

# OpenTheo

## Mark 13 (Part 2)



### Gospel of Mark - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines Mark 13's prediction of the destruction of the temple and the signs that foreshadow it. He highlights the importance of standing firm in faith amidst persecution, and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit in times of trial. However, he emphasizes that the events described primarily speak of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and not necessarily the Second Coming of Christ, and warns against assuming that every reference to Jesus' coming refers to a future Second Coming.

### Transcript

Last time we were in Mark, we were in the 13th chapter, and that is, of course, the Olivet Discourse, and I spent essentially all of the time pointing out to you what the lead-up was to the discourse itself, and how it was that the discourse answers the questions that the disciples asked, because the disciples heard Jesus predict that the temple would be destroyed, and that not one stone would be left standing on another. And so they were curious. Four of them, the three who were closest to him, and Andrew also, came to him privately and asked, when will these things be, and what sign will there be that these things are going to happen? So they wanted to know a time frame, and they wanted to know whether there would be any warning immediately in advance of the event.

They could tell that the prediction was about something very serious. If not one stone of this huge temple was to be left standing on another, it would have to be a tremendous, destructive event, and they would want to know whether they're going to be, you know, in danger at that time. And so they wanted to know how soon is this, is it immediate, or is it far off, and is there going to be any warning to us in advance, to know that it's about to happen.

And so he began saying, in verse 5, take heed that no one deceives you, for many will come in my name, saying, I am he, and will deceive many. And there were many who came, who claimed to be the Messiah. According to the writings of Josephus, the Roman governors prior to 70 A.D. were arresting daily pretenders to be the Messiah, because in times of national crisis in Israel, many times false persons would rise up, offering hope,

claiming to be the one who would lead Israel out of the crisis, trying to get people to follow him, claiming to be the Messiah.

And there were many of those. Jesus said there would be, and there were. And he says, and when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled, for such things must happen.

But the end is not yet. It's interesting how people thinking that this is going to happen, this prophecy is about the end times, often point to the fact that there are wars all over the world, wars and rumors of wars, therefore it must be the end. But Jesus said, no, that's actually the indication, it's not the end.

The end is not yet, when you hear of wars and rumors of wars. It will get worse yet. Not the end of the world, however, the end of Jerusalem, he's thinking of.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of the birth pangs. This will be, as we said last time, the birth pangs of a new order, that would come about out of the ashes of the old order.

The old order, the Old Testament system, established in the time of Moses, which had been in place for 1400 years, or 1500 years at the time that Jerusalem fell, would be, it would go down, and something new would emerge. And that would be, of course, the new covenant order. And he's not suggesting that the new covenant wouldn't exist before 70 AD, he actually established the new covenant with his disciples in the upper room shortly after this.

But 70 AD marks the end of the old system, and therefore the existence of the new system as a stand-alone reality, and having its own identity, not associated with the temple, and not associated with Judaism. And verse 9, But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues, and you will be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for testimony to them. Now, this happened to the disciples, we know that they were beaten, they were imprisoned, and some of them were even killed before 70 AD.

And most of the persecution came from the sources that he mentions, from the synagogues, and from the Sanhedrin, from the Jewish religious authorities, it was they that persecuted the church initially. Eventually, Gentiles got in on the act, but not really until almost 70 AD, it was Nero in the 60s AD who first persecuted Christians coming from a Roman source rather than a Jewish source. There were attempts earlier than Nero's time, attempts on the part of local Jews, for example in Thessalonica, and in Corinth, to try to persuade the authorities that Christianity was illegal, that it shouldn't be permitted in the Roman Empire.

And that's because when the Romans conquered a region, they had a policy that any new region that they conquered, existing religions could continue to be practiced after the Romans took over. The Romans had many gods, they were tolerant of many religions, so if they conquered a new region, that region had their own gods and religions, the Romans allowed them to maintain their existing religious practice. But the law of Rome was that they could not have any new religions established once the Roman power was in place.

So the question arose, is Christianity a new religion, which has arisen under the oversight of the Roman Empire, or is it just a part of Judaism which existed long before the Roman Empire? And that was unclear until the destruction of Jerusalem. And the Jews often tried to persuade the Roman rulers that the Christians had started a new religion and that it should be illegal. But when the Romans heard that the Christians believed in one god and the Jews believed in one god, and the Christian leaders were Jewish men and they were talking about a Jewish messiah, the Romans couldn't see any difference.

They just thought it was another sect of Judaism, and this confusion led to Christianity not being persecuted by the Romans, not being recognized as a new religion, they just thought it was part of an old religion, Judaism. But the persecution of Christians by Romans began with Nero, but he didn't really persecute them for Christ's sake, so to speak, for their religious views. He persecuted them, according to the Roman historians, because he was looking for a scapegoat, having apparently set fire to Rome himself and caused a great conflagration, which took most of the city down, and needing somebody to blame other than himself, as the citizens were becoming angry at him for the suspicion that he was the cause of the fire.

He looked for someone to blame, and he said, those Christians did it, and it says in the Roman historians that he chose them because they were a hated group, they were a group that were despised for their vices. The Christians had been falsely accused of many vices, the Romans didn't understand their religion, they thought they were atheists, the Romans thought the Christians were atheists, because the Christians didn't have any visible gods. They thought the Christians were cannibals, because of the rite of the Last Supper, and eating what they called the body of Jesus and the blood of Jesus, the Romans actually believed that the Christians were practicing cannibalism in their rites.

