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Sermon Summary #40

The Temple is Razed and the Son Returns!

Mark 13:1-37

(Part One)

I can't think of a more appropriate time for us to have arrived at Mark 13 than now. Given the notoriety of Harold Camping and his claims that the Rapture was going to occur on May 21 (and of course now he has conveniently moved the date to October 21), it seems right that we should look at what Jesus had to say about these matters.

Mark 13 is generally regarded as one of the most controversial chapters in the entire Bible. People get confused in reading it and angry when others disagree with their cherished interpretations of what it means. **I fully expect to confuse and anger quite a few of you.** All I ask is that you be patient and remember that **what is of paramount importance is that Jesus is returning.** Jesus is coming back. Jesus will appear in the clouds of heaven personally and physically and visibly and bring the kingdom of God to its ordained consummation.

The basis for our unity in this local church has to be the fact that Jesus is coming back to consummate his kingdom. To make our unity depend on agreement concerning the details surrounding his coming is, in my opinion, sinful. We are not all going to agree on whether there will be an Antichrist and if so who he might be and what he will do. We are not going to agree on matters relating to the timing of the Rapture or the issue of the millennium or how Israel does or does not factor into end-times events. Our unity must be grounded in our common faith that Jesus is coming, and that alone.

Part of the reason for the confusion and disagreement on these matters is the misunderstanding of Mark 13, or its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. So we are going to spend at least two weeks looking at what Jesus said.

So let me begin by drawing a picture for you of what is happening. You need to understand the setting and the context for our Lord's words.

Even though you may not be a student of history, most everyone is aware of the most significant events of the past that have shaped human existence. Whether it be the Ides of March when Julius Caesar was assassinated or 1492 when Columbus first set to sea in search of the new world or 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to church door in Wittenberg, or April 12, 1861, when the first shots were fired that launched the Civil War here in America, or November 22, 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed by Lee Harvey Oswald (or whoever it was that killed him!), these are the sorts of dates or years that we remember. They shape human history.

Well, you may not be aware of the fact that one such date is **70 a.d.** It was some 37 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus that an event occurred in Jerusalem that would forever change the course and direction of human history and especially the history of the church.

As you know, the Jewish people had long suffered under Roman rule. Throughout the many years that Rome oppressed the Jewish people there were numerous revolts and rebellions and futile attempts to throw off the yoke of Roman tyranny. Well, **it all reached a climax in around 66 a.d.** This time the Jewish uprising was of such magnitude that the Emperor of Rome decided the time had come to forever crush the nation of Israel. The Roman armies laid siege to the land of Palestine in 66 a.d. and within a year the Roman military leader Vespasian had conquered most of what we know to be the holy land. But civil broke out back in Rome and the

armies were recalled. There was a brief lull in hostilities from 68 to 69 a.d. During this time Jerusalem was torn apart by its own civil war as different Jewish parties battled for control of the city and Temple. When eventually the Roman armies returned and resumed their attack in 69, Jerusalem was already in a weakened and demoralized state. The Roman General Titus then put Jerusalem under siege for five months until the temple and city were utterly destroyed in 70.

Now, let's go back to around 33 a.d., some 37 years earlier. Jesus and his disciples had entered Jerusalem and the Temple where Jesus had been repeatedly engaged in argument and debate with the religious leaders. Time after time after time Jesus had appealed to them, had answered their questions, had warned them of the consequences of their hard-hearted rebellion and distortion of the law of God. It all reached something of a climax when he overturned the tables in the Temple and routed the money-changers and threatened them with the judgment of God.

We read now in **Mark 13:1** that Jesus finally “**came out of the temple.**” This is more than simply a physical departure. It would be more accurate to say that Jesus “**abandoned**” the temple. He is leaving, never to return. In **Matthew 23:38**, as he is departing, he turned and said to the religious establishment: “See, *your* house is left to *you* desolate.”

