

LESSON TEN

TITLE The Servant and Coming Judgment

SCRIPTURE Mark 13:1-37

MEMORY VERSE

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

Jesus will come back one day to judge the living and the dead, and his disciples must be ready for his return and prepared to endure suffering and persecution along the way.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

TEACHER TIP

Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: "THE MAN COMES AROUND" BY JOHNNY CASH

One of the last songs Johnny Cash wrote before his death in 2003 was "The Man Comes Around" which borrows numerous biblical images about the last days from Revelation and other books of the Bible. The song was inspired by a dream of Cash's that included the phrase "a thorn tree in the whirlwind." Haunted by the dream, Cash scoured the scriptures to discover that the phrase was similar to one found in Job. From there Cash penned the lyrics to the song that imagines the return of Christ and his judgment.

Let's watch a lyric video of the song. See how many biblical images you can pick out in the song's lyrics.

And I heard, as it were, the noise of thunder: one of the four beasts saying: "Come and see." And I saw. And behold, a white horse.

*There's a man goin' 'round takin' names.
And he decides who to free and who to blame.
Everybody won't be treated all the same.
There'll be a golden ladder reaching down.
When the man comes around.*

*The hairs on your arm will stand up
At the terror in each sip and in each sup.
Will you partake of that last offered cup
Or disappear into the potter's ground
When the man comes around?*

*Hear the trumpets, hear the pipers.
One hundred million angels singin'.
Multitudes are marching to the big kettle drum.
Voices callin', voices cryin'.
Some are born and some are dyin'.
It's Alpha and Omega's Kingdom come.*

*And the whirlwind is in the thorn tree.
The virgins are all trimming their wicks.
The whirlwind is in the thorn tree.
It's hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

*'Til Armageddon, no Shalam, no Shalom.
Then the father hen will call his chickens home.
The wise men will bow down before the throne.
And at his feet they'll cast their golden crowns
When the man comes around.*

*Whoever is unjust, let him be unjust still.
Whoever is righteous, let him be righteous still.
Whoever is filthy, let him be filthy still.
Listen to the words long-written down,
When the man comes around.*

*Hear the trumpets, hear the pipers.
One hundred million angels singin'.
Multitudes are marchin' to the big kettle drum.
Voices callin', voices cryin'.
Some are born and some are dyin'.
It's Alpha and Omega's Kingdom come.*

*And the whirlwind is in the thorn tree.
The virgins are all trimming their wicks.
The whirlwind is in the thorn tree.
It's hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

*In measured hundredweight and penny pound
When the man comes around.*

*And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts, and I looked and
behold: a pale horse. And his name, that sat on him, was Death. And Hell
followed with him.*

(Play clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJhgEMKLuHI>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *What images do you remember from the song that paint a picture of what Jesus's return will be like?*
2. *Cash references Jesus's Parable of the Ten Virgins found in Matthew 25:1-13. Read the parable aloud. What does this parable teach us about being prepared for Jesus's return?*
3. *Jesus taught his disciples to be ready and alert for his return. What does it look like for believers to be ready and alert in their day-to-day lives?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: Johnny Cash's vision of the end times can easily evoke fear from the listener. When Jesus returns, he will bring judgment and that will be bad news for some. Jesus should be feared in the sense of being honored and respected as the mighty, victorious king who will one day return to set things right, defeat his enemies, restore all creation, and finally establish his rule over God's kingdom.

This week, we are going to look at Jesus's discourse with his disciples on the end times and the nature of the events that precede his return and judgment. We will also discuss the fact that Jesus teaches his disciples to discern the times and be prepared for his return one day.

OPTION 2: THE ARRIVAL OF THE CRITIC IN RATATOUILLE

Remy, a young rat living in Paris with a delicate palate and culinary aspirations, ends up, by a twist of fate, at the Michelin-star-rated restaurant of the late Chef Auguste Gusteau. Remy idolizes Gusteau and cannot believe his good fortune. However, he is a rat and rats are not exactly welcome in the kitchen of a world-class Parisian restaurant. Remy

befriends Alfredo Linguini, a clumsy garbage boy with no cooking skills. Linguini accidentally messes up a soup; but with Remy's help, the soup is saved and Linguini becomes the new wonder chef in the kitchen. What people do not know is that Remy is working through Linguini to bring his culinary creations to life. However, there is a problem. The restaurant's head chef, Skinner, and the restaurant critic, Anton Ego, both want to see Linguini fail.

Let us watch a scene from the film when Remy, Linguini, and the rest of the restaurant's staff must prepare for the arrival—and coming judgment—of Ego. His critique could make or break the restaurant, which has fallen on hard times, but Remy decides that a simple, peasant dish called Ratatouille might be their best shot at winning over the cynical restaurant critic.

