

Series: The End

Title: Ready to Respond

Text: Mark 13:1-8

Date: October 11, 2020

Verse 1

Mark 13 contains instruction from Jesus concerning the end of times. The teaching within the chapter constitutes our Lord's most lengthy discourse within Mark's gospel.¹ Verse 1 sets the scene for the teaching session. It tells us that Jesus and His disciples were "going out of the temple." The word translated "temple" is one that was used by the Jews to speak of the entire temple complex.² The Lord used His visit to the temple as a springboard for His prophecies concerning the end of time.

Jesus arrived at the temple back in 11:27. His appearing generated a lot of controversy. From the moment He stepped foot in the complex, Jesus experienced conflict with the religious elite. He confronted them in 11:27-33, pronounced a parable of judgment over them in 12:1-12, debated them in 12:13-27, warned His disciples about their false teaching in 12:38-40, and made a pronouncement over their bankrupt system of religion in 12:41-44. Given the tension in the air, one can imagine that the disciples were a bit exasperated. Perhaps they wanted to ease tensions. Looking at the grandeur of the temple complex, they saw an opportunity to divert from the tense topics at hand. One of them (maybe it was Peter) exclaimed, "Look! What massive stones! What impressive buildings!" (Mark 13:1).

History attests that the disciples' admiration of the temple complex was well-founded. The Jewish historian Josephus remarked on the impressive architecture associated with the site.³ Many of the stones from Herod's temple exist to this day. Some are twenty to forty feet in length, weighing around a hundred tons.⁴

The words "going out of the temple" are pregnant with meaning, as we will see throughout our study of Mark 13:1-8. In leaving the temple, Jesus turned His back on it in both a physical and spiritual sense. He symbolically represented the fact that the Lord was finished with the temple complex, and He demonstrated the Lord's judgment on the people of Israel. In Jesus, a better sacrifice had appeared (Hebrews 9:11-14). The people's rejection of the Messiah would result in the Lord's rejection of them.

Verse 2

In response to His disciples' admiration, Jesus said, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). It is

¹ Robertson, 374.

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

³ Josephus, Flavius. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.11.3.

⁴ Robertson, 373.

worth noting that Jesus affirmed the magnificent appearance of the temple complex. He referred to it as having “great buildings.”⁵ However, Jesus warned that the buildings would one day be destroyed. He said, “not one stone will be left upon another.” In the original language of the text, Jesus is pictured as having used two negative words of negation.⁶ Mark used a double negative to convey the meaning of the Lord’s pronouncement. Such a grammatical construction goes against the rules of English, but it was appropriate in Koine Greek. In our text, it conveyed the idea that the temple complex would be completely destroyed. Mark intended to place emphasis on the certainty and complete nature of the event.

In making His pronouncement, Jesus prophesied of future destruction. He did something similar back in Mark 11:12-14 when He pronounced judgment on a fig tree. In our current text, the Lord foretells of future judgment on the temple compound. His pronouncement was justified when one considers the extortion (Mark 11:15-19), spiritual fruitlessness (Mark 11:20-26), erroneous doctrine (Mark 11:27-12:37), and false worship (12:38-44) He found when He visited the temple. The only commendable thing He found within the entire temple complex was a lonely widow giving two tiny coins from a contrite posture of worship (Mark 12:41-44).

Our Lord’s words would be fulfilled with the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. at the hands of Titus. History tells us the temple was initially burned. Afterwards, its walls were pulled down.⁷ The event, like the gift of tongues in Acts 2:1-13, was intended as a sign of condemnation for the Jews. It made it known that the dispensation of God’s work amongst the descendants of Abraham had come to a temporary pause. With the gospel and the birth of the Church, the Lord moved to work primarily amongst the Gentiles. As Paul says in Romans, “A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:15). There is a coming world-wide revival amongst national Israel (Romans 11:26-27 and Revelation 7:1-8); however, God has currently passed over the Jews in order to work amongst now-Jewish people. The destruction of the temple was a work of God designed to demonstrate this reality.

In a sense, Jesus’ pronouncement was the same as one found in 1 Samuel 4:21-22.⁸ When the Ark of the Covenant was captured in Samuel’s day, Eli’s daughter-in-law named her newborn son “Ichabod.” The name was meant to convey that the glory of God had departed from Israel. In a similar way, the destruction of the temple demonstrated that the former glory of Israel had passed away. With the coming of the Messiah, there was no longer a need for the temple complex. One greater than the old system had arrived.

