

Introduction

1. Last week we witnessed Jesus' final public confrontation with the religious leaders of Israel which ultimately set the stage for his betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection
2. Knowing His earthly ministry was coming to an end, Jesus turned his attention directly to His disciples with some final preparation, including what to expect in the future
3. Today we come to the second explanatory section of Mark's Gospel where he focuses on Jesus' words and teaching (remember, Mark's Gospel focuses more on Jesus' actions to prove He is Messiah and Son of God, while Matthew focuses more on Jesus' teaching)
4. His teaching comes in three sections and we will cover these over this week and next week:
 - a. In the first section He prophesies the destruction of the temple
 - b. In the second, He reveals what to expect in regard to the timing of the destruction, His return for the saints, and the end of the age
 - c. In the third section, which we will cover next week, He warns His disciples to be ready and on alert for His return

A. Jesus prophesies of the destruction of the Temple (READ 13:1-4)

1. An unnamed disciple calls Jesus' attention to the marvelous temple complex:
 - a. The first temple was built by Solomon but was destroyed by the Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians
 - b. After the Babylonian captivity ended and the Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple (the second temple) which was the one in Jesus' day
 - c. This second temple was quite a bit smaller than Solomon's so around 20 B.C. King Herod began a campaign to renovate and expand the complex
 - d. The complex took up 1/6 of the old city of Jerusalem and consisted of the temple surrounded by a series of enclosures and smaller buildings joined to it by courts with large columns
 - e. The stones (to which the disciple refers) were massive white marble stones measuring 25 cubits in length (approximately 37 feet), 8 inches in height and 12 inches in width and decorated in gold
 - f. The complex was one of the most impressive sights in the ancient world and considered an architectural wonder
2. Jesus responds with a rather startling prediction—the temple complex would be totally and completely destroyed (2):
 - a. This is not the first time Jesus warned about such destruction—in Luke 19:39-44 He warned the religious leaders that Jerusalem would be destroyed as an act of God's judgment against Israel
 - b. Jesus describes the destruction as so complete that not one stone would be left upon another
3. Peter, James, John and Andrew ask Jesus for clarification regarding the destruction (3-4): **“As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and**

Andrew were questioning Him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?”

- a. In Mark’s account, the focus of the disciples questions is the timing of the destruction—when it will happen and what sign they might look for
- b. However, when we combine the details from all three of the synoptic Gospels we see that there are primarily two questions:
 - 1) When will the Temple be destroyed?
 - 2) What sign will precede Jesus’ return and the end of the age—(e.g. the beginning of the Kingdom of God)
 - 3) It appears the disciples believed all three of these things (destruction of the temple, Jesus’ return and the end of the age) would all occur simultaneously

B. Jesus provides details regarding the timing and the signs for these events (13:5-28)

1. In verses 5-13, Jesus summarizes what His disciples should expect leading up to these events and He does so through a series of imperatives:
 - a. The first imperative is that they not be misled by the many false prophets that would come claiming to be Him (5-6): **“And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He!’ and will mislead many.”**
 - 1) This began almost immediately after Jesus’ ascension, and in fact we have the names of at least two from just a couple decades later:
 - a) A Samaritan named Simon Magus who suggested he was Christ and called himself the “Standing One”
 - b) Another Samaritan named Dositheos pretended to be Jesus and tried to convince the Samaritan that he was the Messiah prophesied by Moses by applying Deuteronomy 18:15 to himself
 - 2) Jesus said that there would be **“many”** and that **“many”** would be led astray--Wikipedia lists nearly 100 knowns religious leaders who have claimed to be Christ over the years
 - b. The second imperative is that they not be alarmed when they hear of wars and rumors of wars or natural disasters (7-8): **“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. 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.”**
 - 1) Most translations render this, “do not be alarmed” which is a better rendering than frightened
 - 2) They weren’t to be shocked or surprised by such things because **“they must take place”** as part of God’s plan
 - 3) However, such things will not indicate that the end of the age has come just yet because they **“are merely the beginning of birth pangs”** (e.g. only the beginning of the birthing process which ultimately culminates with the actual birth)
 - c. The third imperative is that they be on guard because they will face serious persecution (9-13): **“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. The gospel must first be preached to all the nations...(jump to verse 12-13)...Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise**

up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

- 1) Their persecution would serve as a testimony before world leaders for Jesus’ sake
 - 2) It would be used to preach the Gospel to all nations
 - 3) Some would be killed, but those who endure to the end (of the persecution/age) will be saved (e.g. rescued at the time of Christ’s return)
- d. The forth imperative comes in the middle of the passage above which is that they aren’t to worry about what to say when giving a defense (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.”**
- 1) They are merely to speak what “is given” to them “in that hour”
 - 2) It would not be them that speak but rather divine revelation--the Holy Spirit speaking through them!
- c. As stated above, these verses (5-13) serve as a summary of what the disciples were to expect between the time of Christ’s ascension and His return and the end of the age-- Matthew’s account clearly indicates these verses are a summary of the entire time span as he ends this section with these words, **“and then the end shall come”** (Matthew 24:14)
2. Jesus now moves on to answer the disciple’s question about what specific signs they are to look for (14-27):
- a. The first sign is the abomination of desolation which will indicate the coming destruction of the temple and all of Jerusalem (READ 14-23):
 - 1) The **“abomination of desolation”** is a direct reference to the desecration of the temple by the anti-Christ in the book of Revelation that Daniel prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 (READ Daniel 9:24-27 & 12:11)
 - 2) When the disciples see this, Jesus says they are to flee Jerusalem because it will initiate a tremendous time of tribulation unlike any before it or after it (19)
 - 3) In fact, the time will be so terrible that if God does not cut it short no one will survive (20)
 - 4) But even then, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the terrible persecution, the end still hasn’t come (21-23)
 - b. The second sign they are to look for is cosmic disturbances and...finally...Jesus appearing in the clouds (READ 24-27):
 - 1) I believe this is a reference to the Rapture of the Church, but not everyone agrees:
 - a) The Second Coming of Christ happens in two stages—the first is the Rapture of the Church and the second is His return after the Great Tribulation when He takes His throne and reigns for the 1000 year millennium
 - b) Those that see this as the second stage cite that Jesus claims it won’t happen until **“after”** the tribulation mentioned above
 - c) They also cite that Matthew’s and Luke’s account clearly shows that all the nations of the Earth visibly see this return and faint from fear and mourn because of the destruction they are about to face (Matthew 24:30 and Luke 21:25-26)
 - 2) However, I believe the evidence better supports the Rapture:

