

Mark 13:1–23 — Jesus And The Destruction of Jerusalem

August 30, 2020

Good morning. Isn't it good to get back to some sense of normalcy in our community? While the summer was great, and I hate to see it go, it is good to have the kids back in school, the church open, fall programs beginning and our community operating somewhat normally. Like you, I pray everyone stays healthy and we can keep things open this winter!

In March, before COVID hit, we were studying the Gospel of Mark. We took a break from that gospel when COVID hit to teach a small series on the pandemic, then we studied the book of Philippians for the rest of the spring and summer. The plan was to return to the Gospel of Mark if things were back to normal this fall. Since kids are back in school and we have high school football, that is normal enough for me; so it is to the Gospel of Mark that we return.

When we were last in Mark, we finished Mark 12. Beginning in Mark 11, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the final week of his life. He would be crucified on Friday and rise from the dead on Sunday. At the beginning of this final week, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders came to a head. Jesus and the religious leaders were constantly debating in public, and Jesus won those skirmishes very time. Then, Jesus spoke a strange parable known as the cursing of the fig tree. Jesus pronounced judgment on a fig tree because it was all leaves and no fruit. The day after Jesus cursed the fig tree, it was withered and dead, down to the roots. In this acted-out parable we learned the fig tree represented the temple and religious leaders. They also were all leaves and no fruit. The temple looked good but was spiritually fruitless. The leaders were also godless

and corrupt. The extent of the Jewish leaders' corruption would become increasingly apparent by the end of this week as they lied, schemed, manipulated, and deceived their way to crucify Jesus.

As we to come to Mark 13, Jesus moved from pronouncing judgment on the temple and the Jewish leadership, which he did through the parable of the fig tree, to prophesying how and when the judgment of God would take place on Jerusalem, the temple, and the religious leaders. In this chapter, Jesus moved beyond prophesying details on the destruction of the temple to giving us information about his return and the end of the world.

Without question, this chapter is the hardest chapter in the Gospel of Mark. This chapter is also considered one of the hardest in the Bible. Great biblical scholars, that I respect, strongly disagree with one another about this chapter. Their main disagreements all orbit around the question of when Jesus is speaking prophetically about the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D., and when Jesus is speaking about his return and the end of the world.

I have read extensively for this message. I have studied the writings of Bible scholars from differing points of view so I know what they say and why they say it. I have come to my own conclusions about the right way to understand the chapter. This morning, I will explain them to you. If you learned a different view of this chapter, I ask your charity. This chapter is not easy. Remember we are Christians. If we disagree about something, we use that as incentive to put our fingers in the Word of God and learn more. We do not let our disagreements, especially on matters as complex as this chapter, drive us apart.

This morning, we are studying the first 23 verses. Since this chapter is one unit of thought, to give you an overall sense of this chapter, we are going to read the whole thing. After reading the chapter, I will show you how the chapter divides up, so we can logically study it together.

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the

earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.” Mark 13 (ESV)

Jesus’ disciples asked him when the temple would be destroyed. Jesus answered their question, but he went beyond telling them about the temple’s destruction and told them what things would be like at the end of the age, that is the end of the world, when he returns. As I mentioned earlier, the big question of the chapter is, “When is Jesus talking about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which happened 40 years after he spoke these words, and when is he talking about the end of the world?”

Have you heard of R.C. Sproul? He is a theologian that claimed the entire chapter happened in or before 70 A.D. The problem with that is, what do we do with portions such as Mark 13:27, which talks about the gathering of the elect by the angels? That sounds like the end of the world, not the destruction of the temple.

Have you heard of John MacArthur? He claims the exact opposite. He believes very little of this chapter pertains to Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 A.D. and almost all of it pertains to the time of the great tribulation before Christ returns at the end of the world.

Still other theologians are like light switches. They believe one verse talks about the destruction of Jerusalem, then the next verse talks about the end of the world, then it goes back to the destruction of Jerusalem, so the verses of this chapter are like a light switch bouncing between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

How do I think this chapter is structured? The conclusion I agree with is help by some of the best scholars on this book. They believe verses 5-23 deal with the destruction of Jerusalem and verses 24-27 deal with Jesus talking about the end of the world. Jesus ended this chapter with two short parables. The parable of the fig tree, in verses 28-31, tells us the destruction of Jerusalem will take place in that generation. That is what happened. The temple was destroyed less than 40 years after Jesus spoke these words. The parable of the owner is in verses 32-37. This parable says that unlike the destruction of the temple, which Jesus told us would take place within that generation, nobody knows the end of the world and the time of Christ's return. What we do know is we better be ready because it could happen at any time. I put together a chart that shows you how the chapter is structured.

