

“Jesus Taught about the Future”

March 15, 2015

Brian Watson

Mark 13:1–4

¹ *As he 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?”*

Imagine someone comes up to you this week and says, “I have an amazing investment opportunity for you. If you invest all your money with me, I can promise you the best returns. Whatever you give me today, you’ll get back ten times that much in one year, but you have to invest all your money now.” Now, if you’re a sane person, you’ll probably be somewhat skeptical. How can I trust this person? How do I know this investment is going to yield me those results that he’s promised. So, you ask him those questions, and he says, “Okay, I understand your hesitation. So let’s do this: I’m going to tell exactly what some shares of stock will be worth in one month. One month from today, the share price of Apple will be so much, and the share price of Google will be this much, and shares of Exxon will be that much. Then, after a month, if I’m right about those stock prices, then you can trust me.” So, you wait a month, keeping an eye on the stock market the whole time. And what do you know, this man is right about all those stocks, down to the penny. Would you trust him then? Would you be willing to make the investment he’s talked about?

If someone could reliably tell you the future, would you trust that person? If someone could predict something with great accuracy, you probably would be inclined to believe other things he or she talked about. One of the interesting things about Jesus is that he predicted that an historical event would occur within one generation, and it did happen. Three days before he died, he predicted that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. This was in the year A.D. 30 or 33. (There is some debate about the year that Jesus died, and those two years seem to be the only possibilities.) In the year 70, the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. This was a huge event for the Jewish people, and it is well documented in history. Since Jesus’ predictions were written down in the Gospels that were written before 70 (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), and

since they came true, we have excellent reasons to believe all that Jesus taught, including what he taught about his second coming.

Before we start to look at the Bible, I need to talk about the importance of the temple. For the Jews, the temple was one of the symbols of national identity, along with the land of Canaan or Palestine, and the Torah, or the Law (the first five books of the Bible). “The temple was the political, religious, and economic center of Israel.”¹ Thousands of Jews came from all over to observe three festivals each year at the temple: Passover, Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles. The temple was the place where God met with his people. It was a place of worship. It was a place where animal sacrifices were made. And it was a national symbol. The temple was even made to represent the whole universe that God had made. Flavius Joseph, the Jewish rebel turned Roman historian, wrote that the elements of the temple and the garments of the high priest were “made in way of imitation and representation of the universe.”² Jews thought of the temple as the center of their universe. It’s very hard to find something that’s analogous today. But imagine that you combined the State of Liberty, the White House, Fenway Park, and, perhaps, this church building together. That gives you some idea of how significant the temple was.

But the temple was supposed to be temporary. God wanted the temple to point to the coming of the true temple, Jesus. Jesus is the true meeting place between God and man. After all, he is known as Immanuel, God with us (Matt. 1:23). In John 4, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, “a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” He was implying that the place of worship would no longer be the temple. In fact, Jesus himself is the “place” where we worship. That is why he said, in John 2, that his body is the temple (John 2:19-21). The New Testament also makes it clear that Jesus is the true high priest and the true sacrifice for sin.³ So when the Son of God became man, the temple had to be replaced.

The temple also had to be replaced because worship there had become corrupted. God’s plan was that Israel would be his royal priests and his witnesses (Exod. 19:5-6; Isa. 43:10). But they had not been faithful. Centuries before, they had worshiped idols and desecrated the temple,

¹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 49.

² *Antiquities* 3.180, in Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).

³ Jesus as high priest: Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11. Jesus as the final, once-and-for-all sacrifice: Heb. 7:27; 8:11-14; 10:10, 12

so God judged Israel. He used the Babylonians to destroy the temple in 587 B.C. In Jesus' day, the Jewish religious leaders added rules to the law of God, honoring their traditions while ignoring the intent of God's commandments. And when God came in the flesh, they did not recognize him.

We're about to look at Mark 13, but before we do that, it's interesting to observe that earlier in Mark's Gospel, in chapter 11, Jesus goes to the temple when he arrives in Jerusalem. First, he checks out the temple (v. 11). The next day, he returns to the temple, but on his way he sees a fig tree that's not producing fruit, so he curses the fig tree (vv. 12-14). Then when he arrives at the temple, he makes a scene, because worship at the temple had been corrupted. Instead of being a house of prayer for the nations, it was a house of commerce. God's intent for the temple was ignored. So Jesus cleared out the temple (vv. 15-17). Because of his actions and words, the chief priests and scribes wanted to kill Jesus (v.18). The next day, Jesus and his disciples saw that the fig tree, the one Jesus had cursed, had withered (vv. 20-21). The point is clear: just as Jesus spoke judgment against the fig tree, he spoke judgment against the temple and the unfaithful Jewish religious leaders. Just as the fig tree withered, so the temple would be destroyed.

