

Introduction: The Destruction of the Temple (13:1-2)

13:1 *And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him,*

“Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”

2 *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.”

Jesus has been saying that the exile is over –

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel

So the disciples are stunned when Jesus says that the temple will be destroyed.

This is not part of the program.

Ezekiel’s vision was that the temple would be *more* glorious

And Haggai had said “the latter glory of this house

shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.

And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.” (Hag. 2:9)

But now Jesus sounds like he is talking about exile again!

They have no conception of a restoration from exile that does not include the temple!

And so Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask him privately to explain:

1. Wars and Rumors of Wars: the Beginning of the Birth Pains (13:3-8)

3 *And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple,*

Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,

4 *“Tell us, when will these things be,*

and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”

The question that drives the whole discourse is the question about the destruction of the temple.

The temple stands for the old order – the Mosaic order.

Jesus point here is primarily pastoral:

he knows that his disciples are ready for an apocalyptic end to Roman rule,
and they are eager to see the restoration of the Davidic kingdom.

Jesus answers them by explaining to the how the Davidic kingdom will be restored.

In a nutshell the answer is:

“the end is not yet” (v5-8)

persecution will come (v9-13)

the abomination of desolation is the beginning (v14-23)

the Son of Man will come within ‘this generation (v24-31)

so be ready for the unknown day (v32-37)

As we go through Jesus' answer,
we should take seriously the *question* that he is answering.
They are asking, "you have just said that the temple will be destroyed –
and yet you have said that the kingdom is coming –
How does all this fit together?"

And Jesus explains to them how the destruction of the temple
fits into the coming of his kingdom.

5 *And Jesus began to say to them,*

"See that no one leads you astray.

6 Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.

7 And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed.

This must take place, but the end is not yet.

8 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.

In other words, Jesus is warning against two things:
those who will claim to be the Messiah;
and those who use current events to scare people into following them.

How often have Christians fallen prey to the sort of misinformation
that reads current events as the fulfillment of all things?

Please understand this,

when someone says to you,

"just read the newspaper and you can see that these are the end times"
you should respond by saying, "I'm not alarmed.

Jesus said that these things must happen – but the end is not yet!"

Jesus told his disciples that *they* would hear of wars and rumors of wars.
Ever since the first century this has been true.

Wars – even the overthrow of kingdoms (and republics!) –
do not mean that this is the end.

Earthquakes, famines – these are just the ordinary signs that judgment is coming
(and they have been ever since the fall!).

But what is the "end" that Jesus speaks of in v7.

If Jesus is answering the question of the disciples,
then the "end" must be the end of the age –
the age of Moses (the age of the temple).

Josephus speaks of many first century prophets
who claimed that they would restore the kingdom.

So when Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple and the end of the Mosaic age,

he says that wars, famines, and earthquakes
are simply “the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Jesus is telling you that you should not be led astray
by the doomsday warnings of prophecy mongers.
Famines, wars, and earthquakes *are* a sign of coming judgment –
but they do not demonstrate that *now* is the time.

They are a part of God’s common wrath which belongs to every generation.

And for that matter, even persecution is not the sign of the end:

2. The Gospel Proclaimed to All Nations in the Midst of Persecution (13:9-13)

9 *“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.*

10 *And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.*

Jesus’ first warning began, “See that no one leads you astray...” (v5).

Now his second warning begins the same way, “See” (v9)

(it gets translated “be on your guard” because it has the idea of “watch out” –
literally it says “but see yourselves!”)

This language of “watching” or “seeing” runs throughout the whole passage.

And Jesus tells his disciples that *they* will be persecuted.

The book of Acts recounts the fulfillment of this promise.

In the book of Acts the disciples are delivered to the councils,
they are beaten in synagogues,

they stand before governors and kings and bear witness to Jesus.

And the gospel is proclaimed to all nations.

Again, remember that the question is,

“when will the temple be destroyed?

When will your kingdom come?”

If Paul could say in Romans 15 that he has nowhere to go

where the gospel has not been preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum,

then Mark could easily believe that all nations have heard the word by 70 AD

And so Jesus says that the disciples must not fear:

11 *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.*

12 *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.
13 And you will be hated by all for my name's sake.
But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

This is why we sang Micah 7 earlier.

Jesus here echoes Micah 7 – even family members will turn against you.

