

# A Prophecy of Judgment

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## [Mark 13:1-2](#)



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**W**e are beginning a study of Mark 13, which is the longest discourse in Mark's Gospel. It is called the "Olivet Discourse" because it is a discourse that takes place on the Mount of Olives. Few chapters of the Bible have called forth more disagreement among interpreters than Mark 13 and its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21.

Before we begin our study of chapter 13, we need to review its context. Apart from an understanding of its context, you can come up with all kinds of weird interpretations.

So, let's begin at the beginning. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are usually known as the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic comes from two Greek words, which mean: "to see together" and literally means: able "to be seen together." The reason for that name is this: These three gospels each give an account of the same events in Jesus' life. There are in each of them additions and omissions; but broadly speaking, their material is the same, and their arrangement is the same. It is therefore possible to set them down in parallel columns to compare the one with the other. We will be doing this as we study Mark 13.

Chapter 13 begins with the conclusion of a long day at the temple where Jesus entered the arena of argumentation and rebuked, debated, questioned, and taught the religious leaders of Israel.

The leaders of the nation have conspired to put Jesus to death. They have challenged His authority and have asked Him questions that were designed to incriminate Him. These have failed. The leaders have only been embarrassed, causing them to be more resolute in their determination to kill Jesus. All that remains is for Judas to be introduced and for his act of betrayal to be carried out, leading to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. Just as Jesus' debate with the leaders of Jerusalem is over, so is His teaching of the masses coming to a close. Now, the Lord is concentrating much more on His disciples, preparing them for the treacherous day ahead.

As we have seen, Israel viewed Messiah as a warrior-prince who would expel the hated Romans from Israel and bring in a kingdom in which the Jews would be promoted to world dominion. The course of Jesus' ministry is one in which He sought to wean the disciples away from the traditional notion of a warrior Messiah. Instead, Jesus tried to instill in their minds the prospect that the road to His future glory was bound to run by way of the cross, with its experience of rejection, suffering, and humiliation. Jesus taught them that His Kingdom was not of this world, it was not a physical, but a spiritual one:

***Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18:36 NASB)***

***Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21 (NASB)***

Could words be plainer? Jesus taught that His Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. Yet, so many, even today, still look for a future physical kingdom.

Jesus also has been continually warning the Jews of their coming judgment because of their apostasy. He provided a glimpse of this judgment through the withering of the fig tree. In the passage about the fig tree, Jesus' cleansing of the temple is deliberately sandwiched in between two encounters with a fig tree. There is apparently a relationship between the two incidents; there is a common theme, and that theme is judgment. The fig tree upon which Jesus seeks fruit represents an Israel from which her king has come to seek "what belongs to God." After cursing the fig tree, Jesus said to His disciples:

***And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. 23 "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. (Mark 11:22-23 NASB)***

Please notice that Jesus did not say, "Whoever says to 'A' mountain." He said, "Whoever says to 'THIS' mountain." It is my opinion that Jesus was speaking specifically about the temple mount! I think He is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple the Old Covenant system that was associated with a mountain. Josephus, the Jewish historian, compared the temple to a mountain.

As we move closer to chapter 13, notice the building of the judgment theme:

***And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man PLANTED A VINEYARD, AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey....<sup>8</sup> "And they took him, and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.<sup>9</sup> "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. (Mark 12:1, 8-9 NASB)***

Keep verse 9 in mind, because it relates to the prophecy of Jesus in Mark 13. Jesus had clearly prophesied that the Kingdom of God would be taken from the Jews and given to another nation who would bring forth fruit. Listen to what God said to Israel through the prophet Isaiah:

***"And you will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, And the Lord GOD will slay you. But My servants will be called by another name. (Isaiah 65:15 NASB)***

Mark 13 is a prophecy of judgment against Israel. This chapter doesn't deal with global judgment, but strictly with Israel. The theme of judgment had been building to this conclusive prophecy of Israel's end.

As chapter 12 of Mark concludes, the disciples had just been called on to consider the widow who gave her two mites, and now they were confronted by this magnificent sight, this splendid temple, still incomplete and yet majestic in its splendor and hugeness and seemingly everlastingly permanent. And the disciples were awestruck enough to draw Jesus' attention to it. The two mites were forgotten, but Jesus looked at it with calm indifference for He knew its destiny. He was still awestruck at the giving of the poor widow, by which they appear not to have been impressed, and dismissed the temple with a few succinct words. To Him it was her gift that was everlastingly permanent. The temple was under the judgment of God.

