

Mark 13:14-23 Let the Reader Understand Falls Ch. PM 11/12/2023

One of the chief ways to avoid being led astray was to not confuse time of the destruction of the temple with the time of the end of the world. Those are two different events.

In tonight's passage, Jesus answered His disciples' two core questions directly – from verse 4 - when will the temple be destroyed, what will be the sign? That brings us to our main point from our passage.

Watch out! By listening to what Jesus revealed, His disciples understand, take right actions, and avoid being led astray.

1. God provided a way to understand. (v.14a)

Verse 14, *“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”*

What is an abomination? What abomination does Jesus have in mind?

The term “abomination” appears more than 100 times in the Old Testament and just a few times in the New Testament. An abomination is normally a great sin against God, worthy of death. You might first think an abomination is a sexual sin. Scripture does use the word abominations to refer to sexual sins like adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality (see Leviticus 18). But more often throughout the Bible “abomination” refers instead to major covenant violations, especially idolatry.

What is an abomination of desolation? An action of gross offense against God. Here Jesus quoted a phrase that was written 3 times in the Book of Daniel. There was already one fulfillment of this prophecy of Daniel, when something offensive happened in the temple. Here Jesus was talking about a future time when it will happen again.

Let's go over the first fulfillment: Let me read Daniel 11:31-32, which are talking about an enemy king, *“Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.”* So, this prophecy from Daniel had its initial fulfillment 200 years prior to Jesus referring to this sort of thing that was going to happen a second time. The first time happened in 167BC, when the temple was attacked. An army from Syria came with a general whose name was Antiochus Epiphanes. After the army from Syria took control of the city of Jerusalem, the general entered into the temple in Jerusalem. Now we know from the Old Testament that a non-priest was never to enter the inner part of the temple, and certainly a foreigner was never to enter there. But here caused disgust when this pagan general entered the temple! And simply entering was not all the general did. The general set up an altar of the

Greek false god Zeus within the LORD God's holy temple! The general even sacrificed a pig on God's altar of burnt offerings. (Since our God had commanded that pigs were never to be used as sacrifices in worship, and the general knew that, we understand that for that general to enter and furthermore, to sacrifice a pig was a knowingly offensive choice done in order to be as offensive as possible to God and to God's people.) In fact, this act of idolatry and insult was so offensive to the Jewish people that they would soon rise up in rebellion against the Syrian army, in what was called the Maccabean Revolt.

Here Jesus spoke about a second fulfillment: Given the context of the comments of Jesus, He had in mind a time that was forthcoming when this whole thing would happen again! When that audience of Jesus heard Jesus say the sign was "*the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be*" they all would immediately think of that terrible previous scene – when a general was standing in God's holy temple.

Some of these people would have been alive 40 years after Jesus said this, in September of AD 70, when another general – this time a general of the Roman Empire named Titus entered the temple and stood where an unbelieving foreigner ought not stand – in the holy of holies in the Temple of the One Living and True God.

Jesus gave an understanding! When His disciples would see a general standing where he ought not stand, then they would know that the temple would be destroyed, and not one stone would be left upon another. God provided a way for us to understand. That brings us to point number two.

2. Jesus gave action steps to do, based on that understanding. (v.14b-18)

Jesus was not done. Since Jesus gave them the sign, and predicted the event, Jesus also gave them the additional blessing of knowing what to do! Jesus said in v.14b, so when you see that sign, "*then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*" When you see that sign, run!

The command from Jesus to "flee" not only tells them what to do, but it also gives a sense of how urgently to react! Jesus explained further in verse 15, so let me share a quick fact about rooftops in those days, so we understand this command. A person would go up on the roof of his flat-roofed house as regularly as we go out onto our decks, patios and porches. Much like our modern 2nd story decks, the people on flat-roofed houses had 2 options for getting down from the rooftop. Option A) take the staircase from the roof down into the house, and proceed down the inside stairs to the front door of the house and exit the front door OR Option B) instead take the other staircase from the roof that leads straight to the ground on the outside of the home, without ever needing to enter inside of the house. So, in verse 15 we hear the urgency when Jesus instructed them NOT to do what most people would want to do. Most people would want to come down from

the roof by going through the house and on the way through, quickly grabbing a coat or food or shoes. Jesus instructed them not to take the few extra seconds it would take them to go down through the house. Flee as urgently as possible, using the outside staircase. Those few seconds may cost you your life!

