

• Herod's temple

**1. Needless admiration of holy buildings**

• Buildings useful but not indispensable

• Destruction predicted

**2. The disciples ask about timing and about a sign**

**3. Traumatic events that do not prove that the end is near**

• False Messiahs

• Political upheaval

• Earthquakes and famines

Israel is fruitless towards God but the disciples are not so much impressed by the barrenness of the spiritual life of the nation; rather they are admiring the gigantic white stones with which Herod had enlarged the temple<sup>□1</sup>.

**1. The disciples have a needless admiration of holy buildings<sup>□1</sup>.** The temple rebuilt in Ezra's time was a fairly small building. It was a centre for prayer and it symbolised the way in which God has to be approached by blood-atonement.

The temple was honoured by God. Jesus called it His Father's house<sup>□1</sup> and a house of prayer for all nations<sup>□2</sup>. And yet it was nothing in itself. What is a building if the people who use it do not know God? Herod spent years enlarging the temple but his preoccupation with buildings was not matched by any love of God. We tend to be more impressed with buildings than we ought to be. They are useful but they are not indispensable.

Jesus is not as impressed by the holy building as the disciples are. He takes the opportunity to announce to them that not one stone of the temple will be left upon another. He is predicting the destruction of Jerusalem which would take place in AD 70.

**2. The disciples ask a question about timing and about a sign<sup>□1</sup>.** They are startled by Jesus' prediction and soon they ask Jesus a question: 'When will these things be, and what will be the sign ...?' It is a question about the timing and about there being one special sign that will let the disciples know that the predicted fall of Jerusalem is about to take place.

People have a great desire to know the future. An interest in what is about to happen and how to predict what will happen seems to have a hold on every section of the human race. People will turn to evil spirits or to strange cults in the hopes of knowing the future. The teaching of Jesus gives some predictions but often we are too eager to know more than God wants to tell us. This often leads to excessive interest in questions about the timing of future events and the signs of what is to come. It was that way with the disciples.

**3. Jesus speaks of traumatic events that do not prove that the end is near<sup>□1</sup>.** It is surprising how often people quote these verses as if they are about the end of the world and as if they give signs of the nearness of the second coming. Actually in Mark 13, so far, the second coming of Jesus has not been mentioned, only the fall of Jerusalem. And what is coming up in verses 5-8 are not signs of the end of the world, but events that are not signs of the end.

The disciples must be careful not to be deceived by people who claim to know all about the 'end times'<sup>□1</sup> – and so must we.

**False claims to be the Messiah are not a sign of the end<sup>□1</sup>.** Jesus says many people will arise claiming to be the Messiah; Acts 8:9 gives us an example. But this was not to be taken as a sign of the end and the end did not come as soon as false Messiahs came.

**Political upheavals are not a sign of the end<sup>□1</sup>.** Jesus warns of wars and says 'but the end is not yet'. He is not giving a list of what shows the end of the world is near. Far from it. Throughout the history of the world there have been wars and rumours of wars. They do not prove the end of the world is near. There will be aggression among the nations for ethnic-tribal reasons ('nation against nation') and for political reasons ('kingdom against kingdoms') but the apostles must not let themselves think that their work is done and the end is near when they see these things.

**Earthquakes and famines are not a sign of the end<sup>□1</sup>.** There were several earthquakes and times of famine during the period between Jesus and the events of AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. The famine of Acts 11:28 is well-known. Yet neither the end of the world nor the fall of Jerusalem took

□1	13:1-2
□1	13:1, 2
□1	Luke 2:49
□2	Mark 11:17
□1	13:3-4
□1	13:5-8
□1	13:5
□1	13:6
□1	13:7-8a
□1	13:8b

- Signs of the beginning!

#### 4. Challenges for the apostles

- A promise for those who stand firm

#### 5. The sign of Jerusalem's soon-coming destruction

- Escape action

- Preservation of the people of Israel

- False prophets – a warning

place at such times.

'These are the beginning of birth-pangs'. This sentence must be specially noted. These 'signs' are not signs of the end but signs of the beginning! They are the beginning of a major new phase in the history of the world. In the events of AD 33–70 one period of history is coming to an end and a new period of history is beginning. The things that will happen in Israel during these years will bring Jerusalem to its downfall but it will be the beginning of a new period of evangelism, expansion and outreach for the disciples. People like to have 'signs of the end'. More important are signs of the beginning!

4. Jesus warns that the time leading to the fall of Jerusalem will involve challenges for the apostles <sup>☞1</sup>. There will be times when they are persecuted violently and will have the privilege of speaking of Jesus to rulers <sup>☞2</sup>. The time before the fall of Jerusalem must be a time for zeal in the work of reaching all nations <sup>☞3</sup>. If there is any 'sign' of reaching the end of the world it is the evangelisation of the nations.

They will be given what to say when they are brought into special crises <sup>☞1</sup> but they must expect betrayal even from their closest and dearest relatives <sup>☞2</sup>. They will face great animosity <sup>☞3</sup> but those who stand firm will be kept safe and brought to their final reward <sup>☞4</sup>. In fact no Christian is known to have perished in the fall of Jerusalem. The Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella in Perea (see Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:5:3).

5. The disgusting desecration of the temple will be sign of Jerusalem's soon-coming destruction. The 'abomination of desolation' is a phrase taken from Daniel 9:27; 11:31 and 12:11. It was a prediction of a time when pagans would enter a very sacred spot in Jerusalem. Jesus adds 'Let the reader understand'; He is urging that the disciples should read the Old Testament and understand it. (I doubt whether these are only the words of **Mark** the writer. They come in Matthew 24 also and were probably Jesus' words, recorded by both Matthew and Mark.)

When they see a desecration that fulfils His words they must know that Jerusalem is about to fall, and they must take action to escape <sup>☞1</sup>. (Actually the Romans 'brought their ensigns to the temple ... and there they offered sacrifice to them', as the historian Josephus put it, in *Wars of the Jews*, 6:6). That time, says Jesus, will be one of great suffering for the people of Jerusalem <sup>☞2</sup>. The apostles may pray that the time of flight is not in winter <sup>☞3</sup>. The sufferings will be great <sup>☞4</sup>, yet they will be shortened for the sake of God's elect. The Jewish people will not be entirely exterminated since they have a place in the salvation of the world. For the sake of God's elect throughout future history, the people of Israel will be preserved <sup>☞5</sup>. Jesus says little more about this aspect of the matter (but see Luke 21:23, 24 for a few extra phrases). It was left for Paul to develop the theme in Romans 11:11–15, 25–32.

The time immediately before the fall of Jerusalem will produce many false claims. Days of crisis always throw up false prophets, but they have been forewarned <sup>☞1</sup>.

☞1 13:9–13  
☞2 13:9  
☞3 13:10

☞1 13:11  
☞2 13:12  
☞3 13:13a  
☞4 13:13b

☞1 13:14–16

☞2 13:17  
☞3 13:18  
☞4 13:19

☞5 13:20

☞1 13:21–23



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