This is a deliberate echo of **Ezekiel 11:23** where we read that “the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.”

Thus the temple has been **abandoned, not only geographically and physically but spiritually and symbolically.** Just as in Ezekiel's day when the glory of God's presence abandoned the Temple, so now Jesus who is the glory of God has departed.

What will happen 37 years later in 70 a.d. is not simply a pagan empire, Rome, crushing one of its enemies, Israel. Rather, in the same way God used the Babylonians to bring judgment and destruction on Jerusalem in 586 b.c., so once again God is using the Romans to judge Israel for its apostasy and rejection of the Messiah.

As they are departing, one of his disciples says, “Jesus, look at the Temple. It's really something isn't it? So massive, so ornate, so glorious.” And he was right. The Temple in Jerusalem was without question the most monumental structure on earth both in terms of size and opulence. We're not talking about a converted furniture store like Bridgeway! We are talking about a structure that took up over ¼ of the entire city of Jerusalem!

So Jesus says to him in **v. 2** . . . Folks, I seriously doubt if **anything** Jesus had said during his three years of ministry could even come close to this **shocking, earth-shattering declaration** concerning the destruction of the Temple. Not one stone will be left standing upon another! I entitled this message, “**The Temple is Razed and the Son Returns!**” Let's be sure you know what the word “raze” means. We don't use it much anymore. Some of you think it is spelled “raise” and means to lift up or to elevate, as when I “raise” my voice to make a point. No, the word is spelled “raze” and means to level, to reduce a building or structure to nothing; it can even mean to scrape off or to shave off.

Jesus is telling the disciples in the most shocking terms imaginable that this magnificent structure will one day be razed. ***It will be flattened!***

No doubt with his disciples breathless, disoriented, and reeling from these words, Jesus turns and makes his way across the Kedron Valley and up the western slopes of the Mt. of Olives. If you've ever been to Jerusalem, as I have, you can stand on the Mt. of Olives and look across the valley down upon the city of Jerusalem and the Temple.

At that time, Peter, James, John, and Andrew got up the courage to ask another question. You must understand something: **The Jews thought the Temple was indestructible.** It would last as long as the world did. So, as

far as they were concerned, **the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world were one and the same event.** They would happen simultaneously. So they ask Jesus: “when will these things be [that is to say, when will the Temple be destroyed, when will this glorious sanctuary be reduced to a flattened plain?], and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”

What follows in Mark 13:5-37 has been called the **Olivet Discourse** because it was spoken on the Mt. of Olives. And what Jesus said in response to their question is undoubtedly one of the most important prophecies to be found in Scripture.

Perhaps most evangelical Christians believe that what Jesus says beginning in v. 5 and extending to the end of the chapter is all concerned with the **future**. In other words, nothing of what he says here has yet been fulfilled, but will come to pass at the end of human history. We call these people “futurists.” Others argue that everything in Mark 13:5-37 has already happened in the **past**. Nothing of it is yet future. These people are called “preterists,” from a Latin word that means “past.” As you will come to see, I am neither a futurist nor a preterist, but something of an odd mix between the two.

You hear a lot more from the “futurists” than you do the “preterists.” For example, about once a month there appears a large advertisement in U.S.A. Today. Sometimes it shows up in the Oklahoman. It is, if nothing else, bold and unequivocal in its prediction that **Christ is Coming Very Soon!** The article proceeds to identify “**8 Compelling Reasons**” why this is true.

What I find most interesting is that, in five of the eight “compelling reasons,” Mark 13 or Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse of Jesus figures prominently. I don’t think it is a stretch to say that without the Olivet Discourse the article would never have been written, or, if it had, it would lack substantive punch. For example, **the alleged increase in our day of violence and earthquakes and famines and war and false Messiahs is cited as an indication that the end is near.**

Many, perhaps even most people today take note of the multitude of wars all across the globe and point to the earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the earthquake in Haiti and the flooding of the Mississippi and the increasing crime rate and the outbreak of killer tornados and famine in the Sudan and other parts of Africa and immediately conclude that this means the end of the world is near and Christ is coming back very soon. And this conclusion is largely, if not entirely, based on how they interpret the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13.

