

## Before the Birth Pangs Begin

Mark 13:1 – 13

**Proposition:** Rather than trying to predict the end of the time, we are to prepare for the time of the end.

**Application:** Watch with understanding, seek Him in His Word and prayer, and endure with faithfulness.

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I think we can all agree the world is in chaos. Because of this people are concerned about what the future holds and maybe asking if Jesus is coming back within the next decade. Over the centuries, Christians have spent countless hours seeking to do something the Bible never asks us to do, predict the time of the end. No one has swung and missed on the coming of the end more than the Jehovah's Witnesses whose false predictions now stand at nine (1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, and 1984).

Rather than trying to predict the end of time, we should prepare for the time of the end. This chapter deals with the flow of human history. It spans the time from the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem until the return of Christ Jesus. Israel is the focal point, not Canada. Israel is at the center, not the church. Of course, the events described will have a bearing for us in Canada and for the church, but the context is the nation of Israel. Some of the events in this passage have already happened others are in process of being fulfilled and still others will take place at His return.

Just as a photographer brings near and far objects into focus, Jesus does the same with respect to world history. The destruction of the temple is close range – a near object if you will. The far-off object is the day of tribulation. Just as a picture does give us the distance between two objects, we cannot know the time between the near and far off events. The first section of Mark 13 describes events before the tribulation. The middle section describes events during the tribulation. And closing portion of Mark 13 describes the time of the end by way of a parable.

Bringing a child into the world involves at least three stages – *pregnancy, labour* and *delivery*. I believe we are in the pregnancy stage of human history. The pregnancy stage began with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and it will end with the future rebuilt temple at which time the labour pangs begin – i.e. the tribulation. Let's now listen in on a talk between Jesus and His disciples as they sit on the Mt. of Olives with the temple in view.

### I. Destruction of the Temple (13:1 – 4)

*Temple is Desired* (13:1): Jesus left the temple for the last time, never to return. Only hours before Jesus had conflicts with religious leaders in the temple grounds. Now He walked away

from the temple for good. The temple was one of the great wonders of the ancient world. It was covered with gold such that when the sun shone on it, it was blinding to the eyes. The marble stones were 20 to 40 feet long and weighed about 100 tons and were white as snow. But as great as the Temple was Jesus is far greater (Matt 12:6). The temple was defiled by the sin of the religious leaders. Jesus now left it desolate – devoid of God’s presence and soon to be destroyed by the Romans.

*Temple will be destroyed (13:2):* We can make an idol out of something that God has given to us. God gave the temple to Israel as a place for worship. But the temple became more important than the God of the temple. People even swore by the temple (Matt 23:16). Jesus told His disciples that the building they so admired, would soon be a heap of ruins. Thirty-seven years after Jesus spoke these words the Roman emperor Titus ordered the city of Jerusalem destroyed and the temple demolished. First the Romans burned the temple. But the gold melted into the cracks between the stones. To recoup the gold, a Roman commander ordered the temple be dismantled stone by stone. And so, as Jesus foretold the temple would be fully destroyed such that one stone was not left touching another. To this day there is not a single stone left intact, only the foundation stones remain.

The destruction of the temple was a sign of God’s judgement on His people. When the temple was destroyed an exile of the Jewish people followed. For instance, when the Babylonians destroyed the first temple, the Jewish people were exiled. When the Romans destroyed the second temple, the Jewish people were scattered to the four corners of the earth. The destruction of the temple is a sign of God’s judgement.

*Time of the end (13:3, 4):* The disciples did not see a long timeframe between the destruction of the temple and the end of the age. To them the destruction of the temple and the time of the end were one and the same. And so, Jesus explained the events that would lead to the tribulation period.

To bring a child to this world involves pregnancy, labour and delivery. I believe we are in the pregnancy stage of human history. It began with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and lasts until the labour stage, the birth pangs, the tribulation period. The tribulation will begin after the third temple is rebuilt. The late Gershon Salomon, founder of the Temple Mount Faithful, an organization seeking to prepare Israelis to accept and promote the rebuilding of the Temple once said: *“Building the Third Temple is an act which must be done to complete the redemption of the people of the Bible in the Land of the Bible. I cannot imagine an Israeli State or Israeli life in this country without the Temple Mount in the center of this life.”* Before the third temple is rebuilt, the world will face massive deception, devastating wars, natural catastrophes, persecution and proclamation of the Gospel.

