

Continuation of the Olivet Discourse

Mark 13:14-23

Mark 13:14-23 - *“So when you see 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. ¹⁵ Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. ¹⁶ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁷ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ¹⁸ And pray that your flight may not be in winter. ¹⁹ For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. ²¹ “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.”*

Background Notes

The Olivet Discourse was given in answer to the disciples’ questions about the future during the last week of our Lord’s earthly ministry. Look back at verse 4. The disciples asked: *“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”* In verse 5 the Lord began to answer the question about the signs of the End Time. In verses 5-13 the Lord mentioned a number of signs that would continue throughout history, right up to and into the End Times - but were not specifically signs of the End Times. What were these signs? False “christs” (or false messiahs) and deceivers (v6), wars and rumors of wars (v7), famines, earthquakes (v8), persecution, betrayals of believers (v9-13). These signs, the Lord said, would characterize history right up to the End Times, and into the Tribulation of the last days. Starting with verse 14, the Lord gave some definite signs of the End Time.

Doctrinal Points

1. There will be a future Tribulation.

Verse 19: *“For in those days [that is, in the End Times] there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.”*

Some Christians don’t believe that there will be a definite period of time in the future called the Tribulation. They believe the Tribulation is now. They believe that the Tribulation is the trouble and persecution that the Church has gone through

(and continues to go through) ever since the times of the Roman persecutions. Although we don't deny that the Church has gone through much tribulation in the past, and Christians around the world today are suffering persecution, we don't believe these sufferings and persecutions are **the** Tribulation. The time period of **the** Tribulation is yet in the future. The final seven years of Daniel's vision of the future (Daniel 9) is the Tribulation that is in view in the Olivet Discourse. And it is particularly the last 3 ½ years of that Tribulation, called the "Great Tribulation," that is in view in these verses.

Notice verse 19: *"For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be."* This is the time of Tribulation that is predicted in Daniel 12: *"At that time [namely the End Times], Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time."*

This is the time of Tribulation called "*Jacob's Trouble*" in Jeremiah 30:7: *"Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble."* It is not only a time of great tribulation for Jewish people – it's a time of judgment on the whole world. In the book of Revelation 6:8, where some of the details of the tribulation are predicted, we read that as many as 1/4 of the earth's population die from war, famine, plague, and wild beasts! And then in Revelation 9:18 we read that another 1/3 of the people on earth will be killed.

Mark 13:20 says, *"...unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved."* Never has there been tribulation on this earth to such a degree! Although believers undergo persecution today, the "Great Tribulation" is yet in the future.

Verses 21-22: *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."* In verse 6 the Lord said that there would be many false "christs" and false prophets leading up to the last days, but these verses seem to indicate that these false "messiahs" and false prophets will actually increase in the last days, and they will even be able to do certain signs and wonders. 1 John 2:18 says that there will be many "anti-christs" - but there is coming a very significant anti-Christ in the End Time.

2. There will be a future Temple.

The Jewish people do not have a Temple at the present time. A Muslim shrine, The Dome of the Rock, occupies the site of the two former Temples on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Some people speculate that the Dome of the Rock will somehow be removed to make way for a new Temple. It has also been suggested that there is sufficient space for the "Third Temple" to be built right alongside the Dome of the Rock, as a result of a political treaty. We really don't know how it will all work out – but what we do know is that there **will** be a future Temple!

Look at verse 14: “So when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not...” “Standing where it ought not”—that abomination will stand **in** a future Temple where it ought not to be! In the parallel Olivet Discourse passage in Matthew 24:15 - “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place.” In the holy place - that’s **in** the future Temple. Daniel 11:31 and Daniel 12:11 tell us that at that time the daily sacrifices that will be going on in this future Temple will be stopped, and the “abomination of desolation” will be set up.

What is this “abomination of desolation”? It will either be an image (an idol) that is set up in the Temple by the very powerful and significant anti-Christ of the Last Days, or it will be this evil anti-Christ setting himself up as “God” and standing in the Temple! 2 Thessalonians 2:2 speaks of this anti-Christ of the End Times, calling him the “man of sin” and the “son of perdition.” 2 Thessalonians 2:4 says that he “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

The setting up of the “abomination of desolation” in the future Temple signals the beginning of The Great Tribulation. The first 3½ years of the Tribulation will lead up to this point, but the setting up of the abomination of desolation is the sign of the beginning of the last 3½ years of the Tribulation, that which is called The Great Tribulation. And this sign will come about suddenly. We see from these verses that it will happen so suddenly that the believers in Jerusalem at that time will have to flee immediately and not to return home. They are to pray “that your flight may not be in winter” (v18), because travel would be more hazardous in the cold, rainy season.

So there will be a future Tribulation, and there will be a future Temple.

Practical Application

Let’s try to understand prophecy.

Many Christians don’t study Bible prophecy because they say it’s too hard to understand. All this talk about pre-tribulation, pre-millennial, amillennial, post-millennial - all those terms turn them off. Some even jokingly call themselves pan-millennialists—namely, it will all “pan out in the end”! Well, it’s true that the details of prophecy are not always easy to understand, but we should *try* to understand prophecy.

Where is that taught in Mark 13? Verse 14: “let the reader understand.” That phrase also occurs in Matthew 24: “whoever reads, let him understand.” The Lord taught this right here in the Olivet Discourse. And when the Lord spoke of the abomination of desolation being set up, He said: “Let the reader understand.” That phrase is added because **God wants us to understand prophecy**. This information was not given for only the believers of the End Times – it was given for the reader today. We are to understand the prophetic Scriptures.

Again we emphasize that it is not easy to sort out the details of prophecy. For example, on the basis of Scripture, we believe that the Church, the Body of Christ, will be preserved from the Tribulation. Believers will be “raptured” (caught up) from the earth before the Tribulation begins. But we must admit that a lot of the details of prophecy are hard to understand.