A — v. 5-23 — The Destruction of Jerusalem

B — v. 24-27 — The End of the World

A' — v. 28-31 — The parable of the fig tree. The destruction of Jerusalem will happen in that generation

B' — v. 32-37 — The parable of the owner. Be ready. No-one knows when Jesus will return.

Introduction — Jesus leaves the temple — v. 1-4

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" Mark 13:1 (ESV)

Herod's temple was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. There was no temple in the world that could rival its size or grandeur. The best way to understand its size is to look at a model that was created by Alec Garrard. He built this detailed replica of Herod's temple in his retirement. Somewhere I read it took him 30 years. He was trying to give us an idea of the size of the temple. Since everything is to scale, look at the size of the people in the temple complex. They look like ants. It was that large.



The temple complex covered 35 acres. The circumference of the temple was more than one mile around. Josephus, an ancient historian, said some of the



stones used in the base of the temple were longer than 67 feet. They weighed more than a million pounds. People built this without heavy equipment. I have no idea how they moved these stones into place.

There were 162 pillars holding up the exterior roof around the outer court of the temple. Each pillar was so large that three men could barely touch hands and wrap their arms one of them. The temple itself rose 150 feet higher than the rest of the city, making the temple complex a literal mountain in the center of Jerusalem. The walls of the temple were covered in gold plate. There was so much gold that Josephus wrote that travelers looking at the temple from a distance often couldn't look at it because

they were blinded when the gold so brilliantly reflected the sun . The blocks of the temple were white marble, so from a distance, if it was overcast and you weren't blinded by the reflection of the sun off the gold, the temple looked like a snow-covered mountain because it was so white. The walls of the temple were immense. The southern wall, which ascended from the Kidron Valley, was 210 feet high. That is as high as a 15story building. In rural Iowa, I don't think we have corn bins that high.

By the time the temple was destroyed, it had been under construction for 80 years, an entire lifetime. During construction, no hammers and saws were allowed to be used so construction took place in complete silence. All cutting and pounding took place outside of Jerusalem before the stone blocks were brought to Jerusalem. The temple was truly a wonder of human accomplishment and achievement. Herod was proud of his temple. The Jews were also extremely proud. It was a national treasure. Let's see what Jesus thought about the temple.

And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." Mark 13:2 (ESV)

While the disciples were impressed by the temple, Jesus was not. He said the whole thing was coming down. It would be demolished. This is the first specific prediction of the temple's destruction in Mark's Gospel. The idea that this great building would be obliterated was hard for even the disciples to comprehend. Destroying the temple was like setting off a nuclear bomb at the White House. It was impossible to fathom.

The idea of God destroying his own temple as judgment on his own people was not new. In the Old Testament, prophets prophesied the destruction

of Solomon's temple and the subsequent exile of the Jews to Babylon as God's discipline upon the nation for corrupt spiritual leaders and empty worship. God was going to destroy his temple again, because worship in the temple, and its spiritual leaders, had become corrupt. Just as God's people had rejected the prophets God sent them in the Old Testament so God unleashed his judgement upon his people, now God's people were rejecting the greatest prophet of all, God's own son, and as a result, God's judgment had come.

When did God's judgment upon the city of Jerusalem and his temple come? It took place 40 years later in 70 A.D. when the Roman general Titus sacked Jerusalem, leaving not one stone of the temple upon another. We will learn more about the temple's destruction later this morning.

Already, we have some problems in this verse. Jesus said that when the temple was destroyed, there would not be one stone left upon another of these great buildings. If you travel to Jerusalem today, there are portions of the original

temple wall that remain. One of those is known as the Wailing Wall. What are we to make of this? Was Jesus wrong? There are stones left on one another. Were

Jesus' words untrue? No, technically, what Jesus

spoke was right. All the stones of the *buildings* were overturned so not one was left on another. The stones that make up the Wailing Wall are the outer wall of the structure, not buildings of the structure.



