

Jesus' New World Order

Message 12

The Future of God's Kingdom

Mark 13:1-37

Prologue

How much would you pay to know the future? Predicting the future is a big business, and people pay handsome sums to know what to expect next week or next year. Fortunetellers have been around for a long time, selling their services at carnivals, on the shady side of town, or in the horoscope of your newspaper. More respectable are prophets and oracles. Every religion has some professional class equipped to give advice about the future. Modern people tend to scorn prophets and oracles as superstitions, but pay big bucks for “scientific” forecasters. There are weather forecasters, economic forecasters, political forecasters, etc.

So how much would you pay to know the future? It depends on your stake in it. Perhaps you would pay nothing for a weather forecast, even if it is convenient to get some idea how likely it is to rain. But if you were a farmer or contractor, knowing the weather in advance could be very profitable. A stock trader could become as wealthy as Warren Buffet if he knew in advance which way stocks would move. Such information would be worth millions. What might be more valuable for you is a good idea of what will be on your final exam. It would be cheating to do this, but some of your classmates might be willing to pay for an advance copy of the exam. And perhaps you would pay for solid, wise advice on which job to take and whom to marry. Your interest in the future depends on your stake in it.

One of the chief concerns of Jesus' disciples was the temple. It was the center of worship for all those who feared the true God of heaven. This is where they met God. Of course everyone knew that God's presence filled the earth, but God was present in a special way in the temple. The cloud of His glory filled the inner room, the holy of holies. The temple is where the daily morning and evening sacrifices were offered. This is where the Jewish people assembled three times a year for the great national festivals of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths. When someone committed a great sin, this is where he went to offer the sacrifice that would accompany forgiveness for that sin. It was impossible to imagine worship of God apart from the temple.

The temple was also a source of national pride. It was an amazing building. Herod the Great, whose rule began before Jesus was born, recognized that all great rulers engage upon magnificent building projects. He began an enormous renovation of the temple that took until 64 A.D. to complete. But even in Jesus' day the temple in Jerusalem was astonishingly beautiful. Josephus and other ancient writers mention how stunning it was. The temple had become the pride of the Jewish people.

Finally, the temple was a sign of salvation. This is where God lived. It was comforting to know that the God you worship – who promised to provide, protect, and care for you – was right there in Jerusalem. God would surely look favorably upon the land where He lived.

So we can imagine the shock of the disciples when Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed. It would be a blow to national pride, it would challenge their belief in God, and it would make true worship impossible. The disciples were stunned as they crossed the Mount of Olives. Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple was a topic that was too hot to discuss openly.

Now before we plunge into Jesus' teaching about the future, we must take careful note of the issue, the questions, and the audience. The issue in this chapter is the fate of the temple. Jesus is going to branch

out into other matters, but they all relate to this first-century building. There are two questions on the table. First, when will the temple be torn down? Second, what signs will foretell this? And we must keep in mind that Jesus was speaking to His disciples. He was addressing their concerns, answering their questions. And Mark, the author of this gospel, wrote not to us, but to the early Christians. This gospel, like all scripture, is *for* me, not *to* me. As Paul said later, all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is useful for teaching us about God and how to serve Him. But as we use scripture now in the 21st century, the original setting and audience must control how we interpret it. With these thoughts in mind, let us see what Jesus predicted for the future.

Signs of the End

Jesus begins His prophecy by warning the disciples to watch out for false signs of the end. There are two. First, many people will arise claiming to be Jesus. Beware of such people. Even in our own age, 2,000 years later we still have this problem. Sun Myung Moon came on the scene in the 60s claiming to be the Messiah. He has led many ignorant people astray into his Unification Church, which is not a church. It is a false religion. Jesus is the dominant figure of all history, so it is natural that ambitious men will try to use His name for personal gain. Stay away from them. The second false sign is wars. In the next verse Jesus does say that wars will precede the end. But He cautions the disciples, because there are wars in every age. War is a sign of the end, but it is insufficient by itself. People have constantly been tempted to see war as the sign of the end. The war of the Muslims against the Byzantine Empire, the wars during the Reformation, the World Wars of the 20th century – these all sparked alarm that the end had arrived. Not so. Do not be deceived by claims that Christ has come, or that war brings the end. The disciples must look for something else as a sign of the end.

In verse eight Jesus begins to provide the true signs of the end. War is part of the signs, but it must be accompanied by other signs. There will be earthquakes and famines, but these also are insufficient. A more revealing sign is persecution. Jesus tells his disciples that they will be persecuted by both the religious and civil authorities. Even while this is happening, the gospel will spread to all the nations. Jesus comforts his disciples by assuring them that when they are hauled into the courts, the Holy Spirit will give them the words to say to their persecutors. This persecution will get worse and worse, until even children and parents will betray each other. Believers in Jesus will be killed for their faith, until everyone hates them. But finally it will come to an end.