(Play clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YG4h5GbTqU>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Think of the last time you needed to prepare something—anything—for someone else. What were the steps you took to prepare? How did they help you?*
2. *What are the characteristics of someone who prepares well?*
3. *Jesus taught his disciples to be ready and alert for his return. What does it look like for believers to be ready and alert in their day-to-day lives?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: Remy and his friends in the kitchen had to be prepared for the coming judgment of Ego. Thankfully, they were prepared and offered Ego a dish that, while unconventional, amazed and delighted the typically cold and humorless Ego. Ego's review of the restaurant helped turn things around for Remy and Linguini who go on to have success in Paris.

This week we are going to look at Jesus's discourse with his disciples on the end times and the events that precede his return and judgment. We will also discuss that Jesus teaches his disciples to wisely discern the times and live unconventionally by being ready to endure suffering and hardship.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

1. Jesus Teaches His Disciples about the Destruction of the Temple and the End Times (13:1-4)
 - A. The disciples admire the temple (v. 1)
 - B. Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple (v. 2)
 - C. Some of Jesus's disciples ask Jesus for signs of the end times (vv. 3-4)
2. The Signs of the End Times—Local and World Events (13:5-23)
 - A. False saviors and false signs of deception will increase (vv. 5-6)
 - B. Wars and rumors of wars will increase (vv. 7-8a)
 - C. Natural disasters will increase, signaling the beginning of the end (v. 8b)
 - D. Jesus predicts the persecution and family division his disciples must endure for the sake of the gospel and its being preached to the nations (vv. 9-13)
 - E. Jesus points to the Antichrist's desecration of God's temple (v. 14)
 - F. Jesus's followers will experience a period of great tribulation (vv. 15-20)
 - G. Jesus warns his disciples against false Christs and false prophets (vv. 21-23)
3. The Signs of the End Times—Cosmic Events and the Return of the King (13:24-27)
 - A. Great cosmic events will precede the return of the Son of Man (vv. 24-25)
 - B. The Son of Man will return in power and glory with angels to gather God's elect (vv. 26-27)
4. Jesus Teaches His Disciples to Discern the Times (13:28-31)
 - A. Jesus implores his disciples to learn from the blossoming of a fig tree (vv. 28-29)
 - B. Jesus assures his disciples of the certainty and imminency of his prophecies taking place and the eternal endurance of his word (vv. 30-31)
5. The Day and Hour Unknown (13:32-37)
 - A. Jesus acknowledges that only God the Father knows the precise timing of these events (v. 32)
 - B. Jesus encourages his disciples to be watchful and on-guard (vv. 33-37)

CONTEXT

Jesus and his disciples have made the journey to Jerusalem where Jesus is both praised by the people as the Messiah and questioned by the Jewish leaders as an opponent of the religion. Jesus has exposed the

pride, hypocrisy, and ignorance of the Jewish leaders and has taught that God wants true devotion from his people, not the false religion or empty praise of the Jewish leaders.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

We are taught that suffering and hardship are always evil and must be avoided at all costs.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus did not avoid suffering and hardship but, instead, embraced it in order to save others. Like him, we endure suffering and hardships as we look forward to Jesus's return when he will pass judgment and finally establish his rule as king over God's kingdom.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.

At the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, Jesus's disciples are curious about the events of the end times and ask Jesus to tell them what they will be like. Jesus pulls back the curtain for his disciples to give them a glimpse of what is to come. His disciples will be betrayed, persecuted, and put to death for the sake of the gospel while false Christs and false prophets will increase along with wars and natural disasters. Great cosmic events will precede the return of Jesus who will return in power and glory to gather his elect and judge the world.

Jesus does not reveal these things to his disciples to simply appease their curiosity. No, he tells them all that will happen in the last days so that they will be alert and prepared for his return. The theme of being alert and prepared is a prominent one throughout Jesus's teaching and one that Jesus focuses on in this section of Mark's gospel. Jesus will come back one day to judge the living and the dead, and his disciples must be ready for his return and prepared to endure suffering and persecution along the way.

13 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

5 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it 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 unequalled 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.

28 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner

of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: FOLLOWING THE PLOT

Read the passage again and write down the main characters and what key actions move the plot of the story forward as Jesus tells his disciples about the end times and the fact that they should be alert and prepared for them.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: UNDERLINE THE VERBS

This section of Mark’s gospel is filled with vivid imagery and actions related to the last days. Read through the passage three times. On the third reading, circle the verbs and note who or what they are associated with.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Read the passage and write down as single words or short phrases what you think are the key themes. Remember that identifying key themes at the beginning of your study will help you develop a good overall grasp of the passage.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: FOLLOWING THE PLOT

Based on your reading of the passage, what do you think is the author’s intent in Jesus telling his disciples about the end times and the way in which they are to respond to them?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: LOOK UP BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are many insights to be found by looking up phrases and ideas in a Bible Dictionary or Commentary. With a passage like this at the Mount of Olives much of what Jesus teaches is based on Old Testament backgrounds and rabbinic traditions. Use your commentary and other tools that you have available. The commentary section below and a good Bible Dictionary can help you understand background information.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: SYNTHESIZE YOUR THEMES

Refer back to what you wrote down as key themes in the passage.

