

“The Future Tribulation”

October 30, 2016

Mark 13:14-23

I. Introduction

Mark 13 began with Jesus and His disciples leaving the Temple to go to the Mount of Olives. As they were leaving, Jesus pronounced judgment on the Temple—it would be destroyed completely. Whenever Jesus predicted His death and resurrection, the disciples never asked when it would happen, but talk of the destruction of the Temple set-off warnings in their minds. The Temple was the center of the universe for devout Jews. The total destruction of the Temple indicated the end times to the disciples, so in [Mark 13:4](#), Peter, Andrew, James, and John asked Jesus privately, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

In response to their question, Jesus gave a sermon regarding His return. This sermon, often called the “Olivet Discourse,” is Jesus’ longest recorded answer to any question asked Him in the Gospels—it’s also found in [Matthew 24:4-25:46](#) and [Luke 21:8-36](#). Jesus began by foretelling the events that would happen in the world before His return, but He didn’t set an exact time when all these things would happen. He didn’t give the disciples the information they *wanted*, **BUT** He gave them what they *needed*. Using the metaphor of birth pains, He explained that the end of the age would be accompanied with false teachers, false messiahs, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, and violent persecution against believers. Although such certainties have been experienced up to the present time, their frequency and severity will rapidly and dramatically increase at the very end as the final judgment is born. What we experience today is just a preview of the unparalleled destruction that will occur in the months prior to the return of the Son of God.

In today’s Scripture, Jesus continued to describe the future tribulation—focusing particularly on the second half. His description began with the sacrilege of the Temple.

II. The 2nd Half of the Tribulation

A. The Sacrilege of the Temple After describing the initial birth pains that would indicate His imminent return, Jesus shifted His focus to a major event that will notify everyone that they are in the 2nd half of the tribulation: they will “see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong.” [Matthew 24:15](#) adds that Jesus said that ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ was “spoken of through the prophet Daniel.”

The word “*abomination*” refers to that which is detestable, foul, immoral, blasphemous, and abhorrent to God. It is often used in reference to idolatry and pagan worship practices. The phrase,

‘the abomination that causes desolation’ comes from the Book of Daniel where it is found in three places, [Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11](#). [Turn to Daniel 11:31](#). In c. 530 BC Daniel prophesied the perversions of Antiochus IV who controlled Israel from 175 – 165 BC. Antiochus Euphianes, as he is also known, desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig on the altar, forced the priests to eat its meat and erected an idol of Zeus within the temple walls. He, also, set up brothels in the outer courts, banned Judaism, and oppressed the Jewish people, slaughtering thousands and selling many more into slavery.

The Temple was also defiled by the Romans in AD 70 when they captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The historian Josephus writes that before the Temple was destroyed, the Roman soldiers set up their standards in the temple and sacrificed to them. Both these events were mere foreshadowing of the final “**abomination that causes desolation**” prophesied in Daniel.

In [Daniel 9:27 and 12:11](#) the Antichrist, in the midpoint of Daniels’ 70th week, will set up his throne in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. The Book of Revelation adds that after pretending to be a peacemaker by making an alliance with Israel, the Antichrist will turn against the Jewish people, slaughtering them and desecrating the Temple for a period of 3 ½ years ([Revelation 11:2](#)). He will also make war with believers ([Revelation 13:7](#)), regardless if they are a Jew or a Gentile, killing many for their unchanging faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ([Revelation 6:9-11](#)). [Turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4](#).

The warnings given by Christ in the Olivet Discourse were not intended just for the 12 Apostles; they are more appropriate for believers who will be alive at the end of the age when these things occur. This is why Jesus said in [Mark 13:14](#), “**Let the reader understand.**” This isn’t just for the listening disciples but for future readers of Scriptures. God isn’t surprised. He wants those who are alive prior to Jesus’ 2nd coming to read Jesus’ words, realizing that they are in the midst of the final tribulation. Jesus’ words are to enable them to understand and endure the trials of that unparalleled time of trouble.

B. People are to flee. During that final tribulation, the Jewish people will be the focus of persecution and assault. Jesus’ instruction for those who will one day experience these events—beginning with the desecration of the Temple—is simple and clear: people are to flee. When the desecration of Jerusalem’s future temple by the Antichrist takes place, Jesus said, “**Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**” The only safe reaction to “**the abomination that causes desolation**” is to escape from Jerusalem and Judea with as much speed as possible. The Antichrist will inflict his

will and destruction on the whole world, but his wrath will be directed especially at the Jewish people along with believers wherever they may be found.

