

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 13:1-27

Life Lesson

Eschatology is not meant to divide the church or distract believers with speculation about the future. It is meant to shape how we live today. Jesus teaches that while suffering, deception, and hardship are certain, so are His return and ultimate victory. Because of this hope, believers are called to remain watchful, grounded in truth, united in love, and faithful in endurance. Living in light of the end means pursuing holiness, proclaiming the gospel boldly, and standing firm. Be confident that no matter how dark the world becomes, Christ is King and His promises will be fulfilled.

Examine Scripture

13 As he was going out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, look! What massive stones! What impressive buildings!” 2 Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down.” 3 While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” 5 Jesus told them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, don’t be alarmed; these things must take place,

The End Of The World As We Know It (Part 1)

Nothing stirs more debate within the church than eschatology. In our attempts to understand prophecies and the end times, we tend to divide into camps or adopt certain understandings. If we are not careful, such issues can cause division within the Body of Christ. When it comes to doctrine and theology, there are three tiers. First-tier doctrines are the essentials of Christianity, such as the authority of Scripture, the exclusivity of Christ, and salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Second-tier doctrines are distinctives shared by like-minded Christians, such as Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Pentecostals. Lastly, third-tier issues are those we can disagree on, even within the local church. Eschatology falls within the third tier of doctrines and issues. We must not let our views on the End Times affect our fellowship with other believers.

Though a third-tier doctrine, eschatology is important. Eschatology is more than the study of the End Times; it tells how the story of redemption ends. It is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises throughout Scripture. Eschatology also gives us, as followers of Christ, hope that, no matter what struggles and tribulations we face, we do so in a stance of victory. Lastly, if you think eschatology is about preparing for the end of the world, you are missing the point. It’s about how to live now! Eschatology teaches us to endure suffering, practice personal holiness in a culture opposed to Christ, and live in anticipation of Jesus’ return.

Mark 13 contains the “Olivet Discourse.” It is the final and longest continuous teaching of Jesus in Mark and also one of the most difficult to interpret. Because of its prophetic and apocalyptic language, it can be difficult to interpret. Therefore, we must approach this text carefully and without any personal presuppositions about the End Times.

Vs. 1-2

As Jesus and His disciples were leaving the temple, one of the disciples drew attention to its glory and grandeur. Under Herod the Great, the temple was renovated and expanded. The temple area

but it is not yet the end. 8 For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. 9 "But you, be on your guard! They will hand you over to local courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them.

10 And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations. 11 So when they arrest you and hand you over, don't worry beforehand what you will say, but say whatever is given to you at that time, for it isn't you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 You will be hated by everyone because of my name, but the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 "When you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be" (let the reader understand), "then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. 15 A man on the housetop must not come down or go in to get anything out of his house, 16 and a man in the field must not go back to get his coat. 17 Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days! 18 "Pray it won't happen in winter. 19 For those will be days of tribulation, the kind that hasn't been from the beginning of creation, which God created, until now and never will be again. 20 If the Lord had not cut those days short, no one would be saved. But he cut those days short for the sake of the elect, whom he chose. 21 "Then if anyone tells you, 'See, here is the Messiah! See, there!' do not believe it.

22 For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and will perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23 And you must watch! I have told you everything in advance. 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; 25 the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 He will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

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covered about one-sixth of Jerusalem. Its beauty dominated the ancient world. Even the rabbis of the time had a saying: "He who has not seen the Temple in its full construction has never seen a glorious building in his life." So, it is easy to see how the disciple would have been impressed.

However, instead of agreeing, Jesus responded with a prophecy: "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down" (v. 1). Although alluded to in Mark 11 and 12, this is the first direct reference to the temple's destruction. In A.D. 70, this prophecy was fulfilled when the Roman general Titus destroyed the temple and the surrounding buildings. The once glorious temple was erased from the earth; in fact, the exact location of the Temple Mount remains disputed.

Vs. 3-8

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, across from the temple, His inner circle asked Him: "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" (v. 4). Their question is in two parts. They wanted to know when the temple would be destroyed, as mentioned in (v. 2). They also wanted to know the sign that it would happen. The disciples were under the impression that the destruction of the temple would usher in the End Times, as indicated in (Matt. 24). This belief is understandable because the Jews felt that the temple would never be destroyed and would remain God's dwelling place on earth. If it were destroyed, God would no longer dwell with them.

However, Jesus neither answers their question nor rebukes them. Instead, He warns the disciples. The disciples' questions about when and what signs to look for are legitimate, but Jesus points them to something even more important. Jesus' teachings on the End Times are not merely about waiting and watching for future events; we are to live in the now.

Jesus tells His disciples to "watch out that no one deceives you" (v. 6). The mysterious nature of apocalyptic prophecy lends itself not only to misinterpretation but also to opportunities for deception. How many times have we witnessed such deception in our lifetime? Many have made false predictions and deceived many. Jesus's warnings are spiral; they begin broadly and spiral toward greater specificity. Interestingly, this is how the events in (Rev. 8-11) seem to flow. The opening of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls are not necessarily chronological but cyclical in nature. In a sense, they spiral, delivering ever more acts of terror and increasing judgment. Jesus's warnings are the same; they begin generally and spiral toward the more specific.

