

Coming of the Son of Man

Lesson Text: Mark 13:14-27

Background Scripture: Mark 13:1-27

Devotional Reading: 2 Peter 3:3-14

Mark 13:14–27

¹⁴ “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’^[a] standing where it^[b] does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. ¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁷ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter, ¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.

²⁰ “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. ²¹ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁴ “But in those days, following that distress, “‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ ²⁶ “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

LESSON AIMS

- **Facts:** to show some of the signs that will precede the second coming of our Lord Jesus to earth.
- **Principle:** to show that Jesus is coming with power and great glory.
- **Application:** to realize that if the Bible teaches us that Jesus is coming soon in glory, we must do all we can to be ready.

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that the theme of the Old Testament is that Christ is coming, the theme of the four Gospels is that Christ has come, and the theme of the rest of the New Testament is that Christ is coming again. There is basic truth in the approach.

Discussions concerning the Second Coming always elicit significant debate among those among those who profess to believe the Bible to be God’s Word. Sadly, more fire than light is often generated! Even so, those who accept the divine origin of the Scriptures do not always agree about the details of end-times events. Since these things have not yet occurred, we must be cautious about being too dogmatic concerning our preferred understanding of the last days.

Two extremes must be avoided. First, some find that the study of last things, or eschatology, should be avoided because of the controversial nature and the uncertainty of the topic. Second, some develop tunnel vision regarding prophecy and fail to study anything else, thus avoiding serious study of other important Bible doctrines.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 30 **Place:** Mount of Olives (overlooking Jerusalem)

Today’s text is part of a long discourse that Jesus gave to His disciples in the week leading up to His crucifixion and resurrection. In the days preceding, Jesus was acclaimed by the crowds as God’s king (Mark 11:9,10). He took action against those doing business in the temple courts (11:15–19). And He gave a vivid picture of the religious leaders’ rejection of Him and of the judgment that God would bring on them in response (12:1–12).

In this setting, Jesus told His disciples that they could expect the magnificent temple structure to be destroyed (Mark

13:2). Expecting that Jesus was about to assert himself as God's king, the disciples likely believed that the destruction of the temple would mean that God would immediately replace it with a greater temple that would fulfill His promises (Isaiah 56:7). Surely the destruction of the temple must mean that God's glorious reign was about to be revealed in full!

But instead of speaking about glory, Jesus warned about difficulty and hardship. In the paragraphs just preceding today's text, Jesus cautioned His disciples to expect more of what they had experienced in the past: wars, earthquakes, famines, and persecution (Mark 13:3–13). Yet in the midst of all that, they could remain confident that God would be with them and would be victorious (13:26,27). (Parallels to today's text are Matthew 24:15–31; Luke 21:20–28.)

GREAT ABOMINATION (Mark 13:14)

Mark 13 (with parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21) is called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus spoke about Jerusalem's destruction *"as he sat there on the mount of Olives"* (Mark 13:3).

As they sat overlooking the city (from the Mount of Olives), His closest disciples asked Him when these things would take place (Mark 13:4). Jesus began by telling them that false Christs would arrive (v. 6), *"wars and rumors of wars"* (v. 7) would occur, and earthquakes and famines would be frequent. These signs, however, were just *"the beginnings of birth pains"* (v. 8). This would be followed by the intense persecution of the faithful (v. 9).

1) Why is this section of Scripture called the Olivet Discourse? (Mark 13)

We now come to one of the most significant signs mentioned in this discourse: *"the abomination that causes desolation"* (Mark 13:14). Not only is it significant; it has also been the subject of seemingly endless debate!

As to the entire chapter, the chief interpretive question concerns whether Christ was primarily talking about the Jerusalem of His day, or the Jerusalem of the end times, or both! While some Bible students tend to lean one way or the other, most think that Jesus was dealing with both the Jerusalem that would be destroyed in A.D. 70 and a rebuilt Jerusalem after that time, perhaps including an end-time temple.

Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) first speaks of the abomination of desolation, so Christ was not delivering new revelation to His disciples but interpreting what had already been foretold. Many believe this refers to events that will occur during the Great Tribulation. Some suggest Daniel's prophecy referred primarily to what occurred during the Maccabean period, when the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes (ruled 175-164 B.C.), desecrated the temple by erecting an image of Zeus in the temple and sacrificing swine on its altar.

