



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

Chapter 13

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Introduction

In this chapter:

- Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple, the signs that shall precede the day of judgment and the Great Tribulation
- Jesus' discourse on the judgment against Jerusalem and the Temple is the longest discourse in the Gospel according to Mark
- This chapter is in total accordant with Matthew 24



Introduction

Chapter Outline

- Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 13:1-2
- The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13
- The Great Tribulation 13:14-23
- The Coming of the Son of Man 13:24-27
- The Parable of the Fig Tree 13:28-31
- No One Knows the Day or Hour 13:32-37

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 13:1-2



- The Jerusalem Temple was built by King Solomon and was destroyed by the Babylonians
- A modest Temple was rebuilt seventy years later by the returning Judean exiles
- When Herod was appointed King of the Jews by the Romans, he began a rebuilding project to turn the modest Temple into one of the most beautiful buildings in antiquity in an attempt to win over the affections of the Jews
- The temple was constructed of white marble, and the blocks were of a remarkable size

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 13:1-2



- Josephus says that these stones were, some of them, 50 feet long, 24 feet broad, and 16 feet in thickness
- The disciples gazed on these with great admiration
- In spite of the lesson they had just received about the poor widow, they were still measuring things by their quantity and size
- They were now to be taught that, while the one should be spoken of throughout the whole world, (the widow who gave all what she has), the other (the Temple), should be destroyed, so that not a trace should remain

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 13:1-2



- Perhaps because Christ had frequently denounced the destruction of the temple, His disciples, surprised that so beautiful a building should be destroyed, wished on that account to show Him the magnificence of it
- Jesus responds to the His disciples' admiration and shocks them by prophesying its total destruction
- See how little Christ values outward posturing
- He looks with pity upon the ruin of precious souls, and weeps over them, but we do not find Him look with pity upon the ruin of a fine house

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- The Mount of Olives was directly east of Jerusalem, and from it there was a fine view of the temple
- Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple provoked the Apostles to ask Jesus about when this event will occur and what sign there be that these things are coming to an end
- St. Matthew and St. Luke only mention His disciples generally
- St. Mark, going more into detail, gives the names of those who thus asked Him
- It is evident from St. Matthew 24:3 that the disciples closely associated together the destruction of the temple and His final coming at the end of the world

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- They knew from our Lord's words that the destruction of Jerusalem was near at hand, and therefore they thought that the destruction of the world itself, and the day of judgment, were also near at hand
- Their question leads to what is Jesus' discourse on the coming persecution in the life time of the Apostles and His Second Advent at the end of the Age which is recorded in all the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew 23:34-24:31; Luke 21:5-34

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- The first sign of His advent, would be the appearance of false christs and prophets, to deceive humanity, and to set the kingdom of the devil; pretending to do that in the name of God
- It might be that the Lord started by it because of its importance; as, in every generation, the evil one does his best to deceive men, to draw them away from the kingdom of God, and from enjoying His salvation
- The second sign is wars and rumors of wars
- But the Apostles were not to be terrified, *the end is not yet*

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- It is as though, the Lord Jesus Christ, is warning His disciples, not to preoccupy themselves with the destruction of the temple, but rather with getting aware of the deceits of the devil, who is opposing them, using the name of Christ Himself, confirming:
“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and will deceive many.

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- That sign would precede the destruction of the temple, on the hand of the Roman leader Titus
- The Roman empire was aflame with wars, all along the interval between the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and the destruction of the temple
- The history records many of them like the one that took place in Alexandria at about the year 38 AD, between the Egyptians and the resident Jews
- And the war in Seleucia, in which 50,000 Jews were killed; as well as the great tension between the Jews and the Samaritans

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- The famines like the one prophesied by the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28), that occurred in the year 49 AD; the plague that took place in Rome with its 30,000 victims; and the earthquakes in Crete, 46 AD; in Rome, 51 AD; in Aphamia, 53 AD; in Laodicea Phrygia, 60 AD; and in Jerusalem, 67 AD
- That sign, of the occurrences of wars, troubles, earthquakes, and famines, will also precede the end of the world, and the second advent of the Lord Christ
- *the beginnings*, All those troubles would be but small, but light afflictions, *the beginning of sorrows*, in comparison of what should immediately happen