What is interesting is that Matthew and Luke put this saying of Jesus
in the context of sending out the 72 during the ministry of Jesus.

Mark includes it here in the context of what will happen before the destruction of the temple.

In other words,

there is nothing new here!

This is what characterizes the ministry of Jesus' disciples.

They are hated, persecuted, and killed.

The key word here is paradidomi – to hand over:

you will be handed over (9, 11, 12)

(This will be a key word in Mark 14:10-11, 18, 21, 41-42; 15:1, 15)

The disciples will be like Jesus

And they will suffer on account of Jesus –
on account of my name.

Don't be afraid of suffering.

Don't be afraid of persecution.

Jesus told us that those who follow him will suffer.

And God's purpose in suffering is to conform you to Christ,
that you might resemble him.

That *doesn't* mean, however, that suffering is good in itself.

Suffering is horrible.

And it is okay to run away!

So long as you run in the right direction!

3. The Abomination of Desolation (13:14-23)

14 *"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.*

Once again a verb of seeing opens the passage.

"But when you see..."

In other words, now you are seeing what you were watching out for!

The disciples had asked, when will the temple be destroyed.

Jesus is now answering their question.

The language of “abomination of desolation” clearly draws us back to the temple.

Daniel had spoken of this abomination in Daniel 9:27 (cf. 11:31; 12:11).
Daniel clearly seems to be referring to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes
with the interruption of the sacrifices and the profanation of the temple.

This happens in 70 AD with the capture and devastation of Jerusalem.

And Jesus says, that when you see the invasion of Jerusalem coming:

*15 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out,
16 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.
17 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!*

In other words, you won't have much time – so make a run for it!

*18 Pray that it may not happen in winter.
19 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.
20 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.*

Josephus tells us of the horrors of the devastation in Jerusalem.

But you need to understand this not only in physical terms (it was horrible)
but also in spiritual terms.

After all, we are talking about the *destruction of the temple*.

This is the destruction of the place where earth and heaven meet.

This is the obliteration of the place where sin is forgiven
the place where man can meet with God.

We are talking about the end of the Mosaic Age.

We are talking about the catastrophic termination of all that mattered to God's people
(prior to the coming of Jesus).

But Jesus says that even though this is going to be a cataclysm of cosmic proportions,
do not be deceived:

*21 And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!'
do not believe it.
22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders,
to lead astray, if possible, the elect.
23 But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.*

Notice in verse 21 the word “look” (same word as v14) –

others will claim to speak for me.

And these false christs and false prophets will seek to lead astray even the elect (if possible).

Mark's way of putting it indicates that it is *not* possible to lead the elect astray –
but they may lead many astray.

And we do find in the first century that there were all sorts of people
claiming to come in Jesus' name.

And once again in verse 23 we hear, “watch out” (but see yourselves) –
be on your guard, because I have warned you.

4. The Coming of the Son of Man (13:24-27)

24 “*But in those days, after that tribulation,
the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,
25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.*”

In those days.

In what days?

In the days when the Romans invade Jerusalem and destroy the temple.

This is not referring to the end of history –
this is not referring to an event that is in *our* future.

This is referring to what happened in the disciples' future –
at 70 AD.

Why do I say this?

Because of how this connects with the prophets.

This is not climatic language.

This is not about earthly weather.

This is climactic language!

This is about the cataclysm of the ages.

And that will happen *in those days* – which connects verses 24-27 with what precedes it.

Isaiah 13:9-11 says,

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for its iniquity;

I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant,
and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.”

Is this talking about the end of history?

No, it is talking about the end of Babylon – when the Medes rise against them:

“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans,
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.” (v19)

So when Darius the Mede defeats the city of Babylon
the stars of the heavens ceased to give their light!

Or in Isaiah 34:4 when it says that

“All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll”
what is that referring to?

The very next verse says that God’s sword shall fall from the heavens against Edom.

And when God’s judgment comes against Jerusalem in Joel 3:15,

Joel says that the “sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.”

This is the language that symbolizes “political changes within world history,
and is not naturally to be understood of a literal collapse of the universe
at the end of the world.” (France, 533)

It is earth-shattering, not literally, but figuratively.

But now words that had originally been spoken against Babylon and Edom
are now leveled against the city of God and the holy temple.

26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

Now we turn to the positive side of this transformation that will take place in AD 70.

