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The Jesus Identity

Studies in Mark's Gospel

Introduction: Mark 13:1-37

Throughout Mark 11 and 12, Jesus' condemnation of the Jerusalem temple and the religious system it embodied has become increasingly acute. He has condemned the temple as 'a den of thieves' and shown its leaders to be corrupt and self-seeking as they seek to have Jesus killed. Mark 13 begins with a question about the fate of the temple buildings and so it seems sensible to assume that the material in this chapter is primarily about the temple and its destruction.

Read Mark 13:1-4.

1. What significance might the disciples have attached to the temple?
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2. What are the two questions Jesus is asked by his disciples?
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Read Mark 13:5-23

3. Jesus begins by answering the second of the disciples' questions. What are the signs that will precede the destruction of the temple?
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4. [Optional] One of the 'signs' that particularly attracts our attention is the 'abomination that causes desolation'. As modern readers we don't understand much about this reference to Daniel 9:27; 11:31 and 12:11. While we cannot be certain as to the exact event to which Jesus is referring; what will be the effect of this event? What should the Jerusalem Christians do when they see this event?
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5. Jesus frames this section with the warning, 'Watch out!' (v5, 19, 23). His disciples are not to be watching out for 'signs' but instead they are to be watching out for themselves. How might we, in these days, 'watch out' for ourselves and for those we love?
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Read Mark 13:24-27 (notes)

Having spoken about the signs that will precede the destruction of the temple, Jesus now speaks about what will happen next. Logically, that would mean that Jesus is referring to the destruction of the temple itself. The 'apocalyptic' language used here heightens the significance of this event to the point where some assume that Jesus has suddenly shifted his focus to talk about his return for judgment at the end of the Ages. This, however, does not necessarily follow. Instead Jesus describes three things that occur along with the destruction of the temple.

The cosmic signs described in verse 24-25 are 'repeats' of the events described in Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4. In the context of Isaiah, these descriptions refer to God's judgment on Babylon and Edom. In the same way, says Jesus, the destruction of the temple will be Divine Judgment on a massive scale... but not necessarily the end of History as we know it.

The second thing that happens with the destruction of the temple is described in verse 26. It is the vindication of Jesus as the 'Son of Man' (see Daniel 7:13-14). When the temple is destroyed, Jesus will have been shown to have been right and to be exactly who he said he was. In his resurrection and ascension, he will be presented to God the Father to receive authority and power and then he will bring the judgments he is now announcing.

In Mark 13:27, the third thing that happens with the destruction of the temple is that the gospel spreads. God's messengers (the word 'angels' is literally 'messengers') are sent out everywhere to gather the elect. These messengers are the Christians who flee to the four corners of world before Jerusalem falls, proclaiming the gospel and gathering God's elect as they go.

So verses 25-27 describe the three things that happen with the destruction of the temple. When it happens, says Jesus, it will mean:

- judgment from God;
- the vindication of Jesus as the heavenly Son of Man; and,
- the spread of the gospel through God's scattered messengers.

Read Mark 13:28-32

Having answered the disciples' second question regarding signs, Jesus now turns his attention to their first question: 'when?'

6. When does Jesus say the destruction of the temple will happen?

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[It actually happened in 70AD, less than 30 years after Jesus speaks these words.]

Read Mark 13:33-37

7. What are the disciples to do in response to Jesus' words here?

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8. What sorts of activities might 'watching' involve for us, as we await a much greater judgment that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple?

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9. As a Christian, what difficulties will you face while waiting for the future that Jesus promises? What makes it worth enduring such difficulties?

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