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- The signs will not stop at outer and general troubles, like wars, famines, plagues, and earthquakes, but will proceed further to personal affliction, concerning the believers themselves
- Between Jesus' Ascension and the Jewish Revolt that began in 66 AD and reached its climax in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the faithful of the Church suffered so much persecutions
- We find examples in Acts 3:11-22, 5:19, 6:8-15, 7:58-60, 8:3, 9:2, 12:1-5, 16:23, 18:12-17, 21:30-33, 22:30, 23:12,24,26,31-35, 24:10-27, 25:1-26, 27:1, 28:17-19,30-31

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- St. Peter and St. John were arrested, imprisoned, and spoke courageously before the Jewish high court that condemned Jesus
- St. Stephen and St. James were martyred and St. Paul and other disciples were beaten
- *you will be beaten in the synagogues, "From the Jews," says St. Paul 2 Corinthians 11:24, "five times I received forty stripes minus one;" "three times I was beaten with rods."*
- It was part of the duties of the minister in each synagogue, to maintain order, and scourge the condemned

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- *the gospel must first be preached*, St. Paul was arrested by the Romans, imprisoned, and spoke the Gospel before two Roman governors (Felix and Festus), a Jewish King (Herod Antipas II) and two Jewish princesses (Drusilla and Bernice), before being taken as a prisoner to Rome
- All spoke eloquently before their enemies
- Everything that the early Christians suffered that was recorded in Acts was prophesied by Jesus
- *for My sake, for a testimony to them*, This will be a chance for them to preach the gospel and be a *testimony to them*

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- God never sends judgment without previous warning; and there can be no doubt that the Jews, already dispersed over most known countries, had nearly all heard the Gospel "as a witness," before the end of the Jewish state
- St. Paul, Romans 10:18 reminds us that *"their sound has gone out to all earth, and their words to the ends of the world"*
- And he tells the Colossians, 1:6 that the gospel was come to them, and was bearing fruit and increasing in all the world
- The same principle was repeated and will repeat itself to "the end."

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- Even if affliction is inevitable, yet, preaching of the Gospel will never cease
- The Lord Christ is assuring us that although the work of God is always opposed, yet, through opposition, it increases in strength, and splendor
- Affliction is transformed into a testimony to the afflicted believers themselves
- When they assume that they are capable of suppressing the voice of truth by worldly authority and violence, the truth comes to transfigure before them, with a voice much more clear and obvious in their thoughts

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- Some concerns perhaps had seized upon the minds of the disciples, when they were informed by our Lord, that they should stand accused before kings, and princes of the earth, so He said *do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak*
- Jesus assures the Apostles that God the Holy Spirit will be with them in their sufferings and will give them the words they need to defend the Gospel
- It is only necessary for us, under such circumstances, to make an offer of our will; the Holy Spirit will speak for us

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 13:3-13



- Our Lord further warns His disciples that they would have to suffer persecution even from their own relations, their brethren, and their fathers, who, will overcome all the natural ties because of fear, or from the hope of reward and from the hatred of the gospel, would persecute the faithful even unto death
- *by all* Means great numbers, perhaps the greater number or the majority
- *endures to the end*, It is not enough once and again or a third time to have overcome, but, in order to obtain the crown, it is necessary to endure and to conquer, even to the end



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- The Lord Jesus Christ presents to us the *Abomination of desolation* of which the prophet Daniel spoke, 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, as a sign of the destruction of the temple and the ceasing of the daily sacrifice, and also a sign of the end of age, and the Second Coming of the Lord Christ
- St. Luke, 21:20 does not use the expression; it would have sounded strange to his Gentile readers
- He says, *But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near*



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- This reference to the Roman armies by St. Luke has led some Scholars to suppose that "*the abomination of desolation*" meant the Roman armies
- Some scholars believe that the abomination was the statues that were placed in the temple
- Like when Antiochus Epiphanus set the statue of Zeus Olympus upon the altar of sacrifice in the temple, in the year 167 BC, 2 Maccabees 6:2
- And when Pilate set the statue of Caesar in the temple



