

Tell Us Jesus
Mark 13:1-4
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Introduction:

Mark chapter 13 has come to be known as the Olivet Discourse because the discourse by Jesus was delivered on the Mount of Olives. It is a very difficult text because it is considered apocalyptic in its genre. Apocalyptic texts in the Bible unveil teaching about the end times and the dawning of the new kingdom of Jesus. Apocalyptic literature is known for its symbolism and figurative speech. When you read about a dragon, beasts, trumpets, and stars falling in Revelation, you are reading apocalyptic writing.

Throughout Christian history there has been debate about whether prophetic events in the Bible have been fulfilled yet or not. There are three main views on this. Some believe that all prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled. This is called Preterism and is considered false teaching by virtually all evangelicals because it denies the physical return of Jesus to the earth. Some believe that most of the prophecies in the Bible have been fulfilled already except for Jesus coming back to set up his eternal state. This is called Partial-Preterism. Some believe that most of the prophecies have not yet been fulfilled. This is called Futurism. As we read our text today, we will have to decide whether the prophecies have been fulfilled yet or not.

Our confession of faith boils down what we all must believe about the kingdom of God and the end of the world and it leaves room for both Partial-Preterism and Futurism as possible interpretations. I want us to read these sections together now out loud.

First, on the kingdom of God:

The kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Let's now read about the section on last things:

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord.

This is what we confess as a church. There is room for us to disagree on the finer points of the kingdom of God and the end of the world. For example, will there be a rapture of all living saints caught up into heaven before a great seven year tribulation? Notice that is not in our confession of faith, and it is not believed by all Southern Baptists.

God gave us the entire Bible for our instruction, and we should keep staring at it until we are convinced, even in the wake of all other interpretations, that we have come to the correct understanding. But we should have a friendly spirit in our conversations about this topic. When I was at Rocks Baptist Church, our interim pastor Dr. Bill Tomlinson taught verse by verse through Revelation on Wednesday nights. He is a Futurist. But one of the men who regularly attended was not and refused to come to the study because he was a Partial Preterist. I did not think fondly of this man. He did not have the right attitude. I myself am not convinced by some of what the Futurism view offers but I attended every Wednesday night to hear Dr. Tomlinson. Dr. Tomlinson lives in the Woodland in Farmville now and I have even joked with him that he can come and preach a sermon at our church sometime and tell everyone why Pastor Matt should be a Futurist! There is a kindred spirit between us as we both affirm the essential beliefs of the confession of faith.

My teaching on the text may not be your interpretation and it may not be the right interpretation. I still have much to learn on this subject matter. But nevertheless I want to present what makes most sense to me in this text.

The Preterist will take the Olivet Discourse and say it has all been fulfilled. The Partial-Preterist will say that most of the Olivet Discourse has already been fulfilled and only part of it has not. The Futurist will say that most of the Olivet Discourse has not been fulfilled because it is talking about the future. The futurist interpretation is the most popular interpretation today. However I will be interpreting the majority of this text as Herschel Hobbs did, the author of the BF&M 1963. Some of you may be familiar with him because LifeWay provides the teachers an optional commentary to go along with Sunday School classes that is written by Herschel Hobbs. Hobbs sees the majority of this chapter as referring to the destruction of the temple in the first century. The way Hobbs interprets this text was the majority view of Protestants before the 20th century. But take heart, while our interpretations may be different on details, our application of the text can still be similar.

We are going to read the entire chapter today so that we understand all of it in context, but we will then go back and only walk through verses 1-5. We will most likely take about four weeks to get through this chapter. Please pay attention during these sermons. If you doze off, you will get lost very quickly. If you are one that wants to have your ears tickled but your mind not enlarged, you will be disappointed today. I hope the handout I have provided will help you as we are challenged today to study the Word of God carefully.

Reading and Prayer – Mark 13

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold (v.1-2)

In [Mark 11](#) we were given a sandwich—an inside out Fig Newton. Jesus cursed a fruitless fig tree (the top). Then he cleanses the temple (the middle). Then the fig tree is withered to its roots (the bottom). We discovered that God used a fig tree to picture the fruitlessness of Israel and that the Temple was going to be withered like the fig tree. Jesus was still teaching in a cryptic manner. We had to read in between the lines to understand his metaphor.