They thought that they were practicing incest, because all the Christians called each other brother and sister, and so this was misunderstood by the Romans, they thought they were marrying their brothers and their sisters, and therefore, these were the vices that Christians were falsely accused of. Roman historians like Tacitus and Suetonius say that the Christians were despised in the Roman world by the pagans for their vices, and therefore Nero chose them as a scapegoat to punish, because he felt like their general unpopularity in the community would keep the sentiments of the community on his side

in persecuting them and blaming them. So Christians were badly persecuted by Nero, but not as an official policy, that is Christianity was not outlawed in Rome in the days of Nero, it was just a temporary persecution to try to get the suspicion off of Nero about being the one who burned Rome.

But later emperors, after 70 AD, recognized that Christianity was a new religion, it was not part of Judaism, because the temple was now gone, Judaism was done, and yet there were still Christians flourishing and thriving, and then eventually, because of the deification of the emperor, and the Christian's refusal to recognize the emperor as a deity, Christianity was actually outlawed by later emperors, like Diocletian and Decius and others. So eventually Christians were persecuted for being believers in Christ, and for not worshipping the idols of Rome, but initially, until 70 AD, they weren't really persecuted for that. They were persecuted mainly by the Jews, for being followers of Jesus as the Messiah, and so it was the Sanhedrin that stoned Stephen, the first martyr.

The Sanhedrin and the Jews in general encouraged Herod when he killed James, the first apostle to be martyred, and when he arrested Peter, intending to kill him. And it was the Jews who sent Saul of Tarsus as an agent to go arrest Christians, and bring them to justice, as the courts of the Jews felt needed to be done. When Saul himself became a Christian, it was the Jews who sent people around to persecute him, and to try to kill him.

So the great persecutors of the apostles were the Jews, and that's what Jesus said would be the case. Initially, they'll deliver you up to councils, that would be primarily the Sanhedrin, and be beaten in the synagogues, that's the Jewish worship centers, and brought before rulers and kings, this would extend to the Gentiles, as Paul himself was brought before rulers and kings. He spoke before Sergius Paulus, the governor of the island, part of the island, of Cyprus.

The man actually got saved. There were other rulers like Festus and Felix and Agrippa, kings and governors that Paul testified before, and no doubt the other apostles had similar opportunities. So this is what Jesus said would be happening.

He says that they're going to be persecuted, their testimony before kings will be, because they're incarcerated, and they have to stand and give a defense for themselves before kings. This persecution is what Jesus said the apostles would experience, but he said it would turn out for testimony to them. Verse 10 says, and the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.

But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand or premeditate what you will speak, but whatever is given to you in that hour, speak that. For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. So Jesus promised his disciples that when they stand on trial, the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak, as he did, for example, Stephen when he spoke.

Now, just because you've got the Holy Spirit preparing your speech doesn't mean you're going to have an effective defense. Stephen got stoned. But he spoke what God wanted him to say.

When you're on trial for Christ, it would appear it's not so important whether you offer a defense that gets you off as it is that you speak faithfully the words that God wants that court to hear. And basically it may get you killed, but you will have spoken effectively. Think of the impact that Stephen's death and his sermon had, for example, on a young man named Saul, who heard it and saw Stephen stoned.

And Saul, who approved of that at the time, couldn't shake that image of Stephen's face being like the face of an angel. Of the man bowing down and saying, Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge. Saul couldn't get that out of his mind.

It was pricking at him. And so when he finally met Jesus, Jesus said, Saul, it's hard for you to kick against those bricks, isn't it? And so the testimony of a Christian on trial for his faith, the words will be given to him who is trusting the Holy Spirit to give those words. That doesn't mean that because the Holy Spirit is smart enough, like he's a great lawyer, he'll get you off.

It's not important whether you get off or not. It's a question of whether you testify effectively or not. And so he says, brother will betray brother to death.

Verse 12, and a father, his child and the children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. This seems to have happened as the as, you know, the Christians divided families by part of the family becoming Christian. The other part remaining hostile to Christianity.

Families were divided that way. He says, and you'll be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end shall be saved. So it'd be very severe persecution of the disciples before the destruction of Jerusalem.

And all of them, except John, ended up dying as martyrs, either before Jerusalem fell or afterward. Probably most of them died before Jerusalem fell. John probably lived beyond it.

Traditionally, he did live several decades beyond it, but he also suffered persecution. And according to tradition, he was dipped in boiling oil to be killed, but he didn't die. Supernaturally, he was preserved and then he was banished to the island of Patmos, a prison colony of Rome off the coast of Turkey.

And so he suffered also. He said, when you see, verse 14, the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.

And let him who is in the field not go back and get his garment, but woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days, and pray that your flight may not be in the winter. Now we saw in our last lecture that the abomination of desolation is mentioned in Daniel chapter 9, verse 27. And it is mentioned as something that would happen after the Messiah would be cut off, and after the Messiah would be put into the sacrificial system.

Then there would be this abomination of desolation. In the previous verse in Daniel it talks about the Romans coming and destroying the city and the sanctuary. This apparently is the abomination, the coming of the pagans and their standards and banners with their pagan emblems on them and so forth, into the temple and into Jerusalem itself to destroy the temple.

And we know that this is the meaning because of Luke's parallel, which we saw last time in Luke 21, that's chapter 21, verse 20. Instead of saying when you see the abomination that makes desolate, Luke has Jesus saying when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is near. Same statement paraphrased by Luke.

So he's warning them there will be a sign. They ask what sign will there be that this is about to take place? He said well this is it, when you see it, know that that's it and it's time for you to get out of town. In fact, get out hastily, get out as quickly as you can, don't try to take a lot with you.

