

**Introduction**

1. Have you ever wondered when the world will end and what the end will be like?
  - a. Of course you have. Those are questions everyone asks at some point in life.
  - b. Whenever there are events like those that we have seen in the recent war between Russia and Ukraine, there is much speculation about whether those events are leading to the end of the world.
  - c. Jesus' disciples had questions about the end as they anticipated the coming of God's kingdom.
2. Jesus taught His inner circle of Peter, James, John, and Andrew about what lay ahead.
3. **Read Mk 13:1-27.**

**A. An Observation and Prediction about the Temple (1-2)**

1. Jesus and His disciples have concluded their time in the Temple and are leaving.
2. As they were leaving one of His disciples said, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (1)
3. The Grand Temple of Herod
  - a. Herodian Ashlars were the large stone blocks used to construct the Temple.
  - b. One cornerstone of the Temple that remains today in the temple foundation (i.e., the Western or Wailing Wall) is about 33 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 3 feet tall. It weighs about 50 tons.
  - c. Some of the stones in Herod's Temple were reported to be ". . . thirty-seven feet long by twelve feet high by eighteen feet deep" (James Brooks, *Mark*, 206 citing Josephus in *Antiquities* 15.11.3).
  - d. Fashioning these stones away from the temple grounds and moving them to the building site was one of the great engineering marvels of ancient times, somewhat akin to the building of the pyramids.
  - e. William Lane writes, "This complex of stone was one of the most impressive sights in the ancient world and was regarded as an architectural wonder. . . . As a mountain of white marble decorated with gold it dominated the Kidron gorge as an object of dazzling beauty" (William Lane, *Mark*, 451).
4. Looking at the massive stones, Jesus made a prediction, "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (2)

**B. Private Teaching on the Mt. of Olives (3-4)**

1. Teaching the Inner Circle
  - a. At His Transfiguration, Jesus had taken three disciples (i.e., Peter, James, and John) up on the mountain with him (cf., Mk 9:2).
  - b. During this private teaching time on the Mt. of Olives, which gave them a panoramic view of the temple complex, Jesus added Andrew, the brother of Peter, to the inner circle.
  - c. The Mount of Olives is associated in the OT with the day of the Lord and the coming of Messiah (cf., Zech 14:4). For Christians it is also the place where Jesus will descend at the Second Coming.
  - d. Certainly, the disciples wondered what Jesus had meant by His previous statement about the destruction of the Temple.
  - e. One of the four asked Jesus in private, ". . . when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" (3)
2. Jesus gave a lengthy discourse (vv. 5-27) in answer to this question about the destruction of the Temple.
  - a. This teaching is known as The Olivet Discourse or sometimes The Little Apocalypse.
  - b. This difficult teaching of Jesus is also recorded in slightly different forms in Matthew (i.e., Mt 24:1-51) and Luke (i.e., Lk 21:5-36).
3. Frameworks for Interpreting Mark 13:5-27
  - a. This passage is notoriously hard to interpret with faithful teachers coming to different conclusions.
  - b. Some commentators, such as Warren Wiersbe, apply this passage primarily to future events. For example, Wiersbe outlines the passage as follows (Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 147-57):
    - 1) The first half of the tribulation after the rapture of the church per 1 Th 4:13-5:11 (vv. 5-13)
    - 2) The middle of the tribulation (vv. 14-18)
    - 3) The end of the tribulation (vv. 19-27)

- c. Other commentators see this passage as related to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans CE 70.
- d. I prefer a third option which blends the two views of both impending and far future events.
- e. John Grassmick in his commentary on Mark writes, “. . . Jesus skillfully wove together into a unified discourse a prophetic scene involving two perspectives: (a) the near event, the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70); and (b) the far event, the coming of the Son of Man in clouds with power and glory. The former local event was a forerunner of the latter universal event. In this way Jesus followed the precedent of Old Testament prophets by predicting a far future event in terms of a near future event whose fulfillment at least some of His hearers would see (cf., Mark 9:1, 12-13)” (Grassmick, *Mark*, 168).

