

Series: Basic Gospel of Mark
Title: Jesus and The Last Days
Text: Mark 13:1-37
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The subject of prophecy is one that generates much interest from many modern believers. Most preachers are aware they can easily see a surge in worship attendance by simply preaching a series of messages on the subject. However, fascination with the end of the world is not relegated to the church alone. Popular movies and fictional novels propose numerous theories concerning how the world might come to an end.

Sadly, much teaching concerning prophecy in the church nowadays is not tethered to Scripture. In seeking to provide minuscule details concerning what will happen in the end, some go beyond the bounds of Scripture. The end result is an inordinate fascination with dates, cataclysmic events, and apocalyptic rulers. How can discerning believers navigate through the overflow of end-times teaching?

Fortunately, God's Word provides some rather straightforward teaching on the subject. In fact, Jesus Himself preached an entire sermon on the topic. His sermon is now known as "The Olivet Discourse." Matthew 23-25 provided one account of the sermon. For the purposes of our study, we will look at Mark's account. In Mark 13, Jesus taught His disciples concerning the end of all things. By examining His words, we can discover two concepts that are important to our understanding of the last days.

EVENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LAST DAYS (READ MARK 13:1-27)

Commit yourself to a study of the last days and you will soon discover there is a lot of debate concerning end-time events. Arguments rage concerning the timing of Christ's return. Will He first return to rapture the church, or should we expect one, final appearing that ushers in His eternal rule? Others fuss over whether or not there will be a literal, thousand year reign of Christ on the Earth. Camps have formed that don several different labels — post-millennial, pre-millennial, amillennial, and more. On top of the aforementioned debates, there are also questions related to the Great Tribulation and the Antichrist.

Cutting through the confusing flurry of debates can be difficult. Fortunately, Jesus' teaching in Mark 13 provides simple instruction concerning the last days. Instead of attempting to make our thinking fit within the timeline of a contemporary "guru," or instead of grabbing our end-times theology from fanciful works of fiction, its best to build our beliefs on the words of our Lord. From His teaching, we learn of five events that will mark the last days.

The Destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:1-4)

It is important to note that the phrase "last days" is often used within the New Testament (Acts 2:14; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:2) to refer to a period of time that spans from the Ascension of Christ (Acts 1:10) until the Return of Christ (Acts 1:11). We could say that everything within the church age could be considered "the last days." Confusion regarding this matter has led to a lot of misinterpretation of

biblical prophecy. When John spoke of the church age, he flatly said, “My dear children, these are the last days” (1 John 2:18).

Because some don’t see that the church age is the same as the last days, they mistakenly think that all biblical prophecy should be relegated to the far-off future. This hermeneutical folly is especially rampant in American Evangelicalism. It is said that when D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones visited North America for the first time, he was stunned to find so many Bible-believing Christians who thought there was so much unfulfilled prophecy in Scripture.¹ Lloyd-Jones’ dismay was not unwarranted. Indeed, there are many believers who don’t have an appropriate appreciation for the fulfilled prophecy of the New Testament.

One of the biggest fulfillments of New Testament prophecy is found in Mark 13. After having entered Jerusalem for the Holy Week, the disciples gawked at the massive Temple complex. Jesus told the Twelve, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down” (Mark 13:2). In the original language of the text, Jesus was pictured as using a double negative.² Such a grammatical construction goes against the rules of modern English, but it was appropriate in Koine Greek. A double negative was used for emphasis. Thus, Mark conveyed the idea that the temple complex would be completely destroyed.

In making His pronouncement, Jesus prophesied of the future destruction of the Jewish Temple. His pronouncement was justified, considering 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 Jerusalem. 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. when Titus laid siege to Jerusalem. History tells us the temple was first burned. Afterwards, its walls were pulled down.³ The event, like the gift of tongues in Acts 2:1-13, was intended as a sign of condemnation for the Jews. It revealed that 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 said in Romans, “A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:15).

It is sad that many modern Christians are completely unaware of the meaning of Jesus’ prophecy in Mark 13:2. Some assume our Lord’s words refer to a still future event. What a mistake! The fact that Jesus told of the destruction of the Temple years in advance proves that He was more than a prophet. Jesus is the Eternal God who has the ability to see the future as if it is history!

False Teaching/Apostasy (Mark 13:5)

¹ Murray, Iain. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years, 1899-1939*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 269-283.

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

³ Brooks, 207.

In Mark 13:5, Jesus said, “Watch out that no one deceives you” (Mark 13:5). The word translated “watch out” meant “to beware” or “to be on the lookout.” In the original language of the New Testament, it appeared as an aorist imperative; thus, it provided a command to act with a sense of urgency.⁴ It is worth noting that Mark used the same word frequently in chapter 13 (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, Christian nationalism, 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” was of one leading another astray or causing one to wander.⁵ Deceivers will always exist within the Church (1 John 2:26; 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, 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.”⁶

Doctrinal 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 “Christian.” 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.

Persecution of God’s People (Mark 13:9)

Jesus also warned His disciples that they would be persecuted and “flogged” because of their faith in Him (Mark 13:9). The original language of the New Testament used

⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 96.

