

**Mark 13:3-37**  
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**EXHORDIUM**

We know come to Mark 13, a chapter commonly considered apocalyptic. It coincides with those other catastrophic chapters, Matthew 24 and Luke 17. For those of us who grew up on the evangelical church, we thought of these chapters and most of Revelations in terms of the Late Great Planet Earth, the very end of all things.

But as always, in Scripture, we need to pay close attention to the text in context. What is Mark telling us about Jesus and how does this fit in to the bigger picture of the gospel and those things that were falling upon Israel?

Mark has been systematically revealing to us the very things that Jesus was systematically revealing to the Apostles.

First, that Jesus was indeed the Christ and this meant that He is both Savior and Lord. He is the one on whom all their hopes lie and their salvation rests completely in Him.

Second, Mark is revealing to us the nature and extent of the Kingdom. Jesus was revealing the same things to His Apostles.

The rule is different than the earthly kingdoms. Jesus requires obedience unto death. Ruling in His kingdom means serving all. These were ideas completely foreign to the mindset of the people in Christ's day, to the Jews waiting for the Messiah and to the disciples, themselves.

With that in mind, we look at Mark 13. The Jews had been unfaithful to their calling. Their great failing was a failure to take God's kingdom to the ends of the Earth. Instead of feeling blessed beyond their deserts and seeking to share that blessing with all nations, the Jews felt privileged and favored by God. This resulted in insolent pride that manifested itself in all sorts of sordid behavior. These behaviors are revealed in their thoughts and intentions towards Jesus. They claimed to be keepers of the law, keepers of Sabbath, but were, in fact, gross violators of the law, plotting the death of the Messiah on the Sabbath. They showed favorites. They sought to appease Ceasar or oppose Ceasar as, whichever conveniently benefitted their cause.

They had no real concern for the truth or love and thus revealed their actual hatred of God by the way they treated their fellow man. This all comes to fruition in the way they treat the Messiah who is both God and man.

In light of their unfaithfulness to every aspect of the covenant, God was bringing them to a dire judgment. That judgment would fall upon them in a very short time.

## **EXEGESIS**

**3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?**

The disciples are still in some disbelief. Our buildings are strong and have stood for hundreds of years. How could they be destroyed? They want to know when this is going to happen. Jesus gives every indication that it is going to be soon.

Just a few short years later in Jerusalem we find the disciples liquidating their properties in order to share with one another. One strong motivation for this was the sense that judgment was coming on Jerusalem in such a way as to render those properties of little value. That is exactly what happens.

**5 And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: 6 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 7 And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. 8 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.**

The wars and rumors of wars and famines were happening in Israel in the few decades following Christ. There were Messianic zealots in the land during Jesus's day and in the decades to follow. In the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, there were three main factions vying for control of the city and the nation. They were extraordinarily fanatical in their behavior. They eventually all took refuge in the holy city itself where they

continued to prosecute their civil war. Their factions continued even as the Romans were marching on the city.

These Jewish armies were very ruthless against their fellow Jews. They committed many atrocities. During the siege of the city, these marauding armies, entered rooms and stole food from those who were starving. They often murdered those whom they stole from. As the residents of the city began to perish from starvation in large numbers, many of them began to flee the city with the intent of surrendering to the Romans. When the zealot suspected anyone of planning on escaping, they immediately killed them.

They then began to use accusations against anyone that had food or riches, saying they were in a plot to escape. They would murder them and take their food and property. This was all happening while the Roman armies were outside the walls preparing to take the city.

In the months before the fall of the city, there were 185,000 bodies carried from the city and another 650,000 thrown over the walls into the valleys below.

There was much more wickedness being carried on inside the city from the various factions vying for power, than the wickedness perpetrated on the Jews from the Romans. However, the Romans were also wicked and ruthless in various ways. Many of the Jews would swallow their gold coins when they attempted to leave the city and then go to stool to recover their money. Once the Romans figured this out, certain renegade soldiers would murder these Jews and disembowel them searching for the money. Titus condemned this practice but it continued on anyway. Josephus says that 2000 fleeing Jews were killed this way in a single night.

