

Mark 13:1-4. "As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!' 'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things happen?'" Almighty God alone knows the future, and in the Bible he has revealed to all mankind sufficient details about the future that no one has any excuse for ignorance, despair or idleness. God hasn't put Christians under the tyranny of the clairvoyant. The Lord has described the future of the whole church in several lengthy sections of Scripture like this thirteenth chapter of Mark's gospel and a parallel passage in Matthew chapter 24. Also the books of Daniel and Revelation touch on the future. Christ paints what is to come in very broad strokes; for example, he has made it clear to the whole church that our future was never going to be spent in some kind of millennial Utopia, but we have to live our lives in a groaning creation, facing the opposition of the world with the help of the Holy Spirit, while we bring the gospel to all nations, and live godly lives in their midst as the world's salt and light. That is your future as a Christian as it was the future of the apostle Pete and all to follow

Christ often spoke of the future, especially of life after death and eternity. Do you know what he has said? Do you know how it will be with you after you die? Where will you spend eternity? The Lord Christ who displayed such love and wisdom, and who raised the dead, spoke of one of two places where you must be, heaven or hell. The man who trusts in and follows Christ, and shows it's real by serving Christ and his fellow men, has a living hope that he is going to be with his Savior. Christ often spoke of the future, as he does in this chapter, and this gives his disciples their hope.

God alone knows the details of the 365 days of the next year, but he has not disclosed those details to anyone. There was no man or woman in the entire world who predicted the events of 9/11, nor the day after Christmas Day 2004 when an earthquake in the Indian Ocean caused that fearful tidal wave and the deaths of so many people. Nobody at all knew those events were going to happen. It is very likely that pathetic evangelical folklore is already active in creating legends to the affect that in some anonymous

prayer meeting somewhere 5000 miles from everywhere else an equally anonymous woman had a prophecy in which she described tumbling waves and people drowning. I ask you, what does all that sort of thing have to do with godliness? Our future is a secret place known to God alone, and under the control of God. We don't know whether we are all going to grow old. We don't know when we will die, but we do know that each one of us is going to die. That is the one great certainty about our futures, and so we should live each day ready and prepared for the heavenly call by lives of loving service.

God generally acts in accordance with well-established and recognized procedures. That is what makes scientific research and conclusions possible. What we call the laws of nature are just God's ordinary way of working, and without them stable human life in this world would be impossible. $2+2=4$ tomorrow. Pi will be constant tomorrow; the law of gravity will be in operation tomorrow and light will travel at the same speed because that is how God sustains his world. One more thing certain about tomorrow is that King Jesus will be its Lord.

Fifty years earlier Herod the Great had decided to build a temple in Jerusalem. It was to become one of the most impressive buildings in all of ancient architecture. Jerusalem is set on a hill with narrow valleys cutting into its sides. So the architects first required a great platform to be built at various levels that would be the foundation on which the temple and its environs would stand. This platform was clad with marble and it was vast, the size of six or seven football pitches. Ravines were filled in, and great cuttings were made into the sides of the hills. Some of the stones used in the building itself were the size of small buses, over 40 feet in length. They are still there today and you can marvel at how such blocks of stone were cut and maneuvered to the site and set in place.

Much of this platform was roofed over in various courts, with walls and gateways separating them. The roof was a protection from the sun and also from the fierce downpours of rain that can characterize storms in the eastern Mediterranean. The

temple itself took up a quarter of the space and a great altar stood outside it.

Josephus, the Jewish historian from the first century, describes the building like this:

"The outward face of the temple in its front lacked nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. This temple appeared to strangers when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white."

For the Jews the temple's greatness wasn't its size and dazzling appearance, rather this was the place where Jehovah God the Lord lived! It was his home; the focus of his presence. It was a symbol to them that they were a special chosen people because of all the nations in the world this is where God the Creator had decided to have his habitation on earth, not in Rome, not in Egypt, not in Babylon, but in Jerusalem. The temple was the dwelling place of the most high God whom they served.

So Mark tells us that on that day, after Jesus had been teaching in the temple, he and the Twelve walked down into the Kidron valley and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. They sat there and looked across at this incredible sight, one of the wonders of the world. They remained silent for a while and then one of them said what all of them were thinking, "'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!'" (v.1). They were sons of fisherman from Galilee, the largest building they may have ever seen in might have been the local synagogue, but now they looked in awe at this . . . one of the wonders of the world. Utterly magnificent, wasn't it? "'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'" (v.2). You say, "Who can predict the future?" I tell you that the Son of Man can. You change tack and you say, "Anyone can predict the future," and certainly anyone can make predictions and in a certain sense we all have to, but in this chapter Christ speaks very specifically to these men about striking events that are going to happen to this extraordinary building within their lifetimes. The eyes of some

of them are actually going to see and their ears are going to hear unspeakable deeds, and there will be essential precautions for them and their families and friends to take in order to be delivered.