The signs Jesus mentions here are largely true in every age. Today, even as we speak, there are wars, famines, natural disasters, and persecution of believers. It is important to note, however, that Jesus directs these signs to His disciples. It is not hard to find all these signs in the first century, but what about the universal spread of the gospel? How could Jesus have said to His disciples that they would proclaim the gospel to all nations? The key to understanding this is to recognize that Jesus was not talking about American Indians or Australians. Jesus always taught things that were useful to His audience. And his audience lived in an empire that consisted of many nations. Here Jesus is saying that Jews, Idumeans, Parthians, Greeks, Latins, Celts, and all the other nations of the empire would hear the gospel before the end. So when Paul wrote to the Colossians, he said, “Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing...” (Colossians 1:5-6) Paul tells the Romans, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.” (Romans 1:8) Paul’s world, and the other disciples of Jesus, consisted of the Roman Empire and its surrounding lands. Historical records also indicate that the message of the gospel spread rapidly throughout the empire, possibly even as far as India and Ethiopia within a few decades.

In verses 14 to 20 Jesus focuses on the climax to the persecution – the abomination of desolation. This cryptic phrase has produced much speculation. Daniel used it in his book (9:26-27), and it is equally cryptic there. We can make two fairly certain observations. First, it must have to do with the temple. The

term “abomination” is generally reserved for idolatrous practices, and actions which desecrate the holy place. Second, this must be a climactic event. In fact, Jesus presents this as the final sign. When one sees this, he must flee at once. Do not even grab your coat. Just run for the hills!

If we are going to identify the abomination of desolation, we must first decide when it takes place. It would have to be the pinnacle of a period of persecution. It would have to be in a holy place. One strong possibility is the decade of the A.D. 60s. Persecution of Christians by both Jews and Romans grew and intensified during this time. From A.D. 66 to 70 there was ongoing war centered in Jerusalem. Many factions battled for control of the city. In A.D. 68 20,000 Idumeans stormed the city and invaded the temple. There they slit the throats of 8,500 people. Blood poured through the temple. Then they rampaged through the city and slaughtered whoever had failed to flee.

Jesus warns his disciples again that at that time, when the temple is being desecrated and people are being slaughtered all around, some would arise claiming to be Christ. Jesus says in the clearest terms, do not believe them. Jesus appears to be saying the He will not show up in person during all this turmoil.

Prophetic Signs of the End

Verses 24 to 27 are the grand finale of this prophecy. The sun, moon, and stars will fall from the sky, the Son of Man will come in the clouds, and the angels will gather God’s chosen from all over the earth. This might appear to indicate the destruction of our universe, but it is really a metaphorical description of the previous prose description of the end.. Anyone familiar with prophecy will recognize this passage as a standard way of indicating the collapse of government. Isaiah uses this method of describing the fall of Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.
Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.
For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.
I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.
I will make people more rare than fine gold,
and mankind than the gold of Ophir.
Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place,
at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.
And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them,
each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land.
Whoever is found will be thrust through,
and whoever is caught will fall by the sword.
Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes;
their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

Isaiah 13:1, 9-16

This collapsing universe imagery is commonly used to refer to the fall of rulers and empires. (Isaiah 13:1-2, 9-16; 34:1-4; 60:1-2, 19-20; Ezekiel 32:1-2, 7-8)

People also often misunderstand the meaning of this reference to the Son of Man coming in the clouds. They think Jesus is describing Himself coming down through the clouds in his own body.

God coming on the clouds: Psalm 18:7-12; 68:1-4, 32-35; 104:1-3.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry.
Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
He rode on a cherub and flew;
he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness his covering,
his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water.
Out of the brightness before him
hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

Psalm 18:7-12

Daniel 7:13-14
Ascension- Acts 1:9-10
(cf. Mk 14:62)
Divine presence

Conclusion- Divine presence.
Gathering elect. (Rev. 14:14-20)
Forming of Church.

Conclusion

Conclusion (28-31) Certainty and timing of the signs.
It is certain.
Will happen in this generation.

Interpretation- fall of Jerusalem.
Answers questions about temple.
In their lifetime.
End of Pharisee and Sadducee rule.
Preceded by horrible persecution of church.

Historical support: Josephus.

Epilogue 32-37 Watch!
Watch.
Pray.
Study.
Obey.
Christ *will* come again.
I Thess. 4-5

Conclusion

Jesus is predicting the end of the Jewish nation. The universe of Old Covenant Israel will come to an end within the lifetimes of the apostles. The rulers will be replaced and a new political order will emerge. This New Israel is the New Covenant people of God, the church – and the new leaders are the apostles and elders. Jesus is predicting the completion of the process of replacing the Jewish leaders which He began

when He called the apostles to follow Him in chapter 3. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the remaining Jews who refused to believe in Jesus invented a new religion, what we now call Judaism.

21st Century Application

Application

Don't waste your time in futile speculation about Israel.
Jesus comes in judgment like this to other wicked cultures.
Jesus will come to judge you on some unpredictable day.

Watch.

Pray.

Study.

Obey.

Are you ready?

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