How do these key themes help us understand what will transpire in the last days and the kind of faith and attitude believers are to have in them?

If you can pick only one theme or point that Jesus is making, how would you write it in one short sentence?

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: What can happen if you spend too much time trying to predict the end times?

QUESTION 2: Jesus speaks of false christs and false prophets in the last days. What could you do to protect yourself from false understandings about the nature of Christ and his gospel?

QUESTION 3: Think of a time or relationship in your life when you experienced a form of persecution for or opposition to your faith. How is God leading you to be faithful and obedient, despite the persecution or opposition?

QUESTION 4: How could being more mindful of Christ's return help you take advantage of the opportunities that God presents to you?

QUESTION 5: Think of someone God has put on your heart who does not yet know Jesus as Messiah and Savior. How could you invest in a relationship with them in order to live out and share the gospel with them?

4

CHALLENGE

TEACHER TIP

End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

The attitude of the Jewish leaders in Jesus's day has not vanished over time. It is alive and well in any given culture the world over. At the heart of this attitude is the belief that we must do something for God in order for him to do something for us. Play by the rules and God will be happy with you and give you what you want. Break the rules and God will be angry with you and punish or—even worse—condemn you.

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who made a fortune by inventing dynamite and other powerful explosives used for weapons. Years later when Nobel's brother died, a newspaper accidentally printed an obituary for Alfred instead. He was described as a man who became rich by enabling people to kill one another in unprecedented quantities. Shaken by this assessment, Nobel resolved to use his fortune to honor accomplishments that benefited humanity. Thus, he created the Nobel Peace Prize, among others.

Alfred Nobel, in essence, had a sneak preview into how he would be remembered if he were to die that day. One might say he got a glimpse of the future today. As a result of his seeing his own obituary, Alfred Nobel was able to make some key changes in his life. Similarly, Jesus has given us a glimpse of the future. How will this information change our lives? How will we live life differently? Mark 13 points out that the best thing we can do is to follow Jesus' instructions concerning the future and live by the Boy Scout motto, "Be Prepared."

As we look forward to Jesus's return and the coming judgment, we can be assured that God gives us the faith and strength to endure whatever suffering and hardships come our way. His Spirit will empower and motivate us to fulfill Jesus's call to live and preach his gospel in both word and deed.

Our days on this earth are precious few and Christ's return is imminent. This should give us a sense of urgency and remind us that we have a purpose to live for every day as the last days draw closer. This purpose is to be a disciple of Jesus who is alert, ready, and prepared at all times—to bring God glory and help bring others into God's kingdom to enjoy life as it was meant to be lived, to be a disciple who is not surprised by opposition or persecution for the sake of the gospel because those are things that Jesus himself endured with faithfulness and obedience, to be a disciple who waits in hope for Christ's return and proclaims his good news in the meantime.

LET'S PRAY

COMMENTARY

MARK 13:1-13

Warren W. Wiersbe, in the Bible Exposition Commentary, gives his understanding and interpretation of the events surrounding the last days that Jesus describes to his disciples. Keep in mind that the end times are complex and there are different interpretations worthy of study about what the Bible says will take place in the final days.

The Jews were proud of their temple, in spite of the fact that it was built by the Herod family in order to placate the Jews. Jesus had already given His estimate of the temple (Mark 11:15-17), but His disciples were fascinated by the magnificence of the structure. Imagine how shocked they were when Jesus informed them that the building they admired so much would one day be demolished. The Jewish leaders had defiled it; Jesus would depart from it and leave it desolate (Matt. 23:38); the Romans would destroy it.

Once away from the crowds, Jesus' disciples asked Him when this momentous event would take place and what would happen to indicate it was soon to occur. Their questions revealed that their understanding of prophecy was still quite confused. They thought that the destruction of the temple coincided with the end of the age and the return of their Lord (Matt. 24:3). But their questions gave Jesus the opportunity to deliver a prophetic message that is generally called "The Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24-25; Luke 21:5-36).

As we study this important sermon, we must follow some practical guidelines. To begin with, we must study this discourse in the light of the rest of Scripture, especially the Book of Daniel. The prophetic Scriptures harmonize if we consider all that God has revealed.