What I’m going to say today and next week will probably shock many of you. Some of you will choose not to come back. Here’s why.

I do not believe that the wars and famines and earthquakes and persecution and false religions that Jesus mentions here have anything to do with telling us when he’s coming back. In fact, **they don’t tell us anything about anything at all. They are not signs of the Second Coming.** They are in fact just *the normal, routine events* that will characterize the time following Christ’s ascension into heaven and before Jerusalem and its Temple are destroyed in 70 a.d. Jesus makes it as clear as he possibly can: “When you hear about these things happening, don’t be misled, don’t be alarmed, the end is not yet. These are only the beginning of birth pains. Don’t panic. Be patient.”

In other words, and here’s the shocker: I am persuaded that **everything that Jesus says up through the end of v. 27 happened during the time between his ascension in 33 a.d. and the destruction of the city and Temple in 70 a.d.** Let me say that again . . . everything from Mark 13:5 through Mark 13:27 concerns events that occurred in the past, between 33 and 70 a.d., culminating in the utter destruction of both Jerusalem and its Temple. I am, therefore, what is often called a “*partial preterist*”, in that I believe a large part of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the past.

But I’m also a “*partial futurist*” because I do believe that Jesus talks about his second coming and the end of the world here in Mark 13. But he doesn’t get to it until **vv. 32-37.**

Before I explain why I believe this, please hear this clearly. **We must learn to listen to Scripture as the first disciples would have heard it.** Our tendency today is pick up a newspaper or an internet blog or a TV news report and look backwards through it to the first century. In other words, we tend to interpret the past in light of the present. I want to argue that it ought to be precisely the other way around. **We must stand with the disciples in 33 a.d. and listen to what Jesus says in the language and imagery used in that day and look forward. The language that Jesus used in Mark 13 is not the language of Facebook or the New York Times or Fox News. It was the language of the Old Testament, and that is where we will find the key to making sense of what he says.**

Before we look at some of the details of the prophecy, let me tell you why I think the majority of Mark 13 is concerned with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 a.d.

First, the context pertains to the predictions of God's wrath against the *current* (first-century) generation of Israel (see Matthew 23:35,36,38). This leads to the expectation of fulfillment at that historical moment. Second, the *question* posed by the disciples pertained to the temple then standing in Jerusalem, out of which they had just departed, at which they were then looking, and about whose prophesied destruction they were wondering. Third, Jesus' *answer* pertains to the then-standing temple, not some future temple (cf. v. 2 - "these great buildings"). Fourth, the circumstances described in vv. 9-13 are geographically, historically, and culturally limited to conditions relevant in the first century.

Fifth, the entire section is couched in terms of what his actual (original) hearers are to see, hear, and experience. One cannot easily dismiss the repeated use of the second person in Jesus' warnings and instructions. E.g., "when **you** hear" (13:7), "be on **your** guard" (13:9) . . . READ vv. 9-13 highlighting each instance of "**you**" . . . See also 13:28-30a . . .

Sixth, and most important of all, Jesus says that this prophetic scenario applies to "**this generation**" (v. 30). Some try to evade this point by arguing that the word translated "generation" actually means "race" and that Jesus, therefore, was simply saying that the "Jewish race" would not die out until all these things took place. But this would require the Greek word *genos*, whereas the word here is *genea*. Furthermore, the word *genea* occurs 27x in the gospels and *never once* means "race" (see Mt. 1:17; 11:16; 12:39,41,42,45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34; Mk. 8:12,38; 9:19; 13:30; Lk. 1:48,50; 7:31; 9:41; 11:29,30,31,32,50,51; 16:8; 17:25; 21:32).