Why did every stone of the temple end up overturned? Remember I told you the temple was covered in gold plate? When the Romans initially set out to

destroy the temple, they burned it with fire. The problem with burning a temple covered in gold is the gold melts and molten gold drips between the stones. To get to the melted gold that went between the stones, the Roman army tore every stone of the temple apart to dig out the gold from between them.

Let's get back to the text.

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" Mark 13:3–4 (ESV)

At this point, Jesus left the temple complex. He had gone down the Kidron Valley and climbed the Mount of Olives, which was 300 feet higher than Jerusalem. It was only 150 feet higher than the temple because the temple was a 150-foot mountain in the middle of Jerusalem. The view of the temple from the Mount of Olives is spectacular. The Mount of Olives is also a great place to rest after climbing out of the Kidron Valley. This is where Peter, James, John, and Andrew sat down with Jesus to ask him two questions.



1. When will the temple be destroyed?
2. What is the sign when all these things will be accomplished?

The first question is regarding the time of the temple's destruction. The second question is asking for a sign to look for so the disciples would know the destruction of the temple was imminent and would momentarily take place. Clearly what follows in this chapter is an answer to these disciples' questions about Jerusalem and its destruction. If the disciples wanted to know about the

timing and signs of the temple's destruction, then why did Jesus also spend time talking about the end of the world and his return in this chapter?

To answer that question, we go to Matthew and Luke. They also record Jesus' Olivet Discourse that we have before us in Mark 13, but because they devoted more time to it in their Gospels, they told us a little more information about what took place that afternoon. Apparently, at that time, the disciples asked another question. We can read it in Matthew's account.

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3 (ESV)

So disciples didn't just ask questions about the timing of the temple's destruction in Jerusalem, but they also asked when Christ would return and when the end of the world as we know it will take place? That is why Jesus talked about both of those subject in this chapter, not just one of them.

Jesus began by answering the disciple's questions about Jerusalem's destruction. He didn't begin by telling them true signs of Jerusalem's destruction that they should look for, but he told them about false signs they should avoid. He told them about tragedies in this world that would leave many people thinking God's judgment was about to fall, but in reality, those were false signs of Jerusalem's destruction.

What were the false signs of the temple's destruction?

There will be false messiahs who will speak lies.

And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." Mark 13:5–6 (ESV)

Jesus said, "Be prepared for messianic pretenders and their lies." This portion of text will end with another warning to be careful about false teachers. When Jesus gives the same warning twice, what does that mean? It means it is important and we better remember it. The greatest danger Christians will face is not persecution from people outside the church, it is from false teachers in the church that want to lead Christians astray.

Remember Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in 70 A.D.? When we put our fingers in the history books, we find there were an abundance of false teachers and fake messiahs in the years 30-70 A.D.

Acts 5 tells us of a man named Theudas. In the years 44-47 A.D., he claimed to be a prophet of God with miraculous powers that could part the Jordan River at his command. He had a great following, until he and his followers were attacked and killed by the Romans. That proved he was a false messiah and had no power at all.

Acts 21 tells us of an Egyptian who also claimed to be a prophet. He led a group of 4,000 into the wilderness. He claimed to have miraculous powers and at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall. He was also attacked by the Romans. His followers scattered. He escaped with his life but was never heard from again. He was another popular but false messiah.

In the years 66-70 A.D., just before the destruction of Jerusalem, there were a number of Jews who falsely claimed to be the Messiah.

There were many false prophets and fake messiahs in the years 30-70 A.D., and nothing changed. There are still plenty of false teachers around today

trying to lead people away from Jesus. Be careful. False teachers are the devil's most effective way to damage Christ's church.

There will be human disasters, such as wars.

And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. Mark 13:7 (ESV)

Between the years 30 and 60 A.D., there was war between the Parthians and the Romans. There were also constant minor wars in and around Israel. Jesus said that when people heard of wars, and rumors of wars, that would *not* be a sign the destruction of Jerusalem was near. Wars and rumors of wars are a normal part of living in a fallen world filled with sin.

I occasionally have well-meaning people tell me they are sure Jesus is returning soon because there is so much war and turmoil in the world. Are they right? Maybe. Maybe not. War will always take place in a fallen, sinful world. It is a false sign. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history, there were only 268 without war. Since 1985, almost half a million people have died every year in war. War may leave us feeling like the end is near, but it is not necessarily a sign the end is near.

