



NG Study Guide: Mark 13:1-9 “Seek Understanding and Follow Jesus”

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Subject: Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

Object: Don't Be Troubled and Follow Jesus

Thesis: Since Jesus' ascension into heaven till now, there has been no shortage of false teachers pointing to false signs that Jesus is returned or is about to. Don't be deceived by false teachers or troubled by false signs; seek understanding and follow Jesus.

Context: The disciples are showing Jesus around the Herod's Temple complex in Jerusalem.

1) Don't be Deceived: Seek Understanding [1-5]

There will always be an abundance of false teachers; seek understanding from God.

[1] As Jesus and the disciples were walking through Jerusalem, one of the disciples pointed out Herod's temple to Jesus; this is a sight not unfamiliar to Jesus and the disciples, having made the Passover journey to Jerusalem every year. The disciple's amazement at this structure was more than well-founded; if it were still standing today, the temple would easily be considered one of the wonders of the world. It was described by ancient historians as a mountain of marble and gold. At this point in history, the temple was not even complete and wouldn't be until AD 63. Some of the stones were so large that modern cranes probably could not lift them. More importantly, speaking against the Temple was considered by the Pharisees and many Jews to be blasphemous; which puts into perspective just how jarring Jesus' response was.

[2] Jesus demystifies the glory of the temple by prophesying that every stone of Herod's temple is going to come crumbling down.

Jesus wasn't being needlessly negative or morbid; He was being loving by dispelling the Jews' idolatry of the Temple, a sin that they struggled with since its inception. Rather than being amazed and in awe of the God for whom the temple stood, God's people frequently would exchange His glory for that of the temple. God would often make it impossible for the Israelites of the Old Testament to worship at the Temple; and so He did again again when He used the Roman emperor Titus to bring about the destruction of Herod's temple in 70AD. The destruction was as severe as Jesus predicted, and the Roman emperor Titus took it upon himself to parade the lampstand and table of showbread

through the streets of Rome. Countless were slaughtered, with the historian Josephus estimating 1.1 million Jews were killed and almost 100,000 enslaved.

This statement from Jesus doubtless disturbed the disciples. It wouldn't be until later that some of them would approach Jesus for clarity and understanding.

Many have struggled in their faith during the last year and a half of debilitating isolation and political unrest; many have backslided in their faith once churches stopped meeting in person. God's wisdom in allowing it all has doubtlessly been called into question by many of us.

Perhaps God has allowed these trials to remind us that the church gathering is nothing but empty ritual without God being the center as the object of our worship and love.

[3] It wasn't until the disciples climbed the Mount of Olives that only four of the Twelve asked Jesus in private what He meant about the destruction of the Temple. We are left to wonder why the other eight disciples didn't care to ask Jesus what He meant; was it too much for them? Were they apathetic? Did they trust God's wisdom? Did they not believe what Jesus said? We aren't sure, but it's doubtless that these four made the right choice in seeking understanding from Jesus in the midst of their confusion and fear.

Unfortunately, many believers have turned to self-proclaimed prophets instead of God and His Word for wisdom and understanding, especially during these tumultuous times.

Rather than discuss with each other what the others thought Jesus meant, they went straight to Jesus, knowing that He would provide them with an answer. We can have the same assurance that the Lord answers our prayers and questions, even if it doesn't look like an immediate, audible response.

[4] The disciples asked two questions regarding Jesus' prophecy; **when** will it happen and **what** will it look like before it happens? We learn in Matthew 24 that the disciples also ask when Jesus would return at the end of the age, assuming that the destruction of the temple could only mean that the end was near.

It's interesting that the disciples didn't ask **why** it would happen or **how** it would happen; they simply wanted to be prepared for the events described by Jesus and for His triumphant arrival.

Some may say that by virtue of asking Jesus these questions, the disciples demonstrated a lack of faith in God; but there is nothing biblical about that observation. God welcomes all questions asked in humility, encourages us to seek truth, and promises that we will find it when we do.

The way Jesus answered their question, however, was not as tidy as "it will happen on this date at this time." Instead, He took the opportunity to warn His disciples to not be deceived by false teachers who point to false signs.

[5] Before Jesus answered this question, He took the opportunity to warn the disciples against being deceived. The phrase "take heed" means to "pay careful attention to"; admittedly, I'm often undisciplined in my knowledge of the words of Jesus, which only makes me more vulnerable to the deception of sin and false teachers.

If we want to obey Jesus in this, we have to become disciplined in developing a biblical worldview. This doesn't have to look like personal devotional Bible reading; there are countless ways to learn the Bible. For centuries, the Bible was often read aloud in group settings and then discussed, meditated on, and acted upon.

Don't forget that Jesus is living and listening; He is our great High Priest to whom we can go at any time of day and in any circumstance; regardless of feelings of unworthiness or incompetence. We have the same access to Jesus as the disciples had, with the added benefit of the indwelling of His Spirit to illuminate our hearts and minds to the truths of Scripture, the Word of God. Because of this, we are never truly distant from God and are just as close to Jesus as the apostles were.

2) Don't Be Troubled: Follow Jesus [6-9]

[6] Jesus warns the four disciples that in their lifetime, there would be false Christs and false Christians who would identify with Jesus but not actually know Him. Even in the book of Acts, there were false believers using the name of Jesus for their own personal gain and the church as a platform to elevate themselves.

Although it isn't our job to determine the spiritual alignment of everyone we know or meet, we still have to practice discernment when choosing who to trust as a fellow believer. There will always be an abundance of charlatanes who use Jesus, the Word, and the gospel for their own selfish personal gain. This was no different in the early church and has not changed since.