In describing these same end-time events, the prophet Zechariah wrote that only 1/3rd of the Jewish population living in Judea at that time will survive—[turn to Zechariah 13:8-9](#). Although they will be refined by God through persecution, those who are able to escape will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. **“They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God’”** ([Zechariah 13:9b](#)). [Zechariah 12:10](#) says, **“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”**

Back in Mark, Jesus stressed the urgency of that situation as well as things that might hinder people’s flight. *The 1st hindrance is possessions.* Time will be so short, Jesus said, that a person on a housetop will have to move as if escaping from a burning building, taking the outside stairs and not going through the house to pick up valuables. Laborers in the field must show equal speed, not even going back to the end of the furrow to retrieve an outer garment that was laid aside during the heat of the day. To let possessions reduce the urgency by a split second is to flirt with destruction.

Another hindrance is family obligations. Pregnant women and nursing mothers will be unable to respond as fast as necessary because of the burden of children. Jesus knows that maternal instinct will prevail with mothers choosing death before risking an unborn baby or abandoning a newborn. Sensitive to the reality of mother love and family loyalty, Jesus could only sigh **“how dreadful”** for pregnant women and nursing mothers for whom a split-second delay will mean the difference between life and death.

A 3rd hindrance is the weather. Compared to other places in the world, the winters in Israel are generally mild, though it does occasionally snow in Jerusalem. However, when Jesus urged, **“Pray that this will not take place in winter,”** His point was simply that any hindrance, including inclement weather would slow the escape of those attempting to flee. Because the threat will be so great, any obstacle—including cold, rain, or snow—will increase the danger of imminent death. People are to flee.

C. God will intervene. The 2nd half of the tribulation, called the **“great distress”** or the **“great tribulation”** will be even more severe than the 1st 3 ½ years. Jesus said, **“Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now-- and never to be equaled again.”** John wrote of those terrible times in [Revelation chapters 6 – 16](#). I’ll leave it up to you to read

through those chapters but some of the things you will find are: a great earthquake that devastates the earth (6:12-17), hail and fire will consume a third of earth's vegetation (8:6-7); a third of the sun, moon, and stars will be darkened (8:12); demons will be released from bondage to terrorize mankind (9:1-12); a third of earth's population will be killed (9:13-21); the entire sea will turn to blood and all sea creatures will die (16:3).

These will be terrible times of destruction. As Jesus went on to explain, "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." Jesus said that God will intervene and bring an end to the devastation before the whole human race is destroyed. In particular, God will protect His own. Though some will be martyred, many will be preserved as an earthly remnant. To shorten the days means that He limits the time to the 3 ½ years already determined and stop them in the time appointed.

Satanic deception will continue to the very end. Jesus warned that during these shortened days, "False messiahs and false prophets will appear." Their message of deceit will convince many to believe them, because they will "perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." But of themselves, miracles are not a proof of divine calling and approval---turn to Deuteronomy 13:1-5. The final test, the ultimate test is the Word of God. But to be effective, people must know what it says!

Christian disciples must be alert for the sign of abomination that will precede the Great Tribulation and be prepared for urgent flight from satanic judgment. No discernment of signs of the times is more difficult and yet Jesus closes this section of His "Olivet Discourse: with the reminder, "I have told you everything ahead of time." He has told us everything we need to know about the forthcoming tribulation. It is up to us and future Christians to "be on guard."

III. Application

The "Time of Troubles," "the Tribulation," the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ are some of the Bible's most intriguing and provocative themes. The problem with this discourse is that it contains as many questions as it does answers. Jesus didn't intend to remove the veil of secrecy surrounding the timing of the end for His disciples when they asked Him. We shouldn't try to do so either. We shouldn't waste time looking for dates or times. The message is quite simple: God's way, God's Christ and God's people will be vindicated in a conclusive manner that all will recognize. Things may look bleak and all hope seem lost, but God is still fully in control and God's purposes will triumph. Christians may not understand why they suffer, but they can take comfort in knowing that they follow

the steps of their Lord. In [John 15:20](#) Jesus said, “Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

The Olivet Discourse also serves as a warning. On the one extreme, there are the eschatological or “end-time” enthusiasts, who are in danger of losing their heads as they look for all kinds of menacing signs, dates, and times in the highly charged atmosphere of end-time excitement. The earth is usually filled with enough troubles to make believable excited claims that the Messiah is about to come. Such eschatological—end-time fervor only fritters away the opportunity for mission. Guesses about how current events relate to the end time are useless; looking for warning signs can only upset some Christians and sidetrack them and others from the important business at hand. On the other hand, these verses also serve as a warning to the eschatological skeptics or those who are uncaring not to fall asleep, lose interest, faith, or concentration. We must be watching—anticipating Christ’s return.

Paul summed all this up in his letter to Titus, [turn to Titus 2:11-14](#). Christians can be assured of two things: that the coming of the Lord is certain and that it will occur someday. Until that day occurs, we have clear orders from Jesus Christ—[turn to Acts 1:6-8](#). What are you doing to carry out Jesus’ Great Commission.? [2 Corinthians 5:10](#) says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” When you stand before the throne of God, what will He say to you? Will it be, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” or will it be “You wicked, lazy servant!” ([Matt. 25:21, 26](#))? The choice is up to you.