It is important to note that Jesus’ words should not be taken too literally. His intent was to use prophetic language that depicted judgment and destruction. Though

⁵ Robertson, 373.

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

⁷ Brooks, 207.

⁸ Ferguson, 212.

some stones may still rest upon one another at the temple mount, the meaning of Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled — the illustrious temple complex was destroyed.

Verses 3

Hearing Jesus' pronouncement, the disciples were perplexed. Four of them approached Jesus, seeking clarity about what He had said. Mark records, "While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately..." (Mark 13:3). The scene is picturesque. Mark used language that depicted the disciples approaching Jesus as He rested on a the mountainside of the Mount of Olives. As He enjoyed the breeze and the beauty of a spring day, the magnificent temple complex loomed large in His line of sight. Josephus spoke of the way in which the glorious edifice was visible from a great distance in the country side.⁹

The setting on the Mount of Olives was appropriate in light of prophecy. Zechariah prophesied that the mountain will have great significance at the end of time (Zechariah 14:4). Jesus likely chose the location for the teaching hand at session for a reason. In doing so, He demonstrated that His words had an immediate fulfillment, but they also had a long-term fulfillment. His intent was not just to prophesy about the destruction of the temple. He also wanted to give His disciples truth concerning His Second Coming.

With the subject of their conversation in the foreground, four of the disciples approached Jesus, ready to ask a question. The four are the first ones who were called to follow Jesus (Mark 1:16-20). Three of them — Peter, James, and John — served as Jesus' inner circle (Mark 5:37 and 9:2). Maybe the four men had been discussing Jesus' words privately before verses 3 and 4.¹⁰ Still puzzled by His prophecy, they asked for a more detailed explanation.

Verse 4

Verse 4 contains the questions the disciples asked Jesus. By examining what they asked, it seems the men were gripped by Messianic fervor. Notice the way in which the disciples asked two questions within the verse. The first is "When will these things happen?" The word "these" obviously points back to the destruction of the temple that Jesus mentioned back in verse 2. Their second question was "What will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" It seems the latter interrogative was focused on additional events beyond the destruction of the temple. Apparently the disciples assumed the temple would be destroyed and then Jesus would instigate other events that would spark the start of the messianic kingdom.

Peter may have thought that an apocalyptic war was about to go down. Considering his actions in Mark 14:47, such scenario does not seem unlikely. Also, think about the disciple's focus even after the Resurrection. Moments before Jesus' Ascension

⁹ Josephus, Flavius. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.11.3.

¹⁰ Robertson, 373.

into heaven, the Eleven still expected Him to initiate His kingdom at any moment (Acts 1:6). So it is not unreasonable to believe that the disciples mistook Jesus' remarks concerning the temple as a prediction of an immediate initiation of the messianic kingdom. The Twelve believed they needed to get ready for war. Jesus, in their mind, was about to oust the Romans. The fallout would undoubtedly be cataclysmic.

Some find fault with the disciples for asking for a sign. Didn't Jesus condemn the Pharisees for doing something similar (Mark 8:11-12)? Should disciples look for "signs" concerning the kingdom? Based on the Lord's teaching in our current chapter of Mark, it certainly seems that there is nothing wrong with believers being aware of the signs of the times. In addition, it is important to note that the problem with the Pharisees request for a sign was a problem with motives.¹¹ Their intent was argumentative (Mark 8:11). They did not believe Jesus, so they tested Him. Having a holy awareness of eschatological realities is beneficial. That is why we have books of prophecy in the Bible. Jesus wanted us to exhibit end times discernment, so He obliged His disciples' request in verse 4, and He gave the teaching we have before us.

Verse 5

Verse 5 begins Jesus' eschatological discourse. The first words of His teaching are as follows: "Watch out that no one deceives you" (Mark 13:5). The word translated "watch out" means "to beware" or "to be on the lookout." In the original language of the New Testament, it appears as an aorist imperative; thus, it provides a command to act with a sense of urgency.¹² It is worth noting that Mark uses the same word frequently in our current chapter (Mark 13:9, 23, and 33). Its frequent appearances serve as a reminder that issues related to the end of time require great spiritual care, discernment, and attentiveness.

