

Life Group Discussion Questions

Week 25: March 8-15

Mark 13

The “Olivet Discourse,” as it is called is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Jesus and the disciples are leaving Jerusalem and going back to Bethany for the night. Along the way the disciples ask Jesus about the timing of His prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the age (Matt. 24:3). However, Jesus does not give them a clearly defined timeline. He seems to move back and forth in his description of these different events. Most Bible commentaries take the view that some parts of this chapter are talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and other parts are discussing the return of Christ at the end of the age. But the difficulty is trying to figure out when Jesus is shifting from His description of one event to the other. I like the explanation by Mark Strauss. He writes,

Verses 5-23 concern the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and 13:24-27 the return of the Son of Man and the end of the age. This is followed by two explanatory “parables,” each relating to the timing of one of these events. The parable of the fig tree (13:28-31) concerns the destruction of Jerusalem and asserts that it will be preceded by confirmatory signs (13:28-29) and will occur within the generation of the disciples (13:30). The parable of the owner’s return (13:32-37), by contrast, asserts the *unknown time* of the Son of Man’s return and the need for constant watchfulness.¹

We should also remember that sometimes Bible prophecy will have a dual fulfillment in mind. Some Old Testament prophecies had an initial fulfillment in Old Testament times but then, much later, a New Testament writer or speaker would reveal a greater fulfillment of that same prophecy.

We should also remember that while a certain prophecy may be predicting one specific event in the first century, all Bible prophecies contain important principles with practical applications for people in every century.

¹ Mark Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 566.

Read Mark 13:24-27 (NIV)

²⁴ "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

²⁶ "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

14. What events will happen right before the Second Coming of Christ? (13:24-26)

15. What will happen right after Jesus returns? (13:26-27)

Read Mark 13:28-31 (NIV)

²⁸ "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.

³⁰ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

16. What lesson did Jesus want the disciples to learn from the fig tree? (13:28-29)

17. What did Jesus mean when He said that “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”? (13:30)

Black notes,

“All these things” should be understood in the light of “these things” in v. 29. The second coming itself is not included.

According to this understanding there is no need to resort to some unusual interpretation of the phrase “this generation.”

Within roughly forty years of Jesus’ discourse, the disciples had witnessed examples of all the general characteristics of the end times (which continue today) and the destruction of Jerusalem.²

² Black, *The College Press NIV Commentary*, 238.

Read Mark 13:5-13 (NIV)

⁵ Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.

⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

¹² "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

¹³ All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

4. What kind of deception did Jesus warn His disciples about? (13:5-6)

5. Even though terrible things like wars, earthquakes, famines, and persecutions are taking place, what must we continue to do? (13:7-11)

Allen Black comments on these verses:

The disciples must remain on constant guard because they will be subject to intense persecution. The book of Acts testifies to the fulfillment of these verses. The disciples have a work to do before the end can come. The gospel must be preached to all the nations. In order to help them complete their task the Holy Spirit will tell them what to say when they have opportunity to testify to various institutional leaders (from council leaders to kings). The trials seem to be described as part of the means by which the gospel will be preached to all nations—even to rulers in high places.³

³ Allen Black, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Mark* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 230.

6. How can Christians maintain their faith even when their own family members are against them? (13:12-13)

Read Mark 13:14-19 (NIV)

¹⁴ "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

¹⁵ Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out.

¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.

¹⁷ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!

¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter,

¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again.

7. What did Jesus warn those in Judea to do when they see the "abomination that causes desolation"? (13:14)

The phrase "abomination that causes desolation" comes from the Old Testament (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). This is an example of dual fulfillment prophecy. Mark Moore writes,

The "Abomination that Causes Desolation" is some action or entity which causes both sacrilege and destruction. Daniel predicted that this terrible thing would be in the holy place (i.e., the temple). The Jews of the intertestamental period applied this appropriately to Antiochus Epiphanes who entered the temple with his Syrian armies in 167 B.C. He murdered a number of worshipers allowed his troops to fornicate in the temple, slaughter a pig on the altar of God and then ransacked the edifice (1 Macc. 1:56-61; 6:7). That is a good example of the "abomination that causes desolation." The "Abomination that Causes Desolation" was also applied to 63 B.C., when the Roman general Pompey ransacked the city and actually entered the Holy of Holies. Yet Jesus looks for a still future fulfillment. Certainly the destruction of A.D. 70 fits that description.⁴

⁴ Moore, *The Chronological Life of Christ*, 539.