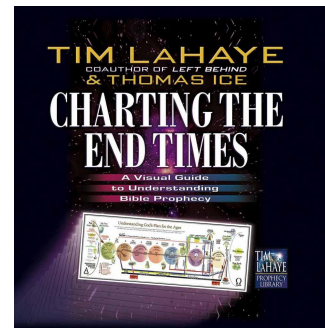
There will be natural disasters, such as earthquakes.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. Mark 13:8 (ESV)

There were numerous earthquakes before 70 A.D. One destroyed Laodicea, another one Philippi, another Corinth, another Cyprus. If you were living in the first century and earthquakes were destroying your cities, what would be your normal response? You would think God was angry and the end was near.

That was not true. They are false signs we should not follow. In addition to earthquakes, Mount Vesuvius erupted around this time burying the city of Pompei in lava and ashes. Jesus said earthquakes, famines, and erupting volcanoes are all a normal part of living in a fallen sinful world where the curse of sin has infected creation.

In spite of Jesus claiming wars and natural disasters are false signs of Jerusalem's destruction and false signs of the end of the world, there still has developed a large cottage industry of people creating books and charts claiming they can show us when the end of the world will take place based on things like wars and earthquakes. The problem is, they have all proved wrong and will continue to be proven wrong. They are looking at false signs.



All those natural disasters and human disasters are false labor pains. They are just part of living on a planet under the curse of sin.

Next. Jesus moved from false signs of Jerusalem's destruction to what life would be like for Christians from the years 30-70 A.D. By the way, not much has changed between then and now.

What should Christians expect in life?

Expect to be persecuted and dragged into courts.

"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them." Mark 13:9 (ESV)

Jesus warned Christians they should expect to face persecution, not just from the Jewish people and Jewish courts, like the Sanhedrin, but also from

Gentile courts. Just as Jesus experienced false charges in Jewish courts and the Roman courts, Christians should expect to experience the same thing. Paul also experienced false charges by the Jewish courts and was dragged into Roman courts. In America, when pastors and churches were fined during COVID-19 for being open and preaching the gospel while liquor stores, abortion clinics, and Wal-Mart were encouraged to be open, it was not an unexpected situation. Jesus told us it would be this way.

What we should notice is that God is in control of all of suffering Christians face. God orchestrated Christians being arrested so when they were arrested they could be witnesses for the gospel when they were brought before governors and kings to defend themselves in court. As Christians, there is no suffering we face without a purpose and that is not used by God for his good purposes.

If you are arrested for being a Christian, how many of us would think the reason God ordained for that to happen is so we could be a witness for the gospel to people we wouldn't normally meet? Most of us would be crying to God asking him to take us out of those hard times when here we find he puts Christians in hard times so they can share the gospel. Most of us don't think that way, yet that is the true biblical picture of why God ordains for his children to face suffering and trials.

So when we face suffering and persecution, it is so God can move us to places we wouldn't normally go, so we meet people we wouldn't normally meet, so the gospel is heard from our lips by people who wouldn't normally hear.

A good example of this is the Apostle Paul in Acts 26. He was arrested for being a Christian. When he was taken through the Roman court system, he eventually was given the opportunity for his case to be heard before King Agrippa. What did Paul do before that king? He shared his testimony on how he became a Christian, then he invited King Agrippa to become a Christian. King Agrippa responded to Paul by saying, “Are you trying to make me a Christian in such a short time?” Paul’s response to him was, “My prayer is that you become just like me except for these chains.”

When Paul was arrested for his faith, he knew it was all part of God’s plan to take him places he wouldn’t go, to share the gospel with people he wouldn’t meet, so the gospel would be heard by people that otherwise would never know it.

Nothing has changed. The same is still true for you and me today. God is large and in charge over all the suffering and persecution we face, and he uses it to bring us into contact with people who need to hear the gospel from our lips.

Expect the gospel will be proclaimed to all nations.

And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. Mark 13:10 (ESV)

This statement appears to interrupt the flow of what Jesus is telling us. It appears to refer to what must happen before Jesus returns at the end of the world, not what will happen before the destruction of Jerusalem took place. Many people who study world missions use this verse to claim Jesus will not return until the gospel has been proclaimed to all people groups. While I strongly affirm the need to finish the task of world evangelism. It is unlikely this particular verse means the gospel must be proclaimed to all nations before Jesus can return.

