

Mark 13:1-37 ~ Scripture Verses

Jesus Foretells the Future

¹ As Jesus was leaving the Temple that day, one of his disciples said, “Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls.”

² Jesus replied, “Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”

³ Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked him, ⁴ “Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?”

⁵ Jesus replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, ⁶ for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many. ⁷ And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. ⁸ Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.

⁹ “When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. ¹⁰ For the Good News must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ But when you are arrested and stand trial, don’t worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

¹² “A brother will betray his brother to death, a father will betray his own child, and children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be killed. ¹³ And everyone will hate you because you are my followers.[a] But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

¹⁴ “The day is coming when you will see the sacrilegious object that causes desecration [or desolation] standing where he [or it] should not be.” (Reader, pay attention!) “Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. ¹⁵ A person out on the deck of a roof must not go down into the house to pack. ¹⁶ A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. ¹⁷ How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. ¹⁸ And pray that your flight will not be in winter. ¹⁹ For there will be greater anguish in those days than at any time since God created the world. And it will never be so great again. ²⁰ In fact, unless the Lord shortens that time of calamity, not a single person will survive. But for the sake of his chosen ones he has shortened those days.

²¹ “Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ don’t believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God’s chosen ones. ²³ Watch out! I have warned you about this ahead of time!

²⁴ “At that time, after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the

moon will give no light,²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.[b]

²⁶ Then everyone will see the Son of Man [c] coming on the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁸ “Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door. ³⁰ I tell you the truth, this generation [d] will not pass from the scene before all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

The Day and Hour Unknown

³² “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. ³³ And since you don’t know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert [e]!

³⁴ “The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return.

³⁵ You, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak.

³⁶ Don’t let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. ³⁷ I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!”

Footnotes:

- a. Mark 13:13 – Greek: on account of my name.
- b. Mark 13:25 – See Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10.
- c. Mark 13:26 – “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself.
- d. Mark 13:30 – Or this age, or this nation, or this race.
- e. Mark 13:33 – Some manuscripts add and pray.

Mark 13:1-37 ~ Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think that Jesus used the discussion about the temple to begin his discourse about the end of the age? What made the temple so significant for the disciples? What would its destruction symbolize for them?
2. What two questions do the disciples ask? (13:4) What might deceive them into thinking the end times had come? (13:5-8) Of what will these events be a sign?
3. After that, what things will happen to the disciples and early church? (13:9-13)
4. What comfort and advocate will help them and you endure these trials? (13:11)
5. Why does “everyone” or “all men” hate Christ followers? (13:13, John 15:18, 15:25, 17:14)
6. What dreadful event will bring days of distress unequalled in human history? (13:14-19, Daniel 11:31, 12:11, 2 Thess 2:4) What is the “abomination” [NIV] or “sacrilegious object” [NLT] or “Horrible Thing” [CEV] or “Awful Horror” [TEV]?
7. What deceptive signs will accompany that distress? Is it possible for Christians to be deceived? How can we recognize false teachers? (13:21-22)
8. Who is the “Son of Man?” How will he come? (13:24-27)
9. How does the “fig tree lesson” (13:28-29) answer the disciples’ question? (13:4)
10. What promises does Jesus give? (13:30-31) How would this comfort or discomfort the disciples? What impact do these promises have on you?
11. There seem to be two time frames that Jesus describes in this chapter. What are they? What happened in August and September of 70 CE?
12. What do you see in these various signs, past, present, and future: (a) wars, (b) earthquakes and famines, (c) trials and persecutions, (d) family divisions, (e) world-wide evangelization, (f) false Messiahs and false prophets?
13. Why do you think the Father has kept the time secret? (13:32) What is the responsibility of believers in the meantime? (13:35-37)
14. How do you think the disciples (and others) would have responded if Jesus told them he would not return for at least another 2,000 years?

Mark 13:1-37 ~ Leader's Guide

1. Why do you think that Jesus used the discussion about the temple to begin his discourse about the end of the age? What made the temple so significant for the disciples? What would its destruction symbolize for them?

About 15 years before Jesus was born (20 B.C.), Herod the Great began to remodel and rebuild the temple, which had stood for nearly 500 years since the days of Ezra (Ezra 6:14, 15). Herod made the temple one of the most beautiful buildings in Jerusalem—not to honor God, but to appease the Jews whom he ruled. The magnificent building project was not completely finished until A.D. 64. According to Josephus, “whatever was not overlaid with gold was the purest white.” The massive stones of the temple were white, and some of them were 37 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet wide. The temple was a truly magnificent building and the center of worship.