In [Mark 12](#) Jesus tells the parable of the tenants. He describes the tenants of a vineyard killing the son of the owner of the vineyard. Then the owner was said to “[come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others](#)” (v.9). The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus was speaking about them being the wicked tenants that would be done away with, [so they sought to arrest Jesus](#) (v.12). The fig tree was quite abstract. Now the parable is a little clearer about what is about to happen to Israel.

What is even more clear is our [first verses today in Mark 13](#). [Jesus and his disciples leave the temple](#). That is symbolism in itself. That was the last time Jesus was ever in the temple. He will never need to go to that temple again. For in a few short days, a cataclysmic transition will begin. Jesus leaves the temple today. In a few short moments God will leave the temple at the cross when he tears the temple curtain in two. No longer will man atone for sins through the mediator of a high priest behind the curtain. Jesus is the high priest that has atoned for sins once and for all ([Hebrews 7:26-27](#)).

One of the disciples speaks up and boasts about the great edifices of the temple grounds (v.1). But Jesus puts a lid on those accolades. Jesus states, “[Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down](#)” (v.2). The disciples still do not understand. They missed the teaching with the fig tree. They missed the parable of the wicked tenants. In fact, they must have overlooked Jesus wailing over Jerusalem in [Luke 19](#). After Jesus has his “Palm Sunday” triumphant entry into Jerusalem a few days ago at the beginning of the Passion Week, Jesus laments in [Luke 19:41-44](#):

[41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”](#)

In this lament Jesus echoes what he just said about the temple in our text in [Mark 13](#); [not one stone would be left upon another](#). There will be utter destruction of the temple and utter destruction of Jerusalem. This is a monumental event. This temple is a thirty-five acre enclosure! Twelve football fields could fit inside the temple complex! But not one stone left upon another.

The temple was God’s plan. It was a great feat of architecture and artistry. But it was but a shadow of the great temple that was coming, Jesus himself. Jesus said in [Matthew 12:6](#), “[I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.](#)” And the Jews missed it. They would continue to offer sacrifices in the temple for forty more years after Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended to

heaven (until the Romans would destroy it in 70 AD). What sacrifices were once a fragrant offering to the Lord were now a pungent odor of rejection of the Lord's Son. The earthly temple had a purpose. But it was fulfilled in Jesus.

Isn't it possible that we can boast in our church building and forget its purpose? Maybe this is not much of a struggle for a quaint church like ours, but I think about this often when I drive by Liberty University. There is something about buildings that draw out excitement in the human heart. Even while I have some concerns with the direction of Liberty University, I go back to visit campus and I get excited when I walk through the new Jerry Falwell Library. You really should go visit it. It has an automated book archive! You can check out a book on the computer, then a robot finds the book in the tower and sends it over to the front desk where a library worker can hand it to you. It is a state of the art facility as well as many facilities on that campus. But if those buildings forget their purpose, the accolades are all for naught. May there never be a day where the presence of God leaves Liberty University, but it can. Most of our older schools were founded for Gospel training but most have rejected the Son. If Liberty University is not careful, it will make decisions that are primarily concerned for the success of Liberty University, not the glory of God.

The temple was destroyed because its purpose was finished and its leaders rejected Jesus. Christian friends, this is a foretaste of the entire world. [2 Peter 3:10](#) tells us of a coming day when "the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." We must not boast exorbitantly in our jobs, in our country, in our 100 acre farm, our 4 bedroom home, our family, our alma mater, or our ten point buck over the fireplace. Even the five Super Bowl trophies of Tom Brady (possibly six after tonight) will not last. Only Redskins' trophies last. This world as we know it is passing away. It will be burned. Not one stone of the earth will be left upon another. Only things of eternity will last. The world's utter rebellion of Jesus as Messiah will be met with fire. And only those who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah will enjoy Jesus in the temple of the new earth. The destruction of the temple was foretold for the disciples. But the destruction of the world has been foretold for us. Are we ready?

