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Mark 13:1-4 Olivet Discourse – The Temple's Destruction

**Discussion:** What is your understanding of the “End Times” as spoken about in the Bible? Have you received any teaching on this topic from within your own church? When do you believe Jesus might return? What will be the signs?

**Introduction**

Over the centuries, theologians have interpreted Scripture differently on the subject of the “End Times”, leading to various opinions about what these events might look like. Jesus encouraged us to keep watch and be ready for when these occur. We remain uncertain about the details or timing of these future events, but some significant points are established facts. These include several important historical dates that we can confidently plot on a timeline for the past 2000 years:

- AD 70. This is when the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple and the city of Jerusalem, leaving the land desolate.
- 1948 was the year when the nation of Israel was once again reinstated.
- From the viewpoint of today's date, we can identify Biblical events that were fulfilled in the past, and others prophesied to occur at some unknown date in the future.

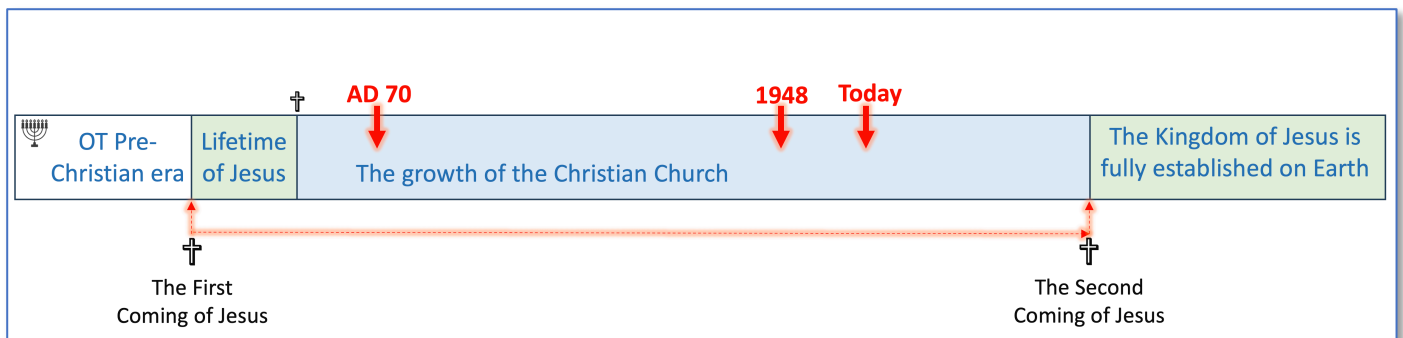


Figure 61: Developing the Timeline

Even though certain passages of Biblical prophecy lead interpreters to differing conclusions, many beliefs are common elements to the faith of *all* Christians:

- belief in the future bodily return of Jesus Christ at his *Second Coming*,
- belief that the future kingdom of Jesus will be eternal,
- belief in a bodily existence in that Kingdom for all those saved by Jesus.

## Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

**Note:** It may be worthwhile for your group to read the entire chapter of Mark 13.

Mark 13	Matthew 24	Luke 21
<p><b><i>The destruction of the temple and signs of the end times</i></b>  <b>1</b> As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!'</p>	<p><b><i>The destruction of the temple and signs of the end times</i></b>  <b>1</b> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.</p>	<p><b><i>The destruction of the temple and signs of the end times</i></b>  <b>5</b> Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God.</p>
<p><b>2</b> 'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'</p>	<p><b>2</b> 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'</p>	<p>But Jesus said, <b>6</b> 'As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.'</p>
<p><b>3</b> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,</p>	<p><b>3</b> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately.</p>	
<p><b>4</b> 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?'</p>	<p>'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'</p>	<p><b>7</b> 'Teacher,' they asked, 'when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?'</p>

### Comparison

- All three Synoptics report that just as Jesus was leaving the Temple Courts, one or more of his disciples commented to him on the magnificence of the Temple complex. Jesus responded that it would be torn down, with “not one stone left upon another” and “every one of them thrown down.”
- Mark and Matthew note the location (the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem) for the discussion that follows.
- Mark names the four Disciples who approached Jesus (Peter, James and John with the addition of Andrew) to ask him about that response. Jesus is reported as sitting, the typical posture we observe in Scripture when a Rabbi is teaching people.<sup>1</sup>
- In all three Synoptics, the Disciples pose two questions to Jesus: “When will these things happen?” and “What will be the signs that they are about to take place?”<sup>2</sup>
- Matthew phrases the second question differently, more explicitly relating it to Jesus's second coming and the End Times.