However, since Christ spoke *"but when you see the abomination that causes desolation"* (Mark 13:14) as something future, it could not have had its primary meaning in a past event. Christ understood the abomination of desolation to be a person, most likely Paul's *"man of lawlessness"* (2 Thess. 2:3), *"oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God, or is worshipped; so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God"* (v. 4). This person is the end-time Antichrist...He will make a covenant with the Jewish people at the beginning of the seven-year period preceding Christ's second coming" (Alvord and Suck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

2) Where do we first read of the abomination that causes desolation in the Bible? What are some possible meanings of this? (Mark 13:14)

GREAT AFFLICTION (Mark 13:15-20)

Verses 15-20 vividly describe the terror involved; no other tribulation is equal to it, *"never to be equaled again"* (v. 19). It, therefore, must be the Great Tribulation of the book of the Revelation.

If Christ had been referring only to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, these events would have been the worst that the world has ever seen. But Jesus indicated that this future time of affliction would be worse than anything ever seen in world history. That being so, His words have an ominous end-times ring.

Since these last days would be so catastrophic, the Lord would actually shorten them. Otherwise, no one would *"survive"* (v. 20), likely a reference to physical survival, not salvation from sin. *"But for the sake of the elect, whom He has chosen, he has shortened the days"* of this time of testing. "God set limits on the duration of the end-time Tribulation... While all this proved true indirectly in A.D. 70, the language of this verse suggests God's *direct* intervention in judgment, an un-

mistakable characteristic of the end-time Tribulation" (Alvord and Suck).

3) *Why could some prophecies of Mark 13 not relate to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? (see v. 19)*

Jesus' words in verse 19 echo those of Daniel 12:1; coupled with Daniel's warning is a promise that God will faithfully deliver His people from the threat. Jesus makes the same point here. The coming siege of Jerusalem will be awful. But for Jesus' followers, the siege's awfulness will underline God's power and faithfulness. God will act as only He can to spare His people the full force of the siege's destruction.

The term *elect* is important in this verse. The word means "chosen" and is used in the Old Testament to refer to Israel as God's chosen people (Isaiah 45:4). Here Jesus uses it to identify His followers as the chosen people of God. As such, they can rely on God's provision in all circumstances, even the most extreme imaginable.

For His people, God has *shortened the days* of the upcoming disaster. Clearly, only God can control the events of history in a way that can be described as shortening the days. The full measure of His divine power will be at work to protect His people in their time of trouble.

4) *Who are the elect and why would the Lord shorten the days of tribulation for them? (v.20)*

WARNING OF FALSE MESSIAHS (Mark 13:21-23)

During the coming hardships, Jesus' followers can easily believe that He is not in control of events. The crisis can induce them to look elsewhere for God's deliverer.

So Jesus warns the disciples beforehand of the temptation to follow another. Others will claim to have found the Messiah.

Both from antiquity and likely intensifying as we approach the end of time, "false Christs and false prophets shall rise." Christians are to be on guard against such deceivers and not be gullible enough to believe those who might proclaim that they have found the Christ or received some new revelation from God (Gal. 1:8,9).

In our day there are those who either claim to be Christ or avow some new insight from on high. It seems that the more bizarre a false teaching is, the more people want to believe it. Of course, this is nothing new. Anyone who has studied church history knows that there are many examples of both deceivers and those being deceived. That this is an ongoing problem among God's people is seen from the many warnings given concerning false teaching throughout the Scriptures.

5) *Why should Christians be on guard against false prophets? (v. 21)*

Of particular importance is the fact that these spiritual counterfeits claim miraculous powers. If they do show "signs and wonders" (Mark 13:22), it is either mere trickery or done by the power of Satan. "*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light*" (2 Cor. 11:13,14). That a person can perform miraculous signs does not necessarily mean he is a true child of God (Matt. 7:21-23).

6) *Do you think the signs and wonders of false prophets are real or fake? Why? (v. 22)*

False teachers, whether ancient or modern, have one goal: to deceive God's people, "the elect" (Mark 13:22). Since Satan has already deceived most men, they are not his primary targets. That Jesus included the words "if it were possible" seems to say that true believers will not be deceived by these pretenders.

As they say, forewarned is forearmed. Hence, Jesus' declaration that He has told us of these things in advance would serve as a reminder both to early disciples of Christ and to those of us who came along later. "Mark closes with another exhortation to remain alert and on guard; we must do our own part to resist the temptations of the false prophets" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). In short, we must not assume that because we are among the elect, we have no role to play in protecting ourselves and our churches from religious charlatans.