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- And when Caligula tried to set for himself a statue in the temple of Jerusalem in the year 40 AD approximately
- And there was also a statue of Adrian that was set in the Holy of Holiness, itself, for a long time
- A group of scholars rejected the two previous views, seeing that the Greek text does not refer to an abomination of desolation through the setting of a statue, or the entrance of pagan soldiers into the temple, but rather through the appearance of a real Antichrist, who sets himself a god in the temple, as said by the apostle Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- Our Lord proceeds to warn all, that when they saw these signs they should *flee to the mountains*
- Not to the mountains of Judaea, for these were already occupied by the Roman army according to Josephus, but those further off, beyond Judaea
- We know from Eusebius that the Christians fled to Pella, on the other side of the Jordan



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- The houses of Palestine, as we have seen in the case of the “paralytic carried by four,” Mark 2:3-12, were furnished with a flight of steps outside, by which the housetop could be reached without actually entering the house
- Our Lord is warning them to flee along the flat roofs to the city wall, and so make their escape
- *nor enter to take anything out of his house*, A graphic way of denoting the extreme urgency of the case, and the danger of being tempted, by the desire to save his property, to delay till escape should become impossible



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- Our Lord warns them that in this impending destruction, so suddenly would it come, they must be ready to fly just as they were
- It was the direction given to Lot, “*Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains*” Genesis 19:17



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- The words, "Woe!" are an exclamation of pity and concern for them
- Women in this condition would be specially objects of pity, for they would be more exposed to danger
- Women would be very incapable of fleeing with any haste; and therefore very liable to fall into the hands of the enemy, and become their victim



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- *nursing babies*, Who could not bear to leave their children behind, and yet would not be able to carry them with them, at least not without great trouble, and which would much retard their flight, and endanger their being taken by the enemy
- Our Lord thus specifies the winter, because at that season, on account of the cold and snow, flight would be attended with special difficulty and hardship, and would be almost impossible for the elders, ill, and weak



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- Jospehus, the Jewish historian, relates the calamities that befell Jerusalem, about thirty-seven years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which verified to the very letter the prediction
- *there will be tribulation*, With the close siege of the Romans; the rage of the zealots, (a group of Jewish rebels who attempted to military overthrow of Roman rule in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD); the rage of different parties among the Jews themselves; the ravage of the sword, both within and without, together with dreadful plagues and famines
- St. John Chrysostom assigns the cause of all this to the base and cruel treatment of the Son of God by the Jews



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- The destruction of their city and their temple, and their continued desolation afterwards, were the lessons by which the Jews were to be taught that the Christ had indeed come, and that this was the Christ whom they had crucified and slain
- The Lord had determined that those days of affliction should be but few, and not last long; that the siege should not be longer continued
- Our Savior will put a stop to these calamities on account of His elect, lest they should be tempted above their strength



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- False Messiahs have continually come forward since the Ascension of the Christ
- Our Lord warns us that as the time of His second advent approaches, deceivers will arise, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect, the believers
- Every age has produced its crop of such deceivers; and it may be expected that, as the time of the end draws nearer and nearer, their number will increase



The Great Tribulation 13:14-23

- St. Jerome says "If any would persuade you that Christ is to be found in the wilderness of unbelief or skeptical philosophy, or in the secret chambers of heresy, believe them not."
- The disciples were around Him and He had just told them that the seduction of the elect would prove impossible; but since this would be all but accomplished, He warns them to be on their guard against every deception, and temptation, and to make use of all means for their perseverance
- His warning is meant for Christians everywhere, even to the end of the world



The Coming of the Son of Man

13:24-27

- In the great events of the creation recorded in Genesis 1 the sun and the moon and the stars did not show their light until that period which is called the fourth day
- So, according to some of the Church Fathers, in the end of the world, the sun and the moon and the stars are represented as withdrawing their light, perhaps figuratively, but perhaps also literally, in the course of some of the unknown physical changes which shall accompany the winding up of the present dispensation