Remember the context. Jesus was answering the question about what would precede the destruction of Jerusalem. He gave his disciples false signs many people would point to as evidence God's judgment was near. In this paragraph, Jesus was telling his disciples what life would be like and what would happen before God brought judgment upon Jerusalem and his temple.

It sounds impossible to think the gospel would be proclaimed to all nations before 70 A.D., until we read this in its first century context. Nobody at that time knew about North America or South America. Nobody knew about Antarctica. All nations, as far as they were concerned, was a much smaller portion of the world. Most of it was conquered by Rome. What we find is that by the year 70 A.D., the gospel had spread to all corners of the known world at that time. This Scripture was fulfilled by 70 A.D.

Expect the Holy Spirit will give Christians the wisdom what to say when brought to trial.

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Mark 13:11 (ESV)

Jesus promised that when Christians were arrested and brought to trial for their faith, the Holy Spirit would give them words to speak. We see this fulfilled in Acts 4:13 when the apostles were arrested and spoke before the Sanhedrin. The Jewish leaders were amazed at how they conducted themselves and communicated the gospel when they were but unschooled ordinary men. I can tell you why they did such a great job — Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit would help them in their time of need.

This verse is sometimes misused. Some people read it and assume this means there is no need to study, read, or prepare. They think all we need to do is speak what comes to mind when sharing for Christ. That is not true. The context is talking about times when Christians were arrested and thrown in jail without the ability or time to prepare.

This verse was a great comfort for first century Christians who were unexpectedly arrested, thrown in jail, and had to quickly defend themselves and share the gospel. This verse should also be a great comfort to us. When we are unexpectedly put in situations where we do not have time to prepare to be a good witness for Christ, the Holy Spirit will work in us help us.

Expect to be betrayed, even by family.

And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. Mark 13:12 (ESV)

Jesus said Christians should expect to even be betrayed by their families. Expect to not just experience conflict and betrayal from people outside the church, but expect it to happen inside the church, even expect it from your own family. This is part of what it means to live in a fallen and sinful world.

Jesus experienced this. Remember Judas. At the Last Supper, according to the Gospel of John, Judas sat at the place of honor for that meal. He was second in command and highly honored in that moment, yet he left the meal and betrayed Jesus to death. That is horrifying. Jesus said expect that kind of treatment from your own family and those closest to you.

Betrayals like this are not directly mentioned in the New Testament as happening in the first century church, but Tacitus, a Roman historian who wrote

during the first century, describes that kind of persecution happening to Christians. Roman leaders would occasionally arrest Christians, torture them until they gave up the names of other Christians, even their own family members, then those Christians were arrested and tortured to gain more names. Jesus said to be prepared. This was not unexpected.

Expect to be hated for Christ, but enduring to the end means you will be saved by Christ.

And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Mark 13:13 (ESV)

Jesus came out and said what of us don't want to hear — if you are a Christian, expect to be hated for following Jesus. Being a Christian is not intended to gain popularity. It is not an easy thing. Earlier in this gospel, Jesus said becoming a Christian means we decide to take up our crosses and follow him. This is not popular today but it is true. Becoming a Christian means you decide to have such loyalty to Jesus as your savior that you are willing to die in order to follow him. Becoming a Christian means being willing to lose your life in order to follow Jesus. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, all who live a godly life in Jesus will be persecuted.

Jesus finished this by reminding us that those who endure to the end will be saved. Jesus didn't say we earn our salvation by endurance. We prove our salvation by enduring persecution and suffering for following Jesus. As we learned in our study of the book of James, superficial faith will always collapse under persecution. If there is genuine faith, people will draw closer to Jesus in times of persecution, not fall away from him. Falling away from Christ in tough

times is evidence someone never knew him. Drawing closer to Jesus in tough times is evidence you have genuinely known him. Look how the Apostle John talks about this.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19 (ESV)

At this point, Jesus had given false signs of Jerusalem's destruction. The first century church was not to be distracted by them. Wars, earthquakes, persecution, false teachers, and even your own family betraying you is all a normal part of living in a fallen and sinful world. Now Jesus gave his disciples the true sign they should look for so they would know the destruction of Jerusalem was near.

The abomination of desolation is the true sign of Jerusalem's destruction.