He said pray that your flight should not be in the winter. In Matthew's parallel in Matthew 24, he says pray that your flight may not be in the winter or on a Sabbath day. And the mention of the Sabbath day has led some people to believe that Jesus was saying that the disciples would not be permitted by their Christian convictions to flee on the Sabbath day.

Why? Well because there was a Sabbath ruling that a person could not travel more than one mile on the Sabbath day, that was the rabbinic teaching. So if the Christians were Sabbath keepers, and it was a Sabbath day when they had to flee, they could only flee one mile, it is said. And that would be why Jesus would say pray that your flight will not be on a Sabbath day.

And that would seem as a confirmation that the early Christians kept the Sabbath day or felt scruples about it. However, that's I think a mistaken way of understanding what Jesus was saying. First of all, because even if the Christians did keep the Sabbath as written in the Old Testament, there is no Sabbath restriction in the Old Testament on how far you can travel, that was a rabbinic tradition.

If Christians felt like they had to keep the fourth commandment and keep Sabbath, that doesn't mean they have to keep all the traditions the rabbis had invented about it. The Sabbath day's journey is not a biblical teaching, it's simply a rabbinic teaching. And

therefore, Jesus would not be concerned that his disciples only travel one mile on the Sabbath because the rabbis say so, especially if they're running for their lives.

David was able to eat the showbread illegally because he was running for his life. Certainly Jesus would not be saying, oh, you better pray it's not on a Sabbath because then you can only go a mile, then you've just got to stand where you are until the next day when you're running for your lives. No, the reason he said pray that your flight not be on a Sabbath day or in winter is because both of those circumstances, winter and Sabbath days, would present obstacles to travel.

Just logistic obstacles. Christians would have no convictions about they shouldn't travel in the winter, nor necessarily on the Sabbath day, but they would have trouble traveling in the winter, the weather could be inclement. And traveling on the Sabbath day, especially trying to leave Jerusalem, could be very difficult.

You can't buy any provisions, the gates would be shut because they shut the gates on the Sabbath. There would be obstacles. Pray that when you leave, it won't be one of those times of the year or times of the week when there would be obstacles and make it difficult for you.

Pray for an easy opening to get out. Verse 19, For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect's sake, whom he chose, he shortened those days.

Now these two verses, perhaps more than any, have served to convince many people that this is not referring to what happened in the Jewish war or in AD 70. But it must be referring to some future tribulation, because why? Because he says the tribulation that would happen at that time would be unprecedented and unique in history in its severity. It would be like no time previously since the creation of the world, and like no hardships that would ever come afterward.

Now the argument goes like this, since AD 70 there have been certainly things that were more horrible to the Jews and to the world than what happened in AD 70. If we're even just thinking of the Jews, the Holocaust in Europe in the 20th century killed what, 6 million Jews? Whereas the Holocaust in AD 70 presumably killed about 7 or 800 thousand, maybe a million. So I mean the Holocaust in Germany was worse.

Now if we're thinking worldwide, certainly many things have happened that were much more devastating than what happened to the Jews in 70 AD. And therefore the fact that Jesus said that this will be worse than anything that's ever been or will ever be afterward, they say cannot really fit the facts of the problems that arose to the Jews in AD 70. And then there's something more, because he says unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved.

And they say that proves that we're not talking about a localized tribulation, we're talking about something global that endangers all flesh, all humanity. And so they say the tribulation that Jesus described is a global threat to all humanity's survival, and it is worse than anything that would ever be before or after it. Such an event, they say, certainly lies in the future.

Well, if there is no hyperbole in these passages, I would have to agree. If Jesus is being quite literal, then I'm going to have to agree with them about that. However, the question has to arise, why should we think he's being literal here? He's using the same kind of hyperbole that you find in the Old Testament often.

Jesus was a Hebrew prophet as well as being the Messiah and the Son of God, and as a prophet he spoke in the language of the prophets. The prophets often spoke in this way about events that were not in fact uniquely disastrous, but were spoken of as if they were because of the desire to put emphasis on the severity, they would overstate the case. Now, this was not being dishonest, this was using hyperbole.

Now, what is hyperbole? Hyperbole is an exaggeration. Now, when we're children we're told not to exaggerate because that's dishonest. When someone exaggerates about the size of the fish that got away, we say they're lying.

An exaggeration, therefore, is a form of dishonesty in many cases, but not all cases. When a child says to his mother, you know, you need to let me go to this movie because everybody is seeing this movie. Well, that's a hyperbole.

Not everybody is seeing the movie. The child knows that, the mother knows that, the mother knows that. There's no attempt here to really convince the mother that every last soul on the planet Earth is seeing that particular movie.

It's understood to be an exaggeration to make a point emphatically. It's not deception, it is emphasis. When the mother says, I've told you a million times to take off your muddy shoes when you come into the house, she hasn't told him that a million times, nor is she inviting him to count up the times and see if it adds up to a million.

She's not using that as a statistic, she's using that as a hyperbole. That's a very common thing, we do it all the time, I just did it in that last sentence. And we do it many times in almost every conversation.

Jesus did too, the Jews did too, they just use different kinds of hyperboles than we do. It is very common for the Jews to say about something, this is the worst in all of history, when it wasn't. We see, for example, that language is used in Exodus chapter 9 about the locust plague that came upon Egypt.

It said there had never been a locust like that before, there'll be never a locust plague like that afterwards, it's about as bad as you're ever going to see ever, anywhere. And



then you hear the same thing about another locust plague in Joel chapter 2. Two different locust plagues, the worst ever. The worst that ever were or ever will be.