The Coming of the Son of Man

13:24-27

- *the powers in the heavens will be shaken*, The powers may here mean those great unseen forces of nature by which the universe is now held in balance state
- When the Creator wills it, these powers shall be shaken, Job 26:11, *"The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at His rebuke"*; Isaiah 34:4, *"All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll."*
- As the end of the world approaches, the elements will shake and tremble



The Coming of the Son of Man

13:24-27

- Others discuss it from a spiritual view saying that in the day of judgment the luminaries of heaven shall be darkened, not by the lack of their light, but by the approach of the true light of the world, i.e. the great Judge the Sun or Righteousness
- And that can be cause for wonder, man should be terrified at the thoughts of the last day, when the angelic powers shall tremble; or, how will these mortal habitations of ours stand the shock, when the very pillars of heaven shall be moved



The Coming of the Son of Man

13:24-27

- St. Augustine says, "The light of truth shall be obscured; because in the great tribulation that shall come on the world, many will fall from the faith, who had seemed to be bright and firm, like the sun and the stars." "And the moon," that is, the Church, "shall not give her light."
- Others also say that He might be speaking of His Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit to fill and indwell the Church that will gather His elect from the four corners of the earth into His Kingdom
- They hold this interpretation based on verse 30: *Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place*



The Coming of the Son of Man

13:24-27

- Even when speaking of the “glorious majesty” of His Second Advent, He calls Himself by the name which links Him to the Humanity, *the Son of Man*
- As the visible world deteriorates, the new invisible, heavenly world will be proclaimed, through the advent of the incarnated Word of God, in clouds, in power and glory
- Many of the Fathers, as St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, and others, think that this sign will be the cross
- But surely the sign of the Son of man at the end of the world will be the Son of man Himself coming in clouds



The Coming of the Son of Man

13:24-27

- *will send His angels*, This represents the great harvest at the end of the world, when the angel-reapers shall be sent forth to separate the wicked from the just
- *gather together His elect from the four winds*; The winds are representing figuratively every corner of the world
- Or, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven
- St. Augustine sees that the Lord gathers, by His angels, Adam, who, previously, had been dispersed all over the world, east, west, north and south

The Parable of the Fig Tree

13:28-31



- Jesus uses the symbolism of the fig tree once again but in this case it is the sign of what is coming
- In the same way that leaves on a fig tree appear in the spring as a sign that the summer season is coming, when these things He has mentioned begin to happen, they will know that the judgment He foretold is near
- Many scholars from the early time think that this tree is the Jewish people, who became like the fig tree, that fell under curse because of their denial

The Parable of the Fig Tree

13:28-31



- For once it comes back to life, through regaining faith at the end of age, we know that the time is near
- That interpretation was according to St. Paul *“Hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.”* Romans 11:25-26
- Several events and texts in the Holy Bible, proclaimed the return of the Jews at the end of age, to accept the Lord Christ, after recognizing their transgression of rejecting and crucifying Him

The Parable of the Fig Tree

13:28-31



- Of these events, was the return of Miriam, sister of Aaron and Moses, cured, after getting infected with Leprosy and staying for seven days outside the camp
- *“And the people did not journey on, till Miriam was brought in again”* (Numbers 12:15)
- According to Origen, that Miriam, refers to the Jewish people who were infected with the leprosy of disbelief, and were cast out of the camp; until they would again return, at the end of age, to the camp, to join the Church of the Gentiles of the whole world

The Parable of the Fig Tree

13:28-31



- The Lord declares that the generation of the literal Israel then living would not pass away before the judgments here predicted would fall upon Jerusalem, just as God had made their forefathers wander in the wilderness *“until all the generation”* that had come out of Egypt *“that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was gone”*, Numbers 32:13
- The destruction of Jerusalem took place within the limits of the generation living in our Lord's time; and there might be some of those whom He was then addressing who would live to see the event

