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Supernatural Power

Stories from Mark’s Gospel

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# Week 13 | Mark 13

### Chapter 13 Summary:

This passage contains Jesus’s longest uninterrupted teaching in Mark’s Gospel. In response to the disciples marveling at the magnificence of the Jerusalem temple, Jesus predicts its utter destruction. Jesus then describes the sorts of tribulations that precede the temple’s destruction and the coming of the Son of Man.[[1]](#footnote-2)

# Day 1

## Read

### Mark 13:1–5 (NIV)

**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.”

3As 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?”

5Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you.

## Study

* The temple complex was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world. It was by far the largest structure for hundreds of miles and with its placement at the top of Mt, Moriah and its white stone façade, could be seen from a great distance. Some of those foundation stones were said to be forty feet long by twelve feet high by eighteen feet wide. The courtyard of the temple had been greatly enlarged (to about four hundred by five hundred yards) in order to accommodate the large throngs of Jews who came to Jerusalem for the festivals. The temple complex covered approximately one-sixth of the area of the city of Jerusalem.[[2]](#footnote-3) Everything about the temple encouraged a sense of awe and a feeling of permanence. Yet the Jewish historian Josephus records the complete leveling of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. (For a diagram of Herod’s temple, see the Faithlife Bible Study [note on Mark 13:1](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Mk13.1))
* Notice that in this scene, Jesus is departing the temple to go to the Mount of Olives. Several commentators note the ominous tone of this departure as it recalls Ezekiel’s vision of the glory of the Lord departing the temple “as the chariot throne of God’s glory rises up from inside the temple, pauses at the east gate, and comes to rest on ‘the mountain east of the city’” [[3]](#footnote-4) ([Ezekiel 10:18–10; 11:22–23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel+10%3A18%E2%80%9310%3B+11%3A22%E2%80%9323&version=NIV)). As in the time of Babylonian conquest, the divine presence has left the temple, and now nothing awaits it but destruction.
* Jesus’ remarks here in 13:2 will be misquoted and used to accuse him at trial ([14:58](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk14.58)) and mock him when he’s dying on the cross ([15:29](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk15.29)).

## Think about

Jesus’ disciples are still struggling to see the portrait that Jesus is painting for them. Everything will change for them in the coming days. Those changes will mark the end of the temple system because God is fulfilling his promise to do something new. That’s what Jesus has been communicating ever sense he flipped over the tables in Mark 11. While the physical temple will stand for several more decades, the curtain that separated God from the people will be torn in half within the week. Jesus’ death and resurrection will be the reconciling event that reunites God and humanity. For all those who trust in Jesus, his sacrifice will be enough and his victory over sin and death complete.

Yet, sitting on the Mount of Olives with Jesus at their side, there is still so much uncertainty for the disciples. They want to know what’s coming. While we understand more than they did at that moment, we want to know the same thing. Yet the discourse that we’ll be looking at for the rest of the week is more about the “why” than the “what” and the “when.” Jesus will return and his people are called to be alert and faithful in the meantime.

## Pray

Praise God that in Jesus, he reconciled himself to us! In Christ we have hope! As scary as events can be in our own time, we look to our Lord to see us through.

# Day 2

## Read

### Mark 13:3–13 (NIV)

3As 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?”

5Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8Nation 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. 10And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11Whenever 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. 13Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

## Study

Scholars debate what set of events Jesus is describing here and for the rest of this discourse in Mark 13. At the risk of over-generalizing, we can find three main views:

1. Jesus is predicting the destruction of the temple and the fate of his earthly followers. His words will come to pass within a few decades with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the persecution of both Christians and Jews under the Roman Emperor.
2. Jesus is predicting the “end of days,” the time that precedes his *parousia* or second coming.
3. Jesus is predicting multiple series of events, some of which will happen decades after his death and some occurring in the time between his ascension and second coming, including those that occur immediately before his return. Scholars debate at what point in chapter 13 Jesus transitions from the time of the temple’s destruction and later events that will precede his second coming.

Look back through the verses above. Could Jesus’ descriptions of events be tied to the destruction of the temple? Are there any that you don’t think could be explained with the temple destruction? Which ones and why?