Second, we must see the practical application of the discourse. Jesus did not preach this sermon to satisfy the curiosity of His disciples, or even to straighten out their confused thinking. At least four times He said "Take heed!" (Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33) and He closed the address with the admonition, "Watch!" While studying this address can help us better understand future events, we must not make the mistake of setting dates! (Mark 13:32)

Third, as we study, we must keep in mind the "Jewish atmosphere" of the discourse. The Olivet Discourse grew out of some questions asked of a Jewish rabbi by four Jewish men, about the future of the Jewish temple. The warnings about "false Christs" would especially concern Jews (Mark 13:5-6, 21-22), as would the warning about Jewish courts and trials (Mark 13:9). The Jews would especially appreciate the reference to "Daniel the prophet" and the admonition to flee from Judea (Mark 13:14).

Finally, we must remember that this chapter describes a period of time known as "the Tribulation" (Mark 13:19, 24; also see Matt. 24:21, 29). The Old Testament prophets wrote about this period and called it "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), a time of wrath (Zeph. 1:15-18), and a time of indignation and punishment (Isa. 26:20-21). As we shall see, it is Daniel the prophet who gives us the "key," resulting in a better understanding of the sequence of events.

In Mark 13, Jesus described three stages in this Tribulation period: (1) the beginning (Mark 13:5-13), (2)

the middle (Mark 13:14–18), and (3) the events that lead to the end (Mark 13:19–27). He then closed with two parables that urge believers to watch and take heed (Mark 13:28–37). Matthew's Gospel is more detailed but has the same basic outline: the beginning of sorrows (Matt. 24:4–14), the middle of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:15–28), the end (Matt. 24:29–31), closing parabolic application (Matt. 24:32–44).

I must point out that it is the conviction of many students of prophecy that believers in this present age of the church will be raptured by Christ and taken to heaven before the Tribulation begins (1 Thes. 4:13–5:11; Rev. 3:10–11). At the close of the Tribulation, they will return to earth with Christ and reign with Him (Rev. 19:11–20:6). I agree with this interpretation, but I do not make it a test of orthodoxy or spirituality.

The key statement is at the end of Mark 13:8: "These are the beginnings of sorrows." The word translated "sorrows" means "birth pangs," suggesting that the world at that time will be like a woman in travail (see Isa. 13:6–8; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:20–23; 1 Thes. 5:3). The birth pangs will come suddenly, build up gradually, and lead to a time of terrible sorrow and tribulation for the whole world.

"Don't be deceived." Jesus listed the things that must not be taken as the "signs" of His coming. Rather, they are indications that the Tribulation "birth pangs" are just beginning. These signs are: the success of false Christs (Mark 13:5–6), nations in conflict (Mark 13:7–8a), natural disturbances (Mark 13:8b), and religious persecutions (Mark 13:9–13). They have always been with us, but since these events are compared to "birth pangs," our Lord may be saying that an acceleration of these things would be significant.

False messiahs. The pages of history are filled with the tragic stories of false messiahs, false prophets, and their enthusiastic but deluded disciples. Jesus warned about false prophets (Matt. 7:15–20), as did Paul (Acts 20:28–31), and John (1 John 4:1–6). There is something in human nature that loves a lie and refuses to believe the costly lessons of the past. Mark Twain said that a lie runs around the world while Truth is putting on her shoes! How easy it is for spiritually blind people to follow popular leaders and gullibly accept their simple but erroneous solutions for the problems of life. Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived by these imposters, and that warning holds good today.

Political conflicts. He also warned them not to be disturbed by political conflicts among the nations. The Roman Empire had enjoyed a measure of peace for many years, but it would not last. As the empire decayed and nationalism developed, it was inevitable that nations would come into conflict. The "Pax Romana" would be gone forever.

Natural disasters. War often leaves famine in its wake (2 Kings 25:2–3; Ezek. 6:11). Famine is also caused by man's abuse of the environment, or it can be sent by God as a judgment (1 Kings 17:1). There have always been earthquakes, and some are evidences of God's wrath (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). Since natural disasters have many causes, it is dangerous to dogmatically make them "the signs of the times."

"Don't be discouraged!" Not only were the believers to take heed and avoid the deceivers, but they were also to take heed to themselves (Mark 13:9–13). Why? Because they would face increasing opposition and persecution from sources both official (Mark 13:9–11) and personal (Mark 13:12–13). It was important that the believers use these experiences as opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ. Persecution would begin in the local Jewish courts, but it would move to the higher courts where governors and kings would be involved. You see a similar development recorded in the Book of Acts

(Acts 4-5; 7; 12; 16; 21-28).

But persecution would only result in proclamation! The believers would suffer for His sake and in that way declare His Gospel. "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you," said Tertullian to his persecutors. "The blood of Christians is seed!" While I do not think that taking the Gospel to all nations (Mark 13:10) is a condition for our Lord's return, it is certainly Christ's commission to His people (Matt. 28:19-20). The "end" here means "the end of the age," the Tribulation period.