The word "generation" is used elsewhere in the gospels of *those living in Christ's day* (see **Mk. 8:12,38; 9:19**; also Mt. 12:38-39; 16:4; 17:17). Every time the words "this generation" occur in the gospels they mean *Jesus' contemporaries*, i.e., the sum total of those living at the same time he did (read Mt. 11:16; 12:41,42,45; and especially 23:36).

The disciples appear to believe that when this destruction occurs, the second coming (or *parousia*) of Christ will likewise take place. They evidently believed, as did most in that day and time, that the temple was as permanent as the world itself. If the former was to be destroyed, it must mark the consummation of history as we know it. Jesus corrects this mistaken assumption. Thus, he says, in effect: "No, the two events are not simultaneous. 'These things' concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple will indeed occur in the lifetime of 'this generation' (13:30). There will be signs that point to it (which Jesus will outline in vv. 9-23). But my coming and the end of history will not occur at that time."

Signs of the Times

Our Lord's comments in vv. 5-13 are designed to **prevent premature excitement and speculation** about when the events of v. 2 would occur. "Don't jump to any hasty conclusions," says Jesus. The main point is that these are *not* signs of the impending destruction of Jerusalem *nor* are they signs of Christ's second advent. These events are only the beginning of birth pains. They serve no purpose at all in telling us when or how soon Jesus is coming back. They are events which will characterize the period 33 to 70 a.d.

It's actually quite **ironic** how events such as those mentioned in these verses are appealed to by people who are trying to work out a pattern for end time events, whereas in fact they are mentioned here precisely in order to *discourage* such speculation. Jesus says as clearly as he can that events described here like wars and famines and earthquakes are *not* part of an end-time scenario, but are rather routine events within world history which must not be given more weight than they deserve.

So let's look at them.

He begins by mentioning the appearance of *religious impostors and Messianic pretenders* (v. 6), examples of which we find in the book of Acts (see 5:36-37; 8:9-10; 13:6; 21:38). Josephus reports that during the reign of Nero deceivers and false prophets were arrested on a daily basis. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius refers to the prevalence of false messiahs in this period.

As for *wars and rumors of wars* (v. 7), the period 33-70 a.d. witnessed countless military disturbances. An uprising in Caesarea took 20,000 Jewish lives; at Scythopolis 13,000 Jews were killed; in Alexandria 50,000 were slain; 10,000 were killed in Damascus. When the Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem (40 a.d.), the Jews refused. As a result, they lived in a state of fearful anxiety over imminent war with Rome and were in such distress that they even neglected to till the land.

The *Annals of Tacitus*, which describes events from a.d. 14 to a.d. 68 describes the turmoil of this period with phrases such as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "commotions in Thrace," "insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues among the Parthians," "the war in Britain," and "the war in Armenia." The "**end**" (v. 7b) that these events do *not* signal refers to the end or termination of Jewish national existence; the end of the city; as well as the end of the temple (primarily the latter), not the "end of the world."

Jesus talks about *political upheaval and turmoil* (v. 8a) which were also very much characteristic of this period of time. As for *natural disasters* like "earthquakes" and "famines" (v. 8b), the famine described in Acts 11:28 occurred in 44 a.d. It resulted in the disciples at Antioch mounting a huge relief effort to ease the burden of the Christians in Judea (Acts 11:29). Three other famines occurred during the reign of Claudius. The Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius both mention the prevalence of famines in this period of history (in particular the widespread famine in Rome in a.d. 51).

Earthquakes were also common (see Acts 16:26). There were recorded earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Apamea, Campania, and Rome. The cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae were devastated by a quake in 60 a.d.

As v. 8 makes clear, none of these "birth pains" were meant at any time to mislead Christians into thinking that either his second coming was imminent or that God's judgments against Jerusalem were about to begin. "Birth pains" in itself means "not yet," especially when combined with the word "beginning".