⁶ Ryle, 216-217.

graphic and gory language. It used terms that referred to the flaying or skinning of human flesh.⁷ For first-century disciples, this meant they would face harsh persecution from governing authorities within Jerusalem, and from the Gentile world as well.

Jesus' words had a near fulfillment found in the book of Acts. In that book, we read of disciples being tried by local authorities (Acts 4:5-7; 5:17-18; and 12:1-3).⁸ Paul also faced trials before governmental leaders (Acts 23:1-11; 24:1-10; 25:1-26:32). In time, all of the disciples would face grave persecution. All of them, except one, would die for the faith. The lone survivor would experience exile at the hands of the Roman government.

Those who followed the disciples' teaching would fare little better. History speaks of the persecution the early church endured. Tacitus, a first-century Roman historian, said that the earliest Christians were "hated for their abominations."⁹ Because they refused to regard the Roman Emperor as divine, they were despised and incriminated on grounds of treason. Tacitus gave details of the persecution endured by first-century believers, detailing how the emperor blamed the church for fires that ravaged Rome:

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.¹⁰

Jesus correctly prophesied concerning persecution. His ability to tell the future as if it was history proved that He was indeed the Son of God.

⁷ Robertson, 374.

⁸ Schnabel, 321

⁹ Brooks, 211.

¹⁰ Tacitus, Annals: Book XV, Chapter 44.

Though they had an immediate application for His disciples, our Lord's words also had application for all generations. God's people must always be prepared to face the trials and tribulations associated with the church age. Too many modern believers seem to be inoculated by the spirit of the age. They have little concern regarding the possibility of persecution. The words of Jesus should serve as a sober reminder that the world has never been, nor never will be, a friend of the church.

A New Heaven and New Earth (Mark 13:24-25)

In Mark 13:24, Jesus transitioned to talk about His Second Coming. He said, "But in those days, after that tribulation: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light." The word "but" is significant. It was a conjunction that contrasted the topic at hand with the previous verses. Paired with the phrase "in those days," it marked a transition to a new focus within Jesus' teaching on the end of times.¹¹ Though He previously spoke of events associated with the first-century destruction of the temple, He leapt thousands of years into the future to discuss the coming of the Son of Man.¹²

In describing His second advent, Jesus spoke of cataclysmic natural disasters. Verse 24 referenced the sun being darkened and the moon losing its light. Such metaphors were drawn from Old Testament prophecy.¹³ Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord said, "When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light" (Ezekiel 32:7). Jesus' usage of such Old Testament metaphors revealed that His intent was to speak of the last days. His focus was no longer on Titus' siege of Jerusalem. He wanted His disciples to be aware of what would happen when Messiah returned to initiate His kingdom.

Jesus' apocalyptic language pointed to what Isaiah foretold in Isaiah 65:17 — "For I will create new heavens and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind." Our Lord intended to speak of the coming destruction of the Earth that will make way for the New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1). Peter prophesied about the same event — "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed" (2 Peter 3:10). The Lord's work of making a New Heaven and New Earth will be a part of His plan to return humanity to pre-sin conditions. Since Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24), the Lord has been on mission to return humanity to its original intent (Genesis 3:8; 14-15).

The Return of Christ (Mark 13:26)

Mark 13:26 succinctly described the Second Coming, saying, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). The events of which Jesus spoke cannot be relegated to the ancient world. The original language of Mark's gospel indicated that Jesus transitioned to speak of things that have still not

¹¹ Brooks, 214.

¹² Schnabel, 331.

¹³ Robertson, 377.

happened. Those who deny this reality are not honest with the text. One has said, “No objective interpreter can deny they intended to describe an event that as yet has not taken place and one that transcends history.”¹⁴

The event in view is none other than the Second Coming, the event described in Revelation 1:7. At our Lord’s return, people “will see the Son of Man coming in clouds.” In Old Testament imagery, clouds were a symbol of Divine power and authority. Daniel 7:13 depicted Messiah coming to earth, surrounded by them.¹⁵

When Jesus appears, the full weight of the Lord’s power and presence will accompany Him. He will come as a conquering king, and the entire world will bear witness to His authority. John gave more detail concerning the Son of Man’s return in the book of Revelation. He said, “Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11). The imagery of Jesus returning in power and purity should compel us to stand in awe of Him. May we fear, adore, worship, and serve our Lord until He returns.

RESPONSES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LAST DAYS (READ MARK 13:28-37)

Many approach the study of end-time events with a spirit of speculative curiosity. They want to know about dates, events, and characters associated with the last days. They yearn for a teacher to present a timeline or system that makes all things clear. A cursory reading of Mark 13 reveals that believers should have a different perspective. Though Jesus did share about key events, He seemed to be more concerned with His disciples response to what He shared. Over and over again, He said things like “watch!” and “be on your guard!” Through His teaching, one discovers three primary responses believers should have to His end-times doctrine.

Be on guard against deceptive “Christian” teaching (Mark 13:21-23).

