

November 17th - Gospel of Mark, Chapter 13, verses 1 – 8:-

The Gospel Reading for this Sunday is in the context of preparation for the coming of 'Christ the King', the theme of Advent which begins on Sunday the 1st of December.

Every commentary I have looked at, gives a different interpretation of this teaching by the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe the first thing to remember is that our Lord gave this teaching about the future and his return in glory for the benefit of all believers down the ages. I do not believe that it is too difficult to understand and, taken with other scripture, it should be helpful to us as we look towards the end times and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory as he promised.

Verses 1 – 4 – The Questions by the Disciples:-

We remember that most of the disciples were from outlying districts and not from the city of Jerusalem. They would be familiar with the Temple buildings but only as occasional visitors. The Jewish historian Josephus depicts the stones as being thirty-seven by twelve by eighteen feet in size and that the *“front was all polished stone insomuch that its fitness, to such as had not seen it was incredible, and to such as had seen it it was greatly amazing”* (Josephus Antiquities Vol. XV xi. 3 – 5). This glorious Temple was destroyed with the rest of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman army under Titus in A.D.70.

In verse 4 there is a double question by the four disciples of the 'inner circle'. The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24, verse 3, makes it clear what was asked. *“When will this be?”* i.e. 'the destruction of the Temple' and *“what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”*. The answer of the Lord Jesus can then be divided as answering these two distinct questions.

Verses 5 – 8 – Events happening in this Present Age:-

This opens with a warning against a ready acceptance that the end times are here already. There will be ongoing wars, famines and earthquakes *“but the end is not yet.”* (verse 7). *“Do not be alarmed . . .”* maybe should be read as 'do not be excited'. See 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Note the strong word *“must”* in the phrase *“this must take place,”*. In all that has been, is now and shall be – the Lord God is, ultimately, in control. Reading on into verses 9 – 13, what we see now is only an introduction to a time of persecution and trial for the followers of the Lord Jesus. That word *“must”* carries with it the truth that all things are taking place within the will of God.

The use of the words *“birth pangs”* is a literal translation from the Greek. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives the warning that wars, earthquakes and famines will be an introduction to the 'birth pangs' proper. A reading of the Book of Revelation chapters 6 – 18 gives a graphic illustration of the 'woes' to be suffered by the world. The doctrine that the Messianic Age would come to birth after a period of woes, as a baby does is found in a number of Old Testament passages: see Isaiah chapter 26, verses 16 – 18; Isaiah 66, verses 6 – 9; Jeremiah chapter 22, verse 23; Hosea chapter 13, verses 12 – 13; Micah chapter 4, verses 9 – 10.

To place this week's Gospel Reading in context it is necessary to read on to the end of chapter 13. Verses 9 – 13 is a warning directed at Christian believers. Verses 14 – 23 appear to refer to the siege and fall of Jerusalem to the Roman army in A.D. 66 – 70. Verses 24 – 36 again apply to the Last Times and the return of *“the Son of Man”*.

The most important message for us, and for all believers is in verses 33 - 37! *“Watch therefore – for you do not know when the master of the house will come”* (verse 35). It is again emphasised and reiterated at the end of the chapter in verse 37 ***“What I say to you I say to all: Watch.”***

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”
(Revelation chapter 22, verse 20)