Persecution and martyrdom are mentioned in v. 9. This marks a turn from widespread phenomena to **what will occur among Jesus' disciples and the community of faith**. The reference to "councils/synagogues" indicates that Jesus has in mind a first-century fulfillment. After 70 a.d., when the Jewish religious and political systems ceased to exist, there were no councils or synagogues. We see fulfillment of this word in Acts 4:1-18; 5:17-40 (synagogues); 12:1; 23:24; 24:27 (governors and kings). See also Acts 8:1.

Perseverance or endurance (v. 13b) is the evidence or proof of eternal life. Jesus assures his followers that "the one who endures to the end will be saved" (v. 13). The "end" may mean, "right through, all the way, perhaps to the *end* of one's life," or "for as long as may be necessary." Thus whoever stands firm throughout the horrible events which will culminate in the destruction of the temple in 70 a.d. will be saved.

But what about v. 10? In fact, let's make it even more difficult by looking at Matthew's version. In Matthew

24:14 we read: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

This is perhaps the single most oft-cited passage in defense of the interpretation that Jesus is describing the end of human history. After all, how could this possibly have occurred in the period 33-70 a.d.?

Note two important facts. **First**, the words "whole world" (ESV and NASB) are a translation of the term *oikoumene*, which literally means an inhabited area, a standard term at that time for the Greek world, then for the Roman empire, and subsequently for the *then known world*. Again, I encourage you *not* to read a statement like this in view of our *global* perspective of the twenty-first century, but in light of the much more limited point of view of the people living in the first century a.d. When we do that we discover that in Jesus' day this word "meant primarily *the area surrounding the Mediterranean and the lesser known areas to the east*, around which stretched mysterious regions (comprising much of our 'old world') beyond the fringes of civilization" (France, *Matthew*, 909).

The same Greek word is used in **Luke 2:1** – "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world (*oikoumene*) should be registered" (i.e., all the inhabited Roman empire). In Acts 11:28 we read that "one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the *world* (this took place in the days of Claudius)". Again, in Acts 24:5, "For we have found this man [Paul] a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the *world*, and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." Often our immediate, knee-jerk interpretation is that the events described with these words describe global events. **Yet we know that they were limited to the Roman empire of the first century.** The reference to the "**nations**" also indicates that the point is not that every geographical area on the globe must be covered but that all the nations, i.e., *Gentiles*, must be reached. Did this occur as Jesus prophesied? Let's allow the biblical text to answer that question.

Writing before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., Paul says to the Colossians that the gospel "has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (1:23b). Similarly, in his letter to the Romans Paul writes: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world" (Rom. 1:8). Again, in Romans 10:18, Paul says in regard to gospel proclamation that "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." The point here is simply that ***what appears to be "universal" or "global" language to our ears today had a much more restricted meaning in the first century.***

One should also take note of what Luke says occurred on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the gospel: "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men *from every nation under heaven*" (Acts 2:5; emphasis mine). No one would argue that Luke intends for us to understand that there were present that day Jews from Australia and China and the United States!

As far as Jesus' prophecy in Mark 13:10 is concerned, his point is that following his resurrection the gospel will be preached outside the boundaries of Judea, such that the Gentile nations will hear the testimony of his redemptive work. Only thereafter, says Jesus, will the "end" of the city and temple occur.

The Great Tribulation

With Mark 13:14 we come to a critical juncture in the discourse. To this point Jesus has referred to general signs that would characterize the period preceding Israel's collapse. Here in v. 14, though, he refers to one sign that unmistakably signals that the prophesied destruction is at hand. It would serve to alert the people of *that* generation as to the proximity of Jerusalem's ruin. In response to the question, "When will these things be?" Jesus now answers:: It is "when you see . . ." (v. 14).

Abomination of Desolation is literally, the abomination that causes desolation. In the OT, "abomination" referred to an object of disgust, hatred, something that causes revulsion; an idolatrous offense or affront to the true worship of God.