Verse 16 further tells us how urgently they must flee. Any persons who happened to be in the field working, ought not to take any extra moments to return from the field back to the place wherever his coat was, but must instead from the exact point wherever he was in the field, must turn and run away instantly. Perhaps his coat was merely a few steps away, but in the wrong direction. Don't risk it! That decision would take off precious time from their fleeing, time which they cannot afford to lose.

Once the bad general stands in the holy temple, and the sign is given that the destruction of the temple is upon them, then very quickly a time of distress will set in across the city. In verse 17, Jesus told about the distress for those who were not able to flee fast enough. Jesus mentioned any women who happen to be pregnant whenever this abomination takes place, or any women who had given birth recently enough that they were still nursing their babies. Our compassionate Savior brought their minds the common knowledge that women in both of those categories would not be able to flee very fast. What about them? All we then get from Jesus is the word "*Alas.*" What does that mean? Alas for them means it is not good for them. Why is it not good? Because any pregnant woman and any woman with a nursing infant cannot move fast enough to keep up with the urgency that the situation will demand. The master teaches in such a way that the rest is left to our imagination.

Verse 18, "*pray that it will not happen in Winter.*" Why not? Because if it happens during Winter, some rivers will be higher and therefore impossible to cross to keep fleeing, and some foods will be scarce, and they will be cold overnight, all causing a greater risk of dying. They would already be at risk of dying from this attacking general and his army.

The historian Josephus reported that in the year AD 70, the Romans crucified so many Jews that they ran out of wood for crosses. Inside the city, there was widespread murder, disease, starvation, and even cannibalism. Josephus reported that around 1 million people died during the attack on Jerusalem in AD70. Whether those numbers are exact or not should not distract us from the clear indication of the terrors of the event; and that was exactly the point that Jesus was making. When you see the sign, run! That brings us to our 3rd point.

3. Jesus forewarned His followers how to avoid being led astray. (v.19-23)

Verse 19, the event is described as worse than anything that has happened since the world was created until that time, and furthermore, that this attack was

worse than anything that will happen in the future until the end of the world. This was coming from the mouth of Jesus. How's that for a warning?

Verse 20, Jesus added that God shortened the event. The idea that God "*shortened the days*" is a reference to the siege lasting 5 months, which though unspeakably horrible while it lasted, was a relatively short timeframe for an ancient attack on a city and a nation. Jesus informed us that God shortened the time, so that there would be some survivors at all, otherwise everyone would have died. Furthermore, God shortened the days, "*for the sake of the elect.*"

Verse 21, when this terrible time arrives, there will be some imposters who lie in order to trick people who are running to safety. Their trick would be to say that Jesus has returned a second time. Perhaps imposters could get believers to gather into some house or area, and then the robbers would take their money and take their lives. Jesus warned that those who were running away must not be deterred from their running by falling for such deceptive traps. SI – you know how the IRS keeps saying that they will never telephone us asking for our personal banking information? Here Jesus was telling them that He Himself will not appear in those moments, so they know it will always be a trap whenever someone says, 'Come here, Christ is around this corner, come and join us!' No, instead remember the words of Jesus, because Jesus Himself said here in verse 21, "*Do not believe it.*" Do not stop your fleeing because of believing such lies, but rather keep right on fleeing until you reach your safe place.

In verse 22, there will be other people who claim to be The Christ! Again, the Jewish historian named Josephus later reported what actually happened around the year 70 - that many imposters stood up, and each one said that he was the Messiah. The historian also reported the fulfillment at that time of what Jesus said here – that the imposters tricked the masses of people and fooling them by performing some sort of "*wonders and signs.*" If there was a miracle, it was done with the devil's dark magic. But often it was no miracle at all, just a simple old-fashioned tricks and deceptions.