Caution and vigilance is needed throughout the last days because of ongoing temptations regarding deception. Indeed, to this day, there are still many who use the subject of the apocalypse as a springboard for heresy. Groups like the one led by David Koresh, or the Heaven's Gate cult, are extreme examples. Other movements within mainline, evangelical Christianity espouse forms of Zionism and Hyper-Dispensationalism that are both spiritually unwise and unsafe. Christians should be careful that they aren't sidetracked by strange doctrines. Jesus said, "Watch out that no one *deceives* you." The idea behind the word "deceives" is of one leading another astray or causing one to wander.¹³ Deceivers will always exist within the Church (1 John 2:26 and 3:7); as a result, believers must always be on guard.

The Lord's words demonstrate that apostasy is one of the hallmarks of the last days. Jesus gave the exact same warning in Matthew 24:5. According to Scripture, the end times will be marked by a great falling away from the faith. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3,

¹¹ Brooks, 207.

¹² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

¹³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

we read, “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first.” Christians should be aware that erroneous doctrine and false religion will be one of the defining marks of the last days. Ryle has correctly noted that Jesus’ words in our text “were specially intended to correct the mistaken views, not only of His apostles, but of the vast body of professing Christians in every age.”¹⁴

Disciples of every generation should be on guard. The Bible teaches the Church Age will be infiltrated by corrupt doctrine. Such perversion will grow to a crescendo as the culmination of all things approaches. Scripture says, “Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you” (2 Timothy 3:13-14). Many Christians nowadays are blinded to these realities. They glibly and gladly buy into any sort of teaching, so long as it boasts of being “Christians.” The spirit of the Bereans is lost on many modern believers. Few “search the Scriptures” to see if what they are being taught is in alignment with the Word of God (Acts 17:11). It is sad that many professing believers will be duped by the apostasy. Because they have little devotion to the unadulterated truth of God’s Word, they won’t be able to spot counterfeit teaching when it arrives.

Verse 6

Jesus continued His warning concerning the apostasy by saying, “Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will deceive many” (Mark 13:6). The pronouncement “I am he” seems to contain a reference to the Divine name for God (Exodus 3:13-14).¹⁵ In Jesus’ day, it was loaded with messianic implications (John 8:58). By using such a profession, one would make a claim of messiahship for himself. According to Jesus many false “christs” will appear on earth before the end of all things. Jesus spoke of this same reality in Matthew 24:24.

False messiah figures posed a problem for the early Church. John spoke of them. In 1 John 2:18, he told of how “many antichrists” had infiltrated the Church. An “antichrist” is anyone who stands against Christ by denying His teaching and perverting His truth. According to John, a number of such individuals will stain the Church throughout history. There will always be antichrists with a lowercase “a” who corrupt the Church with false teaching. In the end of time, prophecy tells us, a major Antichrist will appear. He will be the official Antichrist. The prophet Daniel spoke of him in Daniel 9:26-27, calling him “the coming ruler.” Paul called him “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). In regard to this individual, John flatly said, “Antichrist is coming” (1 John 2:18).

While the spirit of Antichrist will persist throughout the Church Age, he will not appear until the end of time. John spoke of the man’s appearing in the book of Revelation, calling him “the beast” (Revelation 13:1-10). When he steps onto the scene

¹⁴ Ryle, 216-217.

¹⁵ Brooks, 209.

of human history, the Antichrist will hold sway over the world through a one-world religion (Revelation 13:4), government (Revelation 13:1), and economy (Revelation 18:9-20). He will hotly pursue all who resist his rule. This will result in persecution for Jews and Christians (Revelation 6:10 and 7:13-14), since both will be unwilling to submit to his blasphemous state-oriented religion (Revelation 13:7).

Verses 7

In verse 7, Jesus moved from talking about apostasy to speak of the numerous cataclysmic disasters that will accompany the last days. We read, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, don’t be alarmed; these things must take place, but it is not yet the end” (Mark 13:7). The word translated “must take place” is a small three-letter word in the original language that could be translated “it is necessary.” It is often used in the New Testament to speak of Divine necessity.¹⁶ The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was of paramount importance because it symbolized the superior nature of Christ’s work (Hebrews 9:11-14) and it demonstrated the Lord’s judgment upon the Jews for their rejection of Jesus (Romans 11:25). With the destruction of the temple the Lord gave a signal that He was moving from working primarily amongst the Jews to primarily working amongst the Gentile nations (Acts 1:8).

