

Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-8-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ²Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

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Just prior to this passage, Jesus has warned the disciples not to be deceived by the appearance of wealth and power. In chapter 12:38-40 Jesus warned the disciples to “beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!” Despite these outward appearances of blessing and piety, Jesus urges the disciples to be cautious around such people, for “they devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.” As if on cue, in Mark 12:41ff a poor widow appears, putting her last two coins on earth into the temple treasury to enrich the scribes. The scribes were those who should have been caring for widows as God commanded, yet the scribes had left the widow to perish after they got her last two coins out of her.

It is against this backdrop—warnings about wealth, power, and corruption—that Jesus’ disciple marvels at the magnificence of the temple complex. Apparently this disciple had not absorbed Jesus’ lesson about the corruption of the temple officials. He (or she) marveled at the grand structure of the temple without pausing to reflect on the injustices that allowed such a temple to exist in the first place. Jesus seems aware that such an unjust structure cannot stand for long and tells the disciples that it will indeed be thrown down.

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We know from history that the temple was indeed destroyed some 40 years after this conversation. The Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD, destroying almost all of the temple complex except for the Western (or “wailing”) Wall. Mark’s audience was likely aware of the destruction or impending destruction of the Temple depending on when Mark wrote the gospel. It is traditionally dated circa 60-80 AD. In any case, the disciples eagerly wonder how they will know that the temple is about to be destroyed.

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Jesus shows little interest in their question. He doesn’t give them signs as they ask for. Rather, he warns them not to allow themselves to be led astray by others. Faithfulness to the mission and message of the gospel will matter more than knowing what will happen or when it will happen.

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Jesus' warning that many will come in his name, saying "I AM he" (literally "I AM" in Greek, a translation of the sacred four-letter name of God in Hebrew—the name which God gave to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3). Therefore, to come in Jesus' name, saying "I AM" is not limited to crazy people or cult leaders who claim to be Jesus reincarnated. Rather, to come in Jesus' name in this way is to claim the authority that properly belongs to Jesus. Thus everyone from pastors to politicians to peddlers of false hope or quack cures could all fall into this category of offering false hope to the church. Jesus' warning, then, is a warning against idolatry—making someone or something other than God to be God. If one puts one's hope in a false savior, it will be easy to be led astray and Jesus warns against this.

Also, Jesus gives examples of disturbing world events. These are not intended to predict the future, but rather to warn the disciples to remain faithful even in times of great difficulty. When (from 30 AD until now) have there not been all of these things Jesus mentions occurring somewhere in the world? Somewhere war, division, earthquakes, and famines happen, yet Jesus warns the disciples that these struggles do not signify the end, but rather "the beginning of the birthpangs."

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What do you think Jesus would say about the stones of our great buildings today?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus spoke so harshly about the coming destruction of the temple?**
- 3. In what ways are we tempted to be led astray in our own world today?**