

**Mark 13:24-27**

24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven (NRSV).

Jesus is coming. In Mark chapter 13, Jesus and his disciples leave the temple in Jerusalem and the disciples marvel at the great buildings. Jesus informs them that it will all be destroyed. Jesus knows how self destructive people are. Jesus tells his followers that wars will happen but don't worry, these things happen, they have to take place. Jesus says the suffering has not been seen since creation. That means suffering greater than any previous war, suffering greater than WW2, suffering greater than the exile, suffering greater than any previous disaster. Jesus tells us what the problem is. It is false messiahs and false prophets that will lead people astray. It is after a multitude of Christians are led astray that Jesus will come.

Jesus is coming. Andrew wants to know when and what the signs will be that will let us know that this is going to happen. His question should be; what are we to do? Jesus does not give an answer right away but addresses the most important issue which is what we are to do. Jesus instructs us "Do not let anyone lead you astray" (Mark 13:5). He is not talking about the good guys versus the bad guys, he is talking about the good guys going astray from incorrect doctrine.

There is a misunderstanding throughout history of when this is going to happen. Over the past 2 millennium people have thought Jesus is coming soon – during their life time. There is a misunderstanding of things that happen at the end of time. The term "rapture" is not found in Bible. The common belief comes from the teaching of Jesus about taking the true believers up to heaven to be with him. Recently in popular culture some have been teaching that Jesus will rescue you from all of the hardship. That is not what the Bible teaches but is taught as gospel doctrine. When people teach Bible based values that are not in the Bible, when people teach doctrine that is not in line with what the Bible teaches, when people teach Christian doctrine that is not centered on Christ, this is false teaching. This is the false teaching that Jesus condemns for leading people astray. People lead others astray for their own selfish ambition. This is the very same problem that lead to the exile and the same problem God had when God sent Jesus to deal with the scribes and Pharisees. Selfish ambition is the continued human problem throughout history and into contemporary society. The problems always repeat because of the nature of fallen humanity. We do not get it right until we get right with the Lord, until then, we want things our way.

There is no escaping the devastating pain of the end of time. It is common to think that God punishes the disobedient. My interpretation is that God does not pick and choose who gets to live and who had to die. That has been set from the beginning. Everyone dies. God does not pick and choose who gets saved, everyone is invited. What God does is give us instructions and guidelines to follow and if you don't follow, God sends out a word of warning, and we self-destruct by following our own emotions instead

of following the path that was set up for us by God through Jesus Christ. You have to stay true to the teaching of Jesus.

All of the gospels have the conclusion of the ministry of Jesus with his private address to his disciples. The discourse contains predictions of political unrest, natural disasters, and persecution. However, this turmoil is just the beginning of the pain. Deceivers will come and make claims in the name of Jesus. If you can recognize the patterns and follow the patterns that develop, it will allow you to see a picture of what is going on. In the Old Testament, the true prophets had to contend with false prophets that was promising prosperity instead of warning the people. The false prophets told the people what they wanted to hear which run contrary to the God's prophets and the divine word they were called to preach.

The Scripture is clearly about events into the future. Jesus talks about the nature of society when he returns. It will be after the suffering. The Bible is very clear, it will be after the suffering that Jesus will come. Notice the discrepancy in what Jesus says and what is popular to teach and believe in contemporary society. Notice how the patterns develop, there is a parallelism of prophecy. What Jesus describes is parallel to the Old Testament prophecy. Jesus knows the will of God. Jesus sees what will happen. The community is told to discern the signs for when he is coming. The signs are unmistakable. There will be a total collapse of order. Look at the patterns. See how they repeat. When you recognize the pattern it helps you to see the picture. The pattern is telegraphic and reveals what happened behind the scenes.

He is coming. The end is near but it is not here yet. We are just now beginning to see the signs. It is coming after you see the signs. You have to know what the signs are. Jesus tells us he is not coming back until after the suffering. There is no skipping, by passing, or avoiding the tribulation. It is after we suffer that the sun is dark, the moon has no light, and we do not see the stars. It is after these things happen – after the suffering and darkness – then Jesus will come with his angels and gather the elect. It is after the worst suffering in all of history that Jesus returns. The tribulation on earth gives way to the power of heaven. The imagery is vivid. The exalted Christ will come in his glory.

The warning is to the people of faith. The concern is not between good and evil. The concern is with the people of faith. The people of faith are to stay true to his commandments. If you judge others instead of loving your enemies and forgiving trespasses, persecution is coming to all. It is those that have the endurance to hold true to the love of Christ that are the elect. Persecution requires endurance. Recognizing false teaching requires discernment. Disciples are to ignore false teaching and focus on the words, lessons, and action of Jesus.