But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Mark 13:14 (ESV)

Now things get interesting. The sign of Jerusalem's destruction was the abomination of desolation. What is that? The abomination of desolation is referred to three times in Daniel (9:27, 11:21, 12:11). The best way to understand it is to simply break the words apart. Abomination means to make something horrid and detestable. Desolation means to run away from something because it has become so disgusting. If you have ever seen a dog hit by a car on the side of the road so it has rotted for a few days in the sun and burst open, you understand this term. The rotting dog stinks. It is disgusting. The smell of death is putrid. You would never bring that dog home, put him on your couch, pat him on the head and rub him behind the ears. The dog, that was intended to be a

beautiful animal, has turned into a putrid and disgusting animal that you want to get away from. That is a mini abomination of desolation. When Daniel talked about the abomination that produces desolation, he was referring to the same type of thing, but instead of talking about an animal, he was talking about worship of God. He was referring to someone who would take the beautiful worship of God and turn it horrid and disgusting so people would run from worship of God, not be drawn to worship of God.

Did that ever happen? When Daniel originally used this term, he was prophetically speaking about what happened in 167 B.C. when the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem and desecrated the temple. He outlawed worship of God. He sacrificed pigs on the altar. He put a statue of Zeus and an image of himself in the temple, since he thought he was a god. He forbid the Jews from circumcising their children. He turned the temple chambers into houses of prostitution. As a result, the Jews abandoned the temple; his abomination of worship resulted in a desolation of worship by the Jews. They ran from God's house. They were not drawn to God's house. This lasted for three years until 164 B.C. when a Jewish group called the Maccabees successfully led a revolt to get the temple back. To commemorate the rededication of the temple by the Maccabees, the festival of Hanukkah was created.

Jesus saw a second fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. There would be a second desecration of the temple that would be so bad it would cause the Jews to once again give up worship in the temple and run from it.

At this point, some Bible teachers I respect say this entire section deals with the last seven years of history and the great tribulation. While I respect them, on this particular issues I don't agree with them. That is not the primary focus of the text. Jesus had not changed topics. He was still answering the disciple's question about what the sign they should look for was to know the destruction of the temple is near.

If we put our fingers in the books of history, we find interesting events that took place in the temple shortly before Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans. At that time, the Zealots took over temple worship. You may remember that group from your Bible reading. The Zealots were first century terrorists who would knife people in crowds. They were the worst of Antifa and BLM rolled into one. When this terrorist group took over temple leadership, it installed a completely unqualified high priest to direct it — a man named Phanni. The Jews of the city called him "the clown," because his leadership was a joke. He came from a criminal background. He turned the temple into a place for criminal activity, even having people murdered in the temple itself.

That is quite an abomination of worship. Do you think it resulted in desolation of worship by the people? It certainly did. Nobody wanted to be associated with an unqualified high priest who was a criminal and a murderer. I think this was what Jesus was talking about. "When you see that happen, get out of Jerusalem in a hurry. That is the sign you are looking for. Jerusalem's destruction is right around the corner."

It is also helpful for us to remember this same Olivet discourse is recorded

in Matthew and Luke, not just Mark. This is very helpful because Matthew and Luke provide a few extra details about what Jesus said at this time. It helps us understand what Jesus was talking about. When Luke wrote his Gospel, he wrote primarily to Gentile readers who did not have backgrounds in Jewish literature, such as the book of Daniel. The abomination of desolation would not be a ready reference to them in their minds. This is why Luke tells us a little more of what Jesus said at this time. It is very helpful.

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Luke 21:20 (ESV)

Luke retained the key word desolation so we know we are talking about the same thing.

Jesus said that when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by an army, that was the sign. They were to get out of town as fast as possible. God's judgment had come. When the Roman army first surrounded Jerusalem, there was a small window of time to run from the city. That window of time quickly closed because the Romans dug a trench around the city and erected a waterway around the city, cutting it off from the outside world, making it impossible for anyone to escape.

As we continue in Mark, look how Jesus prophetically talked about the small window of time Christians had once the Roman army arrived and the importance of taking advantage of it to escape God's judgment on Jerusalem.

Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. Mark 13:15–18 (ESV)

At the beginning of this gospel, we studied houses in the ancient world. People spent a lot of time on the flat roofs of their houses. We also learned ancient houses had staircases to get to the roof but they were never inside the house. They were always outside, on the back of the house. Jesus said, “When you see the Roman army starting to surround Jerusalem, get off your roof and run. Don’t even go into your house to pack. There is not time.” When people were working in the field, as the day warmed, they would leave their jackets at one end of the field, while they worked at the other end of the field. Jesus said, “When you see the Roman armies, don’t bother to run back to the edge of the field to get your jacket. Just run for your life as fast as you can. There is only a small window of time.” Jesus said this would be especially hard for mothers with children. They were to pray God didn’t bring his judgment in winter, because hat would make running for their lives particularly hard.