Think about

An awareness of the “end of days” or the “day of the Lord” was deeply embedded in Jewish tradition. They awaited a final judgement when the Lord would vindicate his people and judge evil. This terrible judgment would end “this present age” and usher in an era of complete justice and peace. So, when Jesus warns of the temple’s destruction, the disciples already have an inkling of what that might mean and they want a sign. Jesus doesn’t give them a single sign, but instead a warning not to be deceived.

As we study this passage this week, Jesus’ warning to the disciples can apply to us as well. The disciples “need to heed Jesus’ warnings to prevent being beguiled by end-time fervor. Terrible events will occur...These events should not cause undue dread or hysteria or distract them from their calling.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

Endless end time speculation will only amp up our fear. Instead of looking for the anti-Christ in every world leader, tech mogul, or celebrity, we should be looking to love, serve, and encourage those around us. That’s what it means to be ready for his return.

## Pray

No matter what time period disciples of Jesus find themselves in, whether watching the temple fall in 70 A.D. or eagerly awaiting his second coming, we trust in our faithful Lord. He will give us strength to endure. Praise him for that.

# Day 3

## Read

### Mark 13:14–23 (NIV)

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. 15Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19because those will be days of distress unequaled 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. 21At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

## Study

* Once again, scholars differ on precisely what events Jesus is describing and when. (If you missed yesterday’s Engage God Daily, go back and take a look, I outlined them there.) A dive into first century history reveals would-be Messiahs who tried to rouse the people to rebel against Rome. The destruction of the temple and the sacking of Rome did send people fleeing into the mountains that surrounded the city. Yet, do you notice any verses that you think might be better explained with the view that Jesus is talking about the “end of days” immediately before his return?
* The expression “abomination that causes desolation” comes from several places in Daniel ([Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+9%3A27%3B+11%3A31%3B+12%3A11&version=NIV)) that looked ahead to Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrating the temple by erecting a pagan altar within it in 167 BC . This was an abomination that caused “desolation” in that it defiled the temple, preventing Jews from worshiping there.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* For help with verse 20, read the [Faithlife Bible study note](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Mk13.20).

## Think about

Garland notes that Jesus’ discourse in Mark 13 includes seventeen imperatives. Imagine how Mark’s readers would have received these words and consider how we should receive them now.

Garland goes on, “Christians need to be forewarned so that they can be forearmed. They will face adversity, harrowing persecution, false alarms, and the ruin of nations, even their own…He also wants to assure the fainthearted. Persecution should not take them by surprise. When one lives in the midst of a firestorm of persecution, one cannot always perceive how God’s purposes are being accomplished in the world. Mark helps readers see that the persecutions they suffer must be suffered. Things may look bleak and all hope seem lost, but God is still fully in control and God’s purposes will triumph. They may not understand why they suffer, but they can take comfort in knowing that they follow the steps of their Lord.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

## Pray

We can sense Jesus’ compassion for the people’s suffering, and this was days before he would endure his own suffering. No matter how bleak things get, we must remain faithful to Jesus. Pray for endurance and strength today.

# Day 4

The Pastor’s Pregame Podcast is back this week just in time to unpack this challenging chapter! You won’t want to miss this one. Listen at [*CFhome.org/pregame*](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) or through [*Apple Podcasts*](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pastors-pregame/id1582563644).

## Read

### Mark 13:24–31 (NIV)

24“But in those days, following that distress,

“ ‘the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

25the 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. 27And 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. 29Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

## Study

* This week, we’ve considered three major interpretations of Jesus’ words in this discourse (see Day 2 of this week’s EGD for a refresher). Many who take the view that Jesus is discussing both the fall of the Jewish temple, and far future events that will occur before his second coming, see verses 24–27 as a transition. These verses are packed with Old Testament references that many see as predictions immediately preceding the “end of days.”
* It’s hard to call the events described in verses 24–26 signs because once they appear, it will already be too late. From Gombis, “The sun being darkened and the stars falling from the sky are not ‘signs’ that the Son of Man is on his way but rather descriptions of the entire cosmos convulsing at God’s appearance. A number of biblical passages speak of creation being violently shaken when God shows up in power. For example, see [Isaiah 13:9–11 and Joel 2:30–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+13%3A9%E2%80%9311%3B+Joel+2%3A30%E2%80%9331&version=NIV)) [[7]](#footnote-8)
* If Jesus has fully transitioned to discussing the end times, then verse 30 is challenging. For that reason, many commentators see the return to the image of the fig tree as a return to the discussion of the temple’s destruction.