### Context

#### Going Deeper: *Should Mark 13 be considered as Apocalyptic literature?*

In this chapter, Jesus prophesied about the future destruction of the Temple and about when he will return at the End Times. We often consider discussion of the End Times in Scripture to be an Apocalyptic genre. Does Mark 13 qualify? Apocalyptic literature can be defined as the unveiling or disclosure about the divine programme for the world, revealing how God is resolving issues in the earthly and heavenly kingdoms. It is often written to assure God's people that he will vindicate them, despite the tough times they might be experiencing.<sup>3</sup>

Some aspects common to this genre are missing from Mark 13, such as visions, otherworldly/heavenly tours or the pairing of this age and the age to come, the pairing of heaven and earth or details about who belongs to the church and who does not. Nor is there mention of a final judgement (of mankind or of Satan) or of the messianic era that will follow the Parousia.<sup>4,5</sup> Consequently, Mark is possibly often described as *eschatological* and *prophetic*, but with apocalyptic features.<sup>6</sup>

#### Going Deeper: "End Times" Vocabulary (Part One)

- **The Eschaton:** This is simply the term that describes the "End Times"
- **The Parousia:** This Greek word is commonly used to describe the Second Coming of Jesus (even though it has much wider usage in the NT).

### Key Points

- The comment drawing Jesus' attention to the magnificence of the Temple was made "As Jesus was leaving". He would never return, so Mark's words may be more than simply a change of location but also signal a definitive and final break.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Herod had been renovating the Temple since 20 BC, a project that was still underway during Jesus's lifetime and continued until AD 62. The larger stones were 15 meters in length and 2.5 metres high, weighing up to 600 tons each.<sup>9,10</sup> The perimeter was about one mile in length. Viewed from the Mount of Olives, the contemporary historian Josephus described the adornment of this giant white stone complex as "radiating the rising sun like a snowclad mountain."<sup>11</sup>

## Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

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- However, the Temple had forsaken its intended purpose and was to be eradicated.<sup>12</sup> Having countermanded the authority of the Sanhedrin (Mark 11:27-33), the Pharisees (12:13-17), the Sadducees (12:18-27), and finally, the scribes (12:35-40), Jesus had also condemned the Temple as a “Den of Thieves” (11:17) and indicated its destruction in the symbolism of the withered fig tree (11:22).<sup>13</sup>
- By accepting the majority view that Mark was the first Gospel written about AD 69, it becomes evident why Matthew (who wrote at a later date after the events of AD70) is more explicit about the destruction of the Temple as being a separate event to the Eschaton, as Jesus did not return. For Mark, all this was still in the future, while Matthew looks back on the events of AD 70.<sup>14</sup>
- We observe that Jesus is not impressed by the grandeur or architectural beauty of the buildings before him. His concerns are the underlying values and practices associated with them. The destruction of the Temple is an inevitable result of Israel’s failure to fulfil its divine calling.<sup>15</sup>

### What this means for Biblical scholarship of Mark 13

An essential part of understanding the remainder of Mark 13 is to recognise how Jesus decided to answer the Disciples' questions in Mark 13:3-4. Was he

- 1) responding only about the period up to the Destruction of the Temple, or
- 2) was he also alluding to the End Times (the Parousia, his Second Coming)?

Biblical scholars have come to different conclusions about this.

#### Going Deeper: More “End Times” Vocabulary

- **Preterism:** A view that understands Biblical prophecies to have been fulfilled in the past, and in particular by AD 70 with the destruction of the Temple
- **Futurism:** An eschatological view that perceives parts of Biblical prophecy (e.g., Daniel, Ezekiel, Mark 13 and Revelation) have yet to occur, e.g., are future events.

**Discussion:** Question & Answer Session on these verses, the Eschaton and the associated vocabulary. Can you give examples where some denominations might prefer one interpretation over another? How do different worldviews or cultures or traditions impact these preferred interpretations?

## Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

The following diagram shows the leading schools of thought for understanding Mark 13:

Verses	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
1-4				
5-13	AD 30-70	AD 30-70	AD 30-70	AD 30-70
14-23		<i>Parousia</i>		
24-27	<i>Parousia</i>			
28-31	AD 30-70	AD 30-70		
32-37	<i>Parousia</i>	<i>Parousia</i>	<i>Parousia</i>	
	(Stein, Lane)	(Edwards)	(France)	(Wright)

**Figure 62: Options Proposed by Scholars for Interpreting Mark 13**

- Options 1, 2 and 3 agree that
  - verses **5-13** refer to pre-AD 70, and
  - verses **32-37** point to the Parousia.

However, they vary in how verses **14-27** are to be understood.
- Option 4 considers the events of chapter 13 as all fulfilled by AD 70, not future events.

Which of these eschatological positions (Preterist or Futurist) is correct for our understanding of scripture? The Preterist will perceive particular historical events as having already fulfilled scripture, while the Futurist will claim that these events did not (or only partially) fulfil prophecy.

However, regardless of the strength of arguments to support either case, we won't know until it happens. Jesus has made it clear that while we are to remain watchful, the meaning of some prophesy is being withheld from us:

*<sup>19</sup> "I am telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. (John 13:19 and John 14:29)*

*<sup>1</sup> "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. <sup>3</sup> They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup> I have told you this so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, <sup>5</sup> but now I am going to him who sent me. (John 16:1-6a)*