I want to say this to you, that here is a test case of the truthfulness of Jesus' knowledge of the future. He spoke about life after death, and the judgment of God, and the great separation, and heaven and hell. Is what he said truth? If it is I must embrace it and live my life according to his precepts. But anyone can offer an opinion as to what lies beyond the grave. The Humanist Manifesto pronounces, "There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of our body." Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher made this prediction, "No fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave." He went on to express his expectation of what happened after death: "When I die I shall rot." Well, who are we to believe? Jesus Christ or Bertrand Russell? Here are two diametrically opposed views.

The judgment that came upon the Temple confirmed the truth of Jesus' prophesy. You see that pattern all through Jesus' ministry; he said, "I am the bread of life," and then he miraculously makes food and feeds five thousand men out of five loaves of bread and a couple of fishes. The sign confirmed the word. If you want to eat the bread of eternal life and satisfy your spiritual hunger you must go to Jesus. Again he said, "I am the resurrection and the life;" then he raises Jairus' daughter from where she lies cold and dead in her bed. The sign confirms the word. He said, "I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly," and he cleanses the leper, and he heals a woman with an issue of blood. Such signs confirm the word. He claims, "I am the light of the world," and then he gives sight to blind men. The sign confirms the word. John tells us that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and Jesus delivers the Gadarene demoniac from a legion of demons. The sign confirms the word. He looks at the temple with his disciples; "'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'" (v.2) and this extraordinary building was destroyed. That sign confirms the truth of Jesus' words. Do you see that we are not asking you to make a leap of faith into the dark? We are asking

you to think of what Christ claimed and taught and how his mighty works confirmed his words. So that is the first thing I want you to be clear about; there was this great temple and Jesus prophesied that, "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (v.2).

The two sets of brothers arranged a private audience with Jesus after he had told them that the temple was going to be destroyed. They asked him, "Tell us, when will these things happen?" v.4. Remember that they had been raised to believe that the temple would stand there throughout the entire new age introduced by the Messiah. The rabbis in their Sabbath synagogues had taught them that that is what the Lord meant when he said to Solomon, "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever." They'd been told that Psalm 78, and verses 68 and 69 had the same meaning; "He chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount of Zion which he loved. And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he had established for ever." But our Lord has told them that this building is going to be totally demolished, and they believe Jesus of Nazareth

Now what Jesus did not tell them, and never tells us, is the exact timing of the coming of destruction and death. We have the benefit of hindsight. We in can look back at the year 33 AD when Jesus spoke these words, and to the year 70 AD when the temple was actually destroyed. We can see what happened to this magnificent building and also what's happened to the whole Christian church in the 2000 years that followed this conversation, and how everything has taken place as Jesus said here. The signs that have occurred have confirmed the truth of the word of Christ.

NOTE::

Harold Camping has again proclaimed the probable end of the world. This time the end of the world is set for 2011 A.D. He has written a new book entitled *Time Has An End: A Biblical History of the World 11,013 BC - 2011 AD* (Vantage Press: 2005). In this book he proclaims like a modern day prophet that the Church Age ended in 1988, 40 years after the beginning of the nation of Israel in 1948. This is also the beginning of the Great Tribulation in 1988. 1994 marks the beginning of the 2nd Jubilee (Later Rain). Previously, he said 1994 was to be the end of the world. The probable end of the world is now set at 2011 A.D. See Chart. Usually millennialists say there are seven years of tribulation followed directly by the return of Christ. I may not be good at

math, but there seems to be a lot more than 7 years between 1988 and 2011. According to Camping there is now a two-part program to the Great Tribulation (page 421). The main reason Camping sites for the end of the world in 2011 AD is that it is 7,000 years from the Noachian Flood that he claims was in 4990 BC. It is also 23 years from the beginning of the Great Tribulation that is the magic number of judgment (page 425). Christians are now to leave their (spiritual) homeland (the church) just like Jacob and Judah did (page 426). The most likely time of Christ's coming is at the Feast of Ingathering (the 15-22 of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar) that would be in the fall of 2011 (September-October, page 433). According to Camping, when the Tribulation ends, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shine, and the stars shall fall from heaven (page 433). It sounds like a spectacular astronomical show for 2011, but since Camping has been repeatedly wrong in the past, I have little hope that we will see the promised spectacular show in 2011.

