

What Did Jesus Say About The End Times: Part 1

Mark 13:1-23

Introduction: 1) Few subjects spark greater interest than the study of eschatology or the “end times.” Christians and non-Christians alike are fascinated by the issue, even if they are skeptical about much of what they hear and read. Unfortunately much of this skepticism is warranted when you consider the spectacularly erroneous predictions of so many pseudo-prophets and prognosticators.

2) No one has swung and missed on the coming of the end more than the Jehovah’s Witnesses whose false predictions currently stands at 9 (1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, and 1984).

In 1988 many evangelical Christians looked rather foolish when they were seduced by Edgar Whisenant’s *88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988*. Not to be out done, New Age advocates cite Mayan & Aztec calendars and predict the end will come on December 21, 2012. And, I could continue down this tragic trail for quite some time.

3) Jesus addressed issues related to the end times in what is often called “the Olivet Discourse” since it was delivered on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. So important was this teaching that we find it recorded in all 3 synoptic gospels (Matt 24:1-25: 46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36). As we examine these verses we do not find Jesus encouraging us to set dates or identify the Antichrist, False Prophet or the 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Rather, He admonishes us be on guard (v. 9, 23, 33) and stay awake (v. 33, 35, 37). No one but God knows when the end will come (v. 32-37). However, in light of the fact the end will come and it will come suddenly (v. 36), we must remain constantly faithful in our service to our Master (v. 35). It will not be easy, but “it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.”

4) Now, it must honestly be admitted that Mark 13 is a very difficult text to interpret, with faithful, Bible-believing teachers differing on the details. Some are convinced Jesus is only addressing the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in A.D. 70. Others are equally certain He has in view the end of the age and only the end of the age. I, personally, think there is a third and better understanding. Jesus does indeed address the soon coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. And in doing so, He provides a preview of coming attractions, that attraction being His Second Coming and the end of the age. John Grassmick says it so well, “Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (13:2) which prompted the disciples to inquire about the timing of “these things” (v. 4). Apparently they associated the destruction of the temple with the end of the Age (cf. Matt. 24:3). In reply Jesus skillfully wove together into a unified discourse a prophetic scene involving two perspectives: (a) the near event, the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 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).” [BKC, 166].

5) Jesus will employ no less than 19 imperatives in verse 5-37 as He instructs us on how to be prepared for the end times. Many of you will be surprised both by what He says and what He does not say.

I. Deception is coming so do not be led astray. 13:1-8

- Jesus leaves the temple for the last time (v.1). He never returns. The glory of the Lord had departed (cf. Ezk. 11:23). One of the disciples draws attention to the magnificent splendor of the temple, one of the great architectural wonders of the world. Build with

large white stones and lavishly decorated with gold, it was blinding when struck by the brilliance of the sun. It truly was a marvel to behold. The Jewish people believed it be the very sanctuary of God and therefore virtually indestructible until the end of time.

- Thus Jesus' response in verse 2 could not have been more shocking, "do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." I have no doubt their hearts skipped a beat and their breath was taken away by these words.
- Verse 3 now locates them on the Mount of Olives "opposite the temple." It is 2700 feet above sea level and 100 feet above Jerusalem. The inner circle of Peter and James and John and Andrew approach him privately (v. 3) and ask Him to tell them more. Only Mark mentions their names. They want to know "when will these things be and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" (v. 4). The word "accomplished" could be translated "fulfilled" (*NIV*) and indicates the disciples are thinking about the final consummation of history. Matthew 24:3 makes this clear where we read, "Tell us when will these be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" They did not expect a long interval between the destruction of the temple and the end of the age. But, Jesus does not address the issue of timing, though He does use the soon coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem as a type or foreshadowing of end time events. The soon destruction of the temple is the lenses through which we should view the distant destruction of this present evil age and the coming again of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus (13:24-27). This will become evident as the text unfolds.

- Jesus begins with a warning that is applicable to any believer at any time, “See that no one leads you astray” (v. 5). “See” is a present imperative and could be translated “Watch out” (*HCSB*). *The Message*’s paraphrase says, “Watch out for doomsday deceivers.” Why? Verse 6-8 provides the answers.
 - 1) Many will come in my name, saying, “I am he!” This is literally “*ego eimi*” (I AM), and a claim to deity. (v. 6).
 - 2) “They will lead many astray” (v. 6) Simon the magician who we read about in Acts 8:9-11 is someone who typifies what Jesus is talking about. First John 2:18 captures beautifully the parade of false christs who will come prior to the climatic false christ, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.” Note the plural!
 - 3) You will hear of “wars and rumors of wars” but “do not be alarmed” (pre.imp). Why? Because “this must take place, but the end is not yet” (v. 7). The evidences that we live in a fallen and broken world will continue until the end.
 - 4) Nations and kingdoms will fight one another and earthquakes and famines will take place. But, “these are but the beginning of the birth pains.” (v. 8). These type of events set the stage for the finale. If you would like a detailed description of all of this as we approach the end of history read Revelation 6-18! What we experience now almost daily, will intensify as history draws to a close.
- Human history is headed toward the birth of a new Messianic age and kingdom, of that we can be sure. But, before it comes, we can expect times of worldwide trouble and tribulation. Like the labor pains of a woman before delivery, they will continue and grow in intensity before the blessed birth of the baby. This was true leading up to the

destruction of the Jewish temple in A.D. 70. It especially will be true as the curtain on world history comes down.