As an aside, it might be noted that many false teachers through the ages have claimed special insight concerning the

end times. This should not keep us from studying Bible prophecy, but it should cause us to listen cautiously to those who claim knowledge about prophetic themes that they claim have been kept hidden from others until they wrote a book on it!

7) Why are warnings about false teachers always relevant? (v. 23)

GREAT APPEARANCE (Mark 13:24-27)

While "tribulation" can be used of any time of testing or of affliction in general, it is used here of the Great Tribulation, which will precede Jesus' return. The Greek word rendered "tribulation" in Mark 13:24 is translated "*distress*" in verse 19.

Daniel 12:1 says, "*There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered*" (cf. Jer. 30:7; Rev. 7:14).

"*After that distress*" (Mark 13:24) indicates that Jesus' coming would closely follow this time of trouble. "If these verses apply exclusively to the events of A.D. 70 then Jesus Christ should have returned shortly thereafter. That He did not return then supports the view that verses 14-23 refer to both the destruction of Jerusalem and the future Great Tribulation before Christ will return" (Alvord and Suck).

Just prior to the return of Christ, cataclysmic events will occur in the heavens. How this will be interpreted by people viewing them is not stated (cf. Rev. 6:12-17). While such events might cause some to think the end is near, others will go about their daily business as in Noah's day. "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:38,39).

As to stars falling and heavenly powers being shaken (Mark 13:25), this "may refer to: (a) physical forces controlling the movements of the celestial bodies which will be thrown out of their normal course, or (b) spiritual forces of evil, Satan and his cohorts, who will be greatly disturbed by these events" (Alvord and Suck).

8) What events will precede Jesus' return? (vs. 24,25)

After all of the aforementioned events have occurred, "*men will see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*" Or as Revelation 1:7 says, "*Look, he is coming with the clouds,*" and "*every eye will see him, even those who pierced him*"; and *all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."*

Christ's coming in power and glory is vividly described in Revelation 19. In spite of the fact that "*the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, [will gather] together to make war against [Christ]... and against his army*" (v. 19), they will be decisively defeated by the King of kings. Then the beast and the false prophet will be "*thrown alive into fiery lake of burning sulfur*" (v. 20).

Concerning the elect, angels will gather them together "*from the ends of the earth*" (Mark 13:27). As in the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), both wheat and tares grow together until the harvest, which is "the end of the world;...As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world." In other words, we dare not wait until the end of time to try to get ready to meet God. "*now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Cor. 6:2).

As Christ brought the Olivet Discourse to a close, He reminded His disciples of two things. First, just as the leaves of a fig tree indicate that summer is near, so these signs indicate the nearness of Jesus' return (Mark 13:28-30). Second, since no one knows the precise time of Christ's coming (v. 32), we must be waiting, watching, and working until that day (vs. 33-37).

9) When Christ returns, who will see Him? What events will occur? (vs. 26, 27)

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God's people are not exempt from suffering and difficult times (Mark 13:14-16; cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).
2. A time of great tribulation is coming to the earth (Mark 13:17-19).
3. God's grace toward His people is evident even in the midst of tribulation (v. 20).
4. Beware – false christs are even now trying to deter us from following the real Christ (Mark 13:21-23; cf. 1 John 2:18).
5. Count on the fact that Jesus is coming again to rule and reign in power and glory (Mark 13:24-26).
6. When Jesus comes again, He will finally unite all His children from all the ages (v. 27).

CONCLUSION

The Lord Will Deliver

Centuries of history give us certain advantages over Jesus' disciples. As we read His words, we know how accurately He spoke. Wars, famines, and earthquakes have continued in every era. False Messiahs try to turn believers from their faith.

Jerusalem indeed was destroyed by the Romans. Jesus was right about all of that.

But just like Jesus' disciples, we daily confront a world filled with evil. We find ourselves victims of that evil. We are tempted to give in to despair. Like the disciples, we need the assurance that God does not abandon His people. Whatever trouble we face, we are not forsaken. The Lord can deliver us just as He did them. And when He returns, He returns for us. He will reign supreme, and His people will be the beneficiaries.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give us endurance as we face hardships. Give us confident hope for Your promised return. Give us trust in Your provision always. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”
(2 Corinthians 4:17).1