[7] Rome was an expanding empire, and thus was a warring empire. There were no shortage of wars or rumors of wars during the lifetime of the disciples; just ten years after the ascension of Jesus, Rome waged war on the region that would be later known as Britain. No doubt that false prophets capitalized on the opportunity to falsely predict the return of Jesus and to scare people into following and supporting them.

Ironically, it is because of this verse being misused by opportunists that there has been a hyperfixation on wars and rumors of wars amongst Christians, some of whom even excited at the mention of global conflict, thinking that it signals the imminent return of Jesus.

Probably the most difficult part of this verse to bear is the end: "do not be troubled, for such things must happen". War is one of the worst causes of suffering and torment on earth, and has been used by critics of faith as a reason for their unbelief. But Jesus Himself is the answer to their opposition, for there will come a day when He restores the world, where there will be no more sorrow, pain, or suffering, and He will enact justice against the ungodly.

A glimpse of this occurred during World War I in 1914 and was known as the Christmas truce; both sides of the war ceased fighting for the sake of worshiping the Lord on Christmas Eve, sang hymns, and broke bread together. The peace was so powerful, that even after Christmas, both sides refused to fight each other, forcing their commanders to relocate them and replace them with new soldiers; just one disproof of the deceitful cliché that religion is the cause of most or all wars, and proves that faith in and following Jesus can and will bring peace to the world

While the words of Jesus are relevant to all peoples at all times, Jesus was first speaking to the four who came to Him with the question. On top of that, the whole reason for these words spoken by the Lord would be so that they were **not** troubled or riled up at the realities or speculations of war. There has never been peace on earth or a lack of warring; don't let the tragic existence of wars and conflict upset your faith.

[8] Here Jesus elaborates on the wars and other disasters that take place in a fallen world. Every generation tends to either incorrectly view the past as being more or less peaceful than the present, which some in the church use as a false sign that Jesus has returned or is about to. Some interpret "the beginning of sorrows" to indicate that these events are the introduction to the end times; even if that were true, then the conditions of the end times have been met since Jesus' Ascension till the present day because wars, earthquakes, famines and troubles have never ceased

since Jesus spoke these words.

The tragedy of Pompeii was unlike anything witnessed in the ancient world and hasn't been rivaled since; and it occurred in 79 AD, while the apostle John was still alive and before his letters were written. An entire city, one of the great cultural centers of its day, was buried under ash and its entire population was instantly mummified. There are accounts literally around the world of the event, and there is zero dispute of the date of the event. Many Jews at the time saw it as God's vengeance for tearing down the Temple; many Christians assumed it meant Jesus would return at any moment, forgetting when Jesus said "These are the beginning of sorrows," not the end.

Something else that is important to note is that Jesus gives no indication as to the reason for these disasters except for "these things must happen". While we understand that suffering is a consequence of living in a fallen world ruled by the devil, it may not do much to bring peace or offer comfort in the midst of these events.

One reason perhaps is that disasters cause people to turn to God unlike any other happening. It was more often than not during famines and wars that Israel would repent and return to God. After 9/11, church attendance skyrocketed. At the beginning of COVID, Bible sales were at one point more than double that of the same date the year before. The threat of death and loss is what it takes for many people to even consider God or life after death; the church has a wonderful opportunity during those times to preach the gospel of eternal life through following Jesus.

[9] Again, it is important to understand that Jesus is speaking to the four in front of Him before His Words apply to us in our context. Jesus is lovingly telling these four to "watch out for themselves", knowing full well that they would all experience intense persecution at the hands of the Pharisees in the synagogues and the Romans in the courts; John would be boiled in tar but miraculously survive, Andrew was crucified on a X-shaped cross, Peter was crucified upside down, and James was beheaded. The church was more universally persecuted in its earlier years than today (not to diminish the sufferings of persecuted Christ followers today).

The Roman emperor Nero blamed the fires of Rome on the Christian church in AD 64 and believers were routinely devoured by lions as punishment for not worshiping Caesar. He was not even close to the last Roman emperor to attempt to humiliate and destroy the first Christians.

We are told by Paul in his letter to Timothy that "all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:10-13)". Even in a post-Christian country such as ours where our right to assemble is irrevocable, every believer experiences at least some amount of persecution. While it may never become as close to intense as it was for the early church or for believers in countries where worshiping Jesus is a crime, persecution is still persecution; and presents us with a powerful opportunity to give a testimony of Jesus Christ, just as He told the four disciples in this verse.

Conclusion: The church has always thought (with good reason) that they are living in the end times. Don't let false prophetic speculators use false signs to cause your faith to waver; simply seek understanding and follow Jesus with the understanding that He is always at hand and that He will come like a thief in the night.

Study Guide Qs:

Q1: What is your usual response when God's Word challenges or disturbs you? What is your ideal response?

Q2: What is a false belief you used to believe about either the Bible or God? How did you stop believing it?

Q3: How do you respond to wars, speculation and tragic world events? How do we care without being troubled?

Q4: What persecution did you endure because of your faith in Jesus? How did it give a testimony of the gospel?

Digging Deeper:

David Guzik's Bible commentary has a great overview of this text:

<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/mark-13/>

R.C. Sproul has an excellent sermon tackling this passage:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Wfx2EDpUTY>

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationships with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Pray and ask God to help you connect via audio, video, or text with a neighbor you haven't seen in person for too long.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group? 2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.