II. Persecution can be expected but do not be anxious. 13:9-13

- Not only will there be tribulation and trouble on a global level, there will also be trials and persecutions on a personal level. Jesus again challenges His disciples to “watch out” (same word as in verse 5). Translated in the *ESV* as “Be on your guard,” this is also a present imperative. Why does He issue a 2nd challenge to watchfulness? Because difficult times are to be expected for faithful followers of King Jesus.
- You can expect to be “delivered over to councils,” literally “handed over to sanhedrins” just like your Lord. You also will be beaten, publicly flogged in the synagogues, viewed as false teachers and traitors to the nation of Israel. However, this is all a part of God’s plan for gospel proclamation and expansion! “You will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them” (v. 9). We see this prediction clearly unfold in the book of Acts (4:1-22; 5:17-42; 12:1-19; 21:27-28:31). Further, “the gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations” (v. 10). All the “*ethne*”, all the people groups of the world, must hear this gospel before the end comes. So, do not despair, drop out or get discouraged. This is God’s plan. And, do not miss this. There is a glorious promise Jesus makes in verse 11 to all who faithfully bear witness to His name in such circumstances. “Do not be anxious (pre.imp) beforehand what you are to say when they bring you to trial and deliver you over.” Just be faithful to speak of Jesus and His gospel “in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit!” Wow! Praise the Lord for such an awesome promise. He will empower you and enable you to say “the right thing in the right way at just the right time!”

- Opposition from governmental and legal authorities will be harsh. Rejection by family and friends will be heartbreaking, but it will happen, so get ready. [v. 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.”] Notice the word “death” occurs twice emphasizing the extent of the betrayal and persecution some will face. We will be arrested, beaten, betrayed, put to death and even “hated” (v. 13) all for the sake of King Jesus. While this may sound surreal and unfathomable to us in comfortable and cozy America, it is the experience of millions of our brothers and sisters around the world today and throughout church history. One can consult the famous *Fox’s Book of Martyrs* to read the stories of faithful believers who sealed their witness to our Savior with their blood. Church tradition informs us that all the apostles, with the possible exception of John, died the death of a martyr. Some have estimated that more than 70 million Christians have given their lives for their witness to Jesus, with 45 million being in the 20th century alone (“20th Century saw 65% of Christian martyrs”, 5-10-02, *EWTN News*). In “Creedal Christian”, it was reported that in the last decade “there were on average, 270 new Christian martyrs every 24 hours,” or approximately 1 million in the last 10 years (2-10-11).
- Yes, we will be hated for our faithful witness to our Master, but Jesus says be encouraged, “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (v. 13). Perseverance is the proof that our profession is real. It may be tough but our Lord will be faithful to keep up by His power. Stay faithful. Stay true. Again it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.
- The wonderful NC evangelist Vance Havner used to say, “faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first.” This is true for anyone who professes Christ, and it is especially true when we experience severe persecution. It was certainly true for our

Lord's disciples in the 1st century. It is true for our brothers and sisters in the 21st century. And it will be true for those experiencing such trials and tribulations today and in the future as history moves toward its climatic end with the coming again of King Jesus.

III. Tribulation will be intense so be on guard. 13:14-23

Verse 14 introduces us to one of the cryptic and difficult phrases in the Bible: “the abomination of desolation.” The phrase occurs 3 times in the book of Daniel:

- Daniel 9:27; “And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”
- Daniel 11:31; “Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.”
- Daniel 12:11; “And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.”

Jesus utilizes the phrase and fills it with meaning of indescribable suffering and tribulation “as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be” (v. 19). What are we to make of all this? Let me do my best to simplify the complex.

First, the initial fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy (particularly 11:31-32) was the desecration of the temple in 167 B.C. by the Syrian leader Antiochus Epiphanes when he sacrificed a pig on the altar of burnt offerings, pouring out the pig's blood on it, and setting

up a standard or altar to Zeus. This act of idolatry and insult so incensed the Jewish people they would soon revolt in what history calls the Maccabean Revolt.