The temple was completely demolished. There wasn't just an accidental fire caused by an oil lamp falling onto the curtain and starting a blaze. There was a pervasive destruction of the whole edifice so that, as Jesus says here, not one stone was left on another. What happened was this; seven years after the death and resurrection of Jesus the emperor Caligula decreed that a statue of him should be erected inside the temple. A Jewish insurrection almost broke out at that time as the nation expressed its outrage, but negotiations saved the day. Then about thirty years after these words were spoken the Jews did rise up and attempted to throw the Romans out of the land. The Romans took their time in responding, and then in AD 70 the Roman general Titus, who was to become emperor of Rome, led an army into Judah and besieged Jerusalem. The horrors of that siege are grim. We read of the people fleeing from the Roman army and its outriders (who were scouring the countryside for food), crowded into Jerusalem for safety. Titus had to starve the city into subjection. The Jews inside the walls were divided into different parties, some wanting surrender, others demanding wholesale suicide. Jerusalem was torn without and within and more Jews were killed by fellow Jews than by the Roman army.

Josephus tells the story of the siege in the fifth book of *The Jewish Wars*. He tells us that 97,000 were taken captive and 1,100,000 men, women and children perished by slow starvation and the sword. It was a scorched earth policy; it was genocide up to the level of Rwanda. These are the words that Josephus wrote describing the siege of Jerusalem

'Then did the famine widen its progress and devoured the people by whole houses and families. The upper rooms were full of women and children dying of starvation. The lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged. The children and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wherever their misery seized them. As for burying them, those that were sick themselves were not able to do it. And those that were hearty and well were deterred by the great multitude of the dead, and the uncertainty when they would die themselves, for many died as they were burying others, and many went to their own coffins before the fatal hour. The famine confounded all natural passions. A deep silence and a kind of deadly night seized the city.'

But they unlike in modern times had no international aid groups and no friendly UN workers coming in to help them.

In fact they had the evil plunderers who looted houses and stole rings and earrings from the dead and dying. Josephus says that when not even any grass or vegetation were available 'some persons were driven to such terrible distress as to search the common sewers and old dunghills of cattle, and to eat the dung which they got there, and what they could not endure so much as to see, they now used for food'. He describes men gnawing the leather of straps and shoes, and tells a story of a woman who killed and roasted her child, and offered a share of that terrible meal to those who came seeking food.

On August 30 in the year 70 Jerusalem fell and the temple was entered. Titus led in his generals; he pulled aside the curtain before the Holy of Holies and walked in and looked around. There was nothing there. The Ark of the Covenant had disappeared at the time of the exile to Babylon 500 years earlier. It was simply an empty room - much to Titus' disappointment. What an anticlimax to him. Then the army brought its standards into the great temple area and filled that vast plaza of stone pavement with ranks of soldiers. Then they sacrificed to their standards praising their gods for giving them the victory and hailing Titus as the Emperor. Then the soldiers looted the temple, but

Titus was impressed with the building and he ordered that it shouldn't be destroyed. But God had said not a stone would be left on another, and so what happened was this, that as the soldiers attempted to melt the gold on its walls the temple caught alight. There was a huge conflagration and the temple was gutted. Titus then ordered that the whole city, temple and all, to be razed to the ground. The soldiers, hunting for hidden gold, levered stones apart one by one and pushed them down to the ground. Titus ended the horrors of those months by ordering the crucifixion of thousands of Jews. Josephus sums up the consequences for Jerusalem in one sentence: "There was left nothing to make those who had come thither believe it had ever been inhabited." The Lord Jesus speaks these somber words, "Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again" (v.19).

What Christ said would happen to Jerusalem and its temple did take place. We are now saying that whatever Jesus says about anything actually happens. He said, "I am the truth," and we respond, "yes you are", and surely his immeasurable love is also a confirmation of his words. Would a loving man tell terrible lies to deceive millions? Why? Would the man who actually prayed for those crucifying him deliberately lead people astray with his words? He said, "I am the truth," and then when he spoke the winds and waves obeyed him. The sign confirms the word. Would one who had the power of God resort to trickery, deceiving us like this? What possible reason would incarnate love have for behaving like that? He speaks about the future, about your future, that there will come a time when you must meet him. He claims that one day soon you are going to appear before him to answer to him for your life. You are going to receive your eternal destiny from his lips. That is what he claimed, and his whole life confirms that what he says is true. Every one of his fellow countrymen were thinking at that time that the temple would endure as long as the Rock of Gibraltar. They were children of their time, but he said it was going to be destroyed, and destroyed in the lifetime of those listening to him. Indeed this did happen; not one stone was left on another.

