

为何要学习末世? ——马可福音 13:1-4

Why Study the End Times?—Mark 13:1-4

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture Reading: Mark 13:1-37

Mark 13:1-4 (NASB1995)

As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”² And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.”³ As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?”

- We might rarely think about the future in our daily lives, but everyone has a strong innate interest in it. God knows we need to know what is to come, so the Gospel of Mark has an entire chapter on the end times.
- Background: This teaching took place on the evening of Wednesday before Jesus was crucified. The location is the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, which is why it is called the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21). While sitting with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, looking at the temple, Jesus spoke to them about the events that would occur in the end times and how these events should influence their lives today.
- Outline
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Introduction—About the End Times

- Many Christians view eschatology (the study of end times) as a theological ivory tower only for theologians to climb, a hot topic for them to debate but of little value to ordinary believers. We tend to treat the end times as an irrelevant theological subject that can never be understood anyway, so why bother even touching it.
- **【Consider】** Why should we study eschatology?
- 1. Because eschatology is fascinating. After all, everyone has a deep interest in the future. Non-believers even try to predict the future with such total nonsense as horoscopes, fortune-telling, tarot cards, and crystal balls. We Christians have the Bible revealing the future to us, so why wouldn't we study it?
- 2. Because Christians are generally confused about eschatology. You may have heard of the various views—premillennialism, postmillennialism, amillennialism, pre-tribulation rapture, mid-tribulation

rapture, post-tribulation rapture, etc... You wonder: what am I supposed to believe? Is the Bible really so confusing? Well, you have to study it to find out. If you don't study, it'll be forever confusing to you.

- 3. Because eschatology has to do with our overall approach to reading the Bible. Different views stem from different approaches to interpreting the Bible. We must be cautious, for a faulty interpretation method not only affects our understanding of the end times but could also lead to using the Bible to support homosexuality, racism, feminism, or easy-believism that says a person can be saved without any life change...
- 4. Most importantly, eschatology directly relates to the sanctification of our lives as Christians. A correct understanding of the end times will keep us alert and prepared for the Lord's return. The connection between the end times and today constantly reminds us that Jesus' return is not too far off. God has not forgotten His timetable, His will has not failed, and His plan is still unfolding step by step.

2 Peter 3:3-13: "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their **mocking**, following after their own lusts, and saying, '**Where is the promise of His coming?** For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.' ... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, ... **Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "But we **do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ... **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven** with a shout, ... and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so **we shall always be with the Lord.** Therefore **comfort one another with these words.**"

1 John 3:2-3: "Beloved, now we are children of God, **and it has not appeared as yet what we will be.** We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. **And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**"

Romans 11:1, 21, 25-26: "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! ... **for if God did not spare the natural branches,** He will not spare you, either. ... that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved."

- **【Conclusion】** Eschatology concerns our faith in God and the sanctification of our lives, which is why the entire chapter of Mark 13 addresses this topic. The "you" in the passage is transgenerational—all saints in all ages have the urgent need to know these things!

Background of End-time Discussion—A Message of Judgment (vv.1-2)

- "As He was going out of the temple": During Jesus' final week, His teachings in the temple primarily focused on condemning this corrupt religious system (Mark 11:15-19; 12:1-12, 38-44; cf. Matthew 23:1-39).
- "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!": Does this disciple's lack of spiritual insight bother you? Jesus had just cursed the temple, saying it had become a den of robbers and was utterly **corrupted** from within. Yet this disciple was still **mesmerized** by the temple's **outward appearance**. He probably thought this would be the exact place where Jesus would soon ascend to His throne. "What wonderful stones! What wonderful buildings! Everything's all set for you to go in and take your throne!"
- "Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down": Feel the shock of this statement. It's like someone saying before 9/11 that the Twin Towers in New York would be destroyed in an instant, leveled to the ground with nothing left of its existence. No one would've believed! And yet, **history has proven that the Bible's prophecies are always exactly accurate.**

【Fulfillment】 In 70 A.D., the Roman general Titus led a large army to attack Jerusalem. After more than five months of intense war with several large fires, the entire city, including the temple, was leveled. Men, women, and children in Jerusalem were brutally slaughtered. The historian Josephus recorded that 1.1 million Jews perished by the sword. Josephus said "it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground ... that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. ... But though he [a foreigner] were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it." When Jesus said, "Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down," He **was not speaking exaggerated, abstract, or spiritual language.** He knew exactly what would happen 40 years later.

【Side Note】 Interestingly, according to Josephus, Titus did not originally intend to destroy the temple. His initial plan was to dedicate it to Roman deities and then gift it to the Roman Emperor. However, Titus' plan didn't count; Jesus had already declared God's plan for the temple 40 years earlier. During the war, the temple accidentally caught on fire. Seeing that the flames had gone out of control, Titus had to abandon his original plan and give it over to the frenzied soldiers to completely tear down the temple. In order to get the gold layers that covered the stones, they pried apart every stone to scrape off the gold and discarded the stone. As a result, the great temple did exactly end up with not one stone left upon another.

【Insight】 If this statement of Jesus was fulfilled with **such precise literal accuracy,** then we'd certainly expect that **all He said in this chapter would be fulfilled exactly as He literally said it,** wouldn't we?

Question of End-time Discussion—Timing and Signs (vv. 3-4)

- "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately": The disciples couldn't believe what they just heard, so they sent four representatives to ask Jesus.
- "When will these things be?": The first part of their question is about **timing.** "These things" refer not only to the prophecy about the temple. In Matthew 24:3 their exact words are, "What will be the sign of

Your coming, and of the end of the age?" They connected the destruction of the temple with the end of the age, thinking Jesus would immediately bring an end to this sinful world. What they meant by "Your coming" was not a descent from heaven to earth, but rather an ascension of the King to His royal throne.

- "What will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?": The second part of their question is about **the signs**.

【Background】 According to Jewish teaching of the time, there are eight events associated with the Messiah's coming, some of which seemed to have already happened, and the rest they believed would soon be fulfilled.

1. The coming of Messiah would be preceded by a time of tribulation (Roman rule?);
2. In the midst of the turmoil an Elijah-like prophet would appear heralding Messiah's coming (John the Baptist?);
3. Messiah would establish His glorious kingdom and vindicate His people (Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem?);
4. The nations would ally themselves together to fight Messiah (perhaps the destruction of the temple?);
5. Messiah would destroy all those opposing nations;
6. Jerusalem would be restored and made new and glorious;
7. Israel would become the center of the world and all the nations would be subjugated to the Messiah;
8. The Messiah would establish His kingdom, which would be a time of eternal peace, righteousness, and glory.

These are the things the disciples were asking about.

Conclusion and Application

The Jewish expectation of the Messiah was not wrong *per se*, for it was all based on Old Testament prophecies. The problem is that they should've also been expecting something else, right? Their idea about the end times wasn't incorrect, but it was incomplete—seriously incomplete.

What is the one thing that the Old Testament repeatedly prophesied, and yet they repeatedly missed? That the Messiah would suffer, die, and rise again to atone for the sins of God's people.

Today, we already know this most important truth. But there are still many in the world who do not. As we study the second coming of Jesus, let us not forget to proclaim His first coming and the gospel of forgiveness of sins that He has accomplished through the cross.