In Leviticus 1:3 the people were directed to make all their sacrifices at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for its acceptance in front of YHWH. From this time on, there is only one place where sacrifices may be performed: the Tent of Meeting and, later, the temple. This centralization of worship in Israel's religion is crucially important; it is a powerful corollary of Israelite monotheism: one God, one altar.

Jesus' prophecy that not one stone would be left on another was fulfilled in A.D. 70, when, the Romans completely destroyed the temple and the entire city of Jerusalem.

2. What two questions do the disciples ask? (13:4) What might deceive them into thinking the end times had come? (13:5-8) Of what will these events be a sign?

The disciples wanted to know when the temple would be destroyed and what signs to look for. Jesus gave them a prophetic picture of that time, including events leading up to it. He also talked about future events connected with his return to earth to judge all people. Jesus predicted both near and distant events without putting them in chronological order. Some of the disciples lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This event would assure them that everything else Jesus predicted would also happen.

What are the signs of the end times? There have been people in every generation since Christ's resurrection claiming to know exactly when Jesus would return. No one has been right yet, however, because Christ will return on God's timetable, not ours. Jesus predicted that before his return, many believers would be misled by false teachers claiming to have revelations from God.

According to Scripture, the one clear sign of Christ's return will be his unmistakable appearance in the clouds, which will be seen by all people (13:26; Revelation 1:7). In other words, you do not have to wonder whether a certain person is the Messiah or whether these are the “end times.” When Jesus returns,

you will know beyond a doubt, because it will be evident to all true believers. Beware of groups who claim special knowledge of the last days, because no one knows when that time will be (13:32). Be cautious about saying, “This is it!” but be bold in your total commitment to have your heart and life ready for Christ’s return.

3. After that, what things will happen to the disciples and early church? (13:9-13)

These verses (9-13) can be confusing. Jesus says, “When these things begin to happen” referring to signs of the end times. But in the previous sentence he had said, “this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.” That’s what makes it impossible to predict when the end is coming—the signs started back in the first century and, as Jesus said, “with more to come,” we are still seeing them today and most certainly they will continue for possibly thousands of years more.

As the early church began to grow, most of the disciples experienced the kind of persecution Jesus was talking about. Since the time of Christ, Christians have been persecuted in their own lands and on foreign mission fields. Though you may be safe from persecution now, your vision of God’s kingdom should not be limited by what happens only to you. A glance at a newspaper will reveal that many Christians in other parts of the world daily face hardships and persecution. Persecutions are an opportunity for Christians to witness for Christ to those opposed to him. These persecutions serve God’s desire that the gospel be proclaimed to everyone.

To believe in Jesus and stand “firm to the end” will take perseverance because our faith will be challenged and opposed. Severe trials will sift true Christians from fair-weather believers. Enduring to the end does not earn salvation for us, but marks us as already saved. The assurance of our salvation will keep us going through the times of persecution.

4. What comfort and advocate will help them and you endure these trials? (13:11)

Jesus said you could rely on the Holy Spirit to speak through you. But this did not imply that studying the Bible and gaining knowledge is useless or wrong. Before and after his resurrection Jesus himself taught his disciples what to say and how to say it. But Jesus was teaching the kind of attitude we should have when we must take a stand for the gospel. We don’t have to be fearful or defensive about our faith because the Holy Spirit will be present to give us the right words to say.

5. Why does “everyone” or “all men” hate Christ followers? (13:13, John 15:18, 15:25, 17:14)

Is it because Christians (and Jews) give more money to charity than others? Because we start hospitals? Because we care for the poor and homeless? Maybe because we’re hypocrites or we’re “holier than thou?” Here’s what Jesus says:

John 15:18 – “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”

John 15:25 – But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me *without reason.*’

John 17:14 – I have given them your word and the world has hated them [disciples], for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

6. What dreadful event will bring days of distress unequalled in human history? (13:14-19, Daniel 9, 26, 11:31, 12:11, 2 Thess 2:4) What is the “abomination” [NIV] or “sacrilegious object” [NLT] or “Horrible Thing” [CEV] or “Awful Horror” [TEV]?

Daniel 9:26 – After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

Daniel 11:31 – “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

Daniel 12:11 – “From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

The Greek scripture suggests a male standing where he doesn’t belong. Many people believe this is the antichrist. Broadly speaking, the “abomination that causes desolation” is the desecration of the temple by God’s enemies. This happened repeatedly in Israel’s history: in 597 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar looted the temple and took Judean captives to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36); in 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed a pig to Zeus on the sacred temple altar (Daniel 9:27; 11:30, 31). It happened again in A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus placed an idol on the site of the burned-out temple after the destruction of Jerusalem.