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. Mark 13:19–20 (ESV)

Let’s just admit, this language seems rather extreme. The first thing that comes to mind is, “How can this refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans? This sounds like it is referring to Jesus’ return and the end of the world.” In all of history, were there more destructive times in history than the Romans siege of Jerusalem? Grammatically, it is hard to make this refer to the great tribulation and the end of the world because Jesus had not switched topics. He was still answering the disciples’ question about what sign they should look for regarding the coming judgment and destruction of Jerusalem.

How should we understand this extremely language used by Jesus? I think it is likely that Jesus was using hyperbolic language, that is language of exaggeration, used to make a point. If you study Jesus, he loved to use hyperbolic language to make his points. Remember when he said, "First take the plank out of your own eye before you worry about the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye?" That is language of exaggeration used to make a point.

I think the point Jesus was making was the Romans' siege of Jerusalem would be mind-blowingly bad. It would be terrible beyond comprehension. It would rank in their minds as the most horrifying atrocity they would ever see in world history. That is exactly what happened.

How bad was the Roman siege of the city of Jerusalem? Josephus, an ancient historian, told us Jerusalem had 1.2 million people in it when the Romans began the siege. During the siege, the Romans killed 1.1 million. They killed them either by starvation, the sword or crucifixion. Every single person that tried to escape the city was crucified. The Romans crucified so many people they ran out of wood. Even though crosses were recycled, in all the land of Israel, every last bit of wood was used to make crosses to crucify people. Josephus described the roofs in the city filled with starving mothers holding starving babies dying in their arms. The reason the women stayed on the roof is because the streets were stacked with bodies of the dead who had starved to death. Those bodies were openly rotting. People were not buried when they died because there was no food left in the city. The Romans starved them to death so the people had no strength to pick up a shovel. Mothers in desperation ate their own children. When

the Romans finally breached the walls, they killed so many Jews the streets ran like rivers of blood up the ankles and legs.

Notice the way Josephus described destruction Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. Look at the language he used. It is eerily similar to the words Jesus used to describe Jerusalem's destruction as being the worst act of brutality in world history.

“Indeed, in my opinion, the misfortunes of all nations since the world began fall short of those of the Jews.” - Josephus, Jewish Wars, 1.12

Where was God in the midst of this destruction? Is there no mercy? Is there no kindness and grace? The answer is, God was on the throne the whole time and was in complete control of all of this. This was judgment upon Jerusalem for rejecting its savior Jesus. Even though that judgment was deserved, God was still merciful and kind. The text says God cut short the days of the Roman siege of Jerusalem so some would survive.

Isn't this what we see today? Mankind fell into sin. Mankind deserves God's wrath and judgment. God sent his own son to save us and rescue us but people have rejected God's mercy and grace through his son. God's judgment upon sin will eventually fall. It is called the lake of fire. Thankfully, in God's grace, he extends some mercy and not just judgment. He has called us and saved us by his son. He opened our hearts to see the beauty of his son and the greatness of his son so we can trust him and be saved.

Everything in the Olivet discourse in Matthew, Mark, and Luke up to this point has been Jesus answering the disciple's question about when the temple would be destroyed. Luke's gospel makes clear that after the destruction of the

temple there would be an indefinite period before the next events discussed by Jesus, which are his coming and the end of the age, take place. It is called the time of the Gentiles.

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Luke 21:24 (ESV)

After this, Jesus returned to where he started. It is extremely important we be careful of false prophets and false christs that want to lead us astray.

And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. Mark 13:21–22 (ESV)

One thing worth noting is Paul said false christs and false prophets will be able to perform signs and wonders intending to lead people astray. Just because someone can do something miraculous does not mean he or she is from God. Jesus warned us there will be people who can perform false miracles empowered by Satan in order to deceive people. We should prepare for that, expect that. Satan wants to counterfeit the true gospel with a false gospel. He tries to counterfeit true miracles with false, satanically-powered miracles. When we look at Islam, Buddhism, or other false religions, we do find some miraculous things happening. That doesn't mean they are from God. It doesn't mean they are true. Only Jesus is the truth. Expect to see false miracles from false teachers intending to lead you astray.