Now, with all of this in mind, we move into chapter 13 and the "Olivet Discourse" of Jesus. This is one of those places where chapter and verse divisions can be very detrimental. We need to ignore the break here and go from the end of chapter 12 right into 13:

*And as He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" (Mark 13:1 NASB)*

*And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. (Matthew 24:1 NASB)*

*And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, (Luke 21:5 NASB)*

It may seem strange, but it would appear that, even though the disciples would have come to this temple three times annually: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Ex. 23:14-17), they only realize the greatness of the place as they leave it with Jesus for the final time.

Mark says that they particularly pointed out the stones of the temple. What could possibly happen to such a massive edifice? There was nothing quite like the temple in the ancient world. There was such a reverence for the temple, even in distant parts, that one would scarcely dare to imagine that it could ever be destroyed.

Let me give you a little historical background on the **temple**. There were three historical temples in succession: those of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod. The first temple was built by Solomon, about 1005 years before Christ (1 Kings 6). He spent seven years building it:

*And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished throughout all its parts and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it. (1 Kings 6:38 NASB)*

This temple remained till it was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, 584 years before Christ:

*And all the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. <sup>19</sup> Then they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its fortified buildings with fire, and destroyed all its valuable articles. (2 Chronicles 36:18-19 NASB)*

After the Babylonian captivity, the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel, but with vastly inferior and diminished splendor. This was called the second temple. This temple was often defiled in the wars before the time of Christ. It had become very decayed and impaired. Herod's temple was really a massive rebuilding of the Zerubbabel temple, so both are called the "second temple" by Judaism.

This rebuilt second temple is the one under discussion, and it was called **Herod's temple**. Herod the Great, who ruled over the Jewish people from 37 to 4 B.C., was a great lover of architecture. And it is due to him that the temple, with its environs on the temple mount, was built up to such a massive and artistic building complex (nearly five hundred yards long and four hundred yards wide). Herod the Great drew up a grand architectural plan according to which the whole temple with all its surrounding buildings had to be rebuilt. He even caused a thousand priests to be trained as builders to do the work so that the Jews could not accuse him of having the temple built by "unclean hands." This rebuilding began in 19 B.C., but it was only completed in A.D. 63 under Agrippa II. This reminds us of what the Jews said to Jesus in reply to His figurative words about the breaking down and erection of the temple. They understood Him to speak of the temple building, and then said:

***The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" (John 2:20 NASB)***

When they uttered these words (A.D. 28), the temple was therefore already forty-six years in rebuilding. It would take another thirty years and longer before it was to be completed. And it had been finished for hardly seven years when, in A.D. 70, it was completely destroyed in fire and blood notwithstanding the fanaticism with which the Jews tried to defend it.

Josephus, the Jewish historian from the first century, describes the building like this: "The outward face of the temple in its front lacked nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. This temple appeared to strangers when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white."

This temple surpassed the first two in architectural splendor. The temple was a source of wonder. The stones themselves of these buildings were fabulous in size. Those in the foundation were as much as 60 feet long, and others above as much as 67 feet or more long, 7 1/2 feet high, and 9 feet wide. To the Jewish people, there was nothing like this building in the whole world.

The temple was erected on Mount Moriah. The space of the summit of the mount was not, however, large enough for the buildings necessary to be erected. It was, therefore, enlarged by building high walls from the valley below and filling up the space within. One of these walls was 600 feet in height. The ascent to the temple was by high flights of steps.

Rabbinic literature is not particularly favorable to Herod. Nevertheless, concerning Herod's temple, it states, "He who never saw Herod's edifice has never in his life seen a beautiful building."

As a side note, the temple sight is now occupied by the Mosque of Omar. The Dome of the Rock was the center of the Muslim worship (the third holiest place in Islam, after Mecca and Medina).

For the Jews, the temple's greatness wasn't its size and dazzling appearance, rather this was the place where Yahweh the Lord lived! It was His home; the focus of His presence. It was a first century belief that the temple was indestructible, because Yahweh would see to it that it was protected even in war. Israel had traditionally viewed the temple as invincible (Jer 7:4). It was also a symbol to them that they were a special chosen people because, of all the nations in the world, this is where God the Creator had decided to have his habitation on earth; not in Rome, not in Egypt, not in Babylon, but in Jerusalem. The temple was the dwelling place of the most high God whom they served.

It was of this magnificent temple that Jesus said:

***And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another which will not be torn down." (Mark 13:2 NASB)***

***And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down." (Matthew 24:2 NASB)***

***"As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." (Luke 21:6 NASB)***

Notice that all three synoptics say the same thing, *"Not one stone shall be left."* The words "torn down" translate the Greek verb *kataluo*. It can mean literally: "to detach in a demolition process, thrown down, detach" as in this passage. But it is more commonly used in the New Testament to mean more generally: "destroy, demolish, dismantle" and "put an end to." **"Not one stone shall be left upon another"** is a proverbial and hyperbolic way of speaking to denote complete destruction.

