

**Mark 13:1-8**

1 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" 2 Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." 3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" 5 Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs (NRSV).

The scripture is known as apocalyptic discourse because Jesus looks to the future and predicts what is in store for his followers. The lesson is to be vigilant to the end that could come at any time. The dialogue takes place at the temple which is a grand building of enormous stones, and great engineering and construction. The prophecy of Jesus is about the destruction of the temple which is perceived as divine punishment for societal lack of faith, a nation pulling away from God, and a failure to respond to the God's call for repentance.

Jesus left the temple with his disciples and as they were leaving, they marveled at the buildings. Jesus informed them that it would all be destroyed and told them that wars are going to happen. Then he tells them not to worry these things are simply going to happen. Not only that, but great suffering has to take place. Jesus does not sugar coat it and tell them what they want to hear. What he does is caution the people against being led astray. We know Satan leads people astray. He always has and always will. However, the word of caution from Jesus is a word for us because it is the false leaders, false teachers, and false prophets that will lead the Christians astray.

Jesus knew that the people were led astray by a religion that had claimed to be right with God but has gone its own way. The people thought they were righteous, claimed to be righteous, and yet were led away from the will of God. Well, the consequences of transgression are in the buildings that will be destroyed, not by God, but by the people that God created. The attitude of Jesus is worry free. Wars will happen. Don't worry, it has to happen. Destruction will happen but it's OK, it has to happen. There will be earthquakes and famine and that is just the beginning. The destruction of the temple is predicted. Suffering preceding the end of time is predicted. Deceivers that claim to teach in the name of Jesus are predicted. The time will come for destruction and the destruction is just the beginning. So, the main thing is to be true to Christ until the end and be ready for his return. Jesus promises to return after the suffering.

The problem is that it is easy to be led astray. People are comfortable in like minded social groups doing what everyone else is doing. As groups go astray, they lead the people astray. I am sure you remember COVID and the hoarding of toilet paper. People did not need to buy toilet paper. There was panic buying due to perceived scarcity as fear spread through social media. Someone somewhere started a rumor that grew into a

frenzy that led people astray. They needed to buy food, milk, and perishables. The people that were led astray did not do what they needed to do.

The Advent of Christ came at a specific time in history when religion had pulled away from the will of God. They didn't mean to. These were not bad people. They simply morphed into a reality from exile to punishment for transgression. During the Roman occupation, the perception was that if they obeyed enough rules then God will come to the rescue. They were expecting a great warrior like David. They were living during a time of conflict between rising and falling empires. Under the threat of the Roman Empire, the religion became strict and obedient to God's laws. The problem was that focusing on the law led to ignoring care of the people. The population was led astray by authoritarians that took control of the religious world order.

Jesus teaches do not be led astray but you can't really do that. The only way to be led astray is by not knowing you are being led astray. What Jesus actually teaches is to beware; be on the lookout and watch out for the false teachers and signs of deception. Have an investigative and inquiring mind that will dig deeper than the surface rhetoric and pay attention to what is going on. When it comes to something as important as your salvation it is best to investigate what you read and hear. This holds true in religion, politics, and finances. Humans lie and exaggerate. You can only spot deception when you double check the facts. Check the sources of information. Investigate emotionally charged rhetoric. Look at both sides of an argument and analyze the pros and cons. The Advent of Jesus occurred when the religious world that God relied on had let God down by going their own way. They were focused on rules, regulations, and self glory and ignored the care of the people. The problem with being led astray is that people do their own thing and cater to their own desires. They preach and teach other things besides the love and unity that the Lord insists upon. I became a Disciple because of the theological doctrine. I wanted a church that had an intellectual approach to the interpretation of scriptures as opposed to emphasizing dogma. I wanted to make sure I was on the right path because it is when religion does its own thing, instead of following Christ, that the world is led astray.

I like to watch movies and I noticed that most of them have these "happily ever after" endings. We typically watch movies for entertainment and we want to be left feeling happy. However, life does not share the same "happily ever after" ratio. Life is full of pain, disappointment, death, health crisis, financial crisis, and heartache. The disciples want a sign from Jesus of the time when the destruction will happen. Jesus did not answer their question but instead encourages us to be ready for when the time comes. You have to go through the hard times, stand strong in faith until the end and then after the suffering we get the happy ending. In order to be faithful until the end, you have to make sure you are not lead astray.