3-13 and 'that day' (the return of Jesus) in v24-27, Jesus talks about a particularly terrible time of tribulation or suffering in verses 14-23.

*What might lead us to think this is talking about:*

- a) *the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple? (hint, v14-17, 21-23)*
- b) *the end of the world and the return of Christ? (hint, v17-20)*

---

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we know it did happen in 70AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem after the Jews rebelled against them.

### ***(The Great Tribulation continued...)***

The fact is, this section is confusing! It seems to refer to both realities!

The strange reference to seeing 'the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be' in verse 14 connects this passage with the destruction of the temple. It is a phrase borrowed from the book of Daniel, which alludes to pagans profaning the temple. As one commentator writes: *'The "abomination that causes desolation" is a phrase taken from three cryptic references in Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 to a scandal that would defile and profane the Jerusalem temple. The same phrase is used in 1 Maccabees 1:54 [a book written in between the NT and OT] to describe Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), the Syrian general who outraged the Jews in 168 B.C. by erecting an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offering in the temple and sacrificing a sow on it.'*<sup>2</sup> So Jesus seems to be speaking of a similar profaning of the temple to come in the future, which is connected with terrible suffering. The natural reference is the destruction of the temple, which he has been talking about up till this point. His warnings not to be deceived by false claims that the Messiah has come amidst all this suffering also show us that he is still talking about 'these things', rather than 'the end'.

But, on the other hand, the phrase 'in those days' is used a number of times (v17-20) and this 'tribulation' is linked to the cosmic revelation of Jesus at the end of time (v24). This suffering is also described in dramatic language that goes beyond historical experience (v19-20), even something as terrible as the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70AD.

So it seems that Jesus is presenting the imminent destruction of the temple (and Jerusalem with it) as a foreshadowing of the great judgement to come on all of creation with his return in glory at the end.

*What's the practical difference between seeing suffering and turmoil in this age as (i) a foreshadowing of God's judgement to come, and (ii) a sign that the end of the world is about to arrive?*

*Why do you think Christians have often fallen into the trap of thinking that current world events are signalling the return of Jesus? What is tempting about this way of thinking? Why is it unhelpful for Christians?*

### **Be on your Guard**

Amidst the turmoil and suffering of this age, Jesus also warns that his followers will face persecution, and so we need to be on our guard (v9-13).<sup>3</sup>

*What should we expect?*

*What does Jesus want from us during this time?*

*What encouragement does he give us?*

### **Final Reflection**

*In light of Jesus teaching, do you think you consider 'the end of the world' enough as a Christian? Why / why not?*

*How can you help each other 'be on your guard' and 'keep watch' more faithfully?*

---

<sup>2</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, [Pillar New Testament Commentary](#). Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 395-396.

<sup>3</sup> Just as the destruction of Jerusalem is a foreshadowing of the final judgement, so the turmoil leading up to that event is like a foreshadowing of the persecution and trouble Christians of all ages will face in this age before 'the end'.