### C. The Olivet Discourse (5-27) – A Portrait of the Future

#### 1. Portrait Background - Global Conditions from Now to the End (5-13)

- a. Jesus laid out the general circumstances in the world that His followers should expect from this point forward until the end of time.
- b. “Watch out that no one deceives you.” (5)
  - 1) “Watch out” (Gk., *blepete*) - This is the first of four occurrences (vv. 5, 9, 23, 33) in the discourse.
  - 2) The focus of watching is to not be deceived (Gk., *planese*). In Mk 12:27 Jesus used this word in describing the bad theology of the Sadducees when He said, “You are badly mistaken.”
  - 3) Lane writes, “They are to ‘take care’ that they are not deceived by the course of events into thinking that the end has come” (Lane, 445).
- c. Four things will continue to occur while Jesus’ followers await the end of time.
  - 1) False messiahs – “Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ . . .” (5)
    - a) “I am” is similar to Jesus’ “I am” sayings in John. It is a claim to be God.
    - b) James Brooks notes, “. . . there were messianic figures, such as the Egyptian in Acts 21:38 . . . About A.D. 132 Simon bar Kosiba evidently claimed to be the Messiah and led another revolt against Rome . . .” (Brooks, 208-209).
    - c) Luke mentioned a “false prophet named Bar-Jesus” in Ac 13:6.
    - d) Even in our times, David Koresh (ca. 1993) was a cult leader and head of the Branch Davidians in Waco, TX who claimed to be God’s final prophet and messiah.
  - 2) Wars between nations – “. . . rumors of wars . . . Nation will rise against nation . . .” (7-8a)
    - a) There have been many wars and will continue to be wars to the end of time.
    - b) Our most recent example is Russia rising up against Ukraine.
  - 3) Natural disasters - “. . . earthquakes . . . famines . . .” (8b)
    - a) These disasters are not necessarily sent as judgments from God.
    - b) They are signs that we live in a fallen and sinful world that has rebelled against God.
- d. Jesus says, “These are the beginning of birth pains” (8c).
  - 1) They are things that have happened since Jesus’ first coming and will continue to happen until the end of time. These are not signs the end is imminently near and will continue until the actual end.
  - 2) The world is a fallen and sinful place until Jesus returns to rule with justice and righteousness.
  - 3) Daniel Akin writes, “Like the labor pains of a woman that grow in intensity before the blessed birth of the baby, distress will increase before the glorious end” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 309).
- e. The fourth continuing occurrence that will affect believers is personal persecution.
  - 1) A second time, Jesus counseled, “You must be on your guard (Gk., *blepete* – “watch out”) (9a)
  - 2) This time His followers are to watch out for persecution that will come their way because of their faith from this point to the end of time.
  - 3) Lane observes, “Persecution does not mean that the end has come, nor is it an occasion for the loss of hope. It is rather an occasion for witness to the nations, for this must take place before the end comes” (Lane, 445).
  - 4) Jesus said to His followers, “You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues” (9b).
    - a) “handed over” (Gk., *paradidomai*) appears three times in this section (vv. 9, 11, 12).
      - 1 - This is the verb used ten times in Mark 14-15 to describe what was done to Jesus.
      - 2 - If this is how Jesus was treated, then His followers should expect no less.