Both of them unique in history, uniquely disastrous. But they can't both be the worst ever, because they are different ones. It is said of Solomon that he was to be wiser than any king before him and richer than any king before him and any king after him.

Well, there's been someone, at least one wiser than he. Jesus said one greater than Solomon is here. And as far as richer, there's a good chance that some of them, not only kings, but CEOs of corporations and bankers, probably command more wealth than Solomon commanded.

It is a hyperbole. And we can see immediately the use of hyperbole in this very situation. If you turn to Ezekiel chapter 4, because Ezekiel is like Jesus himself, predicting the destruction of Jerusalem.

However, in Ezekiel's day, the destruction of Jerusalem that was coming was from the Babylonians. Jerusalem has been destroyed twice in its history, once by the Babylonians and once by the Romans. Ezekiel predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Jesus predicted the destruction by the Romans. I'm sorry, it's chapter 5, Ezekiel 5. And in speaking about this, he's talking about how he's going to do something. OK, verse 9. Now, let's make it verses 8 and 9. Therefore, thus says the Lord God.

Indeed, I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst. He means Jerusalem's midst. In the sight of the nations.

And I will do among you what I have never done and the like of which I will never do again. Because of all your abominations. Now, what he's saying is I'm going to destroy Jerusalem.

I'm going to do something so severe. It's like what I've never done before. I'll never do it again.

But he did it again in AD 70. In fact, not only it, almost exactly the same accompaniments. When you read of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians and you read about the destruction recorded in Josephus in 70 A.D. by the Romans, it's almost like a replay of the same tape.

It's all the details are the same. The siege, starvation, people eating their babies, you know, the slaughter, the Jews being carried off into foreign lands. It's all the same.

And yet, when it was going to happen in 586 B.C. and it was predicted by a prophet, he said, God is doing to Jerusalem what he has never done before and will never do again.

Jesus predicting the same thing only in 70 A.D. says there will be tribulations such as there has never been before and will never be afterwards. This is hyperbole.

It's common in the prophets to speak this way. It is not reasonable to insist that Jesus must speak like an American. He speaks like a Hebrew prophet and therefore he uses hyperbole.

And when he says, unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would survive. If you would like to do, as I have done at one time, I won't do it right now with you, a study of all the occurrences in the Old Testament of the expression one flesh and no, I mean, all flesh and no flesh. The seemingly universal statements, all flesh, no flesh.

No flesh would survive. And I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and other all flesh and no flesh statements. You'll find that in every case, they are geographically limited statements.

The Babylonians sweeping through the Middle East and conquering all the nations of that region is said in Jeremiah 25 to be a judgment that's coming on all flesh. Well, the Aztecs didn't experience any problems from this. The aboriginals in Australia, they were not threatened by the Babylonians.

All flesh in the region. When the Bible says all flesh and no flesh in various statements, it's talking about within a certain range of consideration. Usually the context tells what the geography is.

If you look at Luke's parallel in Luke 21, he says very clearly what the limits are to this devastation. In Luke chapter 21, this is the parallel statement in Luke. The statement where Jesus said there'll be tribulations such as never was since before or after.

And, you know, all flesh and all of that, those statements we just read in Mark have their parallel in Luke 21, verse beginning of verse 22. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days, for there will be great distress.

The word tribulation in Mark and in Matthew is replaced with the word distress here. There'll be great distress in the land. The land is always an expression for Israel.

And wrath upon this people. What people? This people. Israel.

The Jews. The problems that Jesus is predicting are coming upon the land and upon this people. He's talking about a geographically limited disaster and focused on a particular people.

Now, these words are parallel to the words in Mark, and therefore they give us a clear understanding of the limits of what these hyperbole statements do and do not include.

There would be no Jews that would survive this Holocaust in AD 70 if God did not, as he puts it here, shorten the days. It's not clear what shortening the days means.

It almost sounds like there's a prescribed number of days that it would be, but God's decided to shorten it so that some, the elect will survive. For the elect's sake, the days will be shortened. But the elect survived by escaping.

Early on, in fact. It's not like God shortened the period at the end. But he did apparently shorten the period by cutting out a piece in the middle.

Because Jerusalem was besieged by Vespasian, and then Vespasian withdrew. And then Titus, his son, came back and the siege was resumed. And there was that window of opportunity.

That was, I believe, the only sense in which this period of Holocaust was foreshortened. There was a brief window of relief that was cut out. And what happened? The Christians in Jerusalem fled, and the elect escaped.

And so the days were shortened in that manner. Perhaps it is saying that the first siege would have been the final siege. But God shortened it.

Vespasian besieged it, but the Christians were still in the city. And so he shortened that siege. He cut it off.

Let the Christians escape, and then he brought another siege that brought it down. So that is probably what Jesus is referring to there, it seems to me. Now, Mark 13, 21.

If anyone says to you, look, here's the Christ, or look, he's there. Do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

But take heed. See, I have told you all these things before him. Now, false Christs, I mentioned there were false messiahs.

The Roman historians record that. Were there false prophets? Yes, the New Testament records that. 1 John 4, 1, which was written in the first century, very possibly before 70 A.D., though no one knows for sure.

But John said, Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. We know that Elymas, whom Paul encountered on his first missionary journey, long before 70 A.D., Elymas is said to have been a false prophet. We know that Simon the Sorcerer was thought to be some messianic person.

In fact, I think it's Justin Martyr tells us that that Simon claimed to be the word of God. And there certainly were many false prophets and false Christs that arose in that crisis.

And he said, if it were possible, they would deceive even the elect.

