

“Trouble...with a Capital T!”
The Gospel According to Mark 13:14-27
November 18th, 2018

The pastor was preaching on the Day of Judgment. “Lightning will flash, thunder will boom, rivers will overflow...Fire will flame from the heavens...The earth will quake violently...Darkness will fall upon the entire earth!”

A young boy’s voice lifted from the congregation as he asked his father, “Dad, do you think we’ll get out of school early that day?”

Judgment is a prevalent theme in the Bible. Because God is holy, He must punish sin. The Old Testament prophets spoke to the defeat and downfall of many nations because of sin, depravity, and their unfaithfulness to God’s commands.

Noteworthy are **Jeremiah’s** oracles of judgment against many nations – Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Elam, and Babylon. **Ezekiel** also declared judgment against many of the same nations, to include a vision of judgment in Jerusalem. **Daniel** contains judgment against kings – Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. **Isaiah** and many of the Minor Prophets (they’re called minor because their writings are short, not because they were unimportant) spoke judgment against the people of God.

This emphasis of judgment continues in the New Testament. *You did know that the people of God are not exempt from God’s judgment, didn’t you?* **I Peter 4:17** – “For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

Jesus often spoke of pending judgment for His hearers if they didn’t turn away from their sin and embrace Him. Among the most stirring examples is the 13th chapter of the New Testament’s second book, the Gospel According to Mark. Here we have both the end of the Jewish age (in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple), and the end of time when Jesus Christ returns to earth to bring to a close life as we presently know it on earth.

As Robert Preston put it in *Music Man*, “Ya got trouble, my friend; right here in river city. Trouble with a capital T, and that rhymes with P and that stands for pool.” Those living through the destruction of Jerusalem and the apocalypse would wish all they had to deal with was a pool table!

We must keep our perspective as we study these fascinating verses. In verse 2, Jesus tells the disciples that the beautiful temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. In response to this, Jesus’ disciples asked Him two questions in verse 3 – those questions were: “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled.”

What we have before us from verse 5 of **Mark Chapter 13** through verse 36 is Jesus’ extended answer to those two questions. Verses 1-13, which we studied last Sunday, and verses 14-23 before us today are part of Jesus’ answer to the question – “when will these things be?” – when the temple would be destroyed. Let’s look now at verses 14-23:

The Gospel According to Mark 13:14-23:

“So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. ¹⁶ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁷ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ¹⁸ And pray that your flight may not be in winter. ¹⁹ For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

²¹ “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, *He is* there!’ do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

In verse 14, Jesus says to the disciples listening to Him speak these words that they would see “the abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought now (in the holy place)” according to **Matthew Chapter 24**.

This refers to the Old Testament prophet Daniel who uses this phrase three times in the Old Testament book bearing his name – **9:27; 11:31, and 12:11**. In Daniel the phrase stands for the horrifying sacrilege which was to be perpetrated by the “king of the north” when he abolished the regular sacrificial ritual of the Jerusalem temple.

From Daniel, we understand the “abomination of desolation” has something to do with the temple of the Lord. To properly interpret sacred Scripture, we compare it with other passages of Scripture. This Olivet Discourse of Jesus recorded here in **Mark Chapter 13** is also found in two other gospel accounts – those of Matthew and Luke. It’s insightful to see how Luke describes what both Matthew and Mark call this “abomination of desolation.” Over in **Luke 21:20**, we read Jesus’ words, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.”

The “abomination of desolation” is the desecration of the temple by God’s enemies. It happened repeatedly in Israel’s history; in 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar looted the temple and took Judean captives to Babylon; in 168 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed a pig to the Greek god Zeus on the sacred temple altar; and, it would again in AD 70 when the Roman General Titus placed an idol on the site of the burned-out temple after Jerusalem was destroyed.

The writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus, who witnessed these events have been preserved for us today. He wrote, “The Romans, upon the burning of the holy house itself (the temple), and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns (idols) to the Temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them. (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, chap 6) This was a clear abomination of the temple worship of Israel’s God.

When the Jerusalem temple was destroyed then, it marked the end of the old Mosaic system. “The daily sacrifice, the yearly feasts, the altar, the holy of holies, the priesthood . . . (they) were all essential parts of revealed religion, till Christ came, but no longer. When He died upon the cross, their work was done. They were dead, and it only remained that they should be buried.” (Ryle, 317) “Jerusalem could no longer keep the covenant mercy of God within its walls. If it did not recognize the Christ and proclaim Him to the nations, its divine purpose would be brought to

an end. Instead these men following Jesus would take the gospel to the four corners of the earth. They would be the dwelling place of God's Spirit; they would be His temple!" (Ferguson, 214)

In verses 14b-16, Jesus tells His disciples what to do when the Roman armies begin to surround the city. Among the things to do, they are to flee Judea to the mountains (v. 14b); if at home, they are to leave without getting any valuables before doing so (v. 15).