It would not be easy for these "common people" to face courts, governors, and kings; but Jesus assured them that the Holy Spirit would minister through them whenever they had opportunity to witness (Mark 13:11). This passage should not be used as an excuse or a crutch for poorly prepared preachers. It is an encouragement for all believers who sincerely want to witness for Christ and honor Him (John 14:26; Acts 4:8). If we are walking in the Spirit, we will have no trouble bearing witness for Christ when the opportunities arrive (John 15:26-27).

We can understand official persecution, but why would friends and family members create problems for believers? (see Micah 7:4ff; John 15:18-27) You would think that Jewish families in particular would be loyal to each other. But the Christian faith was looked on as heresy and blasphemy by both the Jews and the Gentiles. Twice daily, orthodox Jews affirmed, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord!" (Deut. 6:4) The Jew who said "Jesus is Lord!" blasphemed and was worthy of death. Rome expected its citizens to declare "Caesar is lord!" or suffer the consequences. Thus, families and friends would be torn between their loyalty to their "ancient faith" and their nation, and their devotion to loved ones.

The real cause for persecution is stated in Mark 13:13, "for My name's sake." If we identify with Jesus Christ, we can expect the world to treat us the way it treated Him (John 15:20ff). You can belong to all sorts of weird religious groups today and not suffer much opposition from family and friends, but the minute you bring the name of Jesus into the picture, and share the Gospel, somebody will start to oppose you. His name is still hated.

Do not interpret Mark 13:13 as a condition for salvation, for it applies primarily to witnesses during the Tribulation. In any period a person lives, if he is truly born again, God will love him (John 13:1; Rom. 8:35-38) and keep him (John 10:27-29; Rom. 8:29-34). Since "the end" in Mark 13:7 means "the end of the age," that is likely what it means in Mark 13:13. During the Tribulation, the true believers will prove their faith by their faithfulness. They will not give in to the godless pressures of false religion (Rev. 13).

MARK 13:14-23

Geoffrey Grogan, in his contribution to the Focus on the Bible Commentary, notes how Mark's gospel delves into relatively complex concepts regarding the end times, despite its typically direct and straightforward style, and offers some understanding to the reader about what is to come preceding the return of Christ.

So far, the teaching of this chapter in the Gospel has been straightforward and relatively simple to understand. We can see that it relates to what lies ahead for the disciples, but also that much of it embraces later times too. At this point, however, Jesus introduces a somewhat enigmatic expression taken from the Book of Daniel, where it occurs three times (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). It is 'the abomination that causes desolation'. What does it mean? 'Abomination' certainly suggests something deeply repugnant to God, and 'desolation', followed by the words, 'standing where it does not belong',

appears to be a reference to something alien and illegitimate that would cause worshippers to leave the temple of God. A study of the Danielic passages tends to confirm this. The words of Jesus too clearly imply that this temple would become devoid of worshippers.

This raises the question as to the time of the fulfilment of this prophecy. In considering this, we need to remember that the phrase started life within the Old Testament period, in the Book of Daniel. In fact, Daniel is expressly mentioned in the parallel passage in Matthew (Matt. 24:15). It is widely agreed that there was some fulfilment of these Daniel prophecies during the Maccabean period, when a representative of the pagan Syrian monarch, the political overlord of the Jews, profaned the altar in the Jerusalem temple.

The use of this prophecy by Jesus and with a future reference, however, certainly indicates that this does not exhaust its meaning, and so bears witness to the fact that he himself accepted the principle of typology. When, then, was it to be more completely fulfilled? A case can certainly be made out for the events of the Jewish War of AD 66–70, which culminated in Jerusalem's destruction. The Roman soldiers who besieged Jerusalem and destroyed its temple carried standards with images on them and these were considered idolatrous by the Jews. The parallel passage in Luke mentions that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies (cf. Luke 21:20). Certainly the teaching of Jesus could apply to something like this.

It is interesting though that Mark's account of his words here uses a masculine form for the Greek participle translated 'standing' (see the NIV margin), and that Paul does the same sort of thing in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–10 when he is writing of the man of lawlessness. This certainly suggests that the ultimate abomination is to be a human object of worship, and the fact that in Matthew's account this abomination is mentioned in a passage dealing with questions of the disciples that included explicit reference to the coming of Jesus (24:3, 15, 27, 30) strongly suggests that Jesus has the end-time in view.

Probably therefore Daniel's prophecy is a germinal one, related to a repeated sequence of events, culminating in a happening just prior to the return of Christ. This would in fact make it parallel to the references to religious, political and physical disturbances of God's order to be found earlier in this chapter, except for the fact that, unlike them, it appears to culminate in a single event. The words, 'let the reader understand,' may have been spoken by Jesus himself or they may be Mark's own comment at this point. A further question is that of the identity of the book to be read. Is it the Book of Daniel or the Gospel of Mark? Either is possible. On the whole it seems most likely that the words were spoken by Jesus and that they were meant to apply to the Book of Daniel. The exhortation contained in the following verse could hardly apply to readers of the Gospel who were situated in Rome, but it would have great relevance to Christians in Judea at the time when the Roman armies were approaching Jerusalem.