Which sounds like it's saying the true people who will be faithful unto death will not be deceived, but they might be almost deceived. They would be in danger of being deceived if they are not, you know, strongly loyal to Christ. Otherwise, they themselves could be deceived.

And now we come to the verses that I mentioned at the end of our last session, we would have to give some special treatment to. Verses 24 and following, but in those days after that tribulation, and by the way, Matthew 24 says immediately after the tribulation of those days, so there's no allowance here for some gap between the end of that tribulation and the events now recorded, but rather in Matthew 24, the parallel says immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars of heaven will fall and the powers in heaven will be shaken.

Then they will see the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send his angels and gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. Now, this is almost universally thought to be a reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of the world.

I have my doubts that it is. It could be, but I think it is not. I'll tell you why, but I will allow it.

I mean, I would allow people to have a difference of opinion respectively, because Jesus, first of all, does not say how long the tribulation will last. We have been taught to think of the tribulation as three and a half years or seven years or some other short period of time. Jesus doesn't say how long the tribulation will last.

He says there'll be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. Well, how long will the wrath upon this people go on? Does it end with the destruction of Jerusalem, or does it go on through the age? Have the Jews experienced wrath since 70 AD in the lands they've been dispersed to? Leviticus 26 said that God would disperse them to all the lands and he'd send a sword after them in those lands. And they would suffer there too.

One could argue, if he wished, that the tribulation that Jesus spoke of began with the Jewish war and has continued to this day. And if they wish to say that, they might find some encouragement in that view from Luke 21, where we saw a moment ago, Jesus said, there'll be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. That's Luke 21, 23.

And the next verse says this, Luke 21, 24, says they will fall by the edge of the sword. That did happen. They will be led away captive into all nations.

That did happen. And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles. That has happened

until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

In other words, this prediction in Luke 21 seems to look to an ongoing trampling of Jerusalem, or maybe an ongoing tribulation on the land of the people. Until when? Till the end of the times of the Gentiles, which would bring us probably through the entire church age. And if that is true, then one could say that the tribulation period is until the end of the times of the Gentiles, and therefore has been over, well, it's been almost 2000 years now.

And after that tribulation is over, then Jesus will come back. And so a person could, with reasonable respectability, say that both Matthew and Mark, when they come to this business about the signs in the heavens and the coming of the Son of Man and the angels going out and gathering the elect, that this could in fact be a reference to the second coming of Christ, because it happens after that tribulation, and that tribulation may not be over yet. So that would be a possible view.

That's one option. One reason I have a bit of a problem with that option is because it is after these verses that Jesus says in verse 30, Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass until all these things take place. Now, all these things taken absolutely literally would include the things recorded in verses 24 through 27.

And they would have to then happen in that generation. And therefore, they would have to be associated with what the rest of the book, the rest of the chapter is associated with, the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem. That is a possibility.

I'll tell you why it's a possibility in a moment. But if one really had serious problems with that, as I said, they could believe that verses 24 through 30, or 24 through 27, are talking about the second coming of Christ. And they just provide a brief glimpse ahead to that event.

But then he comes back to all that he said apart from those verses and says, now all these things will happen in this generation. It's possible. It's possible that Jesus could say all these things means all these things, with the exception of this little section here, because all these things could be a hyperbole.

But it's not really necessary to take that approach. As I said, if people have a real difficult time, as many people do, seeing verses 24 through 27 as being about anything other than the second coming of Christ, that can work. That can work.

It could be possible that that's what it means. But since he said in a later verse, all these things will happen in this generation, it's also possible we should be looking for a fulfillment in that generation, if possible. Now, is that possible? In verse 24, it talks about, and verse 25, it talks about seemingly the disruption of the cosmos, the stars falling, the sun being darkened, the moon likewise being darkened.

We have similar language over in Acts chapter 2, for Peter, I believe. I actually believe Peter is talking about 70 A.D. in Acts chapter 2, when he's quoting from Joel, verses 17 through 21. It says, It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, and all my men servants, my maidservants, I will pour out of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. Now, Peter is quoting Joel too, and he has begun this quote by saying, this is what was spoken by the prophet. Now, he's just talked about those verses in Joel that mentioned the day of Pentecost, but he doesn't stop there.

He continues the quote beyond that point, seemingly unnecessarily. He's just identified his own time, the day of Pentecost, as the fulfillment of this promise of the pouring out of the spirit. And he could stop the quote there and be done with it, but in verse 19 he goes on, he says, And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned to darkness, the moon into blood before the coming of the great and notable day of Yahweh. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now, what is the time frame of this? Again, it's got the sun being darkened, in this case the moon turns to blood.

There's signs in the earth and in the heavens, and wonders. Could these words apply to 70 A.D.? I believe they could and should. There was fire, the city was burned, there was pillars of smoke, darkening the sky, the sun was darkened by the smoke.

The moon probably looked blood red at times, if you ever lived in a smoggy city like Los Angeles, where I grew up, there are many times you'd look at the sky and the sun looked literally red. Candy apple red. Blood red.

Because of the way that the smoke or the smog in the sky, which they've cleaned up a lot since then, but in the 70s it was very smoggy in L.A. and there were many nights that we looked and saw the moon and it was blood red. Well, that's how it looks through smoke. It's talking about the burning of the city.

So much smoke going up, the sun is darkened by the thick black smoke, just like it's darkened by a locust plague or several other things that darken the sky. Clouds darken the sky too. There's the blood red appearance of the moon.

Were there signs and wonders, miracles in the heavens in 70 A.D.? Josephus said there were, and he wasn't trying to identify that event with these prophecies. Josephus said that during the Jewish war there were certain signs that were remarkable. He said, for example, a star the shape of a sword hung over the city of Jerusalem for a whole year.

