

Mark 13:1-23 – The Destruction Of The Temple

Jesus had been teaching in the temple. The temple should have been a house for God's glory, and for all the nations to worship God. However, it had become a centre of false religion and unbelief led by the rulers of Israel. Jesus now came out of the temple, and began to speak about how it would be destroyed. When his kingdom came, there would be no place for a temple in Jerusalem. God's people are now a world-wide church of every nation, and we worship in every place. The time for the temple to be destroyed had nearly come. Everything that Jesus spoke in these verses was fulfilled 40 years later (see v30) in the year 70 (“AD 70”) when the Roman army came and destroyed Jerusalem, the temple and the Jewish nation.

1. The Question (v1-4)

Jesus was a prophet – the greatest and indeed the God of all the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-3). When he said the temple would be destroyed, his disciples asked him: when, and what was the sign it would happen? As that temple was destroyed nearly 2000 years ago now, what use is this teaching to us? We must remember that God is always the same. He is the God who judges with great and terrible wrath. He is also the God who is very kind and merciful to his people. The destruction of the temple is part of our story as Christians, because it tells us how a Jewish nation became a world-wide family of believers. This passage is not about the end of the world or about our future at all, but because God never changes, it does help us a lot. God tears down and builds up something better and newer as his kingdom goes forward. How can we be ready?

2. The birth-pains (v5-13)

These verses are about the beginning of troubles – not the final destruction itself. It is like child-birth – there is a long time of pains coming and growing before the final climax. Jesus' first warning was that we must not be deceived. When terrible times come, we must stand firm. We need to make sure our faith has a strong foundation. You only know how good the foundation is when the wind and rain come; and if it is weak, it is too late! Truth never changes, and we need to be strong and not change our path in trials. In times of difficulty, we are tempted to believe lies that make our lives easier. Jesus teaches us (v7-8) to be patient. Even the most terrible persecutions and difficult trials can come (v9-13). But in every trial, God will give the strength we need if we rely on him. He will not give it beforehand, but even in the hour itself.

3. The time to flee (v14-23)

At last the final destruction would come. Jesus told his disciples a sign – the “abomination (awful, totally unclean thing) that brings desolation”. These words come from the prophet Daniel (e.g. 9:13). It meant seeing pagans about to enter God's holy place (Jerusalem, and then the temple). It is a fact of history that in AD70, when the Christians saw the Roman army preparing to enter Jerusalem, they all fled as Jesus taught them. They were saved, and the Jews who remained were all killed. God has great mercy upon his people. The trials are hard, but he saves them. If you are not saved, do not think you can escape God's terrible wrath; only his people can escape, and then only by the “skin of their teeth”. There is no time to spare. Finally (v21-23) Jesus again warns: the thing we need is truth. He is the truth. Accept no counterfeit!