Daniel had seen the vision of the enthronement of the Son of Man
at the right hand of God.

In Daniel’s vision, the one like a Son of Man could be interpreted as Israel.

(After all, in Daniel it is “the saints of the Most High” who receive the kingdom).

Certainly that is the way that the Jews understood Daniel!

But all through his ministry,

Jesus has been redefining the meaning of “Son of Man” to mean himself.

Now Jesus says that the coming of the Son of Man in judgment against his enemies
will mean the destruction of the temple.

And then they will see (remember v14).

Who will see?

After all, we are not talking about the descent of the Son of Man to earth.

In Daniel's vision the "coming of the Son of Man"
is the coming of the Son of Man into the heavens.
As one scholar has rightly said,
"the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven
was never conceived as a primitive form of space travel,
but as a symbol for the mighty reversal of fortunes within history
and at the national level." (Caird, quoted in France, 535)
But the coming of Jesus to the right hand of the Father has visible consequences.

Jesus is King.

We do not yet see everything under his feet – but we see Jesus.
And when Jesus sits down at the right hand of the Father,
there are earthly consequences.

Remember that when Jesus died the veil of the temple was torn in two.
There was darkness on the earth.
There was an earthquake.
Some dead saints came back to life.
Likewise, when Jesus sat down at the right hand of God,
there were earthly consequences:

and those earthly consequences were focused on Jerusalem.

The transfer of authority from the earthly to the heavenly
resulted in the destruction of the earthly.
The coming of the Son of Man to the right hand of the Father
is demonstrated in the destruction of the temple.

So what?

So what!
Remember what the earthly temple was!
It was the place where God met with his people.
It was the place where earth and heaven met.
Without the temple in Jerusalem
man has no way to get to God!
There is no future for Israel apart from the temple!

Except Jesus.

*27 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.*

The prophets had spoken of how the exiles would be restored –
how God would bring his people back to the land,
and sometimes they also spoke of how the Gentiles
would come to Jerusalem as well.

Now Jesus says that when the Son of Man is seated at the right hand of God
he will send out his angels (the word means messengers)
to the four corners of the earth to gather his elect.

This is what I am doing right now!
Ever since AD 70 Jesus has sent out his messengers to bring his people home.

5. The Sign of the Fig Tree (13:28-31)

But the disciples had asked for a sign!
What is the sign of these things?

Jesus answers:

- 28 *“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.*
- 29 *So also, when you see these things taking place,
you know that he is near, at the very gates.*
- 30 *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*
- 31 *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

Just a couple days ago Jesus had cursed the fig tree
(as a sign of the coming curse upon the temple).
Now Jesus says that the sign they should seek
is the sign of the fig tree.

When you see all these things –
when you see [same “seeing” word as verse 14]
when you see the whole pattern of verses 5-27 –
then you know that the time is near.

And Jesus says that all this will happen in *this* generation.
And sure enough, 40 years later the temple is destroyed.
Jesus words were fulfilled.

6. Therefore, Stay Awake (13:32-37)

32 *“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father.*

What day? What hour?
In Matthew’s gospel the disciples had asked about the destruction of Jerusalem
and the end of the age.
Here they only ask about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Is Jesus still talking about AD 70?

It is possible.

But there is a definite shift in the “knowability” of the “that day.”

In verses 5-31 there is a very definite sign that shows you what is coming.

Now, Jesus speaks of a day – of an hour – that only the Father knows,
yet Jesus himself seems to understand the destruction of the temple very well.

And if you keep reading, you start realizing that we are on rather different ground here:

33 Be on guard, keep awake.

For you do not know when the time will come.

*34 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.*

35 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—*

36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Again, in verse 33 we have the “watch out” (see yourselves).

But now Jesus commands us to stay awake.

There is no concession to reality here!

You must stay awake at all times.

No sleeping – not in the evening, or at midnight,
or when the rooster crows, or in the morning!

If the master comes and finds you asleep – you are in trouble!

The four words used here are related to the Roman “watches” of the night.

Every night had 12 hours

(remember that in those days an hour simply equals 1/12 of daylight,
so in the winter an hour of daytime is shorter than a summer hour!)

The porter is commanded to keep watch all night.

You don’t get any time off.

There is no “me” time for the disciple of Christ.

You must *always* stay awake!