

I. Mark 13:5-13 - The Beginning of Distress and the Gospel Preached

A. A number of troublesome events that are NOT signs

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. ⁹ “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³ All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. Mark 13:5-13

1. There will be false Christs that deceive many (v5-6, 21-22). There are records from 30-70 AD of people claiming to be the Messiah. Furthermore, the whole Jewish uprising was built on Messianic fervor, especially among the Zealots.
2. There would be unrest between nations (vv7-8). Surprisingly, though this was the time of the Roman Empire at its height, it became a time of remarkable unrest, especially during the reign of Nero (54-68 AD). Josephus notes this in his Wars of the Jews, as do other historians.

3. There were to be earthquakes and famines (v8). The books of Acts records a massive famine during this generation in the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28). Other famines and earthquakes are recorded by Josephus and other historians.
4. But the main point of Jesus is these things are not to cause alarm for they are NOT the sign of the impending doom of the Temple. They are simply the early birth pangs - and they are part of every generation in this fallen world.
5. Thus, those who point to earthquakes, famines, and war as signs that “Jesus is about to return” are doubly wrong. This whole text has NOTHING to do with the final return of Christ, and earthquakes, famines, and wars were NOT the signs of the event about which Jesus was speaking in the first place!
6. There will also be persecution for the apostles (and the early church). Note the Jewish origin for the predicted persecution - synagogues and councils. Even the phrase ‘kings and governors’ speaks of King Herod and the Roman provincial rules. All of this is fulfilled and recorded in the book of Acts (see Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; Acts 7:54-8:3; 13:50-51; 14:19-20; Acts 21-26). We also read about it in other New Testament books (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Hebrews 10:32-34; Revelation 2:9-10; 3:9-10).
7. Even family members would turn in each other for being Christians (v12). In fact, it would seem everyone hated followers of Jesus (v13). But the apostles and other believers had to remain firm to the end of this period when Jesus would come in judgment to destroy the Temple and end the Old Covenant era, thus vindicating those who had proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah.

B. Was the Gospel preached to all nations before 70 AD?

And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

Mark 13:10

1. Some say that this could not have been fulfilled prior to 70 AD, so Jesus' words must refer well beyond that time frame. They also note that Matthew 24:14 says the Gospel will be preached in the whole world and they say this did not happen. However, the New Testament uses this language to say Jesus' words were fulfilled long prior to 70 AD.

2. There are several passages indicating that this statement was in fact fulfilled in the sense in which Jesus intended it.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because **your faith is being reported all over the world.** Romans 1:8

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. Colossians 1:6

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Colossians 1:23

Now there were staying in Jerusalem **God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.** Acts 2:5

- a. All of these verses use the same type of terminology - the whole world, every nation under heaven, every creature under heaven - as Jesus used in the Olivet discourse.
- b. Paul says the faith of the Roman believers was reported all over the world. If one thinks this is hyperbole, then so is Mark 13:10. One can not have it both ways.

- c. Paul says the gospel is bearing fruit "all over the world" and has been preached to "every creature under heaven". If one takes this literally, then every single human being had heard the Gospel by the time Paul wrote Colossians. If one takes it as hyperbole, then the same must be true in Mark 13:10. Paul is indicating that what Jesus had predicted had in fact happened during his lifetime.

- d. Luke says that on Pentecost Jews from 'every nation under heaven' were in the crowd. This meant that as they responded and then returned to their nations, the Gospel was spreading in each nation. It is clear Luke is using hyperbole, but this is also true of Jesus' words in Mark 13:10. If Jesus is not using hyperbole, then neither is Luke! One can not have it both ways. And this fits with the Jewish focus in Mark 13:10. The focus is the apostles and their ministry, which began in Jerusalem and spread from there, beginning with Jews but eventually spreading to everyone.

3. Thus, the New Testament uses the same terminology as Mark 13:10 and Matthew 24:14 to indicate that what Jesus predicted in fact did happen prior to 70 AD.

4. It should also be noted that this language is related to Jesus' parable about the growth of the kingdom being like yeast/leaven a woman mixed into dough. Just as the leaven works all through the dough, so also the Gospel of the Kingdom would be working through the whole world.

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." Matthew 13:33

5. Finally, I would say that this is also related to the fact that in the Old Covenant era the Gospel went to Israel, but with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, the Old Covenant was finding its fulfillment in the New Covenant and fading away. Thus, the Gospel was going to be spreading out to all nations.