And the temple was destroyed by the Roman Empire in A.D. 70. There had always been conflict between the Jews and the Roman Empire, who took control of Palestine in 63 B.C. Eventually, the conflict would come to a head in A.D. 66. In 70, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. As we look at Mark 13, I'll talk more about what happened at that time.

One final note before we look at Mark 13: we have to keep in mind that Mark probably wrote this Gospel sometime between the mid-50s and the mid-60s.⁴ The issues are too involved to get into now, but I think an earlier dating is more likely. Just recently, a fragment of a copy of Mark's Gospel was found in Egypt. The piece of papyrus—an ancient form of paper—that contained part of Mark's Gospel was reused to make a mask for a mummy. Scholars think that

⁴ For example, Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), believe Mark was written around the mid-50s or so (pp. 233-34). D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), believe the Gospel was written "in the late 50s or the 60s" (p. 182), though they acknowledge, "The majority of contemporary scholars date Mark in the middle to the late 60s" (p. 181). The issues involved are rather complex, but they depend upon whether Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source (and thus depend on when those Gospels were likely written), external sources (generally early Christian theologians and historians), and the issue of whether it is possible for someone (namely, Jesus) to predict in advance what would happen to the temple.

piece of papyrus dates to the year 80 or 90.⁵ Mark probably wrote the Gospel in Rome, so it would take some time for the Gospel to be copied by hand, to circulate to Egypt, and then to be so common (in terms of the number of manuscripts produced—all copied by hand) that it would be used to make an ancient form of papier-mâché. The fact that some of a manuscript of Mark was used as a mummy mask sometime between 80 or 90 probably means that the Gospel had been around for two or three decades. This is important because Mark, writing before the year 70, is reporting what Jesus said in the year 30 or 33, about what would happen in the year 70. So here we have an historical record of a prediction of something that would happen, before it happened. The only reason people think Mark wrote after the year 70 is because they think such prediction is impossible.

Now let's look at Mark 13 and what Jesus had to say about the judgment of Jerusalem and the temple. The chapter begins with Jesus and his disciples leaving the temple complex and heading east to the Mount of Olives. One of his disciples says, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" The temple was indeed an impressive building, one of the most impressive in all the world at that time. This was not the temple that Solomon built, because that one was destroyed. This was the second temple, which was built in 515 B.C., but was substantially renovated by Herod beginning in 20 or 19 B.C. Most of the work on the building was finished within a decade, but ornamental details were worked on until war broke out in A.D. 66. The temple was one of the most impressive buildings in the middle east. Herod increased the Temple Mount to an area the size of thirty-five football fields. It was covered with gold plates that shone so brightly in the sun that people were nearly blinded. "In the 1990s an archeological exploration of the temple foundations revealed a large stone . . . that was 42 x 14 x 11 feet in size and estimated to weigh 600 tons." Two other stones they found were 40 and 25 feet long.⁶

But Jesus wasn't impressed. He said, "Do you see all these great buildings? Well, they're all coming down." This would have shocked the disciples, I'm sure. What could be so powerful as to destroy the temple? Remember, this was before modern weapons and machines. I'm sure

⁵ See Terrence McCoy, "Biblical scholar claims to have found the oldest known Gospel — inside a mummy mask," *The Washington Post*, January 20, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/20/biblical-scholar-says-hes-found-the-oldest-known-gospel-inside-a-mummy-mask/> (accessed March 13, 2015).

⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Jesus, the Temple, and the Coming Son of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 55.

they had a hard time believing this could happen. So some of the disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, ask Jesus a two-part question in verse 4: “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” In other words, when is this going to happen, and how will we know it’s about to happen?

Some theologians don’t think Jesus answers a question about the destruction of the temple. They think he is talking about what happens before his second coming. But this doesn’t make good sense of the text. There is no indication that Jesus ignores their question. And if we look down to verse 30, he says, “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” I believe we should take Jesus’ words there at face value. What he’s about to say will happen within one generation from when he was speaking. It appears that in the Bible, a generation can last for forty years (see Ps. 95:10).⁷ So, if Jesus is speaking in 30 or 33, and the temple is destroyed in 70, he is right: the events that he predicts come to pass in one generation.

This is what Jesus says in verses 5-13:

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.

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.