This then raises a further question: to what should we apply the words of verses 14b to 23? This is not an easy matter. These verses certainly look as if they apply to the events associated with the Fall of Jerusalem. They are very specific and detailed. They assume that there is a dreadful threat to Judea and so, by implication, to Jerusalem, its capital. Just as the people of Israel had to leave Egypt with all speed after they had kept the first Passover, so now there was to be no thought of anything else when the warning signs were seen. Eusebius, the first great Church historian after Luke's account of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles, tells his readers that when the Christians in Jerusalem saw the Roman legions approaching, they thought of this prophecy and left the city for Pella, amongst the mountains of Peraea, east of the Jordan.

The problem of interpretation becomes acute when we come to verse 19. This verse seems definitely eschatological, and should be compared with Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7; and Revelation 7:14. Yet, despite this, it occurs in a context appearing to relate to AD 70. In fact, the question of the disciples in verse 4, referring as it does to our Lord's affirmation in verse 2, certainly appears to apply to the destruction of the temple, which we know to have happened in AD 70. This provides one of the two historical foci of the chapter. The other is provided by verse 26, the coming of the Son of Man in glory. Whereabouts in the chapter, then, does Jesus move in his teaching from events associated with the first advent to those associated with the second?

There have been four approaches to it by those who accept this chapter as authoritative teaching given by a Teacher with divine authority. Two of these see the chapter as referring only to one great event, whereas the other two see it as referring to two great events.

First of all, some have interpreted everything in the chapter in relation to the Fall of Jerusalem. Everything then applies to the first century AD. Even the coming of the Son of Man here referred to is not the Second Advent, but is a coming like the coming of God in judgement to Israel in so many passages in the Old Testament. We might then compare 9:1, if, as we have suggested, this applies to the Transfiguration of Jesus rather than to his second advent. If this is what it means, however, it is not easy then to understand the reference to the gathering of the elect in verse 27.

Secondly, there are those who apply everything to the Second Advent. This would be simple were it not for verses 1 to 4. If this is the meaning, how can the teaching of Jesus be reckoned in any sense an answer to the question asked by the disciples?

Thirdly, there is the view that the change from the Fall of Jerusalem to the events associated with the Second Advent comes at or around verse 19. This is in fact very difficult, for there is no indication whatever there of a change of subject. The tribulation seems, on this view, to be related first of all to the Fall of Jerusalem but then, because it is depicted in such extreme language, to the events preceding the Second Advent. This interpretation, popular as it is, bristles with problems.

Lastly, there are those who hold that all applies to the Fall of Jerusalem except verses 24 to 27, which relate to the Second Advent. Everything before this applies to the first century (although some of the events form a series which goes on beyond this). Verses 29 and 30 require very careful interpretation. According to this way of understanding the chapter, the phrase, 'these things', in verse 30 refers to the same events as 'all these things' in verse 29, which, the careful reader will note, do not and cannot include the coming of the Son of Man. To notice this is of great importance for understanding the chapter. So then all the signs will take place, not only before the Second Advent, but even before the Fall of Jerusalem, so that the latter is truly an anticipation of the former. This means that it is important to keep abreast of world news.

There is one further problem for this interpretation, and it stems from the words that introduce verse 24, 'But in those days, following that distress.' Do they rule out the possibility of a very long time gap between verses 23 and 24? No! The problem is resolved if we take it that the phrase, 'that distress' refers to the whole period of trouble outlined by Jesus in verses 5 to 23 and not simply to the 'days of distress unequalled from the beginning' associated with the Fall of Jerusalem, and which are referred to in verse 19.

I recognize the difficulties of the passage, but see less problems in the last interpretation than in the other three.

MARK 13:24-27

Prophecy is one of the most difficult things to interpret in scripture. Are the events foretold by Jesus in Mark 13 understood by modern readers as already fulfilled or yet to be fulfilled? James A. Brooks, in his work for the New American Commentary, references the Old Testament and the passages that help the reader understand what Jesus was talking about and how these prophecies would be fulfilled.

At this point the dual reference of the discourse becomes undeniable—at least for all readers since A.D. 70. The disciples who first heard what Jesus said and even some of the original readers/hearers of the Gospel may have thought the fall of Jerusalem would constitute the end of the world, but that has not proved to be true. The modern reader may conclude that Jesus and/or Mark were mistaken (this conclusion is not possible for those who affirm the total truthfulness of Scripture), but no objective interpreter can deny they intended to describe an event that as yet has not taken place and one that transcends history.