## **II. Great Deceptions (13:5 – 6)**

*Deception misleads* (13:5, 6): Mark Twain once said, “*a lie runs around the world while truth is putting on her shoes.*” Lies spread quickly but truth wins the race. During times of major crisis, imposters will perform counterfeit signs, proclaim a false message of hope to deceive those who are seeking answers. Sometimes a lie is easier to believe than truth. Truth hurts but truth also heals. The main target of deceivers will be believers, because they will be seeking spiritual answers to life’s problems. As we move closer and closer to the tribulation period, deception will increase but we shouldn’t be alarmed (1 John 2:18; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Thess 2:7 – 10).

*Defend against deception:* The Thessalonian passage tells us that if we fail to love the truth, we will be open to deceit. How do we defend against deceit? Love the truth! Make the Word of God more precious to you than a thousand pieces of gold and silver (Ps 119:72). Love the Word of God. Study it. Apply it to your life. Then you will be able to discern truth from error (Heb 5:13 – 14; 1 John 4:1).

The destruction of the temple starts the clock on the events of this present age – the pregnant age. As we move closer and closer to the tribulation period, the time of labour, deception will increase and so will wars and rumours of wars.

## **III. Devastating Wars (13:7, 8a)**

*Devastating Wars* (13:7, 8a): The history of the world is a history of bloodshed. When there is peace, it is short lived. As we move toward the tribulation period, Israel will hear news of wars close by and wars far off. Wars that have already begun and wars that are yet to begin. We must not be disturbed by such news rather we should expect them because these things must take place. We may be disturbed at the sudden rise and even support for groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis but we should not be surprised. Such things must happen. The world will not become more peaceful but more bloody. Why? The total depravity of humanity is at the root of all this carnage. Satan works through human depravity to achieve his destructive plans (Eph 2:1, 2). As we move into the future demonic activity will increase through human depravity.

The destruction of the temple starts the clock on the events of this present age. As we move closer and closer to the tribulation period, deception will increase and so will wars both near and far. Natural disasters will also increase in intensity and frequency.

## **IV. Natural Disasters (13:8b)**

*Earthquakes* (13:8b): Our planet has at least 50 earthquakes a day. Most are ignored because they occur in remote places others are too small in magnitude. One scientist said, “*if you want to get away from earthquakes move to Antarctica.*”

*Famines:* People will not have food enough to eat. Part of the reason is crop failure. But the main cause is armed conflict between nations.

*Epidemics* (Luke 21:11): As global travel increases, as people fly from country to country, they bring infectious diseases with them and the spread may cause epidemics. Plagues may even be due to biowarfare – because of biotechnologies such as *gain of function* techniques. In short, *gain of function* involves altering the genes of microbes, so they become more transmissible and possibly more lethal. It’s scary to think that this could happen. But it can. As we seek the Lord, we will find a peace in Him (John 14:27).

Christians are the most persecuted people in the Middle East. In Iraq, Christians are “*close to extinction*”. Jesus warns us to be prepared for persecution. The source of persecution will come from surprising places; religious leaders, government officials even family members.

## **V. Persecution and Proclamation (13:9 – 13)**

*Religious leaders* (13:9): We can expect religious leaders to treat Christians as they treated the Lord Jesus. The world will accept us if we join scientology, become a Buddhist, believe in the return of the 13<sup>th</sup> Imam, but the moment we talk about faith in Christ Jesus we will be opposed. This may disturb us, but it should not surprise us.

*Government rulers:* Because of our faith in the Lord Jesus, we may be pressured to recant or face punishment. Not only will opposition come from official channels it will also come through family.

*Family members* (13:12, 13): Family members will betray each other to authorities. We may have heard about honour killings within Muslim families. For instance, a 17-year-old Somali girl left Islam because she trusted in the Lord Jesus. As a result, she was shot to death in an "honour killing." Nurta Farah, fled her village to live with relatives after her parents tortured her for leaving Islam. She was then shot with a pistol. Sources believe the two men who shot her were relatives acting on behalf of her parents. These same sources also said the parents severely beat her for leaving Islam (Mic 7:5 – 7). We will be hated by religious authorities, government rulers, and family members. We will be hated by all people (13:13), even our boss, our neighbour, our co-worker. As we face opposition from all sources, we are to seek refuge in the Lord.

At last, some good news! Persecution for the Gospel will result in proclamation of the Gospel.

*Persecution results in proclamation* (12:10, 11): Persecution will give us opportunity to powerfully and spontaneously proclaim the Gospel of repentance from sin and faith in Christ Jesus. As we proclaim the Gospel In a state of crisis the Holy Spirit will speak through us.

Will deception, wars, catastrophes, and persecutions shake our faith? If we have genuine faith in the Lord Jesus, we will endure to the end. As one seminary prof once said, “*A faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first*”. We endure not by compromise with culture but by commitment to Christ Jesus. Seek Him in His Word. Seek Him in prayer. Prove your faith in the Lord through your faithfulness to the Lord.