I give you a story to illustrate the extent of the starvation going on in the city. Many Jews began escaping and coming over to the Romans, whereupon they were given food. A large number escaped in a single night and consequently gorged themselves with food. Their bodies were so emaciated and bloated that the heavy feasting burst their bellies and they died.

It was truly a horrific scene and largely as a result of the wickedness of the leaders of the insurrection within the city.

**9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. 10 And the gospel must first be published among all nations.**

These prophecies come true just a few short years later. James is martyred and then a persecution arises that chases many faithful Christians away from Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul, himself, is part of this persecution and involved in the murder of St. Stephen. Paul later is brought before kings as a testimony against them as well as an opportunity to preach the gospel in all nations.

Rome was the predominant world power. The gospel is published throughout the entire Roman empire during the generation following Christ's prophecy. The Apostle Paul, himself, traveled and preached through much of the empire. He was beaten in and around the synagogues, constantly preaching to the Jews first and also to the Greeks.

**11 But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.**

The men and women, these Holy martyrs were faithful to the end and spoke as empowered by the Holy Ghost.

**12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. 13 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.**

As the persecutions progressed, there was reason to fear even the members of one's own family. We know that the man born blind was put out of the synagogue and his parents were in fear of having the same thing done to him. They owned him as their son but did not actively come to his defense. Imagine a state of affairs in which owning someone as your son would cost your life. As the wars among the Jews escalated, there was very great fear on all sides. One's life was in danger to take a side.

Jesus is speaking to His disciples here and we would assume that He is talking particularly about persecution of Christians. The events that transpired in the persecutions of Christians would fit this interpretation. But I believe the verses can be more broadly applied. Jesus is talking about those closely covenanted with Himself. He is also talking about God's covenant people, the Jews. Among the Jews, there were great factions. In the days preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, there were three great factions for much of it. One of them was completely destroyed and two factions survived the holocaust, that of Simon and that of John. They constantly persecuted the people, murdering and plundering their own people right up to the very end when the Romans finally entered the city.

The Christians had already fled the city but there were Jews in the city who were not fanatical adherents. Josephus talks about his own mother being in the city. There were many who were caught up in the war who were not necessarily supporters of any of the factions. And of them, they who endured to the end were saved. But the large number of the rest perished.

It was estimated that there were 2.7 million people in the city during the siege. 1.1 million of them died. And of those who were left, they were all put to extreme straights. If the siege had not ended, they would have all perished.

**14 But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains: 15 And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: 16 And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. 17 But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! 18 And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.**

This verse had originally referred to the conquest of Antiochus Epiphanes. It is quoted by Jesus as referring to a time where that event will be repeated but that this time not defeated. The temple was eventually desecrated, not by the Romans only but also by the Jews first. When the Romans took the outer walls, wicked John and his army took refuge in the

inner sections of the temple. They did not surrender from there until the Temple itself was caught afire and burned to the ground.

The warnings here are for God's people to take note and to make preparations. We see in the early church, the Christians selling their possessions and leaving Jerusalem. By the time the Romans occupy the city, there are few, if any Christians left, and the city is completely abandoned to God's enemies, both foreign and domestic.

**19 For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. 20 And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.**

Josephus describes the events surrounding the siege and occupations of Jerusalem in exactly these terms. He says that such atrocities by the Jews themselves, and the subsequent horror of the acts of the Romans were unparalleled in human history.

How were the elect saved? No doubt there were some in the city who subsequently proved to be disciples of Jesus Christ. If they survived, how could they fail to see the reality of these chapters from the words of Christ? Some of them lived. But if the days had gone on much longer, then they all would have died.

**21 And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: 22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. 23 But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.**

False Christs were the very reason for the slaughter. Various men claimed that God was speaking to them and exhorted the people on to resist the Romans. Josephus says that the leaders hired false prophets to claim that the Messiah would soon show up and defeat the Romans. This gave the people hope and strength to resist but only to their peril and death.

