



Distorted Christianity

Mark 13:1-23

March 3, 2019

God has entrusted some special things to us, including his word, his Spirit, his presence, his salvation, and much more. It is imperative that we use these things wisely and responsibly. Today's passage tells the horrific consequences that God gave another group of his people who failed to use his gift faithfully.

The massive stones and magnificent buildings that impressed the disciples (v. 1) were part of the Jewish Temple. Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians around 586 BC, but a new temple was rebuilt in the same area (see Ezra, Haggai). In the first century BC, Herod the Great expanded this temple considerably. Most of the stones weigh between 2-8 tons. The largest stone is 43 feet long and weighs over 500 tons!

Jesus' words were fulfilled during the Jews first revolt against Rome, which began in AD 66. After destroying other towns, the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem. In AD 70 they broke through the defenses, tore down the Temple and walls, and burned the entire city. Jesus' statement that all the stones would be thrown down is hyperbole. The Romans left one part of the retaining wall around the Temple intact to show how powerful they were to be able to otherwise decimate a stronghold of such huge stones. That portion of the wall still stands to this very day and is called the Western Wall or Wailing Wall.

The meaning of Mark 13:1-23 is clear when you read it in light of this background (e.g., vv. 7-8). The puzzling "abomination of desolation" (v. 14) means "repulsive and destructive" and refers to the Roman armies coming against Jerusalem. This is stated overtly in Luke's parallel account (21:20; cf. 19:43-44). The siege by the Roman army also explains Jesus' admonitions not to go back into the city (Mark 13:14-16) and the dreadful distress that would come (starvation; 13:17-20). Note that the distress (tribulation, ESV) of this time is said to be unequalled (Mark 13:19) and is described by Matthew as "great tribulation" (24:19, ESV). Church history tells us that the Christians heeded Jesus' warning and fled to Pella in the Decapolis, some 80-90 miles away. The message we already suspected is stated overtly by Luke: all this happened as the "time of punishment (vengeance) in fulfillment of all that has been written" (21:22ff.).

The message of Mark 13:1-23 is that God's people are accountable for how they handle what God entrusts to them. If we fail, as Judaism did, we too stand to be punished by God (cf. 12:40). We must take pains to avoid sins like theirs, including: incessant, critical questions (2:1-3:6), stubborn hearts (3:5), seeing God at work and criticizing instead of repenting (3:28-30), following traditions instead of God's word (7:1-20), judging others based on one's traditions (7:5), honoring God with our lips but not our hearts (7:6), failing to bear fruit (11:12-21), profiting financially from religion (11:15-17), not listening to God's spokespersons (12:1-12), not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God (12:24), doing religious deeds for show, taking advantage of the weak (12:38-40), and rejecting Jesus (chs. 14-16). Many other could be mentioned (cf. Matthew 23).

This section of Mark also warns us that God's people often face persecution (13:9-13), and there is a great danger of deception, especially about the future (13:5, 21-23).