First, Jesus tells his disciples that the time leading up to the temple of the destruction would be one full of people trying to deceive them, claiming that they are the Messiah. We know that there were several people in the first century who claimed to be the Messiah, so this prediction came

⁷ T. C. Mitchell, “Generation,” in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 403: “It is sometimes held that a period of 40 years, the duration, for instance, of the wilderness wanderings, is to be taken as a round number indicating a generation.”

true.⁸ Jesus also said there would wars and rumors of wars. These things happen all the time, so the disciples shouldn't be worried about such things. There was a war between Rome and Parthia in 36 and a local war between Herod Antipas and the Nabatean king Aretas in 36 and 37.⁹ And the war between the Romans and the Jews started in 66. But the "end," the destruction of the temple, was still to come. Jesus also says that there would be earthquakes and famines. Again, these things happen all time. There was a large famine during the reign of the emperor Claudius, between roughly 45 and 48 (predicted by the prophet Agabus in Acts 11:28).¹⁰ There were several major earthquakes between 33 and 70, including earthquakes in Antioch (37), Phrygia (53), Asia Minor (61), and Jerusalem (67). All of these things would happen before the temple was destroyed. If the destruction of the temple was the birth, these events were just the birth pains leading up to it.¹¹

Jesus told the disciples that they would be handed over to civic and religious authorities. We know from the book of Acts that the disciples appeared before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council in Jerusalem, and were flogged (Acts 5:27-42). Stephen and James were martyred (Acts 7:58; 12:2). In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul describes getting flogged and beaten (vv. 23-25), probably by leaders of local synagogues. And Paul appeared before various governors and kings (Acts 18:12-17; 23:23-24:27; 24:27-26:32). All of this would happen before the temple was destroyed.

More positively, the gospel had to be preached to "all nations." In the Bible, "all the world" or "all nations" often meant the known world. In Acts 24:5, the high priest and some elders brought charges against Paul, saying, "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world." Toward the beginning of the book of Romans, Paul writes to them, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world" (1:8).¹²

⁸ Stein, *Jesus, the Temple and the Coming Son of Man*, 77, mentions several: Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37; Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.271; *Jewish Wars* 2.56); Simon of Perea (*Antiquities* 17.273-77; *Jewish Wars* 2.57-59) and Athronges of Judea (*Antiquities* 17.278-84; *Jewish Wars* 2.60-65). Right before A.D. 70, there were Menahem, the son of Judas the Galilean (*Jewish Wars* 2.433-48), John of Gischala (*Jewish Wars* 2.585-89; 4.121-27), and Simon bar-Giora (*Jewish Wars* 4.503-44; 4.556-83).

⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 903.

¹⁰ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 372-374.

¹¹ Stein, *Jesus, the Temple and the Coming Son of Man*, 80, observes that "birth pangs" is often used in the Old Testament "to describe the tribulation preceding the destruction of a city, and the city most frequently referred to is Jerusalem (Jer 4:31; 6:24; 22:23; 30:6; Is 26:17; Mic 4:9-10)." See also Isa. 13:8; 21:3; Jer. 50:43; Hos. 13:13.

¹² See also Rom. 1:5; 10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:6.

But things would get bad: in addition to being flogged, brothers would betray their own brothers to death, and fathers would betray children. That is, unbelievers would betray their own believing family members, reporting them to hostile authorities. Jesus' followers would be hated. But the one who endures such things—the one who doesn't renounce the faith—will be saved.

In verse 14, Jesus starts to talk about the sign that would precede the destruction of the temple. Let's read verses 14-23:

¹⁴“When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. ¹⁶Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁷How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ¹⁸Pray that this will not take place in winter, ¹⁹because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. ²⁰If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. ²¹At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. ²²For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. ²³So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

Verse 14 is a bit tricky. What is Jesus talking about? It seems that Jesus is referring to the book of Daniel. The “abomination that causes desolation” is mentioned four times in Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). According to 1 Maccabees 1:54, a book written after the Old Testament was completed and before the coming of Christ, this prophecy was fulfilled by the Syrian king Antiochus IV in 167 B.C. Antiochus was a bad man. In 168, he looted the temple and supposedly killed 40,000 Jews in one day. A year later, he looted Jerusalem again, set fire to parts of the city, and slaughtered many. He set out to destroy the Jewish religion. He set up an altar for Zeus in the temple and sacrificed pigs on it. He also prohibited circumcision and Sabbath observance, and banned and burned copies of the Torah.¹³ So, Antiochus's idolatry, or his abomination, left the temple desolate. After three years, the Maccabean revolt removed the altar to Zeus and purified the temple.