**24 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, 25 And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. 26 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.**

This sounds a lot like what happened at the crucifixion. However, here it refers to the time after the siege of Jerusalem. When Jesus was crucified, the sun was darkened. The powers in the heavenlies were judged and thrown down from their power. As rulers in the spheres they were dethroned.

It appears that Jesus is referring to something similar but also with signs and wonders occurring. In the final fall of Jerusalem, the Old Testament system was completely destroyed. The many citizens from all over came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. There were about 255,000 lambs killed for the Passover that year. There was plenty of food and lots of people. The siege began exactly at that time and these people were locked up in Jerusalem. With the rejection of Jesus as the Christ, the judgment was falling on Jerusalem. They did not recognize their true Passover lamb. Now, they would see Him coming in judgment.

When the temple finally fell, there were several omens recorded by Josephus. There was an earthquake and there was a star in the sky over the city that looked like a sword. That sword would also look like a cross.

**27 And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.**

Jesus has sent His angels to gather the elect from the four winds, even the uttermost part of the earth and heaven.

**28 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: 29 So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.**

The Christians were ready for these events.

**30 Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.**

Jesus said that these things would happen in one generation. They did. The war with Rome was from 66-70 AD., just about 35 or so years after Jesus's death.

**31 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. 32 But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. 33 Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.**

The Lord always exhorts us to watchfulness. We should pay attention to what we are doing and to our times. The church is declining and so we, too, should watch and pray.

There has been confusion about the verse that says that Son does not know the day or hour of this event. Of course, Jesus is God in the flesh. As God, He knows all things but as to His humanity, He is ignorant of some events. The problem is that even in His human travels on Earth, Jesus seemed often to possess divine knowledge.

**34 For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.**

**35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: 36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.**

This is like the parable of the vineyard keepers. The master went away and when He came back they were not watching but were giving themselves to all sorts of excesses.

## **EXHORTATION**

**37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.**

I suppose this exhortation is always appropriate. We things are not going well and we wonder where God is. Stay on your watch. Do not despair. God is coming to save you. When things are going your way and everything seems like immense blessing. Do not fall asleep. Do not take

God's blessings for granted. Stay awake. Stay aware. Watch for God, lest He come to you while you are leaving off being faithful and watchful.

We ought to pay attention to what is going on around us. Is God blessing? Then give Him thanks and acknowledge that all good things come from His hand.

But is that blessing waning? Are God's warning appropriate for those who are neglecting faithfulness, whether in an individual, in a church, in the broader church or at the National level? We must watch and be able to read the times. God's judgment is beginning to fall on our land. The fact of widespread abortion will not bring the judgment of God on us. It is the judgment of God upon us. Homosexual marriage, homo ministers, pro-homo groups in our high schools and grade schools does not bring the threat of judgment. It is judgment. Widespread personal and national slavery through debt will not bring the judgment of God. It is the judgment.

Now, can all of these things get worse? As these things occur in our land and we do nothing, will God bring more judgment, letting these things grow far worse until He must simply act in a catastrophic way? Yes, that is exactly what will happen. I hope and pray that you and the broader church around you is waking up. But I fear that the unbelieving voices of moderation and tolerance, voices that love disobedience, voices that love a place at the political table, voices that appease the enemies of God, are louder than our voices who praise and serve the One True God and who seek the God will fight His and our enemies and subdue all the enemies of Christ beneath our feet. We know that God will win in the end in every land, in our land, as well. But what will happen in our day? What will happen in our generation and the one that follows us? Will we obey or will we not?

We need repentance for the sins that in our midst. As we turn from these sins ourselves, we must ask God to pour out His Spirit upon His people and bring them back to their sanity and back to His Son, His Spirit and His Word. We must learn to abide by all of God's Word, unapologetically and insist that all men, kings, princes, presidents, city council women, and ministers submit to God's Word.

Unless God does something in our midst soon, and unless His people dramatically change their ways, we should expect more of His chastisement. So, as Jesus told His disciples, so I tell you, Watch. Watch and Pray.