What are "these things" and "those days"?

Before we move on in the text, I want to first show us two very important phrases in chapter 13. [Verse 4](#) says "when will these things be and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished." [Verse 17](#) says "those days." [Verse 19](#) says "those days." In [Verse 23](#) Jesus says to look out because he told "all things" to the disciples. In [verse 24](#) Jesus says, "But in those days..." [Verse 29](#) has "these things" again. [Verse 30](#) then says that "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

What are these things? What are those days? We will discover that they [all refer back to verses 1-2](#), concerning Jesus foretelling the destruction of the temple.

But let me read [verse 30](#) to us one more time because it is an end of a section. Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, [this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.](#)" So everything above [verse 30](#) should be read as referring to one extraordinary event.

The Importance of “This generation”

In [verse 30](#), that was just read, it also talks about all “[these things](#)” happening in “[this generation](#)”. Who is talking here? Jesus. Who is the audience to Jesus? The disciples. Jesus is telling his disciples that [what he talks about in verses 1-29 are all going to occur within the lifetime of the disciples](#). This is not a promise that every disciple will be alive at that time. But Jesus is promising that the generation of the disciples will have people alive to witness the teachings of Jesus to come to pass. That is to say, that there will be people who were alive at the destruction of the temple in 70 AD who were also alive when Jesus foretold of the destruction of the temple in about 30 AD.

Those that want to interpret the signs in this discourse as the signs before Jesus returns at the end of the world must then interpret “[this generation](#)” as something else other than the generation of the disciples. But Jesus never uses the phrase “[this generation](#)” anywhere else in the Gospels to refer to a future time. For example in [Mark 8:11-12](#) it states, “[The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.’](#)” “[This generation](#)” means right now! How else would the disciples take this sentence? They ask him a question, Jesus answers it, and Jesus tells them it will take place in this generation.

So between “[these things](#)” and “[those days](#)” referring back to the original foretelling of the temple destruction in [verses 1-2](#), and Jesus saying that these things will occur in “[this generation](#)”, I believe the text is giving us evidence that we should understand [verses 1-30](#) to be talking about the same thing, the destruction of the temple, and then be looking for [verses 1-30 to all be fulfilled in the contemporary generation](#) of the disciples, not some future time that still has not yet happened in history.

Questions about the Coming Destruction (v.3-4)

Once they arrive to the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Jesus privately about this pronouncement of the temple’s destruction ([v.3](#)). The Mount of Olives has a spectacular view of the temple mount across the way. In [verse 4](#) they ask, “[When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?](#)” Hey Jesus! Give us the 411. You just dropped a Hawaii text message that a missile is coming; take cover! Notice that they ask when “[these things](#)” will be accomplished. What are “[these things](#)” referring to? What Jesus just pronounced—the destruction of the temple.

The Olivet Discourse is recorded in [Matthew 24](#) and [Luke 21](#) as well. As we walk through Mark 13, we will refer to these chapters from time to time because [they give nuance to Mark 13](#). In [Matthew 24](#) the question by the disciples says this, “[When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?](#)” Notice that the disciples link the destruction of the temple with a coming of Jesus and the end of the age. This is why in your Bible, you may have non-inspired paragraph headings that the editors inserted that say starting in verse 3 of Mark 13 “[Signs of the Close of the Age](#)” or something similar to that. That is a perfectly

accurate title for the paragraph. But it may be a bit confusing because most of us in the 21st century evangelical culture immediately jump to the end of the world when Jesus returns to set up the eternal state on earth—the end times stuff. But that is not what is meant here by the coming of Jesus and the end of the age.

The ending of the age is easy enough to understand. Indeed an age is ending. Jesus has been teaching about it. The age of the Old Covenant is ending and a New Covenant is being secured at the cross. Jesus will raise a glass soon in the upper room to say that his blood that he will shed for sins on the cross represents a new covenant. The old order of the temple is ending. The new temple of Jesus will emerge.