Virtually the entire section consists of allusions to various Old Testament texts. One must conclude that the return of the Lord fulfills many of the promises originally given to Israel. What Mark described amounts to the consummation of the kingdom of God. Whereas throughout most of the Gospel Christ and his kingdom have been veiled, here they are fully revealed. Mark prepared his readers/hearers for the passion account by showing them the ultimate triumph of Jesus.

13:24–25 The word “but” contrasts what follows with what precedes and suggests that the return of the Son of Man is an altogether different event from the fall of Jerusalem and other sufferings of the present age. “In those days” is an Old Testament expression (e.g., Jer 3:16, 18; Joel 3:1; Zech 8:23). Mark used the Greek equivalent several times (also 1:9, “At that time”; 8:1, “During those days”; 13:17, 19, 20), which is more of an indicator of the certainty of God’s will than a particular time. Here it simply refers to a time after the “distress” or “tribulation” or “trouble” of vv. 2–23, but no one can determine how long the period of trouble lasts.

Verses 24b–25 are not a direct quotation, as the NIV implies by its use of quotation marks, but an allusion to such passages as Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7–8; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15. The four statements are parallel, as the poetic arrangement in the NIV indicates. The various items are not to be taken literally but as symbolic of an event of cosmic significance. Certainly the darkening of the sun at Jesus’ crucifixion (15:33) does not constitute fulfillment of v. 24b, although it too is a symbol of divine wrath.

13:26 “At that time” (tote, “then,” RSV, NRSV, NASB, NEB, REB, GNB) also refers to a time after the distresses of the present age. The statement “men will see” in the NIV, in the Greek text is literally “they will see” (RSV, NRSV, NASB, NEB, REB). It presumably means that all persons and not just disciples will observe the return.

The affirmation is a clear allusion to, if not a quotation of, Dan 7:13. In fact, this is the only passage that specifically associates the Son of Man in Mark with the one in Daniel, but Daniel likely is the source of all of the references to this person. It is significant that the term “Son of Man” is used here. The same one who humbly ministered on earth (10:45), the same one who suffered and died (8:31), will return with “great power and glory.” In the Old Testament “glory” is a characteristic of God (e.g., Exod 16:7, 10; 24:16–17). Jesus’ glorious return is further indication of his deity.

13:27 Nothing is said about judgment, either punishment or rewards. Nothing is said about resurrection or reigning. The only purpose of the coming mentioned is the gathering of the scattered

elect. The “elect” are those who are chosen and blessed by God. The word itself gives no indication of why God chose them. The idea of gathering the scattered people of God goes back to the Old Testament, where it is a function of God himself (e.g., Deut 30:3–4; Ps 147:2; Isa 11:12; 43:6; Jer 32:37; Ezek 11:17; 34:13; 36:24). The expression “four winds” appears five times in the Old Testament (e.g., Zech 2:6). The Old Testament several times uses the expressions “end(s) of the earth” (e.g., Deut 13:7; 30:4; Jer 12:12) and “end of the heavens” (Deut 4:32; 30:4 LXX; Ps 19:6) but does not combine them as here. The idea is that Jesus will regather his people from wherever they have been scattered. This was a comforting word for Mark’s readers/hearers who were about to be—and according to some datings of Mark’s Gospel had been—scattered.

MARK 13:28-31

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, in their commentary in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, explains how Jesus’ statements in vv. 28-31 of Mark 13 are related to his overall discourse with the disciples in this section of the gospel.

The “parable” of a fig tree is really an analogy (NIV, “lesson”; for this broad definition of the Greek term *parabole*, see *Overview*, 4:1–34). In Palestine most trees retain their leaves in the winter (the olive, oak, evergreen, terebinth, etc.), but the fig tree is an exception. In the fall it loses its leaves; and when in the spring the sap rises in its branches and the tree begins to leaf out, summer cannot be far off (Lane, 479). Jesus points out that just as the new shoots on the tree reveal that summer is near, so when “these things” are seen to be happening, his disciples will know that “it” (or “he”) is near (v. 29).

Four closely related questions emerge: (1) What does the fig tree symbolize? (2) What are “these things” that the disciples will witness? (3) What is the thing (or person) that is “near”? and (4) What is “this generation” that will not pass away until “all these things have happened” (v. 30)? The answers to these questions are closely tied to our interpretation of the discourse as a whole.

1. Jesus had earlier cursed the fig tree (11:12–25), which was symbolic of God’s judgment against Israel and the temple. It is possible, therefore, that the leafing of the fig tree in the springtime symbolizes the restoration of God’s people in the new community of the Messiah (cf. T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* [JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989], 251–52). Yet Jesus does not draw such a specific analogy. The fundamental point seems to be more general: the certainty of summer following the leafing of a fig tree confirms that what Jesus has predicted will certainly come to pass.