When he says "let the reader understand" he means "let the reader of the OT book of Daniel understand" the true meaning and fulfillment of the coming Abomination of Desolation (for it was in Daniel that this was first revealed). The Abomination of Desolation, therefore, refers first to Antiochus Epiphanes and his desecration of the temple in 168 b.c. and, second, to something that was to occur in relation to the entire city of Jerusalem and the temple within the lifetime of his contemporaries.

So what, then, was the Abomination of Desolation to which Jesus referred?

The most likely identification is *Titus and the armies of Rome*. While the city of Jerusalem was still burning, the soldiers brought their legionary standards into the temple precincts and offered sacrifices there, declaring Titus to be victor. The idolatrous representations of Caesar and the Roman eagle on the standards would have constituted the worst imaginable blasphemy to the Jewish people.

Up until v. 14 Jesus has said: Cool your jets! Don't panic! The end isn't at hand. Calm down. But when you see the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem and desecrating the Temple, get the heck out of town! Run away as fast as you can. Don't stop to take anything with you. Hightail it out of the city!

In vv. 14-18 Jesus gives them a plan of escape. The appearance of the Abomination of Desolation was the sign for immediate flight from Judea.

Those in the countryside of Judea (v. 14) must take to the hills as the Romans come to ravage farmlands and villages widespread). Jewish houses were flat-roofed structures that often formed a continuous terrace extending to the outer walls of the city, making it possible to quicken one's departure by following this "elevated highway" to the gates of the city (v. 15).

Working men will have to get by with the clothes they have on. There will be no time to go home and pack (vv. 15-16). Nursing mothers and pregnant women are obviously ill-prepared for hasty escape (v. 17). In Palestine during the winter, roads were practically impassible because of mud; harsh weather and cold temperatures would slow down one's journey and make mountain hideaways unbearable (v. 18).

These instructions were in fact followed by Christians in Judea and Jerusalem. By all accounts, **no Christian died** in the holocaust that engulfed Jerusalem shortly thereafter.

I can hear what you're thinking: "**Sam, what about v. 19?** Isn't that a reference to the future Great Tribulation? And in describing it the way Jesus does, it has to be at the end of history because there have been holocausts and slaughters worse than the one that occurred in 70 a.d."

The Horror of 70 A.D.

The reference in v. 19 is to the events of April-September in 70 a.d.

Multitudes of thieves, zealots, and murderers had flocked to the city seeking refuge. The city was without law and order. Chaos and anarchy reigned. The city divided into warring factions who took turns attacking each other. In one incident, more than 12,000 of the city's nobles and leading citizens were tortured and killed by the zealots. Those who tried to escape had their throats slit and their bodies were left to rot in the streets. Burial became an impossibility. Huge piles of cadavers filled the streets or were thrown from the city's walls. Josephus describes it:

It is impossible fully to describe the horror of the famine and pestilence that engulfed Jerusalem during the siege. People not only sold their homes but their children as well to obtain food. People regularly ate from the public sewers, cattle and pigeon dung, leather shields, hay, clothing, and things that scavenger dogs would dare not to touch! Unbelievable forms of torture were inflicted on those suspected of hiding food:

In desperation, some left the city at night to hunt for food but were captured by the Romans. Thousands were

crucified in plain sight of the city walls, often at a rate of 500 per day.

After the city fell, almost 100,000 Jewish survivors were sold into slavery. Others were consigned to die in the gladiatorial exhibitions or were selected to be paraded in Titus' triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. According to Josephus, **more than 1,100,000 died** during the siege of the city

The Great Tribulation

In Mark 13:19 Jesus says there will be "such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be." Many insist that this "great tribulation" cannot refer to the events of 70 a.d. because worse and more severe tribulations have since followed (World War II and the Holocaust, Stalin, Pol Pot's genocidal campaign in Cambodia, etc.). Let me say several things in response to this objection.

