

Signs of the Times

Mark 13

Occasionally a dying parent or a dear friend has the privilege of saying goodbye and sharing their final words with those they love. Such words are so pregnant with meaning that one hangs on the meaning of every phrase. Such is the farewell discourse of Jesus in the second Gospel. It is Jesus' final words of warning and encouragement to his disciples about two coming events: one which would happen in the lifetime of the first disciples and another which may take place in ours. While the chapter is considered one of the most difficult in the Gospel of Mark, it contains an encouraging promise. Since God brought about the events that Jesus prophesied would take place in the lifetime of the first disciples, he will certainly accomplish the final event. In this study we will explore the connection between the two and learn how to be watchful.

1. Share any experience you have had of a dying person's farewell thoughts. If this has not been your experience, describe what subjects would be uppermost in your own mind if you were given one last chance to speak with those you love.

2. Read Mark 13. Overlooking the temple from the Mount of Olives, Jesus and the disciples would have an excellent view of Herod's temple, described as a mountain of white marble covered with pure gold. What terrible events does Jesus predict (Mark 13:1-13)?

What disappointments does Jesus prepare the disciples to face?

3. In your own words, what answer does Jesus give to the disciples' questions in Mark 13:4: "When will these things happen?" and "what will be the sign that they are about to be fulfilled?"

4. Jesus describes the imperative of being ready for an escape to a safe haven. What might divert disciples from watching carefully for the signs of these times and from readiness for their escape (Mark 13:5-23)?

In what similar ways could natural disasters and false spiritualities lead believers today to a false sense that the end has come?

5. Jesus says (of the destruction of the temple) that these things will happen "in this generation" (Mark 13:30). In what ways will the Second Coming of Jesus (the Son of Man) more than compensate for the loss of the temple?

6. How does Jesus' language express the absolute dominion with which he will reign as King when he comes (Mark 13:24)?

7. Why is it significant that the elect are gathered "from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens" (Mark 13:27)?

What is the relationship of this prophecy of a great gathering to the first prophecy of the destruction of the *physical* temple?

8. With which character can you identify in Mark 13:32-37?

9. The Second Coming of Jesus will mean for each individual what his or her death will mean: the end of one's personal world. What will it mean for you to live each day with your bags packed up and ready to go?

10. How will you "be on your guard" for diversions, and "keep watch" for the coming of the Son of Man both in times of social disruption and in times of relative security?