

Wary of Those Who Would Lead Us Astray

November 14, 2021 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Mark 13:1-8

13:1 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

2 “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

A friend of mine had taken a group of cub scouts through the Cathedral of Notre Dame in the early part of April 2019. They marveled at the beauty of a building that was magnificent in structure and had stood the test of time where people had worshipped for centuries. About a week later this great cathedral burned. The destruction was hard to believe, especially with a structure that had been around for that long and which was anticipated to be around for many years yet to come. As wonderful as the cathedral was, and which is now in the process of being restored, that tragedy was a grim reminder of just how fragile the things of this earth are, even when we marvel in what humans can achieve to the glory of God.

As much as we are amazed in a structure like the Cathedral in Notre Dame, the Temple in Jerusalem was many times more grandiose.

This was Jesus’ last visit to the temple area. He would do no more preaching or public teaching. One of the disciples remarked on the incredible beauty of the temple. Although no one knows exactly what this temple looked like, it must have been magnificent, for in its time it was considered one of the architectural wonders of the world. This was not Solomon’s temple—it had been destroyed by the Babylonians in the seventh century B.C. (2 Kings 25:8–10). This temple had been built by Ezra after the return from exile in the sixth century B.C. (Ezra 6:14–15), desecrated by the Seleucids in the second century B.C., reconsecrated by the Maccabees soon afterward, and enormously expanded by Herod the Great.

About fifteen years before Jesus was born (around 20 B.C.), Herod the Great began a massive reconstruction project to help the Jews remodel and beautify their temple. Herod had no interest in the Jews' God, but he wanted to stay on friendly terms with his subjects, as well as build what he thought would be a lasting monument to his dynasty. Though the Jews disliked Herod, they were very proud of the temple. At this time, the construction project was still going on, for Herod's reconstruction of the temple would not be finished until about A.D. 64 (just a few years before it was destroyed by Rome).

The temple was impressive, covering about one-sixth of the land area of the ancient city of Jerusalem. It was not one building, but a majestic mixture of porches, colonnades, separate small edifices, and courts surrounding the temple proper ...The disciples gazed in wonder at marble pillars forty feet high, carved from a single solid stone. The temple's foundation was so solid that it is believed that some of the original footings remain to this day. The Jews were convinced of the permanence of this magnificent structure, not only because of the stability of construction, but also because it represented God's presence among them. The *massive stones* the disciple mentioned were huge white stones, some of them measuring twenty-five by eight by twelve feet and weighing more than one hundred tons.¹

One can only imagine how magnificent the Temple of Jerusalem was and, in turn, how shocked the disciples would have been to hear from Jesus: ***“Do you see all these great buildings? ...Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*** And, Jesus was right. By the time of 70 AD, when the Roman Empire squashed the Jewish rebellion and sacked the Temple.

At the time the disciples did not know, of course, when these things were to happen. The discourse Jesus gives the disciples in Mark chapter 13, where Jesus answered this question by not only speaking of the disaster that was about to happen in their time, but used it as a launching point to warn about the things that were yet to come. You see, the disciples had inadvertently asked Jesus a two-part question. The question, *“when will these things happen?”* referred to the impending destruction of Jerusalem. But their question, *“And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”* was a question about the end of the age. The disciples figured the time was soon upon them that Jesus would establish his kingdom, and they wondered what signs to look for when the time got close.

People in Jesus' day were always looking for signs of the end of the age, just as we have people today who claim they know what the signs of the end of the age are. Jesus warned the disciples, and by extension warns every generation until he returns again: ***“Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in [Jesus'] name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.***

¹ Barton, B. B. (1994). [Mark](#) (pp. 369–370). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

In every generation since Christ's resurrection, individuals have claimed to be the Christ or to know exactly when Jesus would return (remember Sun Myung Moon and David Koresh?). Obviously, no one else has been Christ, and no one has been right about the timing of the Second Coming. According to Scripture, the one clear sign of Christ's return will be his unmistakable appearance in the clouds, which will be seen by all people (13:26; Revelation 1:7). In other words, believers never have to wonder whether a certain person is the Messiah. When Jesus returns, believers will know beyond a doubt because he will be evident to all.²

With his answers, Jesus prepared his disciples for the difficult years ahead. He warned them about false messiahs, natural disasters, and persecutions. But he also assured them that he would be with them to protect them and make his kingdom known through them. Jesus promised that, in the end, he would return in power and glory to save them. Jesus' warnings and promises to his disciples also apply to us as we look forward to his return:

- We must be ready.
- We must continue to proclaim the gospel.
- We must endure great trials.
- We must wait patiently.³

So often when people think about the end of the age, they think about this time ending with terrible destruction, just like the Temple of Jerusalem experienced destruction. I know of some people who live in fear of the end of the age, believing that they will be caught up in the destruction of all things and that they themselves will be destroyed. But Jesus did not use the language of destruction when he described the coming of the age of his Second Coming. He used birthing language. After describing the rising of nation against nation, earthquakes, and famines, he said: "***These are the beginning of birth pains.***" Did you hear that? The beginning of the birth pains. All this pain will lead to a new birth.

Now, I obviously cannot speak to bearing the pain of giving birth. But most loving mothers will tell you that even though the pain of birth was difficult, it is worth it all to be able to hold onto their newborn for the first time. This is what the end of time will be like for those who believe in Jesus. Yes, there will be pain and difficulty before we experience either the Second Coming of Christ or before we leave this earth to spend time with God in eternity. But the pain and suffering of this world will be as nothing compared to the new life we will have in Christ. And when it comes to thinking about the end of this age, that is what is most important to keep at the forefront of our thoughts.

² Barton, B. B. (1994). [Mark](#) (pp. 373–374). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

³ Barton, B. B. (1994). [Mark](#) (p. 369). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.