That would probably be considered a sign, if a sword-shaped star hung over the city for a year, like a sword hanging over the city of judgment. Josephus said there was a time when many citizens looked up in the clouds and saw what appeared to be soldiers in armor running in the clouds. I would presume they'd be angels.

Jesus said they'll see the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens. This happened. There were other signs on earth as well.

Josephus gives reference to a cow that gave birth to a lamb when it was about to be sacrificed. Weird. And a huge gate in Jerusalem that took several men to move, to close it and open it.

It shut on its own, or opened on its own, he says. There were several other things that Josephus thought were remarkable, apparently supernatural signs, that occurred in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish war. Now, Josephus was not a Christian and he was not interested in making any kind of confirmation of Christian teaching about this.

He was just a historian. He had a whole paragraph about these signs that occurred. So, Peter tells us on the day of Pentecost that following Pentecost, that is, following God putting his spirit on the remnant, he would judge those who were not the remnant.

He was going to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The remnant would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the city would receive a judgment of fire. There'd be fire and smoke and vapors and the sky would be darkened and all of that.

These things did happen. And interestingly, at the end of that quotation, he says, and whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That's not at the end of the world, that's now.

Paul quotes that verse in Romans chapter 10, that verse from Joel 2. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Paul says that's applicable now. Joel is not talking about some future event at the end of the world, he's talking about when God pours out his spirit on Jerusalem and judges that portion that does not receive him.

And so, the image of the sun being darkened and so forth is found in connection with AD 70 in Peter's quotation. Now what about here? Mark 13.24 and 25 says what? The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars of heaven will fall, the powers of heaven will be shaken. Stars fall? Not to earth, certainly.

The earth is smaller than any of the stars, there can't be a star that would fall to earth. The earth might fall into a star. It'd be so small, by comparison, it would hardly be noticed by the stars.

It'd be like a little pebble falling into an ocean. But the stars don't literally fall to the

earth. But the imagery is common imagery in the Old Testament prophets.

For example, in Isaiah chapter 13, we have a prophecy about the destruction of Babylon. It is specifically said to be something that the Medes accomplished. The Medes are brought against Babylon.

This happened, of course, in 539 BC. And in Isaiah 13, it talks about that. For example, in verse 17, it says, Behold, I stir up the Medes against them.

Okay, so we know the time frame. Babylon is judged. Verse 1 of chapter 13 of Isaiah says, The burden against Babylon.

Babylon is conquered by the Medes and the Persians. So that is the event described here. But look at verse 10.

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. This is prophetic hyperbole.

The fall of Babylon is like the going out of the light of the heavens. The sun and the moon and the stars, it is as if they go dark. They do for the Babylonians.

God is putting their lights out, we might say. But the fact is, to the world at the time, it seemed that Babylon was as permanent as the very heavenly bodies. And with the destruction of Babylon, it was comparable to the destruction of the sun and the moon and the stars.

It was that big, it was that much of an earth shaking disaster. In Isaiah 34, we find a prophecy about the destruction of Edom. Now, Edom got destroyed before Jesus was born.

Edom was destroyed in the second century B.C. And so this prophecy was fulfilled long ago. Notice in Isaiah 34.5, it says, For my sword shall be bathed in heaven. And indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of my curse, etc.

And in verse 6, at the end of verse 6, it says, The Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah, which was an Edomite city, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Now, this can't be future, this is past. Edom is extinct.

But in that connection it says, in verse 4, The hosts of heaven, that's the stars, shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll. All the hosts shall fall down, as a leaf falls from the vine, and as its fruit falling from a fig tree. It's like the stars, the heavens are being rolled up like a scroll that you've finished reading, it's time to roll it up and put it away.

And the stars fall like figs off a tree. Certainly not literally. This is with reference to the



destruction of a kingdom that has been gone for now thousands of years.

It was not the end of the universe, though the prophets often spoke that way. Look at Ezekiel 32. In Ezekiel 32, this is a prophecy about Egypt being conquered by Babylon, in Ezekiel's own day.

We won't take the time to look at all the context of this, but the prophecy in Ezekiel 32 is addressed to Egypt, as are some of the other chapters nearby, and it's about the Babylonians conquering the Egyptians. And in the context of that, it says in verses 7 and 8, When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens and make the stars dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light.

All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land, says the Lord God. Now this is about Egypt being conquered by Babylon. Similar language was used by the Babylonians being conquered by the Medes and the Persians.

Or by Edom disappearing in the second century B.C. This is a common thing. Prophets talk about the fall of a land, of a nation. For that nation is the end of the world.

It's like the sun has gone out, the moon has gotten dark, the stars have gone dark. That's the imagery the prophets use. They're not talking about the literal end of the world.

So when Jesus uses exactly the same imagery in connection with the fall of Jerusalem, he's not really out of step with the way the Hebrew prophets talk regularly. So in Mark 13, 24, In those days after that tribulation, the sun will be dark, and the moon will not give its light. The stars of heaven will fall, the powers of heaven will be shaken.

That's not any different than Isaiah 13 or Isaiah 34 or Ezekiel chapter 32 or Joel. Chapter 2 and chapter 3 both spoke about the darkening of the sky when Jerusalem would be destroyed. So it's not necessary for verses 24 and 25 to mean anything other than the destruction of Jerusalem.

But what about verse 26? Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great power and glory. Did they? Well, it depends on how this is understood. It's clear from the previous two verses that Jesus has lapsed into prophetic imagery using the kind of apocalyptic language that you find in the Old Testament.