The disciples would know all about this and they would have understood what Jesus was referring to. They knew this because the purification of the temple was commemorated each year during the eight-day festival of Hanukkah, or the Feast of Lights. At any rate, Jesus wants his

¹³ Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 16. See also 1 Macc. 1:47, 54, 59; 6:7; Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.254; *Jewish Wars* 1.34.

disciples to know that something similar to what Antiochus did is going to happen at the temple before it is destroyed. This sign would have to happen shortly before the Roman armies came and surrounded Jerusalem. It seems most likely that this “abomination of desolation” was what happened to the high priesthood around the year 67 or 68. The high priesthood was supposed to descend from one generation to another within one family (the descendents of Aaron, within the tribe of Levi). So the current high priest would be succeeded by his son. But instead, some rebels took over the temple and cast lots for the priesthood. These rebels made the temple, in the words of Josephus, “a shop of tyranny.”¹⁴ Josephus reports that when this happened, the previous high priest Ananus, said these words: “Certainly, it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places that ought not to be trodden upon at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains.”¹⁵ After Ananus gave that speech, there was a battle between the zealots—the ones trying to seize control of the temple—and the people that Ananus had gathered together to stop them. And Josephus tells us this: “As for the dead bodies of the people, their relations carried them out to their own houses; but when any of the zealots were wounded, he went up into the temple, and defiled that sacred floor with his blood, insomuch that one may say it was their blood alone that polluted our sanctuary.”¹⁶

When this event happened, according to Jesus, any Christians in Jerusalem were supposed to flee to the mountains. Much of what we see in Mark 13:15-22 are directions to people living in Palestine during that time. They were to go immediately. It would be difficult for pregnant women and nursing mothers. It would be difficult in the winter, when rivers would be flooded and hard to cross, and roads would be muddy.

Jesus even says that the distress of this time would be worse than any in history. That’s probably a bit of hyperbole: the use of over-the-top language to bring home a point.¹⁷ Still, things were bad during the Jewish War against Rome. Most of what we know of the war comes from Flavius Josephus, a Jew who was a leader of the rebellion in Galilee. He was captured by the

¹⁴ *Jewish Wars* 4.151.

¹⁵ *Jewish Wars* 4.163.

¹⁶ *Jewish Wars* 4.201.

¹⁷ Compare Exod. 9:18; 11:6; Joel 2:1-2. For another example of obvious hyperbole, compare 2 Kgs. 18:5 with 2 Kgs. 23:25. The former passage says, “Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.” The latter passage says, “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.” If 2 Kgs. 18:5 were true in a strictly literal way, then 2 Kgs. 23:25 would be wrong.

Romans and would eventually write a history of this time. He tells us that over 600,000 died from starvation in the city and that some people resorted to eating the dung of cattle.¹⁸ Even more disturbing, he reports that some women ate their own children.¹⁹ This is what would happen when a foreign army came in and besieged a city. They would cut off escape from the city by building siege works. Because this type of battle took a long time, the conquered city would run out of food and people would starve. Josephus tells us that 1.1 million Jews died and 97,000 were taken captive.²⁰ Some people believe Josephus exaggerated numbers, but even if he did, the destruction in this war was great. According to Don Carson, “There have been greater numbers of deaths—six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin—but never so high a percentage of a great city’s population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem.”²¹

Jesus says this time would be so bad that if God didn’t cut these days short, even the elect, the people that God had chosen to be his, wouldn’t survive. The Roman siege against Jerusalem lasted five months. If it lasted longer, no one would have survived. Perhaps some of the Jews who survived later became Christians, and if the siege lasted longer, they wouldn’t have become Christians before they died.

This time would also be accompanied by confusion. People would claim to be the Christ, the Messiah. False prophets would arise and even perform miracles.²² So Jesus told the disciples to be on guard.

He then shifts gears in verse 24 to talk about what appears to be his second coming. He contrasts the judgment on Jerusalem, which came in 70, to the final judgment of the world, which will come when Jesus returns. I won’t talk much about Jesus’ second coming today because I’ll talk about it at the end of this sermon series. But it’s important to note that in the Bible, there are patterns that develop. And one of those patterns is that of judgment. Throughout the Old Testament, there are many types of judgment of sin: the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues in Egypt—particularly the tenth plague when all the firstborn in Egypt died, the Red Sea swallowing up Pharaoh’s army, the destruction of the Canaanites, and

¹⁸ *Jewish Wars* 5.569-571.