2. So which prediction is in view that will surely come to pass—the destruction of Jerusalem, or the coming of the Son of Man at the end of the age? The simplest and least problematic solution is to take the primary referent as the destruction of Jerusalem (Lane, 478; France, 538; Garland, 502; Witherington, 348). Both “these things” (*tauta*) of v. 29, and “all these things” (*tauta panta*) of v. 30 refer to the events of vv. 5–23, which climax in the “abomination of desolation” and the destruction of Jerusalem. As we have seen throughout the discourse, this cataclysmic event then serves as a prototype and model for the ultimate crisis, which will precede the final tribulation and the coming of the Son of Man.

3. Following this interpretation consistently throughout the passage, the next phrase in v. 29, *engys estin*, should not be translated “he is near” (NRSV, NET, CSB, ESV; cf. NLT)—a reference to the Son of Man—but rather “it is near” (NIV, TNIV; cf. TEV and CEB, “the time”), referring either

to the “abomination that causes desolation” (cf. v. 14) or the fall of the city itself. Just as summer follows the sprouting of the fig tree, so the destruction of Jerusalem will follow the preparatory signs Jesus has described.

4. Finally, this interpretation allows the most natural and straightforward sense of the expression “this generation” (he genea haute) in v. 30. A multiplicity of interpretations has been suggested for this difficult phrase, including humanity in general, the Jewish people, Christians, and unbelievers. None of these fit the context well. It seems best, therefore, to understand it to mean Jesus’ own generation. This is the sense of the phrase elsewhere in Mark (8:12, 38; 9:19). A biblical generation was about forty years, which was “not coincidentally the length of time between Jesus’ prediction and the destruction of Jerusalem” (Witherington, 349). “All these things” (tauta panta), then, refers to the signs found in vv. 5–23, which are not confined to a remote future but “are to be experienced, though not necessarily exhausted, by the contemporary generation” (A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* [Leiden: Brill, 1966], 133).

Since Jesus’ words here are preceded by the solemn “I tell you the truth” (amen lego hymin; see comments at 3:28), they are not to be taken lightly. To suggest that Jesus was mistaken in the statement he made in this verse, but that the mistake was regarding a matter of such small consequence that it makes no difference, is to fail to take seriously the solemnity of these introductory words.

Jesus strongly emphasizes the certainty and reliability of his predictions. “Heaven and earth” is a reference to the whole of the universe, all creation. The certitude and absolute reliability of Jesus’ words are far greater than the apparent continuance of the universe. It will someday cease to exist, but Jesus’ words will always have validity (Ps 102:25–27; Isa 40:6–8; 51:6).

MARK 13:32

It is mysterious that Jesus, in his earthly ministry, did not know the precise timing of what will happen in the end times. However, D.A. Carson, in his commentary in the NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible, gives insight into phrases like “that day or hour” and “no one knows...nor the Son” to help the reader understand God’s overall plan of salvation and the role of Jesus, God’s Son, in that plan.

that day or hour. “That day” is a common prophetic expression for the day of God’s decisive intervention, whether in the past (e.g., Isa 7:18; Jer 4:9) or in the future (e.g., Isa 11:10, 11; 19:23; 52:6; Jer 30:8; Hos 2:21–23). The “hour” is the precise time when the event happens (see note on 14:35). This rare expression occurs in Dan 12:1, where it refers to the time of unparalleled distress (see note on v. 19) arising as a result of the abomination of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (see note on v. 14). It could also refer to the end times or the Antiochus-like distress caused by Israel’s false messiahs that immediately preceded the destruction of AD 70 (see note on vv. 24–25). no one knows ... nor the Son. While Jesus’ sign is reliable (v. 14), only God knows the precise timing. This should not be seen as undermining Jesus’ deity (see note on 1:2–3); it instead reflects Jesus’ role as the obedient servant-Son (see note on 1:11) who lived in submission to the Father (cf. 14:36; Heb 10:5–7).

MARK 13:33-37

Hans F. Bayer, in his commentary notes in the ESV Study Bible, gives an overview of the readiness that Jesus calls his disciples to have after telling them all that will take place in the end times.

Jesus gives this entire discourse about the end times so that the disciples will be on guard (vv. 5, 9, 23). This parable about a man going on a journey (vv. 34–37) displays similarities with the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–12). The point is perpetual readiness while bearing God-given responsibilities. The sudden return of the master of the house corresponds to the sudden coming of the Son of Man (find you asleep, 13:36; see Luke 17:24–32). Instead of speculating about the specific timing of end-time events, all disciples are to be vigilant.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Hans F. Bayer, *Mark*, The ESV Study Bible.

James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary.

D.A. Carson, *Mark*, The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary.

John D. Grassmick, *Mark*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

Geoffrey Grogan, *Mark: Good News from Jerusalem*, Focus on the Bible Commentary.

Leland Ryken, Introduction to *Mark: Literary Features*, The ESV Study Bible.

R.C. Sproul, *Mark*, The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version.

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Mark*, The Bible Exposition Commentary.