- a) Jesus is encouraging to His disciples, not warning the unsaved—in fact, Luke records that Jesus told them that when they see this sign, they are to **“straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (Luke 21:28b)
- b) The tribulation described in Mark 13:14-20 is related specially to that in Jerusalem when the temple and Jerusalem are destroyed, not necessarily to world-wide tribulation (since Jesus tells them to flee the city for their safety)
- c) Later in the Olivet Discourse Jesus tells them no one knows the day or hour when this appearance will happen (a general reference to not knowing when it will occur)—this makes no sense because the final stage of His coming is known...down to the number of days after the abomination of desolation until
- d) Matthew’s account describes this event as two people standing side by side when one is taken away and the other left

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| C. So how does this apply to us? |
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1. As I stated above, verses 5-13 provide a summary of what Jesus’ disciples can expect between His ascension and His return/end of the age which means that it applies to believers until He returns:
 - a. It includes things like many false prophets coming in His name, claiming to be Him
 - b. It includes wars and natural disasters like earthquakes and famines
 - c. And it includes serious persecution for the saints, for some even death
 - 1) All of the apostles except John were martyred for their faith, and even John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos
 - 2) The first 300 years of the Church were a time of severe persecution by the Roman empire, and there’s not been a single generation since when Christians haven’t faced persecution
 - 3) That persecution has continued up and through today--According to a 2019 report commissioned by the British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world today
 - 4) According to the report, not only has Christian persecution spread more geographically, but the level and severity of the persecution has increased substantially
 - 5) The report concluded that anti-Christian persecution is now at “genocidal levels” according to the standards for genocide established by the UN and that Christianity will soon be completely wiped out in some parts of the world like Syria, Iraq, Egypt, north-east Nigeria and the Philippines)
 - 6) In the past few years we’ve seen the government of the largest country in the world with 1.4 billion people (China) declare their plan to eradicate Christianity from their country and systematically destroy 1000s of churches and arrest hundreds of thousands of Christians
 - 7) India, the second largest country in the world with 1.3 billion people, now ranks #10 on Open Doors most dangerous places for Christians
 - 8) And...we are now seeing a growing intolerance, and even hatred, for Christians here in the United States
 - d. I know what you’re all thinking, Does this mean the Church will be here during the 7 Year Tribulation?
 - 1) There is great debate and no consensus among good Bible scholars as to the exact timing of the rapture—no position is without difficult issues

- 2) Some believe that the entire seven years of tribulation described by Daniel and the book of Revelation amount to God's wrath and that the Church is raptured before it begins (pre-trib)
 - 3) Others, see the first half (or so) of the seven years as tribulation brought about by the anti-Christ, but not God's wrath; they see the Church present during this time but raptured sometime during the second half prior to God's wrath being poured out (pre-wrath or intra-seal)
 - 4) I believe the only thing anyone can say with absolute certainty is that believers will face tribulation (whether that's only before the 7 years or partially in it), but that we will be raptured before God pours out His wrath (whether that begins at the beginning of the 7 years or at sometime within them)
2. But what about the signs Jesus prophesied:
- a. Both Daniel's and Jesus' prophecies regarding the abomination of desolation, as well as the book of Revelation, indicate that the ultimate fulfillment is yet still future and will occur during the anti-Christ's reign—as such it will still serve as a sign for those who are present
 - b. However, there was a partial fulfillment in A.D. 70 that served as a foreshadowing of what is to come when Rome destroyed the Temple along with most of Jerusalem and slaughtered 1.1 million Jews (Luke's account alludes to this by referring to the surrounding of Jerusalem rather than the abomination of desolation)
 - c. As for the cosmic disturbances and Christ appearing in the sky—that is still future and something we are to continually encouraged to watch for:
 - 1) Paul encouraged Titus to “**deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus**” (Titus 2:12-13)
 - 2) He reminded Timothy to continue to preach the Word and pursue things like righteousness, godliness, faith, love perseverance and gentleness, and to fight the good fight of faith, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:14)
 - 3) He wrote to Timothy a second time in 2 Timothy 2:4-8 and reminded him that God will reward all those who have “**loved His appearing**” and that when Jesus is revealed, we will be revealed with Him in glory
3. Next week we will pick up with verses 28-37 with Jesus' call to be on alert and be ready for His appearing