The Parable of the Fig Tree

13:28-31



- *Heaven and earth will pass away*, Which may be understood as what will be at the second coming of Christ
- Here is a distinct prediction that the present structure of the universe *will pass away*; it will perish, as far as its present state and condition are concerned
- *My words*, Not merely the words which He had just uttered respecting Jerusalem, but all His other words - all the revelation of God, all the words of Him who is the Truth

No One Knows the Day or Hour

13:32-37



- Before ending His talk by persuading them to watch, He intended to exhort His disciples to avoid preoccupying themselves with knowing the day and hour, but rather with getting ready through persistent watching and anticipating His advent
- The eternal Son, as God, by His omniscience, and as man, by knowledge imparted to Him, knows perfectly the day and the hour of the future judgment
- But Christ as man, and as the Messenger from God to men, did not so know it as to be able to reveal it to men

No One Knows the Day or Hour 13:32-37



- “We must remember, that the meaning of this sentence is not, that Christ was really ignorant of this circumstance, but only that it was not then a convenient time to disclose the secret.”
St. Augustine
- “Not as if Christ were ignorant Himself, as certain Eutychian heretics, called *Agnoitæ*, held; but because He knew it not as our teacher, to teach it others, as being not expedient.” St. Ambrose

No One Knows the Day or Hour

13:32-37



- Some will perhaps think, that it would have been much better, if the Almighty had not left the hour of death uncertain; as in that case, they would not have been so anxious with regard to its arrival
- But St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and other saints assure us, on the contrary, that it is a very great mercy of God to keep us in this ignorance, that we may always be prepared for it
- For, if we knew the precise period, this assurance would give occasion of living more carelessly, unguardedly, and of sinning more freely

No One Knows the Day or Hour 13:32-37



- If, with this uncertainty of the hour of our death, we live in spite of that, so very negligent; what should we do, if we were assured that we were not to die for some years?
- St. Gregory and St. Augustine say, that God chose to leave us in this uncertainty, purposely to prevent all attachment to temporal things

No One Knows the Day or Hour

13:32-37



- Jesus tells a short parable in which He is the man who leaves and places His servants (the Apostles and disciples and those of future generations) in charge of His "house" the Church
- *a man going to a far country*, Christ, when He ascended on high, went to heaven, *a far country*
- *left his house*, His church to the care of His apostles, and gave authority to govern it, according to the laws, rules, and directions prescribed by Him; and assigned every man his particular work, for which He gave him proper gifts and abilities
- *the doorkeeper*, All the apostles and ministers, who must watch over themselves, and the souls of men committed to their care

No One Knows the Day or Hour

13:32-37



- *Watch therefore, Against false christs, and false prophets and over yourselves*
- According to the Jewish, there were only three watches - namely, the first watch, from sunset to 10 pm; the second watch, from 10 pm to 2 am; and the third watch, from 2 am to sunrise
- But after the establishment of the Roman power in Judaea, these watches were divided into four; and were either described as the first, second, third, and fourth respectively; or, as here, by the terms *the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning*

No One Knows the Day or Hour

13:32-37



- These are generally referred to the different ages of man's life; infancy, youth, manhood, and old age
- We are exhorted to be always in readiness, for we do not know at what hour the Judge will come
- We are taught to watch, because we are charged with the care of our soul, which is the temple or house of God
- *he find you sleeping*, This applies to all the servants, not merely to *the doorkeeper*

No One Knows the Day or Hour 13:32-37



- In the case of a master absent on a journey, the servants cannot know even the day, not to speak of the hour or watch of the night
- Therefore they must keep awake not merely one night, but many nights
- The key word for all generations in this passage is the command to "Watch!"



Discussion

- What is *the 'abomination of desolation'*? To what historical event does the expression refer?
- How are we to understand Jesus' warnings about cosmic disturbances if the dramatic events He describes are not to be taken literally?
- What are the two key events this chapter prepares the readers for?



Discussion

- The key word of the chapter was “WATCH!”. How alert are you to the dangers, the distractions, the delusions, to the opposition – to anything which would lead you astray or trip you up as a Christian?
- If you knew He was to return in two months, how would life change now? What things would be less important and what things would be more important? Can you make those changes now – because of the real possibility He MAY just return in two months?