

ENCOUNTER.

Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

Lesson Eight: Encounter His Warnings

Mark 13

Jesus had recently squared off with five of Israel's most powerful ruling groups – the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the chief priests, and the Herodians. These governing factions were usually at odds with each other battling for supremacy. In recent days, they had joined forces against their mutual enemy – the Lord Jesus. He alone represented a threat to their power and had the potential to bring undue attention to the Roman officials, a situation they all wanted to avoid.

Jesus and His disciples exited the Temple through the Eastern Gate. They made their way down the ravine called the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. Just before they left the temple, Jesus pointed out a poor widow putting all she had into the treasury. Unlike the wealthy worshipers who sought to draw attention to their gifts, she was the ultimate example of humility and genuine faith. Her gift represented total surrender to the Lord and ultimate trust in His ability to provide.

I. Be Warned (Mark 13:1-2)

The disciples had clearly been told of Jesus' impending death, burial, and resurrection. But because they were expecting the Messiah to be a military leader who would overthrow the Roman government, they misinterpreted His purpose and plan for redemption.

Walking up the Mount of Olives gave the men a panoramic view of Jerusalem and her crown jewel, the Temple. The Jews were proud of the Temple, despite the fact that it was built by the Herod family to placate them. Herod the Great began work on it in 19 BC and it took over 80 years to complete. Rodney Cooper writes:

The temple was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world. It had been under construction for forty-six years and was just nearing its completion. It was located on a spectacular site on Mt. Moriah. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote: "The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching

strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white.”¹

As the men glanced back at the magnificent structure, one of the disciples commented on its beauty. Jesus acknowledged the beauty of the Temple, but warned it would be completely destroyed one day. His words cast a melancholy pall over the twelve and probably caused each man to quietly ponder the meaning of Jesus’ words.

Jesus and the twelve stopped for a rest somewhere on the western face of the Mount of Olives. Four of the disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew seized on this opportunity to speak to the Lord privately, pressing Him for some clarification. The confused young men fired off two questions, “When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4). This conversation begins what Bible scholars call “the Olivet Discourse,” a passage that has been studied in depth and debated at length.

II. Be Aware (Mark 13:3-23)

As mere mortals, we live in a world governed by time and space. So it is little wonder that the men started their query by asking: When were these catastrophic events going to happen? Most of us have found that Jesus rarely gives us a timeline, even if we have pleaded for one. Perhaps it is because we would cease walking by faith and begin to live by the ticks on our Timex!

Jesus skipped over the “when” question and began to speak of the signs that will signal the end is coming. Warren Wiersbe weighs in with his interpretation of this extended passage:

I must point out that it is the conviction of many students of prophecy that believers in this present age of the church will be raptured by Christ and taken to heaven before the Tribulation begins (1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11; Revelation 3:10-11). At the close of the Tribulation, they will return to earth with Christ and reign with Him (Revelation 19:11–20:6). I agree with this interpretation, but I do not make it a test of orthodoxy or spirituality.²

Let me hasten to say, that many solid conservative evangelicals disagree on the tenets of the Tribulation. In my mind, the question is not, “Am I going through the Tribulation” but instead, the more pressing question we need to answer is, “Am I going to Heaven because I have repented of my sin and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior?” If you

are assured of your salvation, anxiety over who will face the Tribulation tends to be dispelled.

There will be indications that the Tribulation “birth pangs” are about to begin. The onset will be sudden and build up gradually, culminating in a time of terrible sorrow and tribulation for the whole world. Wiersbe notes:

These signs are: the success of false Christs (Mark 13:5-6), nations in conflict (Mark 13:7-8a), natural disturbances (Mark 13:8b), and religious persecutions (Mark 13:9-13). They have always been with us, but since these events are compared to “birth pangs,” our Lord may be saying that an acceleration of these things would be significant.³

The reference, “the one who endures will be saved” (Mark 13:13), does not imply a doctrine of salvation by works. Rather it confirms that genuine faith is evidenced by the endurance of those who walk through trials believing God is faithful and sovereign, while those who are merely religious and not born again, will abandon the faith when life gets hard.

In Mark 13:14, Mark uses the phrase “the Abomination of Desolation.” This term was used in a prophecy found in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. As we read in our workbook:

We know that at least part of Daniel’s prophecy came true in 167 BC when Antiochus IV set up an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offering. Worshipping a fake god in the temple was bad enough, but Antiochus performed the ultimate act of desecration by sacrificing a pig on the altar – an animal considered unclean under the Mosaic law (Leviticus 11:7-8 and Deuteronomy 14:8).⁴

In a second partial fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecies, the temple was defiled by the Romans in AD 70, when they captured and destroyed the temple as well as the city of Jerusalem.

These events foreshadow the midway point of the Tribulation. Satan will energize and indwell the Antichrist, who will invade the Temple, set up his own image, and force the world to worship the devil. This event will usher in the last half of the Tribulation. The seven-year Tribulation will conclude with terrifying signs in the heavens and worldwide chaos on the earth. These signs will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth. “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26).

The enemies of God will engage in the Battle of Armageddon. They will be convinced they will be victorious over the Lord and His army of believers. But, just one word from the Lord Jesus, and it will all be over! The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be hurled into lake of fire, while godless millions will be swept into a lost eternity. Satan will be incarcerated in the Abyss until his final judgment (Revelation 20:1-3).

III. Be Alert (Mark 13:24-37)

Jesus, not wanting His disciples to be so sidetracked with the prophecies of the future that they neglected the responsibilities of the present, closed the Olivet Discourse with the use of parables. Cooper comments:

The first illustration centered around the fig tree. In Palestine most trees remained green throughout the year, with the exception of the fig tree. During the fall the fig tree would lose its leaves. In the spring the sap would fill the branches and the tree would begin the process of putting forth its leaves. This meant that summer was not far away. Jesus did not want His disciples to despair about the persecution they would face. Jesus was showing that just as He promised there would be persecution, deliverance would follow through His return as the Son of Man.⁵

Watch for the signs of the end times, although no one knows the exact time Jesus is coming back.

The parable of the householder is a warning to us to be alert. We are to be about the Father's business until He returns. While there will be signs of the Lord's return, no one knows the exact time when it will happen. So take heed. Keep on the alert.

The Olivet Discourse is not a full revelation of the end times. Again, we would fail to live by faith if we knew all the dates and details. We would just hunker down and bide our time. Instead, He has given us sufficient information to be able to live in a state of perpetual readiness while we wait. We have received enough information to assure us that, despite the seemingly acceleration of evil, God is still in control!

Beloved, may we take His warning to heart and be found faithful until He comes!

¹ Cooper, R. (2000). *Mark* (Vol. 2), p. 215–216. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers. Logos Edition

² Wiersbe, W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Vol. 1), p. 155. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books.

³ Wiersbe, W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Vol. 1), p. 155. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books.

⁴ *Encounter: Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, (2026), p. 233.

⁵ Cooper, R. (2000). *Mark* (Vol. 2), p. 221-222. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.