Jesus as describing a local event here to those listening to Him. He mentions fleeing *Judea*, the region in which Jerusalem was located. Then He refers to their homes. Jewish homes at this time had flat roofs, which were used for prayer and drying vegetables among other things. The staircase from this roof was on the outside of the house – a person could get down without going inside. This would be very strange if this applied to people living in our area today – certainly, we've no mountains to go to!

In verse 17, Jesus gives a specific warning for those with children or pregnant – an acknowledgement that those with little ones may not be able to move quickly, though they will have to. Jesus makes a similar acknowledgment in verse 18 regarding winter and the Sabbath. The winter was cold, but also the rainy season, and more difficult to travel quickly.

Again, these warnings of Jesus, speak to the yet future (for them) fall of Jerusalem. Many Bible teachers lift these verses out of that context and apply them to Jesus' yet future return. "When He comes, it will be...pointless to flee to the mountains. Revelation says unbelievers will wish to be buried under mountains on that day. *Why would a believer want to flee anyway? And how could it be worse for mother at Christ's return, or worse if he came on a cold winter day?* But it is imperative to flee, at once, from a vengeful army, and cold and children do compound the troubles of flight." (Doriani, 359)

This brings us to verse 19 and Jesus' conclusion to the descriptors of the days of vengeance. "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

Some 35 years after He spoke these words, this prophecy came true when the Roman armies encircled Jerusalem, and for five months conducted a siege of the city, before entering the city, and destroying just about everything in its path. The Romans plowed up the ground upon which the city stood. Josephus' accounts of the human suffering are disturbing, and I've chosen not to share any of them for this message. Suffice it to say that those who did not heed Christ's warnings paid terribly for their error. Unspeakable acts of violence occurred, Jew against Jew, parent against child. Starving people will do unthinkable things, even to those closest to them.

Jesus was here speaking about the Jewish nation. The Jews suffered a great many tribulations since the destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly do we remember their sufferings during the Second World War; yet these times of distress cannot compare with that which Jesus described in His Olivet Discourse." (Kik, 117)

Those days of tribulation when the temple was destroyed were so intense, that Jesus said if they carried on for long, not even His children, "the elect" would be spared (that's in verse 22). But, for their sake, the days of tribulation were shortened.

We conclude by looking at three uses of this text for living the Christian life in our day:

1 – **It’s not cowardly for a Christian to flee from harm.** It wasn’t cowardly to flee the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And, in various places of Scripture, Jesus commands us to flee from possibly destructive influences to our soul.

In **I Corinthians 6:18**, God’s Word teaches, “*Flee* sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” We shouldn’t see how close we can get to sinning without sinning! If an adulterous relationship is possible, ***get away*** from the situation – and now!

In **1 Timothy 6:18**, God’s Word teaches us, “But you, O man of God, *flee* these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” In the immediately preceding verses, Paul instructs believers in Christ to flee error and greed.

2 – **Consider Jesus’ special care for His children (“the elect”).** In verse 20, Jesus mentions the “elect.” J. C. Ryle notes, “Those whom God has chosen to salvation by Christ, are those whom God specially loves in this world. He cares more for them than for kings on their thrones, if kings are not converted. He hears their prayers. He orders all the events of nations and the issues of wars for their good, and their sanctification. He keeps them by His Spirit. He allows neither man nor devil to pluck them out of His hand. Whatever tribulation comes on the world, God’s elect are safe.” (Ryle, 320)

3 – **You can trust Jesus.** Jesus never fails. What Jesus spoke of in today’s passage came true with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It’s a matter of history, even as these words of His on the Mount of Olives were a matter of true prophecy. Every Word of this Bible is true. If you’re a Christian, you’ve already trusted Jesus with the care of your soul, both in this life, and in the one to come. This is a great reminder that He always comes through.

If you’re not yet a Christian, perhaps today is the day that God is calling you to Himself through the preaching of His Word outwardly, and the inward call of His Spirit, changing your heart. If this is happening to you, surrender to that call, and turn to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in faith.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24)

The verses we’ll study next Sunday – mark 13:24-36 – speak largely of events yet ahead. Jesus speaks of His Second Coming to earth.