It was bad enough that there would be a threat of physical violence by an occupying and vicious Roman Army, but it was all made worse by the threats of false christs and false prophets rising up to try to lead people astray.

Verse 23, Jesus said "*Be on guard...*" This is fourth time in chapter 13, that Mark used the same word to look, to see or to watch out.

One way to be alert to false Messiahs is to remember that they are showing off their signs and wonders. They need people to be impressed by performing fake miracles, because they have nothing else to offer. What is fascinating is what we have noticed throughout our study of Mark about Jesus the Genuine Messiah. Jesus was restrained. He was not restrained from performing signs and wonders at all or in a limited, but rather He was restrained from using those miracles to impose

faith. Why? Because, as we have notice repeatedly in studying Mark, fundamentally, the good news of Jesus is not about the miracles. On the contrary, the miracles only point to the best part, which is the death of Jesus for our sins, and the resurrection of Jesus for our victory. Fundamentally, the good news about Jesus is not about speculating about the second coming either. The good news is about us being rescued, and us keeping the faith until the end, and us sharing the good news around the world.

Conclusion:

1. Understand.

Mark wrote, “*let the reader understand...*” Mark when he wrote this passage, put all the emphasis in all the same places that Jesus had put the emphasis when Jesus spoke it. Both Jesus and His disciple Mark want us to get it. Get what? Well, grasp the truth that when Jesus gave instruction concerning future events, His purpose was not to satisfy our curiosity or to answer all or our speculative questions. Instead, the purpose of our Savior was to protect and guide and instruct us. Please notice that Jesus gave relatively little attention to the question that the disciples did ask, which was “*When?*” Please understand why Jesus gave so much attention to the question that the disciples did not ask, which was, “*How shall we live faithfully?*” The disciples were behind in their understanding. First of all, after Jesus taught in the temple, the disciples should not be commenting on the wonderful stones. Second of all, when Jesus said the stones were to be so dismantled that not one stone would be left on another, the disciples should not be focused on when. Rather, while they have Jesus with them, they should be seeking to understand what their relationship with God is supposed to be like, without a temple! After the temple is destroyed, and everything that their Jewish mindset has understood about God and His temple now undergoes a huge change, what are the basic things that they need to know and remember?” that is what the disciples should have asked. And Jesus answered as if they had asked that. Please understand that.

2. Avoid being led astray.

The first time was in verse 1, when the disciples said to Jesus to “*Look*” at the wonderful stones of the temple...

The second time was in verse 5, translated “*See or look*” when Jesus said see that no one leads you astray,

The third time was in verse 9, translated as “*Be on your guard*” when Jesus told them to watch out,

And the fourth time is found here in verse 23 “*be on guard*” when Jesus told them again to watch out.

So, “*See*” or “*Look out*” or “*Watch out*” was a repeated theme from Jesus to His hearers, and therefore was a repeated theme from Mark to us as readers.

We must watch out that we do not allow people with easy solutions and impressive actions to distract us from our main task, which is to proclaim the gospel to the nations, and to endure to the end, keeping our faith in the Lord. Jesus provided what is needed – knowledge. Foreknowledge. They knew ahead of time. Forewarned is forearmed. Armed with information. An understanding. The understanding is that God never neglects His people. No matter the terrible suffering, God is with us. We do not know the whole story of what God is doing in our suffering. Living by faith often means we simply trust God when we cannot see what He is doing.

Jesus wants us to keep the faith until the last day of our lives, or until Jesus comes again. Everything that Jesus provided here is aimed at that goal. The Lord Jesus, who had come to Jerusalem on the colt, had cleared the temple, had taught in the temple, and was heading to the cross to become the temple, and to make us into the living temple, did all of this so that you would endure. No matter what comes, Christ will enable us to keep the faith and not be led astray.

Titus 2:13, we are “...*waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us...*”