## Think about

Again, we need to take Jesus’ warnings seriously. We are to be alert and on guard, but not fearful or suspicious. Garland explains it this way:

“Jesus neither affirms nor denies that there is a time gap between the destruction of the temple and the end in 13:24–27; he wants to prevent his followers from trying to nail down a specific chronology of end-time events. Anything is possible. The ambiguity is deliberate, and Jesus does not intend for us to try to unravel it. Otherwise, he would have given more definite clues. He expects his disciples to be ready for anything anytime. Busying oneself with calculations about dates is thus a fruitless exercise that can only distract from the mission that God has called the church to do—to preach the gospel. God does not require a studious deciphering of international threats and natural disasters but spiritual vigilance that makes one ready for Christ’s return whenever he comes.[[8]](#footnote-9)”

## Pray

An over-emphasis on the “end times” can not only make us fearful, it can create in us a hostility for those in our modern world who we assume will oppose and persecute us during the last days. (In the span of my lifetime, I’ve been warned that the anti-Christ will come from Russia, Iraq, Iran, leftwing America, rightwing America and the Vatican!)

Paul reminds us in Ephesians that our battle is not with flesh and blood but “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Jesus tells us directly that we are to love our earthly enemies and pray for those who persecute us for his name’s sake (Matthew 5:44). Pray that you will have the heart of Jesus as you await his return.

# Day 5

## Read

### Mark 13:32–37 (NIV)

32“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34It’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. 36If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

## Study

* The parable of the watchman (verses 33–37) has to do with being watchful in the present age in anticipation of the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus commends “being watchful” and warns against “sleeping.” “What does he mean? Being watchful and diligent involves paying attention to what Jesus has said to do throughout Mark’s Gospel. Disciples are to cultivate communities that embody the cross-shaped Messiah…To be “sleeping” means to become complacent about cultivating these sorts of communities. Communities that are “asleep” are those that are formed by the habits and social patterns of their surrounding cultures.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

## Think about

Jesus will ultimately come, and everyone will witness it and acknowledge it. What will we do in the meantime?

According to Garland, “The most important thing that Christians have been called to do is to preach the gospel to all the nations (13:10). When the Son of Man comes, he will not quiz people to see whose predictions on the date were accurate. He will want to know what we were doing. Were we proclaiming the gospel to all the nations? Were we enduring suffering faithfully? Were we fulfilling the assigned tasks? Those who have been asleep on the job or buried in the task of trying to map out the times rather than carrying out the mission will be more than just embarrassed; they will be judged. That is why Jesus warns his disciples to be on their guard (13:9).”[[10]](#footnote-11)

## Pray

What does it mean to you to be alert to Jesus’ return? How should that affect how you spend you time, money, energy and resources? How should it affect your priorities? Pray over your answers.

Go back and reflect on all of [Mark 13](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk13). What is the Spirit saying to you through Mark’s Gospel?

1. Timothy G. Gombis, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/strygdcm62mk?ref=Bible.Mk13.1-37&off=4230&ctx=+1+Maccabees+1:54.%0a%0a~This+passage+contain), ed. Scot McKnight and Tremper Longman III, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Rodney L. Cooper, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc62mk?ref=Bible.Mk13.1&off=295&ctx=ness+of+the+temple.%0a~The+temple+was+consi), vol. 2, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 215–216. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. R. T. France, [*The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](https://ref.ly/res/LLS:29.46.20/2020-03-31T01:04:52Z/1863403?len=512), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. David E. Garland, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac62mk?ref=Bible.Mk13.5-23&off=353&ctx=+not+augur+the+end.+~They+need+to+heed+Je), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 491–492. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Timothy G. Gombis, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/strygdcm62mk?ref=Bible.Mk13.5-23&off=8115&ctx=+editorial+comment%3f%0a~The+expression+%E2%80%9Cabom), ed. Scot McKnight and Tremper Longman III, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 456–457. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Garland, 505. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Gombis, 459. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Garland, 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Gombis, 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Garland, 509. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)