And one of the ways that apocalyptic language speaks of God's judgments in the Old Testament is to speak of it as a visitation from God or as God coming to them. And we saw in another connection on a previous lecture, Isaiah chapter 19 verse 1 is a perfect parallel to this statement. Although in Isaiah 19 verse 1 it's not about Jerusalem, it's about Egypt, actually.

Again, it's talking this time about the Assyrians conquering Egypt. Egypt was conquered by the Assyrians in Isaiah's day and by the Babylonians in Ezekiel's day. So both prophets speak about Egypt's succumbing to invasion.

And in chapter 19 of Isaiah, it is the Assyrian invasion of Egypt that is under consideration. But the Assyrian armies are viewed as God's hand of judgment. They are God's armies coming to destroy Egypt.

And it says, behold, in verse 1, Isaiah 19, 1, behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt. Certainly not literally, he didn't come to Egypt. He sent the Assyrians and they came into Egypt.

And executed God's judgment on his behalf. But in the figurative language of the prophets, the Lord riding on a cloud comes to Egypt. In Mark 13, 26, Jesus riding on a cloud comes to Jerusalem in the same sense.

In what sense? Through the armies of Rome, the instruments of his judgment. Just as the Assyrians coming against Egypt were the instruments of God's judgment and spoken of as if God himself was riding the clouds coming in judgment against Egypt. Jesus used the exact same expression about what he's talking about, which we've seen elsewhere is not the second coming of Christ.

It is the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, does this mean there is no future second coming of Christ? No, I'm not saying that. There are people who say that.

I'm not one of them. I believe there's a future second coming of Christ. But we need to be careful not to assume that every time the Bible speaks of Jesus coming, that it's referring to that event.

Because the prophets do use that kind of language figuratively, too. Remember, Jesus said, some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. He didn't mean the second coming, certainly, because all those people have tasted death since then.

In the book of Revelation, there are seven letters to seven churches. Five of them are told that he will come to them. Those churches, most of them are gone now.

If he came to them, it was a long time ago. He told the church of Ephesus, if you don't repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. To another church, he said, if you do not watch, I will come upon you.

I will come to you and you will not know at what hour I will come. That church is gone by now. It's not there anymore.

None of those churches are there anymore, except Philadelphia and Smyrna, some say.

But he didn't threaten to come to those ones. The ones he came to were the ones that have been judged and are gone.

But the coming of God, even the coming of Jesus in some passages, is talking not about the second coming, but about something else. In this case, it is a coming that he said would happen within that generation. And verse 27, Mark 13, 27 says, and then he will send his angels and gather together his elect from the four winds.

The four winds mean the four compass points, north, south, east and west. Now he'll gather his elect, who will? The angels that he sends out. Now, what are angels? Well, in the most basic meaning of the Greek word, they're messengers.

Angelos, messenger. Almost always in the Bible, the word angels is used to speak of human, excuse me, non-human messengers of supernatural beings from heaven, messengers that God sends from heaven, like the angel Gabriel, bringing messages. The word angel, which only means messenger, in most contexts does mean heavenly messengers, but not always.

There are times when Jesus is referred to, like in Malachi 3, he's called the messenger, the angel of the covenant. He's a human being, not an angel in the way we usually think of it. He's the messenger of the covenant.

The word angel is used there in Malachi chapter 3. Also, John the Baptist sent messengers from prison to ask Jesus if he was the one who was coming or not. Those messengers are referred to as angeloi, messengers, angels. They were not, they were humans, of course, but the word angels can mean human messengers.

Not most of the time, but sometimes, and if sometimes, then possibly in this instance. Is it possible that Jesus could say that after the destruction of Jerusalem, God sends his messengers to all the world to gather his elect, not into the sky, but into the church, into his kingdom? The evangelization of the nations, which goes out as the primary activity of God after the destruction of Jerusalem. Remember the story that Jesus told about the wedding feast in Matthew 22, where the king's first invited guest refused to come to the wedding feast, and he got angry, he sent his armies out, and he burned up their city? And then he sent his messengers out far and wide to bring in, from the highways and byways, guests to the wedding.

Certainly the first messengers who rejected his invitation were the Jews, and it was their city that got burned up. But then we read of him sending out his messengers far and wide to bring in the Gentiles into the kingdom. That is seen as sort of the natural sequel to the destruction of Jerusalem, is the in-bringing of the Gentiles.

This passage in verse 27 could, certainly, without violence to the words themselves, refer to that. Truly it does say at the end of that verse that they'll gather from the

farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven, which might give the impression that it means they're being taken from earth to heaven. It certainly gives that impression upon a casual reading.

However, it's a figure of speech too. The farthest part of heaven would probably mean the horizon, the most distant visible part where the heavens touch the earth at the horizon, from that furthest place away from Israel. From Israel, the earth, to the farthest part of the horizon, visible horizon, they'll gather the elect in.

And in Matthew 24, this same statement is like this. They will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. One end of heaven to the other, from one horizon to the other horizon.

The end of heaven is not out in outer space. The end of heaven is at the edge of the visible heavens, from an earthly standpoint. And so, these verses, Mark 13, 24 through 27, do not necessarily speak about the second coming of Christ.

As I said, you could take them that way, and you could make the tribulation that they immediately follow to be extended through the present age, and that would be another legitimate option. And I have every respect for people who take that option, but it seems to me that since Jesus, after this point, said, this generation will not pass before all these things are fulfilled, that perhaps it is not the option that he intended for us to take, but rather that those verses are apocalyptic language, like that used in the prophets of the destruction of other nations, here, of the destruction of Jerusalem. Now quickly, verse 28, now learn this parable from the fig tree.