You notice again in our text how these four disciples believed Jesus. Nicodemus didn't believe him when Jesus said that he had to be born again. "Can a man enter his mother's womb and be born again?" he asked. Peter didn't believe him when he told the disciples that he must be crucified and buried and rise again the third day. "Far be it for thee to die like that," he said to Jesus. The wailing women in Jairus' household didn't believe him when he told them that Jairus' daughter wasn't dead but asleep. They mocked him. The Roman soldiers didn't believe his claims to be a king. They blindfolded him, and hit him, and plucked the hairs on his beard. They mocked him and dressed him in a purple robe and pretended to bow before him. One dying thief didn't believe when Jesus told the other, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." He cursed Jesus. But after these disciples had been with Jesus for three years, after they knew him better than anyone else in the world, when they had heard all his teaching and seen his great miracles then, when he said to them on this occasion, "'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'" (v.2) they replied with this word, "When?" If the Son of Man said it then that settled it. Do you have their faith? Have you walked with Jesus for the last three years as we have been going through Mark's gospel? Many of you haven't, but do you read and think about the life of Jesus? That is the reason we should trust him, it is the appeal of his whole glorious life. That is why we should listen to what he says to us about the future.

3. WHAT JESUS' WARNING TELLS US ABOUT HIM AND OUR WORLD.

The Lord Jesus Christ made many predictions about the future, about a coin being found in the mouth of a fish which Peter would catch in the lake, about the death of a brother of two sisters, about Judas betraying him, about a Roman soldier going home to find his servant well again, about Peter denying him three times before the dawn broke, about all the disciples forsaking him, about his own death and resurrection, about the Spirit of God being poured out and heavenly power coming upon these men, about Peter living to be an old man and having to be carried about, about the gospel going into all the world, and also about the destruction of the temple. All he predicted came to pass. Never did he prophesy something and get it wrong. Not once.

The Lord is preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. He is in charge of creation. Our Lord reigns! He upholds, and directs, and disposes all things both animate and inanimate. He works all things after the counsel of his own will. He is the almighty and everywhere-present God. So there was this vast Jerusalem temple, and to destroy it required a rebellion in Jerusalem, and a decision to invade the land taken in Rome, and the arrival of an army, and the siege of the city, and the accidental conflagration of the temple, and the decision of Titus to raze the whole city to the ground. None of this happened by fate but it all fulfilled the word of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord continues personally and actively to sustain and control and direct the earth. He's literally got the whole world in his hands. He is the one who accomplishes the purposes that God has for the universe. The Lord is King! He reigns over the general course of mankind; he reigns over the life of every individual and over the whole globe too. His reign embraces everything. There is not a single atom somewhere in the universe that is a free agent. Every thought in men's minds, every action men take, the fall of the sparrow and the decision the king makes in his heart are all under his control.

The providence of Christ is not something impersonal and mechanical. The terrible end of the temple shows us the Almighty Lord at work. The temple was not destroyed by fate, nor chance, nor by a clockwork view of history. There were two reasons for the destruction of the temple. The first was the folly and malice of man. The temple was destroyed by the foolishness of a Jewish uprising, the demagogues who stirred the people up to take on Rome promising them divine intervention and protection. There were the fearful reprisals of Rome, and the fire that spread out of control; all these were the events that caused it - one hundred per cent. None of that wickedness can be charged to God at all. He does not sin nor tempt any man to sin. No taint of the sin of the Romans in their rape of Jerusalem clings to our Lord. But the temple was also destroyed one hundred per cent by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Man and God. Human responsibility and divine sovereignty. $100\% + 100\% = 100$

Here we have a human Jesus sitting and answering the question of four friends, but

here we also see an utterly supernatural Christ, whose providence is all-embracing. It is concerned with both the good and the bad actions of men. We can understand the inclusion of the good, but we must not exclude the evil. This is illustrated most significantly in the history of Joseph and in the history of Christ. Joseph said to the brothers who has sold him into Egyptian slavery, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen 50:20). When Titus led his army to Jerusalem he did not know that he was fulfilling a prophecy of the Son of God. He did not know that he was a mere rod of chastisement in the hands of the God whose temple he ordered destroyed. That was not his intention but that is what he was. A mere cane in the Lord's hand! When Christ died in Jerusalem at the decree of the chief priests they didn't dream that they were fulfilling God's purpose for the salvation of the Gentiles, but they were. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). There are many other instances in Scripture where God is said to bring about his purposes by means of the wicked works of wicked men.

The Lord's providence embraces the smallest decisions we can take. A God who did not control the smallest matters could not control the flow of history.

But this 13th chapter of Mark's gospel deals with one of the most significant events of world history that changed the whole future of the Jewish people. It resulted in their dispersion for centuries.

Wasn't this event a great warning to us today? Didn't Jesus tell his disciples in order to warn them what they must do? Wouldn't they have been fools to have seen all the signs and refused to have done anything? "Flee to the mountains" said Christ (v. 14). Remember the angels urging Lot and his family to flee from Sodom. "Don't look back longingly at your old way of life. Flee!" It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is appointed unto men once to die and after death the judgment. Turn!