¹⁹ *Jewish Wars* 6.201-212.

²⁰ *Jewish Wars* 6.420.

²¹ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 501.

²² It would seem that some people perform “miracles,” or supernatural works, by the power of Satan. The famous example is Pharaoh’s wise men and sorcerers, or magicians: Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18-19.

even the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. All of these events, along with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, anticipate the final judgment that will come when Jesus returns.

Finally, Jesus says this of the destruction of the temple in Mark 13:28-31:

²⁸ “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

In Palestine, the budding fig trees tell you that summer is near. And the events that Jesus described would tell the disciples, as well as the readers of Mark’s Gospel, that the destruction of Jerusalem and its glorious temple was near. Jesus says that this is the truth. These things would occur within a generation. There would be people who would have heard his words and who would live to see the destruction of the temple. And the last claim that Jesus made, in verse 31, is the biggest: his words are eternal. They will outlast the current heavens and earth. That reminds me of Isaiah 40:8: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” Surely, this is another way that Jesus hinted at his identity: God in the flesh.

So why did I spend all this time talking about this issue this morning. Why dig up what may seem like an arcane bit of Jewish history? Why talk about the gory details of a war fought long ago in a place that is far away?

Well, I suppose there are three main points. The first one is that we can trust Jesus. Let me make this point again. Jesus said these words in the year 30 or 33. Mark wrote them down sometime between the mid-50s and mid-60s. And these events all came to pass. Most of them occurred in the late 60s or the year 70. This is amazing.

A lot of people doubt that the Bible is true. But this is proof that the Bible is true. And what’s even more amazing is that the Bible doesn’t actually report the destruction of Jerusalem in the temple in 70. We know from other historical sources, like Josephus, about what happened. In the Bible, we just have the predictions of what would occur. And those predictions are not so detailed that we would have to say, “Well, that was obviously written after the fact!” But they contain enough detail to show us that Jesus knew exactly what would happen. This is what Eusebius (c. 264-339), a church historian writing in the fourth century, wrote: “If any one compares the words of our Saviour with the other accounts of the historian concerning the whole

war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Saviour were truly divine and marvellously strange” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.7.7).²³

Only one who is a true prophet could predict such events in such a way. And if Jesus came to tell us the word of God, we should pay attention to all that he said. That’s a lot of what I’ve been trying to do in this sermon series.²⁴ We can trust that the Gospels report truth about Jesus: that he lived a perfect life, the kind that none of us could ever live; that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for our rebellion against God; and that he rose from the grave on the third day, showing he paid that penalty in full and that he has power over death.

A second point flows right out of that first point. Jesus taught about the judgment of Jerusalem and the faithless Jewish people who rejected him. But he also taught about the final judgment of all people on earth who reject him. Jesus will return, at a time that we don’t know. It could happen any time. And what will happen for those who have rejected him will be infinitely worse than what happened to the Jewish people in Jerusalem in the year 70. Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, and it came to pass. Jesus also predicted that he would come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. That, too, will come to pass. We don’t when. We will likely die before that happens. But whether we die or whether we’re around when Jesus returns, there will be a day of judgment for everyone who has ever lived. And there will only be two categories of people: those who are united to Jesus by faith, who have a real relationship with him, who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, and those who don’t believe in Jesus, who don’t have a relationship with him, and who reject the Holy Spirit. Today is the day to turn from your self-centered way of living. Today is the day to put your faith in Jesus.

I think there’s a third point of application for us here. Jesus said that in the days before the destruction of the temple, there would be false prophets. There would be deception. There would be confusion. There would be persecution. And that has always been true for Christians, at least in some part of the world. It’s true today, and it is becoming increasingly true right around

²³ Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. I* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 142.

²⁴ I should also point out that in verse 32, Jesus says he doesn’t know the day or hour when he will return. If someone were making up this story, why would they ever write such a thing? If they wanted to create a story regarding a supposed God-man, wouldn’t this admission be embarrassing? Such a detail fulfills the criterion of embarrassment, one of the various criteria that indicate that historical writings are indeed historical. It seems to me this detail is best explained by the fact that, as I stressed earlier in a sermon titled, “Jesus Was a Man,” Jesus lived fundamentally as a human, and in his life on earth he decided not to make use of all his divine powers, including omniscience.

us. Hold on to the faith. Trust what God has revealed in the Bible. Don't listen to the false teachers who try to change the message of the Bible. Don't give in to pressure. Don't deny the faith, even if you have to appear before authorities. "He who stands firm to the end will be saved." Let us stand firm in the faith.