But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand. Mark 13:23 (ESV)

Jesus told his disciples all these things so they could be prepared to know when the destruction of Jerusalem would come. He told them the false signs not

to follow and the true sign of the desecration of the temple and the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies that would tell them the destruction of Jerusalem was near.

Next week, Jesus moves from talking about the destruction of Jerusalem to talking about the end of the world. I can't wait to tell you what he has to say. Before we go, let's wrap up with some key applications that we learned this morning.

Applications

What can we learn from this passage?

1. **Don't be deceived by false teachers.** Multiple times Jesus warned Christians there would be false teachers trying to lead people away from Jesus, both before and after 70 A.D. Some false teachers will even perform miraculous signs to lead people astray. Since Jesus talked about this twice, this means it is very important for us to watch out for these spiritual charlatans. While this was originally addressing people in the first century, we find plenty of false teachers today. An example of that is the prosperity gospel preachers. "Follow Jesus so you can get rich. That is very popular. It is not true. Jesus said Christians should expect to suffer, expect to be persecuted, expect to be betrayed. We are not to follow Jesus to be rich. We follow Jesus to be saved from our sin. The Jehovah's Witnesses are another false gospel. They claim Jesus was not God and didn't die for our sin. They claim Jesus and Satan are brothers. Nope. That is a lie. Don't be deceived. In many mainline denominations you find people who hold a low view of the Bible. They claim the Bible is riddled with errors and you can't trust it. That is a lie. Some pastors and churches teach homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle.

That is not in this book. Keep your finger in the text. Stay away from people who do not agree with this book. The best way we can avoid false teachers is to keep our fingers in this book, not put our fingers in a false teacher's book.

2. **Be careful of end time speculation.** It is interesting that Jesus began by giving a list of false signs of the end. Earthquakes, famines, plagues, and wars are not signs of the end of Jerusalem or the end of the world. He called them false labor pains. Earthquakes, plagues, famines, betrayal, and war are all part of living in a fallen world. Watch out for all the end time speculation guys and their books, especially when they think they can nail a date because of wars in the Middle East and natural disasters in this world. They are barking up the wrong tree. The most recent wing-nut who did this was a guy named Harold Camping. I grew up listening to him on the radio while eating breakfast before school. He thought he had it all figured out that Christ was going to return on May 21, 2011. He even put up billboards across the country to tell everyone about it. Guess what. He got it wrong. If he had read more of his Bible, he would have known Jesus said it is foolish to try to set a date, especially off of false signs of the end.



3. **We will face persecution and suffering, but God will use it for the spread of the gospel.** As Christians, we should expect to suffer. If the world did not love Jesus, don't expect the world will love us because we are following Jesus. The good news is God is large and in charge. When we face suffering and persecution, God promises to use those hard times in our lives as a

platform to further the gospel message through our lives. When our world starts falling apart, it is not because God has lost control. Everything happens to God's loved children for a purpose. Christians are persecuted, arrested, and even put in prison so God can take us to places we wouldn't go, to meet people we wouldn't meet, so the gospel message would be heard by people who wouldn't otherwise have a chance to hear it. Earlier, we heard how Paul was accused of being a Christian and God used it to give him a chance to share the gospel with King Agrippa. That happened more than once. Remember when we were studying the book of Philippians? Paul was still under arrest for being a Christian. He was in Rome under house arrest chained to a Praetorian guard. Paul reasoned from Jesus' words in this passage that God had him chained to these guards for a reason. God had taken him to a place he wouldn't have gone to meet people he wouldn't have met so people who wouldn't normally know the gospel would be able to hear. As we learned in Philippians, Paul shared the gospel with the guards that were chained to him. One by one they became Christians and returned to Caesar's own household, sharing the gospel when they returned. God used Paul's imprisonment as the way the household of Caesar would begin coming to Jesus! Folks the same is true for us today. I don't know what changes in plans you are facing. I don't know what disaster has hit your life. I don't know how your well laid plans have been turned upside down, but I do know that God is large and in charge. He has ordained it so that you would now meet people you wouldn't meet. You would go places you wouldn't go, and the

gospel would be heard by people who wouldn't otherwise hear. Let us pray.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

© You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided (1) you credit the author, (2) modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web address (www.Christ2RCulture.com) on the copied resource.