Can you imagine the confusion, the shock, here? The disciples had trouble thinking of this magnificent structure being torn down; this impressive building that had been around for years and years and years. Add to this the walls of Jerusalem and its location at the pinnacle of a mountain, and the whole scene appeared indestructible. Aside from this, the temple was the place where God had chosen to reveal Himself, and where the high priest interceded for the people in the Holy of Holies.

Jesus predicts that this massive temple would be utterly destroyed in an act of God's judgment. At the time this was spoken, no event was more improbable than this. Yet, all this happened in A.D. 70 exactly as Jesus said it would. After the city was taken, Josephus says that Titus "gave orders that the soldiers should dig up even the foundations of the temple, and also the city itself." Thus fulfilling the prophecy of:

***Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest. (Micah 3:12 NASB)***

Josephus observed that the leveling was so severe that Jerusalem's city wall "was so completely leveled with the ground that there was no longer anything to lead those who visited the spot to believe that it had ever been inhabited."

Luke further expounded upon this idea in:

***And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, <sup>44</sup> and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44 NASB)***

Here we clearly see the reason for this utter destruction of Jerusalem: *"Because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."* The nation had rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and because of this, they were judged, their temple and city destroyed as had been prophesied.

F.F. Bruce described the destruction of the city in this way:

Accordingly, in April of A.D. 70 Titus invested Jerusalem... As the siege wore on, the horrors of famine, and even cannibalism, were added to the hazards of war. By September 26 the whole city was in Titus' hands. It was razed to the ground, only three towers of Herod's palace on the western wall being left standing, with part of the western wall itself.

Jesus pronounced doom on the temple because the true center of the relation between God and man has shifted to Himself. In chapter 12, Jesus has already insisted that what Israel does with Him, not the temple, determines the fate of the Israelites:

***"Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; (Mark 12:10 NASB)***

Jesus taught this same idea in John 4:

*"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> "You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. <sup>24</sup> "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:20-24 NASB)*

Jesus said there is a time coming when no one will worship God at Jerusalem. Then he said, *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."* Soon, no one will worship in Jerusalem, but now God can be worshiped in truth (i.e. reality)! The shadow worship of the temple is being replaced with the reality:

*For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. (Hebrews 10:1 NASB)*

The Law system was a shadow of the good things to come. The good things were the spiritual things of the Gospel. It had been prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and that God would raise a spiritual temple: the church, Christ's body:

*"Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, And the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" <sup>8</sup> "Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," Declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, But not a kernel will fall to the ground. <sup>10</sup> "All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, Those who say, 'The calamity will not overtake or confront us.' <sup>11</sup> "In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old; <sup>12</sup> That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this. (Amos 9:7-12 NASB)*

James said that the Church, the body of Christ, was this tabernacle of David, and it was being raised up at that time:

*And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. <sup>15</sup> "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, <sup>16</sup> 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, <sup>17</sup> IN ORDER THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' (Acts 15:13-17 NASB)*

The fleshly, earthly tabernacle was a shadow, and God destroyed it in A.D. 70. We now live in a spiritual kingdom, with a spiritual tabernacle; we worship God in spirit and in reality.

So Mark tells us that on that day, after Jesus had been teaching in the temple, He and the Twelve walked down into the Kidron Valley and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. They sat there and looked across at this incredible sight, one of the wonders of the world. Then one of them said, *"Look,*

*Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"* They were sons of fisherman from Galilee. The largest building they'd ever seen in their districts would have been the local synagogue, but now they looked in awe at this, one of the wonders of the world. *"Do you see all these great buildings?"* replied Jesus. ***"Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."***

You may ask, "Who can predict the future?" I tell you, without any doubt, that Jesus can! Christ speaks very specifically to these men about striking events that are going to happen to this extraordinary building within their lifetimes. The eyes of some of them are actually going to see, and their ears are going to hear unspeakable deeds, and there will be essential precautions for them and their families and friends to take in order to be delivered.

Whenever Jesus spoke about the future, He did so with complete accuracy. He spoke about life after death and the judgment of God on those who would not believe in Him. Is what He said truth? Because if it is, we must believe Him or perish. But anyone can offer an opinion as to what lies beyond the grave. The Humanist Manifesto pronounces, "There is no credible evidence that life survives the *death of our body.*" *In 1938 Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher, made this prediction, "No fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave."* He went on to express his expectation of what happened after death: *"When I die I shall rot."* Well, who are we to believe? This is a question of faith, isn't it? Jesus Christ or Bertrand Russell? Here are two diametrically opposed views.