Once one grasps the dimensions of what occurred in 70 a.d., one realizes that the savagery, cruelty, and the monstrosities that occurred were beyond comparison. Also, never so high a percentage of one city's population was destroyed. *Everyone was either killed or sold into slavery.* As noted earlier, approximations are that 1,100,000 people were killed and 100,000 were enslaved.

It may well be, however, that the statement in v. 19 is deliberately hyperbolic, a stock saying for an indescribably horrendous time. In other words, it may be proverbial, designed to emphasize how truly horrible an event it was. Biblical scholars have long recognized that oracles of judgment are often couched in language that is universal and radical. For example:

"There shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, *such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again*" (Exod. 11:6).

"Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, *such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now*" (Exod. 9:18).

"And the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; they were very numerous. *There had never been so many locusts, nor would there be so many again*" (Exod. 10:14; cf. Joel 1:1-4).

"A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; *there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations*" (Joel 2:2).

"And because of all your abominations, I will do among you *what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again*" (a reference to the impending Babylonian Captivity; Ezek. 5:9; cf. Mt. 24:21).

"Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; *for under the whole of heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem*" (Dan. 9:12).

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. *And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time . . .*" (Dan. 12:1).

Look also at similar terminology in the following two texts:

"He [Hezekiah] trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; *so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him*" (2 Kings 18:5).

“And before him [Josiah] *there was no king like him* who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to the law of Moses; *nor did any like arise after him*” (2 Kings 23:25).

In 2 Kings 18:5 it is written of Hezekiah that there would be no king after him who would show the same devotion to the Lord as he showed. But then we are told concerning Josiah’s reign, which *follows* Hezekiah’s reign, that ‘there was no king like him who turned to the Lord.’ How can Hezekiah’s reign be the greatest and Josiah’s reign be the greatest? The phraseology is obviously hyperbolic, emphasizing complete devotion to the Lord and his law.

The destruction, however, will not run its full course (v. 20). The days will be shortened, either to allow the elect to survive or perhaps because the presence of the elect in the world mitigates the divine wrath (i.e., common grace).

But according to vv. 21-22 one shouldn’t look for the second coming of Christ in the chaotic events surrounding Jerusalem’s fall. Such troublesome times would prove to be a golden opportunity for false prophets to lead people astray with false expectations of Christ’s appearance. But Jesus says, “Don’t be swayed by their miracles or their message. Don’t believe it” (v. 21).

Josephus actually records several instances of impostors who enticed people into the desert and elsewhere with promises of the Messiah’s appearance.

So let me sum up what we’ve seen thus far. Jesus tells his disciples when the Temple will be destroyed, *but*, he also tells them that, contrary to their expectations, his second coming and the end of the age are *not* to occur at that time (i.e., not at the same time as the destruction of the Temple). In other words, the destruction of the Temple *can* be dated by signs, but the second coming of Christ *cannot*.

The so-called *Great Tribulation* mentioned in v. 19 *has already come and gone*. It is to be identified with the siege on Jerusalem during the years 66-70 a.d., which culminated in the destruction of the city and its Temple by the armies of Rome (the latter being the “abomination of desolation” referred to in v. 15). Thus the **Great Tribulation” of Mark 13:19 is not a future event but an established fact of past history.**

This doesn’t mean there won’t be horrible tribulation and trials and persecution and martyrdom in the future in connection with the second coming of Jesus. I believe there will be. But that’s not what Jesus is talking about here in Mark 13.

So what does all this mean for us?

(1) This passage is a clarion call for us to reevaluate our understanding of the end-times and to reconfigure our expectations concerning when Christ might return. It is also a correction to us concerning events that we have mistakenly assumed indicate that his return is soon.

(2) The judgment of God against Israel in 70 a.d. in which he raised up the Roman armies to bring destruction on both city and Temple was a *preview* of the judgment yet to come at the end of history. Do not be deceived. Neither a nation nor an individual can callously reject the gospel of Jesus Christ and escape the wrath of God to come. So repent and believe the gospel!