

FOLLOW ME

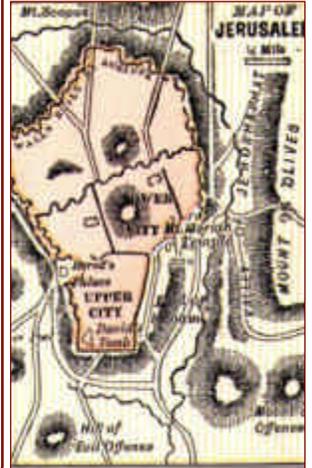
LESSON SIXTEEN: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 13



FAST FACTS

- Ss. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus to explain His prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed.
- Jesus prophesied that wars and other disasters would precede the Temple's destruction.
- He warned that false christs and prophets would arise and mislead many people.
- He further warned that His Disciples would be persecuted and scattered, but that this would result in the spread of the Gospel.
- Jesus prophesied that His Second Coming would be visible to all.
- He further taught that no one, not even He, knows the time of the end of the ages; only God the Father knows this.
- Jesus concluded by exhorting His followers to watch and pray for His return.

MAP



MARK 13:1-23

In the only extended passage in St. Mark's entire Gospel account, Jesus prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and discusses the coming of the Son of Man. He begins by prophesying the conditions preceding and during the fall of Jerusalem, and warns His followers of the persecution they will suffer.

Jesus stated that, before Jerusalem would be destroyed, there would be wars and disasters so severe that, if God did not intervene, everyone and everything would be destroyed (vv.7-8, 19-20). Jesus was not talking

about wars and disasters around the world, or about events in the distant future:

He was specifically prophesying events in first-century Judea and the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in 70 AD.

Jesus warns His followers to not be deceived by "false christs and false prophets" who promise to save people



TIME TRAVEL

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus describes the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD:

While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction.

IT'S IN THE BIBLE...

Many individuals who claim to be Christians also claim to be prophets; some even succeed in gaining large numbers of followers and starting their own religious movements. How can we identify a false prophet? Deuteronomy 18:21-22 gives a very simple test:

And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' -- when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

from the tribulation they are undergoing, even if these individuals have the ability to work miracles as supposed evidence of their ability and power (vv. 21-23; cf. v. 6). It would have been easy for Christians to despair and follow anyone who seemed like he might save them from destruction; Jesus warned, however, that these were deceivers.

Finally, Jesus warned His Disciples that they would be persecuted for His sake. Not only would they be persecuted in Judea, but they would be brought before distant rulers as well. St. Luke's *Acts of the Apostles* tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled: opposition to the Church developed immediately after Pentecost (4:1-37); Saul of Tarsus (who became St. Paul) assisted in persecuting Christians, scattering them throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1-3); St. James was killed and St. Peter imprisoned by Herod (12:1-24); and St. Paul was sent in chains to Caesarea and Rome (23:23-26:32).

St. John Chrysostom teaches that Jesus was really prophesying a war involving two enemies:

For the war, saith He, shall be twofold that of the deceivers, and that of the enemies, but the former far more grievous, as coming upon them in the confusion and turmoils, and when men were terrified and troubled. For indeed great was the storm then, when the Roman power was beginning to flourish, and cities were taken, and camps and weapons were set in motion, and many were readily believed.

MARK 13:24-37

Jesus moved on from prophesying the end of Jerusalem to prophesying regarding His Second Coming. Notably, in contrast the highly detailed and very complicated predictions of some Christians regarding the end of the ages, Jesus said very little about His Second Coming. He focused on His return, explaining that the sun, moon, and stars would seem to fail, and all people would see him. St. John Chrysostom explains the meaning of this description:

How doth He come? The very creation being then transfigured, for 'the sun shall be darkened,' not destroyed, but overcome by the light of His presence; and the stars shall fall, for what shall be the need of them thenceforth, there being no

night? and 'the powers of Heaven shall be shaken,' and in all likelihood, seeing so great a change come to pass...He added, 'They shall see the Son of Man coming,' no longer on the cross, but 'in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory.'

Jesus concludes that Christians should remain alert and continually watch for His coming. This does not mean that we should stare at the sky to seem Him descend to earth: it instead means that we should live each day as if Christ might return at that moment. We should live so that, if we were to turn around and suddenly see Him, we would not be embarrassed by what we were doing. St. Athanasius the Great teaches:

Whereas this time is uncertain and always in prospect, we may advance day by day as if summoned, reaching forward to the things before us and forgetting the things behind. For who, if they knew the day of the end, would not disregard the interval? But if ignorant, would they not be more ready day by day? It was on this account that the Savior said: 'Watch; for you do not know when the time will come.'

LOOK AT YOURSELF

Should you follow the teachings of some Christians who create elaborate schemes to better predict when Christ will return? Jesus tells us that no one — not even He — knows when the end of the ages will be. The fourth-century martyr, St. Victorinus of Pettau, warns us:

We must not inordinately fix upon the chronology of what is said in Scripture, because frequently the Holy Spirit, having spoken at the end of the last times, then returns again to address a previous time, and fills up what had before been left unsaid. Nor must we look for a specific chronology in apocalyptic visions, but rather follow the meaning of those things which are prophesied.

Jesus tells us the meaning of His prophecy: "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is" (v. 33).



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- Jesus warns against following false christs and false prophets. How can I avoid being deceived by such individuals and groups?
- The Church venerates the holy martyrs, like St. James, who died for Christ. Do I honor their sacrifices? Would I be willing to make a similar sacrifice?
- What can I do to "watch and pray" in preparation for Christ's return?