I'm here to tell you that you should believe Jesus, all He said about the future took place. The judgment that came upon the temple confirmed the truth of His prophesy. You see that pattern right through Jesus' ministry; He said, ***"I am the bread of life,"*** and then He miraculously makes food and feeds five thousand men out of five loaves of bread and a couple of fishes. The sign confirmed the word. If you want to eat the bread of eternal life and satisfy your spiritual hunger, you must trust Jesus. Again He said, ***"I am the resurrection and the life,"*** then He raises Jairus' daughter from the dead. The sign confirms the word. He said, ***"I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly,"*** and He cleanses the leper, and He heals a woman with an issue of blood. Such signs confirm the word. He claims, ***"I am the light of the world,"*** and then He gives sight to blind men. The sign confirms the word. John tells us that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and Jesus delivers the demoniac from a legion of demons. The sign confirms the word. He looks at the temple with His disciples; ***"Do you see these great buildings?"*** replied Jesus. ***"Not one stone shall be left upon another which will not be torn down."*** And this is exactly what happened in the exact time frame that He said it would. That sign confirms the truth of Jesus' words. I am asking you to think of what Christ claimed and taught and how His words were confirmed by His mighty works. The temple was comprehensively demolished. There wasn't just an accidental fire caused by an oil lamp falling onto the curtain and starting a blaze. There was a pervasive destruction of the whole edifice so that, as Jesus says here, not one stone was left on another. What happened was this: About thirty years after these words were spoken, the Jews rose up and attempted to throw the Romans out of the land. The Romans took their time in responding, and then in A.D. 66 the Roman General Titus, who was to become emperor of Rome, led an army into Judah and besieged Jerusalem.

Titus had to starve the city into subjection. The Jews inside the walls were divided into different parties, some wanting surrender, others demanding wholesale suicide. Jerusalem was torn without and within. More Jews were killed by fellow Jews than by the Roman army.

On August in the year A.D.70, Jerusalem fell and the temple was entered. Titus led in his generals; he pulled aside the curtain before the Holy of Holies and walked in and looked around. There was nothing there. The Ark of the Covenant had disappeared at the time of the exile to Babylon 500 years earlier. It was simply an empty room much to Titus' disappointment. What an anticlimax to him.

Then the army brought its standards into the great temple area and filled that vast plaza of stone pavement with ranks of soldiers. They sacrificed to their standards praising their gods for giving them the victory and hailing Titus as the Emperor. Then the soldiers looted the temple, but Titus was impressed with the building, and he ordered that it shouldn't be destroyed. But God had said not a stone would be left on another, and so what happened was this: As the soldiers attempted to melt the gold on its walls, the temple caught fire. There was a huge conflagration and the temple was gutted. Titus then ordered that the whole city, temple and all, be razed to the ground. The soldiers, hunting for hidden gold, levered stones apart one by one and pushed them down to the ground. Titus ended the horrors of those months by ordering the crucifixion of thousands of Jews. Josephus sums up the consequences for Jerusalem in one sentence: "There was left nothing to make those who had come thither believe it had ever been inhabited." The Lord Jesus speaks these somber words:

***"For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall. (Mark 13:19 NASB)***

The point I am making is this: What Christ said would happen to Jerusalem and its temple did take place. John, who never forgot that day and the words of Jesus, was still alive in A.D. 70. He may well have stood again as an old man at the very same spot on the Mount of Olives where Jesus had sat and spoken with them forty years earlier, opposite where the temple once stood.

The Lord Jesus Christ made many predictions about the future; about a coin being found in the mouth of a fish that Peter would catch in the lake, about the death of a brother of two sisters, about Judas betraying Him, about a Roman soldier going home to find his servant well again, about Peter denying Him three times before the dawn broke, about all the disciples forsaking Him, about His own death and resurrection, about the Spirit of God being poured out and heavenly power coming upon these men, about the Gospel going into all the world, and also about the destruction of the temple. All He predicted came to pass. Never did He prophesy something and get it wrong. Not once. What does this tell us about Jesus?

It tells us that He is the LORD! He is in charge of creation. Our Lord reigns! He upholds and directs and disposes all things, both animate and inanimate. He works all things after the counsel of His own will. He is the almighty and everywhere-present God.

So there was this vast Jerusalem temple, and to destroy it required a rebellion in Jerusalem, a decision to invade the land taken in Rome, the arrival of an army, the siege of the city, the accidental conflagration of the temple, and the decision of Titus to raze the whole city to the ground. None of this happened by fate, but it all fulfilled the word of Jesus Christ.

With that background in mind, we are prepared to look at the disciples' questions in verses 3 and 4, next week.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on May 6, 2007. [Media #365b](#).

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