- b) “local councils” (Gk., *synedria* – Sanhedrin) - We know that Peter and John as well as the other apostles soon ran afoul of the Sanhedrin just as Jesus had (cf., Ac 4:1-22; 5:17-42).
  - c) “flogged in the synagogues” - Paul was flogged five times with the “forty lashes minus one” (2 Cor 11:24).
- 5) “On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them” (9c)
- a) Peter was arrested to stand trial before Herod Agrippa I (cf., Ac 12:1-19).
  - b) On his first missionary journey, Paul was tried by Sergius Paulus in Cyprus (cf., Ac 13:7).
  - c) On his second missionary journey, Paul was tried by Gallio in Corinth (cf., Ac 18:12).
  - d) At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (cf., Ac 21:27-22:29), stood trial before the Sanhedrin (cf., Ac 22:30-23:11), was transferred to Caesarea to stand trial before the Governor Felix (cf., Ac 24:1-27), was held and tried again by the new Governor Festus and King Herod Agrippa II two years later (cf., Ac 24:27-26:32), and was finally remanded to Rome for trial (cf., Ac 27:1), we believe, before the emperor.
- 6) Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and the modern day “Voice of the Martyrs” website document many Christians who have suffered persecution for their faith in the centuries since the time of Jesus.
- a) There are many Christians in the world today, especially in the 10/40 window, who face persecution and possible execution for being Christians and preaching the gospel.
  - b) Daniel Akin writes, “In the last decade ‘there were on average, 270 new Christian martyrs every 24 hours,’ or approximately one million in the last 10 years (Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 310 citing Weigel, “Christian Number”).
- 7) Lane notes, “Mark cautions his readers that the community is to find its authentic eschatological dimension not in apocalyptic fervor but in obedience to Jesus’ call to cross-bearing and evangelism in the confidence that this is the will of God which must be fulfilled before the parousia” (Lane, 447).
- f. Jesus also said, “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations (Gk., *ethne*) (10).
- 1) Jesus’ focus was not on the persecution but on the preaching of the gospel because of it.
  - 2) Modern missiologists take this word “nations” to mean every people group or language.
  - 3) Groups, such as Wycliffe Bible Translators, work to translate the gospel into every human language, sometimes even creating a written form of the language in the process.
- g. When facing these persecutions, Jesus called on His followers to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead them through (11). Brooks notes, “Verse 11 is primarily a prohibition against anxiety, not against preparation” (Brooks, 210).
- h. Notice that spiritual relationships will supersede blood relationships (cf., vv. 12-13).
- 1) Blood relationships (e.g., brother, parent, child) will be disrupted because of differences in belief.
  - 2) Spiritual relationships (e.g., brothers and sisters in Christ) will be more important and truer.
  - 3) In certain parts of the Muslim world today, there is an expectation that the head of a family will kill anyone in that family who converts to Christianity.
  - 4) The key when facing persecution from any source but especially from family members is “to stand firm to the end” (Gk., *hupomeinas eis telos* – “an abiding endurance in spite of opposition”) (13).
2. Portrait Foreground - The Impending Destruction of Jerusalem (14-23)
- a. Lane notes, “This extended warning is tied to verse 4 by the reference to ‘all things’ in verse 23 and furnishes the most direct answer to the question of the disciples concerning *when* they could expect the destruction of the Temple. The entire section is to be interpreted in the light of the events which occurred in the turbulent and chaotic period A.D. 66-70” (Lane, 466).
  - b. So what is the “abomination that causes desolation” (Gk., *bdelugma tes epemoseos*)? (14)
    - 1) These words appear within quotation marks and are a reference back to the prophecy of Daniel.
    - 2) Matthew makes this reference clearer in his account when he writes, “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—” (Mt 24:15).
    - 3) Luke adds that one will know this this time has arrived, “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near” (Lk 21:20).

- 4) Let's examine the three abominations mentioned in Dan 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11.
- a) "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (Dan 9:27).
    - 1 – This abomination may be related to the desecration of the temple in 167 BCE by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian ruler of Palestine, who sacrificed a pig on the altar of sacrifice and set up an altar to Zeus in the Temple.
    - 2 – This idolatrous act led to the Maccabean Revolt and a brief period of Jewish self-rule under the Hasmonean Dynasty.
  - b) "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation" (Dan 11:31).
    - 1 – This abomination may be related to the one perpetrated by the Roman General Titus when he entered and desecrated the Temple.
    - 2 – This abomination would occur in CE 70 as predicted in vv. 14-23.
  - c) "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days" (Dan 11:31).
    - 1 – This final abomination may relate to the event described below in vv. 20-24.
    - 2 – This final abomination may anticipate a climactic desecration and destruction of the Temple just prior to Jesus' Second Coming at the end of time.
- c. The time described in vv. 14-23 will be a desperate time of great distress calling for immediate action by those seeing these signs.
- 1) "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (14)
  - 2) Don't go back for anything in your house or field. Simply flee (15-16).
    - a) If you are on the roof, go down the back stairs and don't go in the house to get anything.
    - b) If you are working in the field, don't even pause to get your coat, just run for the hills.
  - 3) It will be a hard time for "pregnant women and nursing mothers" as well all who are weak. (17)
  - 4) These words remind me of the images of desperate refugees recently fleeing from Ukraine.
- d. The only hint of mercy is that by God's grace these events won't take place in winter when the wadis are filled and unpassable due to runoff in the rainy season. (18)
- e. ". . . those will be days of distress (Gk., *thipsis* – "tribulation") unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (19).
- f. If God doesn't intervene, the destruction will be complete. (20)
- g. False messiahs will continue to proclaim themselves as they had in vv. 5-6. (21-22)
- h. Jesus concludes this section with the command, "So be on your guard (Gk., *blepete*); I have told you everything ahead of time."
- 1) Lane notes, "The people of God, however, have been forewarned and must 'take care' to avoid being deceived (verse 23)" (Lane, 445).
  - 2) Jesus clearly warned His disciples about the impending destruction of Herod's Temple.
    - a) However, the destruction of the Temple has more to do with the end of the institution than with the physical destruction of the building.
    - b) The concept of temple is also applied to the body of Jesus, which is destroyed in crucifixion but raised again three days later by the power of God in the resurrection (cf., Mk 14:57-62).
    - c) "The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' They replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (Jn 2:18-22).
    - d) The Temple of Herod was destroyed by the Romans in CE 70 and lies in ruins today.
    - e) For believers, Jesus, our Great High Priest, is the Temple to whom we direct our worship (cf. Heb 7:11-28).
    - f) There will be no need for a temple in the coming kingdom of God since, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:3b-4).