First, Jesus warns that many will come claiming to be the Messiah. John reminds us that "you have heard that antichrist is coming,

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even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). We have witnessed many who claim to be Jesus or the Messiah. As the End Times draw near, not only will these antichrists increase, but so will the number of people they deceive. Next, Jesus warns that there will be wars and rumors of wars, and nations will rise up against nations. Yet Jesus says, "it is not yet the end" (v. 7). In other words, things will get worse before they get better. Jesus continues to warn of earthly calamities: earthquakes and famines. Yet these are only "the beginning of birth pains" (v. 8). Birth pains that began with the first coming of Jesus and will only end at His second coming.

Vs. 9-13

Now, Jesus' warning becomes more specific. He warns the disciples of impending persecution. The disciples will face persecution, arrest, flogging, crucifixion, and beheading for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus even says that families will be broken, that brothers will betray brothers, and that children will rise up against their parents and put them to death. If that were not enough, Jesus says, "You will be hated by everyone because of my name" (v. 13).

This may seem grim, but Jesus gives the disciples and us three promises. First, in (v. 10), Jesus says, "And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations." The proclamation of the Gospel is more important than our comfort or even our lives. The glory of the Gospel is worth our lives, and even our deaths. Second, in (v. 11), Jesus promises that in moments of persecution, the Holy Spirit will guide us and our words. Lastly, in (v. 13), Jesus promises that "the one who endures to the end will be saved." True faith does not seek persecution or suffering, but it embraces them when they come, because a diamond shines brighter against a dark background.

Vs. 14-23

Now comes one of the most difficult verses in Mark, even in the entire New Testament. Jesus refers to (Dan. 9:27) and the "abomination of desolation standing where it should not be" (v. 14). There is an obvious allusion to the prophecies in Daniel. To add to the difficulty, Mark assumes his readers will understand exactly what Jesus means by his parenthetical comment: "let the reader understand" (v. 14). Commentators and scholars cannot agree on what or who Jesus is referring to, but there seems to be a sense of "sensus plenior" (a deeper meaning to this prophecy). It has a "now, not yet" tension. The "now" would have been Mark's audience, who would have understood it as referring to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 B.C., when he sacrificed a pig on the altar to honor Zeus. They would also have understood the "abomination of desolation" as the destruction of the temple by Titus in A.D. 70. However, it speaks of a

Personal Reflection

1. How have your views on the End Times influenced your unity and fellowship with other believers, especially with those who hold different perspectives?
2. In what ways are you tempted to focus more on when Christ will return than on how you are living faithfully now?
3. Jesus warns repeatedly about deception. What steps are you taking to remain grounded in Scripture and discern the truth in confusing or divisive times?
4. How does the promise of suffering for the sake of Christ challenge your expectations of the Christian life, and where might God be calling you to endure faithfully?
5. How does the certainty of Jesus' return shape your daily hope, holiness, and commitment to living for His glory today?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

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future fulfillment as well (the “not yet”) in the coming of the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:4). This event has yet to happen and will clearly be the beginning of the end.

The coming of the “abomination of desolation” will cause people to flee to the mountains. The race to escape will be intense (vs. 15-18). This communicates the daunting judgment that is coming, as we see in the Book of Revelation. It will be a sign of the coming tribulation and time of suffering. Again, there are many different views of the tribulation that Jesus refers to. Some see it as a literal seven-year period of tribulation marked by the appearance of the Antichrist, who will deceive many and then usher in a false religion with himself as the object of worship. Those who follow Jesus will be greatly persecuted. Others see the tribulation as figurative, referring to the suffering and persecution of believers throughout history.

Either way, Jesus makes two things clear. First, tribulation and suffering will come, and it will be intense. In fact, Jesus says, “If the Lord had not cut those days short, no one would be saved. But he cut those days short for the sake of the elect, whom he chose” (v. 20). The suffering will be matched only by the deception of many false messiahs and false prophets. The target of the tribulation and deception is the elect of God, those who follow Jesus. Secondly, Jesus warns that we must be watchful and attentive. We must not fall into deception, nor must we falter in suffering.

Vs. 24-27

Again, Jesus uses apocalyptic language to describe the intensity and dread of the tribulation to come. It is common prophetic language to state that the sun and stars will not shine, the moon will be as blood, there will be earthquakes, etc. These images depict the most frightening scenes to demonstrate the intensity of judgment. Regardless of your eschatology (dispensationalism, preterism, futurism, historicism, or eclectic), the tribulation will bring great suffering and persecution for God’s elect, the followers of Jesus.

Yet, even amid suffering and tribulation, there is hope! Jesus is coming again! The first time, He came humble and meek, a babe in a manger. The next time, He will come “in clouds with great power and glory” (v. 26). In (Rev. 19:11-16), John writes, “There was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God . . . And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

Jesus is coming, and He will gather His elect, and we will be with Him for all eternity to enjoy and glorify Him forever.