The “abomination that causes desolation” could be referring to John the Zealot, a leader of thieves and murderers, who took over the temple just before the Romans laid siege on Jerusalem. Jesus was warning the Christians to get out of the city and “flee to the mountains” at a certain time (Luke 21:20-21). When the Zealots took control of the temple, there was a short window of time before the Romans would lay siege to the city, at which point the Christians did leave. Eusebius described how many of those Christians went to Pella, a city in Perea. After the Zealots kicked all the priests out of the temple, the High Priest said, “Certainly it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many **abominations**, or these sacred places that ought not to be trodden on at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains.”⁵

8. What warning did Jesus give to those on their roof and those in the field? (13:15-16)

9. Why would this be a dreadful time for pregnant women and nursing mothers? (13:17)

10. When Jesus made the prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem it was a done deal. Jerusalem would be destroyed. But what does His instruction in verse 18 tell us about our ability and responsibility to be involved in how prophecies are fulfilled? (13:18-19)

Read Mark 13:20-23 (NIV)

²⁰ **If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.**

²¹ **At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it.**

²² **For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible.**

²³ **So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.**

11. Why did the Lord decide to “cut short those days”? (12:20)

12. What did Jesus warn His disciples to not believe? (13:21)

13. What would make these false Christs and false prophets so convincing? (13:22-23)

⁵ Josephus, *Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 528.

Read Mark 13:1-4 (NIV)

¹ As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

² **"Do you see all these great buildings?"** replied Jesus. **"Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."**

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,

⁴ "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

1. What impressed the disciples as they left the temple? (13:1-2)

2. What did Jesus predict about the “massive stones” and the “magnificent buildings” that the disciples were admiring? (13:2)

3. What did Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Jesus privately on the Mount of Olives? (13:3-4)

The disciples had heard Jesus make predictions about the coming of His kingdom. But this new prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem threw a monkey wrench into their limited understanding of prophecy. They were still expecting Jesus to establish a physical kingdom. They were expecting to rule with Jesus, sitting on 12 physical thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). As they left Jerusalem, the disciples were not just admiring how great the temple was. They really believed that all those temple buildings along with the Antonio Fortress and the Palace of Herod would soon belong to Jesus. Mark Moore observes,

They note, in particular, the grandeur of the temple. They have no thought of its destruction, only its occupancy. Very likely they think that Jesus is on the verge of taking over the very temple buildings for the establishment of his kingdom. Perhaps they are making “dibs” on their own personal office space. After all, they are the chief executives of this new kingdom.⁶

In the “Olivet Discourse,” Jesus tells His disciples some things about the future in order to correct their misunderstanding about the Kingdom of God and prepare them for the persecution they are going to face as followers of Christ.

⁶ Mark Moore, *The Chronological Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2007), 535.

18. What can we count on lasting even longer than heaven and earth? (13:31)

Read Mark 13:32-37 (NIV)

³² "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

³⁴ It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.

³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.

³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!"

19. Why didn't Christ tell us the exact time when He would return to earth? (13:32-33; see also Deuteronomy 29:29 and Acts 1:7)

20. What example did Jesus use to explain what His return to earth will be like? (13:34)

21. What conclusion did Jesus draw from the fact that the day of His return is secret? (13:35)

22. Based on what Jesus told His disciples about the future, what does He want us to do? (13:36-37)

Strauss writes,

The final call for watchfulness intentionally widens the application beyond the four disciples (13:3) to "all" of Jesus' followers (cf. Luke 12:41). This agrees with our interpretation of the discourse as a whole, where the parable of the fig tree concerns the disciples and the destruction of Jerusalem (13:28-31), while the parable of the absent owner is for all future generations (13:32-37).⁷

⁷ Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 597.

Sermon Notes 3/8/20

"The End is Coming"

Mark 13

How can we be ready for the End of the Age?

1. Keep the _____ things the _____ things.

Mark 13:32

Acts 1:7-8

Deuteronomy 29:29

2. Continue to _____ God's word.

Mark 13:31

Mark 13:5-6

Mark 13:21-23

3. Continue to _____ the Gospel.

Mark 13:9-10

Matthew 24:12-14

Luke 24:46-48

4. Continue to _____ your faith.

Mark 13:7-8

Mark 13:12-13

Mark 13:33-37

Sermon and Bible Reading Schedule

Date	Sermon	Bible Reading
3/8/20	"The End is Coming!"	Mark 13
3/15/20	"Wherever the Gospel is Preached"	Mark 14:1-26
3/22/20	"When the Rooster Crows"	Mark 14:27-72
3/29/20	"The Trial of Jesus"	Mark 15:1-20
4/5/20	"The Death and Burial of Jesus"	Mark 15:21-47
4/12/20	"The Resurrection of Jesus"	Mark 16