- i. Lane concludes, “. . . the response to the question of verse 4 is complete with verse 23. All that remains is to announce the final victory of the Son of Man” (Lane, 473).
3. Portrait Horizon - The Final Apocalypse (24-27)
- a. “But in those days, following that distress . . .” (24) – This phrase points to a future time beyond the destruction of Herod’s Temple predicted in vv. 14-23.
    - 1) The destruction of the Temple is not a sign the end is near.
    - 2) What Jesus predict in vv. 24-27 lies in the distant and unknown future.
  - b. Jesus does not cite particular OT passages but alludes to many OT prophecies in the words that He uses (cf., Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:10,31, 3:15; Dan 7:13-14). His words also affirm some of the visions that John would later have in Revelation (cf., Rev 6:13-14, 7:9-10).
  - c. This future time will be apocalyptic, that is it will be a time when the normal order of things in both human relationships and the cosmos will be disrupted and the glory of God will be revealed.
    - 1) “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (24b-25)
    - 2) These words allude to the end time occurrences in Isaiah’s vision of the judgement of Babylon (cf., Isa 13:10) and all nations (cf., Isa 34:4).
    - 3) They also relate to John’s vision of the opening the sixth seal of judgment in Rev 6:12-14.
  - d. These days of greatest distress will be cut short by the return of the Son of Man.
    - 1) Of course, Jesus’ reference to the “Son of Man” is the clearest gospel reference to Dan 7:13, and it is also Jesus’ favorite name for Himself.
    - 2) The image in Daniel 7:13-14 is similar to what Jesus described here as the Son of Man comes forth from the presence of God with all power and glory.
    - 3) The Son of Man’s return will restore order to the chaos and bring God’s justice and righteousness in a powerful, eternal rule over creation.
  - e. The Son of Man will command “his angels and gather his elect (Gk., *eklektous* – “eclectic; an unusual or varied collection”)
    - 1) God’s people will come from every nation where the gospel has been proclaimed from the four corners of the earth. (27)
    - 2) This vision relates to the gathering of God’s people envisioned both by OT prophets (cf., Isa 5:26; Ezek 36:24, 37:21; Zech 10:8) as well as John’s vision of the multitude from every nation gathered at the Throne of God in Rev 7:9-10.
  - f. Later, Jesus’ words concerning “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mk 14:62) in regard to Himself solidifies the charge of blasphemy again Him and leads to the Sanhedrin condemning him to death. After we conclude our look at the Little Apocalypse in our next lesson, we will move into Mark’s passion narrative (Mark 14-16), the final, climactic section of his gospel.

#### **D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection**

1. Do you worry and fret about the end times?

Brooks notes, “The major concerns in Mark’s account of Jesus’ last words to his disciples are to watch for his return and not to be deceived by upsetting events or persons in the meantime. Not even the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple was to dismay the disciples. The temple was no longer to be the focus of Christian hope” (Brooks, 205).

2. What should you be doing while you await Jesus’ return?

Lane notes that our task “. . . is to be vigilant so as not to be led astray and to refuse to be disturbed by contemporary events, which are in God’s control” (Lane, 459).

3. Are you faithful and obedient to God even in times of personal and global distress?

4. Do you stay on mission with the Lord even when facing personal persecution?

- a) How can the persecution of Christians today result in the spread of Christianity?
- b) What should be our Christian view of death as a possible result of persecution?

5. How do you personally embrace the kingdom reality that suffering is required on the road to ultimate vindication and glory?