In light of all of the details concerning the end of time found in verses 14-22, Jesus encouraged His disciples toward spiritual vigilance. In Mark 13:23, He said, “And you must watch! I have told you everything in advance.” The word translated “watch” is one that meant “be on the look out,” “be careful,” or “beware.”¹⁶ In the original language of the text, it appeared as a present imperative verb. Thus, Jesus commanded ongoing vigilance in spiritual matters.

Jesus wanted His disciples to exercise a habit-of-life caution concerning end-time truth. In fact, Mark placed the word translated “you” in a position of emphasis in the verse.¹⁷ His intent stressed the need for believers to take personal responsibility for spiritual vigilance. In all generations, believers should examine popular teaching to see if it is in alignment with the plumb line of Scripture. Caution should be taken so that one is not easily led astray by seducing doctrines. One has rightly said, “Gullibility

¹⁴ Brooks, 214.

¹⁵ Schnabel, 332.

¹⁶ Zodhiates, 342-343.

¹⁷ Robertson, 377.

is no mark of a saint or of piety...God gave us our wits for self-protection.”¹⁸ In light of the Lord’s teaching on the last days, may we be on guard against hollow teachings that lead us away from the firm foundation of Christ.

Avoid setting dates (Mark 13:32-33).

In Mark 13:32, Jesus said, “Now concerning that day or hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven nor the Son—but only the Father.” Our Lord’s words revealed the folly of making predictions about the Lord’s return. We should stay silent on dates and deadlines. The Lord never intended for us to know precisely when He will return.

Conspiracies and controversies concerning Christ’s return have gripped the church throughout the ages. In recent years, misguided Christian teachers have seized the opportunity to attract crowds by making bold pronouncements. Diseases, current events, wars, political upheaval, and the like have all been used as opportunities to announce that Christ’s return is near. Such date-setting sensationalism goes against the grain of Jesus’ prophetic teaching. Our Lord told us that we can’t know the exact date of His return.

If He had given us a date, many would likely respond in despair, if the event appeared to be too far out into the future. Knowing that no relief was in sight, the church would perhaps be given over to despondency and discouragement in the face of fallen society. On the flip side, if Jesus had given a date for His return, others would become slack and lazy in disciple making and world missions.

Can you imagine what it would have been like if the early church would have known the date of Christ’s return? How would they have responded, if they would have been aware that He wasn’t going to return for at least two thousand years? They surely wouldn’t have been as motivated toward holiness. Gospel advancement might have stalled.¹⁹ Perhaps the book of Acts wouldn’t have given witness to such a fervent commitment to missions.

We could probably say the same for ourselves. If we knew when Christ was going to return, we might not be as faithful to our spiritual duties as we should to be. Some argue that people would probably be more motivated if they knew the exact date of Christ’s return. The way in which the Lord concealed the date of His return reveals otherwise. The Lord withheld details concerning exact timing in His Divine wisdom, knowing an answer would not help us in any way.

Serve Christ (Mark 13:34-37).

In verse 34, Jesus concluded His teaching on the last days with a short parable. Some have called it a mini parable.²⁰ Our Lord said, “It is like a man on a journey, who left his house, gave authority to his servants, gave each one his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to be alert” (Mark 13:34). Earlier in Mark’s gospel, a “house” was used on multiple occasions to make reference to the church (Mark 1:29; 2:15; 7:24; 9:33; and 10:10). Since homes were standard meeting places for believers in first-century Rome,

¹⁸ Robertson, 377.

¹⁹ Ryle, 230.

²⁰ Brooks, 218.

the gospel writer strategically made mention of homes in order to allude to discipleship and the mission of Christ's body.

In the Graeco-Roman world, households had servants who were each assigned special responsibilities or "work." Jesus used that cultural convention as a metaphor for the church. He wanted to represent the way individual members of the body of Christ have special, God-given gifts to use for the upbuilding of His Kingdom. The New Testament teaches that believers, at salvation, receive unique spiritual gifts to use in Christ's service (Romans 12:6-8). Such gifts come with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3). It is the responsibility of each servant to identify his or her gifts and use them in service for Jesus.

Commenting on the metaphor in our passage, one has said, "All of the servants in a well-ordered household know what their role is, and attend to it. Only when each individual fulfills his or her own task does the household run smoothly."²¹ The same is true for faithful congregations. Local assemblies will never be strong and effective for Christ unless church members own their God-given duties. Our text teaches us of our need to be serious about our Christian service until Christ returns.

The fourth-century Christian theologian Jerome was known for saying, "Be doing something that the devil may always find you engaged."²² Believers should regularly look at their lives and make evaluations about their commitments to service within the Church. They should take honest inventory, seeking to discover whether or not they are faithfully engaged in Great Commission efforts.

As we conclude our study on end-time events, make sure you don't miss Jesus' closing application. The prospect of the soon return of Christ should motivate you to labor for His kingdom. Charles Spurgeon once said, "It should be your desire to do something in the present life that will live after you are gone."²³ May the Lord use last-day realities to ignite a fervent fire of Christian service in our hearts.

²¹ Ferguson, 220.

²² Ryle, 233.

²³ . Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1880; 26 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 611.