

MARK 13

The Olivet Discourse
—or—
The Little Apocalypse

BACKGROUND

- The “abomination which causes desolation” in v. 14 (also translated the “desolating sacrilege”) derives from
 - a. 1 Maccabees 1:54-64.
 - i. This is an intertestamental book describing the Maccabean revolution against the Syrian overlords of Israel in the 2nd century BC. It is a deuterocanonical book included in the Catholic canon but not in the protestant Bible, and our primary historical source for Israel during this period.
 - ii. This passage describes Antiochus Epiphanes’ erection of a pagan altar in the Jerusalem Temple, which helped lead to the revolt in 164 BC:

On [Dec 8, 167 BC] the king erected the abomination of desolation above the altar [of holocausts]; and altars were built in the surrounding towns of Judah and incense offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practicing the Law, the king’s decree sentenced him to death. Having might on their side they took action month after month against any offenders they discovered in the towns of Israel. Women who had had their children circumcised were put to death according to the edict with their babies hung around their necks, and the members of their household and those who had performed the circumcision were executed with them.
 - b. Dan 9:27, 11:31; 12:11: These are prophecies which likely have their first fulfillment in the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes.
 - c. The Temple was also desecrated by the Romans in 70 AD during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, at the culmination of the Roman-Jewish War in 66-70.

QUESTIONS

1. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by
 - a. “Eschatological dualism”—the present age is under the power of evil, and the future age, inaugurated by the Day of the Lord, is a time of righteousness when God saves the elect and judges the wicked
 - b. a focus on *God’s* role as rescuer, making it very deterministic (*Depending on the person, this can lead to a hopeful or pessimistic outlook.*)
 - c. Visions, symbols, and pseudonymity (i.e., writing under the assumed name of someone famous, e.g. the apocalyptic books of Enoch)

d. The structure: (1) woes, (2) tribulation, (3) divine intervention (8b/19/24-27)

Which of these attributes is present in the Olivet Discourse? *It does reflect the dualistic eschatology and follows the woes/trib/intervent. Patter. But it doesn't have timetables or calculations or other-worldly journeys or visions of heaven or hell; and it actually gives instructions to the disciples as well as saying that both the author and Jesus don't know the time of the second coming.*

2. This chapter is Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples in Mark's Gospel account. It parallels Jesus' final discourse in John 14-17, the Great Commission in Mt 28:16-20 and Jesus' resurrection appearances in Jerusalem (Lk 24:36-49) and on the Mt. of Olives (Acts 1:6-11) in Luke/Acts.

In John, Jesus' final message may be summarized: "love one another." In Matthew and Luke it is a mandate to carry out the Gentile mission. What is Jesus' farewell message in Mark? *Watch!*

- Some commentators see Mark 13 as a prophecy of two times: (1) Vv. 5-23 about the events leading up to the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by Rome in 70 AD; (2) vv. 24-36 (starting with v. 24, "following that distress") describing Jesus' second coming to judge the earth.
3. What do you think the disciples meant by "these things" in v. 4? *Why?* Reread vv. 1-4 if necessary. Which events in this chapter have occurred already, and which are yet to come? *Certainly deceivers, wars, natural upheavals (5b-8) have occurred; also persecution of Christians (9-13); the desolating sacrilege (14-23). In contrast, the coming of the Son of Man hasn't (24-27); nor the cosmological upheavals in 24-25.*
 4. Where in this chapter do you see Jesus warning against the dual errors of (1) paying no attention to the signs of the times, and (2) paying too much attention? What is the meaning of the fig tree parable (28-31)? *Hope because the coming is certain and imminent.* How about the doorman parable (34-37)? *Only the Father knows when, so be alert, neither indifferent (36) or misguidedly enthusiastic (5-6; 21-23).*
- Mark's Gospel, the earliest of the four, was probably written soon after the great fire of Rome which devastated part of the city in the winter of 64-65. The Christians were made the scapegoats of this disaster by Nero, quite possibly to respond to anti-Christian propaganda which blamed them for the fire. *This is perhaps why Mark uses this generally cryptic genre and the phrase "let the reader understand" in 14—to avoid Roman hostility.*
5. How did Mark's account of Jesus' warnings speak to the early church in this context? *In this context, Jesus is saying that the Temple will be destroyed, but that won't be the end; the end will come later when the Son of Man returns.* Specifically, consider v. 8b, "these are the beginning of the birth pangs", v. 32, "No one knows about that day or hour" and v. 21, "Look, there he is!"
 - *Fun fact:* v. 32 was used in arguments by some of the Church Fathers against Jesus' divinity.
 6. What does it mean for us to watch? Read Luke 12:39-46; 21:28, 34-36. What did Luke/Jesus in Luke think it meant to watch? *Note: In the rest of Mark Jesus models "watching"—in fact, the account of the garden of Gethsemane (14:17-15:1) has four phases paralleling the four watches of the night in 13:35.*

My notes:

- *“Generation” in 30 can also be translated “race.”*
- *Winter in Palestine is cold and potentially very rainy, making the wadis difficult to cross.*
- *Luke’s mention of the abomination that causes desolation is replaced by a warning that when the armies surround Jerusalem—as if in siege—the desolation is at hand (Lk 21:20).*
- *In v. 10’s “the Gospel must first be preached to all nations”, “nations” is goyim, which can also be translated “gentiles”.*
- *Mark wants the reader to know that the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem isn’t the sign of the end of the world.*
- *He also wants to caution against date-fixing, or indifference.*

Bibliography:

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