According to some, there is a further stage in the progressive fulfillment of the predictions of Daniel and Jesus, specifically the setting of an image of the antichrist in Jerusalem (2 Thess 2:4). Currently, the Muslim Dome of the Rock mosque occupies the original site of the temple in Jerusalem. Draw what conclusions you wish from that.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 – He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

7. What deceptive signs will accompany that distress? Is it possible for Christians to be deceived? How can we recognize false teachers? (13:21-22)

Is it possible for Christians to be deceived? Yes. So convincing will be the arguments and proofs from deceivers in the end times that it will be difficult *not* to fall away from Christ. If we are prepared, Jesus says, we can remain faithful. But if we are not prepared, we will turn away. To penetrate the disguises of false teachers we can ask: (1) Have their predictions come true, or do they have to revise them to fit what's already happened? (2) Does any teaching utilize a small section of the Bible to the neglect of the whole? (3) Does the teaching contradict what the Bible says about God? (4) Are the practices meant to glorify the teacher or Christ? (5) Do the teachings promote hostility toward other Christians?

8. Who is the “Son of Man?” How will he come? (13:24-27)

The “Son of Man” is the title that Jesus used for himself. Jesus will come in the same way that God came down on Mt. Sinai during the Exodus.

9. How does the “fig tree lesson” (13:28-29) answer the disciples’ question? (13:4)

10. What promises does Jesus give? (13:30-31) How would this comfort or discomfort the disciples? What impact do these promises have on you?

In verse 30, the word “generation” is found in most English translations, but the Aramaic word can also be translated as race, age, nation, or even “this very race of men.” This verse is confusing because Jesus spoke both about things that would occur in the next 40 years, that some of the disciples would see, but also about things in the distant future. In his following remarks, he emphasized the truth of his words and being prepared and those are the lessons we should take with us.

In Jesus’ day the world seemed concrete, dependable, and permanent. These days many people fear its destruction by nuclear war. Jesus tells us, however, that even if the earth passes away, the truth of his words will never be changed or abolished. God and his Word provide the only stability in our unstable world. How shortsighted people are who spend their time learning about this temporary world and accumulating its possessions, while neglecting the Bible and its eternal truths!

11. There seem to be two time frames that Jesus describes in this chapter. What are they? What happened in August and September of 70 CE?

On the one hand, Jesus is speaking of the immediate future, specifically what the disciples will experience, in some cases right away and in others after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE. But he is also speaking of the future—as we know now, more than 2,000 years and perhaps much longer.

12. What do you see in these various signs, past, present, and future: (a) wars, (b) earthquakes and famines, (c) trials and persecutions, (d) family divisions, (e) world-wide evangelization, (f) false Messiahs and false prophets?

13. Why do you think the Father has kept the time secret? (13:32) What is the responsibility of believers in the meantime? (13:35-37)

When Jesus said that even he did not know the time of the end, he was affirming his humanity. Of course God the Father knows the time, and Jesus and the Father are one. But when Jesus became a man, he voluntarily gave up the unlimited use of his divine attributes.

The emphasis of this verse is not on Jesus' lack of knowledge, but rather on the fact that no one knows. It is God the Father's secret to be revealed when he wills. No one can predict by Scripture or science the exact day of Jesus' return. Jesus is teaching that preparation, not calculation, is needed.

Months of planning go into a wedding, the birth of a baby, a career change, a speaking engagement, the purchase of a home. Do you place the same importance on preparing for Christ's return, the most important event in your life? Its results will last for eternity. You dare not postpone your preparations because you do not know when his return will occur. The way to prepare is to study God's Word and live by its instructions each day. Only then will you be ready.

The entire thirteenth chapter of Mark tells us how to live while we wait for Christ's return:

(1) We are not to be misled by confusing claims or speculative interpretations of what will happen (13:5, 6).

(2) We should not be afraid to tell people about Christ, despite what they might say or do to us (13:9-11).

(3) We must stand firm by faith and not be surprised by persecutions (13:13).

(4) We must be morally alert, obedient to the commands for living found in God's Word.

This chapter was not given to promote discussions on prophetic timetables, but to stimulate right living for God in a world where he is largely ignored.

14. How do you think the disciples (and others) would have responded if Jesus told them he would not return for at least another 2,000 years?

[Many of the notes above are from the NIV Life Application Study Bible.]