Jesus told His first-century followers to not “be alarmed” when they heard of wars and rumors of wars. The prohibition is against a mental anguish that involves inward fear and fright.¹⁷ Believers should never be unnecessarily scared or unnerved about end-time events. Though they may see “signs of the times” that would naturally produce great stress, they can have confidence that God is in control. No war, pandemic, famine, or political upheaval is beyond the bounds of His oversight. He holds us in His hand (John 10:29), and He will keep us safe until the end (Philippians 1:6).

Ryle has correctly noted that one should see a bit of both fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecy in our text.¹⁸ This is seen through Jesus’ assertion that the events of A.D. 70 were “not yet the end.” According to Jesus, there would be unfulfilled prophecy after that event. Prophetic Scripture often has a way of having both a “near” and a “far” fulfillment. Such a precedent for interpretation is seen in key passages like Isaiah 9:6-7 and 53:7-11. Without this near/far understanding of Scripture, we will have difficulty understanding Bible prophecy. One has remarked on this regarding our current text by saying, “Recognition of the dual application of Jesus’ answer will go a long way toward solving the difficulties of the discourse and arriving at a sound interpretation.”¹⁹

Verse 8

¹⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

¹⁷ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

¹⁸ Ryle, 214.

¹⁹ Brooks, 208.

As to the “near” fulfillment of the things spoken of in Mark 13:7-8, there are many historical events to which one can point. Historians have pointed out that “earthquakes” rocked cities like Crete, Rome, Phrygia, and Campania in the years between Jesus’ pronouncement and the actual destruction of the temple.²⁰ The occurrence of such natural disasters seems to have been a fulfillment of Mark 13:8.

In addition, those years saw four different famines during the reign of Claudius which could be regarded as a fulfillment of verse 8. One such famine is mentioned in Acts 11:28.²¹ The “wars” of verse 8 were most likely the Jewish wars of rebellion that persisted from A.D. 66 all the way up until A.D. 73 or 74 with the slaughter on mount Masada.²² As we study Jesus’ words, we should keep in mind that His prophecy has already been fulfilled in some ways. However, as we will see later in chapter 13, there is still much that is yet to be fulfilled.

The book of Revelation tells us that this is true. In its futuristic literature, it speaks of many of the things in verse 8 as happening at the end of time. It tells of wars (Revelation 6:1-4 and 9-11), earthquakes (Revelation 6:12-17), and famines (Revelation 6:5-8) that are yet to happen in an unprecedented manner. Each of the cataclysmic events of Mark 13:8 form the content of the six seals from the sixth chapter of Revelation. Though there was a “near” fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy with the wars, famines, and earthquakes of the first century, there is a “far” fulfillment yet to be experienced.

In verse 8, Jesus describes the signs that will accompany the end of time as functioning like “birth pains.” The metaphor is one that was used by the prophets of the Old Testament (Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 4:31; Hosea 13:13; Micah 4:9-10).²³ As used by Jesus in our current text, it was intended to demonstrate the way in which such signs will persist throughout the Church Age. However, they will increase in intensity as Christ’s return gets closer. One can say that such pains are a reminder that the Christian’s perspective concerning Christ’s return should always be one of immanency mixed with an attitude of “not yet.” Ultimately, one cannot know when the precise timing of the end will be. Did not Jesus tell His disciples, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:7)? At the same time, believers are told to “wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Christians should live in light of Christ’s return, but they should avoid an unhealthy fixation on it. Timetables, chronological charts, and spooky speculation probably aren’t advisable. Mature Christians know they aren’t called to figure out all of the events associated with the end of time. They are called, rather, to live by faith (Romans 1:17). Eschatological truth shouldn’t be a source of speculation and entertainment, it should be

²⁰ Robertson, 375.

²¹ Robertson, 375.

²² Brooks, 209.

²³ Brooks, 209.

a catalyst for spiritual edification. It should be used as an anchor to strengthen our hope, energize our witness, and add resolve to our pursuit of purity. Peter said, "Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat" (2 Peter 3:11-12).