But [Matthew 24](#) states that the disciples ask for the sign of the coming of Jesus. And I stated just a moment ago that all of these verses here are referring to an event in the first century, the destruction of the temple. So Pastor Matt, how can you say that the coming of Jesus is somehow fulfilled in the destruction of the temple? Isn't the coming of Jesus going to happen at the end of the world? Yes, Jesus is coming back someday. But I believe that this “coming” in this particular text is not referring to the physical return of Jesus to earth, but something else.

Remember that [verse 30](#) states, “Truly, I say to you, [this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.](#)” “These things” is referring to the destruction of the temple taught in the first two verses. And the current generation, the disciples listening right then and there will still be alive when the events discussed in verses 1-30 occur. So how does Jesus come in the destruction of the temple then?

For one clue, please go down and read with me [Mark 13:26](#) which states, “[And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.](#)” Remember, this coming of the Son of Man in the clouds will occur in this current generation. And here is the answer: The coming of Jesus referred to by the disciples in their question is a symbolic coming of Jesus to destroy the temple. Jesus is speaking like any Hebrew would. He is reflecting his own literature of the Old Testament. We have an example in the Old Testament of a prophet speaking about God coming to judge in a cloud. Let's read [Isaiah 19:1](#) that states, “[An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.](#)” Here we have Isaiah foretelling that Egypt will take on calamity. But he describes God riding into Egypt on a cloud to exercise his judgment. This is figurative language. God did not really go to Egypt on a cloud. But God's presence and judgment are often depicted by a cloud in the Bible.

Remember how Jesus talks to the different churches in Revelation through the pen of John? For example, he says to the church of Ephesus who had abandoned their first love in [Revelation 2:5](#), “[Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent; and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.](#)” Jesus explains that he will come and shut down the church if they refuse to repent. And there is no church in Ephesus today. He did come to Ephesus in that figurative sense.

So in [Mark 13](#), Jesus speaks of coming on a cloud in the first century, through his sovereign hands, by the means of the Roman army that will utterly destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 70

AD. We know that Jesus did not physically come back in the first century. We know that all in this text must have happened during the generation of the disciples. So interpreting the coming of Jesus as his sovereign judgment from heaven against Jerusalem is consistent with our text and other examples in the Bible.

Let's go back to Mark 13:4. Very specifically, the disciples ask for two things concerning the destruction of the temple. They ask when the destruction will be and they ask for the signs of the destruction. They ask for the time and signs. If Jesus started talking about the end of the world after their question, he would not be answering their question about the destruction of the temple! And so we will be looking for the time and signs of the destruction of the temple until Jesus finishes in [verse 30](#) saying "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

I warned you. This text is difficult. And it is partly difficult because we have to deconstruct what we assume about the text and try to see it a different way, hopefully the way Jesus presents it. This text serves as a good reminder for us that we are told to study the Bible carefully so that we can rightly understand it ([2 Timothy 2:15](#)). Ezra is a great example for us from the Old Testament. In [Ezra 7:10](#) it states, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." And it sure happened in Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah is about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after returning out of exile. Ezra gets out the book of the Law, the first five books of the Bible and starts reading them before the people. In [Nehemiah 8:3-4](#) it states, "And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose..." In [verse 8](#) it states, "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." That's what we need to do with the entire Bible. Ezra could read to the Israelites about the confusing texts in Leviticus and they listened attentively and wanted to understand it. We must work through Mark 13 and listen attentively and try to understand it. We could not get through many verses in the chapter today, but I hope you walk away challenged to study the Bible more. Read it in multiple versions. Read multiple commentaries. Regularly listen to it preached. Strive to grasp it until it has grasped you.

Conclusion:

We will continue next week [picking up in verse 5](#) where Jesus will disclose the signs of the temple destruction.

For now, let's echo the disciples in [verse 4](#), "Tell us..." Tell us Jesus. Pray to God and ask him to give you understanding as we walk through the rest of this chapter. And even in our struggles, let us feast on the fact that we who have repented and believed in Jesus have a temple that will never be destroyed: Jesus! I pray that we all will be in that temple! I pray that we all have turned to love Jesus and what he accomplished in dying for our sin, resurrecting from the grave, and setting up a kingdom for us to live in forever. Let us pray.