Second, given the context of the passage and Jesus' instructions in verses 14-19, it appears He has in mind another fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Christians living in those volatile days were admonished to understand the signs of the times (v. 14). When the abomination of desolation is "standing where he ought not be," perhaps a reference to the Roman General Titus entering the temple in September, A.D. 70, then "those in Judea were to flee to the mountains" (v. 14). Further, everyone was to act quickly with a sense of urgency (vs. 15-18). James Edwards summarized the Lord's instructions well, "People on their flat-roofed Palestinian house must flee by the outside staircase without going inside (v. 15)...and the field worker will have no time to fetch his outer cloak (v. 16). Worst of all will be the fate of pregnant women and nursing mothers (v. 17; see Luke 23:29-31), and anyone fleeing in winter when the wadis – the ravines and gorges – are swollen and impossible to cross (v. 18)" (*Edwards*, 397). All of this took place in Judea in A. D. 70.

Third, the tragic events of 167 B.C. and A.D. 70 anticipate and foreshadow a final and climatic event of horrible destruction and desecration just prior to our Lord's 2nd coming. Jesus is and will continue to speak of the eschatological end thru the eyes of the soon destruction of the temple. Again, the detailed and precise explanation of James Edwards cannot be improved upon in my judgment, especially as he makes a connection with other crucial New Testament text: "The abomination that causes desolation" "refers to "the man of lawlessness" as conceived in 2 Thess. 2:3-4, who will exalt himself in the temple as God (or as "a Son of God," according to *Did.* 16:4). The agreements of 2 Thessalonians 2 with v. 14 are [close]. The "man of lawlessness" corresponds to the man *standing* in v. 14; and the

description of him parodying God in the temple correlates with” ‘ “the abomination that causes desolation” standing where he *does not belong*.”” Both texts depict a blasphemous Antichrist who will do a scandalous deed that will trigger the return of the Lord. Both texts also warn disciples against mistaken eschatological assumptions, especially against being deceived by signs and wonders...v. 14, like 2 Thessalonians 2, indicates that Jesus foresaw the rise of a terrible antagonist, an Antichrist, who at some future time will unleash a severe tribulation on the people of God, which in turn will usher in the return of the Lord. Mark relates this abominable event only cryptically and suggestively to the destruction of the temple. In so doing he imputes both historical and eschatological value to the same event. V. 14 is thus the hinge of Mark 13 that links “these things,” relating to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, with “those days” of the End.” ‘ “The abomination that causes desolation”” alludes to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, but it is not exhausted by it. The “abomination” is a mysterious (2 Thess 2:7!) double referent, a historical medium that anticipates an ultimate fulfillment in the advent of the Antichrist and the final tribulation before the return of the Son of Man. Titus’s destruction of Jerusalem is like a scouting film: it gives an authentic picture of one’s future opponent; but there is, of course, a great deal of difference between clashing with players in the stadium as opposed to simply watching them on film.” (*Edwards*, 398-99).

John Grassmick adds of the man “standing where he ought not to be” verse 14, “This person is the end-time Antichrist (Dan. 7:23-26; 9:25-27; 2 Thes. 2:3-4, 8-9; Rev. 13:1-10, 14-15)” (*BKC*, 170).

Verse 19 informs us “those days” (v. 24) will be unequalled and unlike any time in all of human history. As horrible as A.D. 70 was, those days will pale in comparison to the end-

time “tribulation.” Indeed as verse 20 makes clear, “And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved.” No one would survive or be delivered from death if those days were allowed to continue. However, in grace, God places a divine limitation on the time of tribulation. “But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.” Even in His wrath, God remembers mercy” (Hab. 3:2).

Jesus concludes this section again with a warning about “false christs and false prophets (v. 22). Count on it they will come on the scene (“will arise”). They will also “perform signs and wonders” (cf. Rev. 19:20). If possible, but praise God they can’t, they would “lead astray the elect.” So, since we are safe do we let down our guard and grow complacent and comfortable? No! “Be on guard” (pre. imp). This is the third time Jesus has warned them! In fact He concludes verse 23 with these words, “I have told you all things beforehand.” *The Message* says, “I’ve given you fair warning.”

Conclusion: Teaching on the end times can be both comforting and troubling and all at the same time. In our broken and fallen world we can expect trials, tribulations and troubles until Jesus returns. Until He does should we be working out our prophetic calendar of events with its appropriate cast of actors? Not at all. Instead, listen to what Jesus says and not to others who wish to lead you astray. Stick with Jesus! Instead, do not be surprised by the catastrophes of nature, the wars throughout history or the sufferings of God’s people. Stay strong! Instead, realize that when Jesus talks about the future “his words are meant to change the way we live in the present.” (*Ferguson, Mark, 218*). Instead, do as Paul encouraged in Titus 2:13 and look for “our blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Instead, do as John urged in Rev. 22:20 and pray, “Come Lord Jesus.” And as you

watch and pray, “Be on guard and don’t be anxious.” Jesus already told you all about what to expect!