When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near. What? The thing they asked about, the destruction of Jerusalem.

That's all they asked about. It, the thing you wondered about, it's near. You want to know when it's near? When you see these things happening, you'll know it is near.

Just like when you see, at the end of the winter, in the late spring, the fig tree begins to put out its new leaves, you know that that's a sign that summer is coming rapidly. So these signs will tell you that the thing is near that you asked about. It's at the very doors.

Now, interestingly, this expression was used by James. You may recall, in James chapter 5, James 5, verses 8 and 9, he said to his readers who were first century Jews, but Jewish Christians, the remnant, you also be patient, establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. What coming of the Lord? Certainly not the second coming was not at hand.

The coming of the Lord predicted in the Olivet Discourse, probably. And there's reason to believe he means that, because the next verse says, Do not grumble against one

another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the judge is standing at the door.

That phrase is taken from the Olivet Discourse. Jesus, when you see these things, know that it is near, it's at the door. James said it's at the door.

Right now, it's at the door. The coming of the Lord is near. James is apparently saying to his readers, the things that Jesus predicted about the coming of the Son of Man, being at the door, that's now.

It's now at the door. He's at the door. The judgment is imminent on Jerusalem.

That can tell us quite clearly that James wrote this before Jerusalem fell. And he's writing to Jewish Christians about this judgment on their commonwealth being near. And then verse 30, Luke, I mean, I keep saying Luke because I've been, I recently was teaching through Luke.

Mark 13:30. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Now, I mentioned that some people want this to be a future generation.

And they say this generation means the generation that sees something, these signs. And they say particularly that the fig tree is the sign. Because they say the fig tree represents Israel.

And Israel after Jesus' time, of course, was destroyed by the Romans. But in the last days, they say, it was predicted that Israel would be restored. And the restoration of Israel in the last days, they say, is like the fig tree blossoming again after the long winter of deadness.

And so Jesus is saying, so they say, when you see the fig tree Israel coming back to life in the end times, the generation that sees that will see the second coming of Christ. Now, in my judgment, nothing has been said about the second coming of Christ in Mark chapter 13. No one asked about it.

And Jesus has not introduced the subject. They asked about 70 AD. He answered questions about 70 AD.

Why would he then say that when Israel is restored, that's when these things will be near? No, he's talking about the nearness of the destruction of Israel, not that it's restoration. If you look at the parallel to this in Luke 21 about the fig tree, notice he says in Luke 21 verses 29 and 30, he spoke to them a parable, look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.

So you likewise, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is

near. That is the fig tree and all the trees. He's not talking about the fig tree as a specific emblem of Israel.

He's talking about trees in general. This is just a countryman's parable. When you see the trees beginning to blossom, summer is near.

It's not any different in principle than when he said in Matthew chapter 16 verses 2 and 3. Matthew 16, 2 and 3, he said, when it is evening, you say, it will be fair weather for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather day because the sky is red and threatening. Hypocrites, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of these times.

Now, he said, you can tell things from nature. Why can't you tell spiritual things? Why can't you see the times you're living in? And it's the same thing. You can tell from nature when summer is coming.

So also, you'll be able to tell from these signs when the destruction of Jerusalem is near at the doors. And then verse 31, real quickly here, I know it's running late. He said, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.

Now, I am of the opinion, and there are some who would challenge this, that when he says heaven and earth will pass away, he is now talking about the end of the world for the first time. He's now actually going to be talking about the second coming of Christ, in which the heavens and the earth will be dissolved, according to 2 Peter chapter 3. And although he's making it as a point of how his words will endure, and it's not really so much focusing on the end of the heavens and the earth, but he says heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. He says, but of that day and hour, no one knows.

And he indicates that that day, when the heavens and earth pass away, he can't answer questions about that. They asked him about one event, the destruction of Jerusalem, when one stone will be not left standing on another. He said, I can tell you about that.

That's going to happen in this generation. These signs are going to happen. You have this warning.

You can get out of town on time. But when heaven and earth pass away, I can't answer any questions about when that is. No one knows that, not even me.

He said, no one knows the day or the hour, neither the angels in heaven, nor the son, meaning himself, but only the father. So take heed and watch for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country who left his house and gave authority to his servants and to each his work and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming in the

evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all, watch.

Now, it seems to me these last verses, which are extended on considerably in Matthew 24 and 25, are now talking about the end of the world, which he just throws in as sort of an appendix. He talks about the end of Jerusalem. And many Jews might have thought that'd be the end of the world.

But no, the end of the world is something else. There will be an end to the world. That will happen.

But that's not going to happen at the same time as the end of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's end, it can be predicted within a certain range of time. The end of the world, no, all bets are off on that.

Even Jesus doesn't know when that's going to be. And so it seems that he's saying you need to watch for that. He didn't know, but it might come in their lifetime.

He didn't know when it was going to come. It might come in their lifetime or much later than their lifetime. So he says, what I say to you, I say to all.

Now, what he said about the fall of Jerusalem, he said primarily to his disciples there who were in Jerusalem. But when it comes to the end of the world, he's got advice for everybody, not just the Jews, not just his disciples in Jerusalem, but everybody. What I say to you, I say to all.

Watch, because you don't know when the Son of Man will come in destruction of the world. He's going to come in destruction on Jerusalem at one point, but that's only a precursor of a much larger and time destruction of the whole world when he comes in judgment then. And so that's, I believe, how we're to understand Mark chapter 13.

And we'll stop there because of the time.