



## **Mark 13:1–7**

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him privately, 4 ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?’ 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 rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

## **Reflection**

It’s interesting what we place our confidence in ... a relationship, the strength of our career, the state of our finances or our health. Some immovable object, the seeming bedrock of our existence, the foundation our lives are built on that we

trust to weather any storm. It's what you return to in adversity or in those moments of self-doubt, when everything else is stripped bare. At least I've still got my ...

The temple in Jerusalem was a bit like that for Jews at the turn of the first millennia. Their nation had never really recovered from the exile in which the first temple, begun by king David and completed by his son Solomon at the heights of his reign, had been destroyed. With the destruction of the temple it was believed that God had withdrawn his presence from earth. The small remnant of the Jewish nation who were carted off into exile had seventy long years to contemplate the reasons why, until the Persians allowed them to rebuild the temple – but the end product was a shadow of its former glory; and so too the

Jewish nation. First it was the Babylonians, then it was the Persians, next the Greeks, then they had a brief period of autonomy before the Roman rule of Jesus' day. The Promised Land, Jerusalem, overrun and overruled by foreign nations – God's people taxed, oppressed and at the mercy of the whims of a seeming never ending procession of pagan rulers. And yet through it all, in a period known as Second Temple Judaism, the humble second temple, rebuilt and funded initially by the Persians, stood in Jerusalem as a reminder of the past and a symbol of the future of God's people. It was believed that the temple was the overlap of heaven and earth, the very dwelling place of the presence of God – and thus was the bedrock on which the subjugated Jewish nation stood, their confidence and their hope in face of cen-

turies of adversity. Then in 19 BC Herod the Great, a client king, set in place by the Romans, for political reasons and personal vanity, embarked on a significant expansion and beautification of the temple in Jerusalem as part of a large, national reconstruction program. The building works spanned more than eighty years with the temple finally completed in AD 62. First century historian Josephus said, 'it was a structure more noteworthy than any under the sun'. The Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived during seventy of the eighty years of temple construction, describes the buildings as 'of most exceeding beauty and magnificence so as to be universal objects of admiration'; Roman historian Tacitus as, 'immensely opulent'.

In this building – the temple itself and vast

courts and precincts – first century Jews placed their trust. And so you can imagine the shock and fear that would have gripped Jesus’ disciples when Jesus first spoke these words to them in Mark 13:1–7,

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‘The gate opening into [the temple],’ wrote Josephus, was completely overlaid with gold, as was the whole wall around it. It had above it golden vines from which hung grape clusters as tall as a man; and it had golden doors 30 metres high and eight metres broad. Before these hung a veil of equal length of Babylonian tapestry, with embroidery of blue and fine linen, of scarlet also and purple, wrought with marvellous skill.’

Jesus' disciples, country tourists from the far north of Galilee, get caught up in the spectacle as they are leaving the temple; just as the rich had in giving their gifts and the teachers of the law in their flowing robes, hearts filled with pride and greed to match the lavishness of their surroundings. But Jesus stands there with his carpenter's hands and his unremarkable dress. Perhaps he's remembering the poor widow's two small copper coins from a few moments before – worth infinitely more to God than Herod's gold. As the disciples gawk at the beautiful stones and lavish gifts, Jesus says,

“Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”



Talk about a bucket of cold water! Shocked, fearful and confused, as little later on sitting down at the Mount of Olives that overlooks Jerusalem, mid-way through verse 3,

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?”

But as he so often does, Jesus’ reply doesn’t answer their specific questions. He doesn’t tell them when or offer them a sign that will announce the beginning of the temple’s destruction, instead, he tells them what they really need to know when these events occur.

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When the temple in Jerusalem is torn, stone from stone, by the Romans the question Jesus answers is the deeper question that will be on the lips and in the minds and hearts of every faithful Jew. Are these the end of days? Is this beginning of the end of the world? In their fear many will claim so, some will rise up claiming to be sent by God, claiming even to be Jesus returned. But do not be deceived. Do not join them or you too will perish. When the

temple is destroyed, when you hear of political upheaval and turmoil, do not be frightened. These are but the beginning of birth pains. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right way.

## **Think & Pray**

In 70 A.D., after four years of rebellion by the Jewish people Roman legions under Titus retook and destroyed temple, never to be rebuilt. But Judaism's darkest hour was barely a blip on the screen for the early Christian church because the meeting place between God and humankind was no longer a temple built by human hands, but a person, Jesus Christ, who lived on in their hearts and their communities through the Holy Spirit.

The worldly things that we place our confidence in will go the same way as the temple. Is your trust in them or in him? Is Jesus Christ and the sure and certain hope of resurrection from the dead the foundation upon which you are building your life? Because if not, you are destined for a great fall. Your marriage, your CV, your investments properties, your professional qualifications, your wardrobe or the physique you see in the mirror at the gym are poor, poor substitutes for Jesus. Because one day, they'll all come tumbling down, not one stone left upon another. And on that day only Jesus and those who've entrusted their life to him will stand.

Pray today that you are not beguiled by the trappings of life in Sydney and begin to put your trust in them over him. Pray

that God's word would enable you to see clearly enough to lead yourself and others through the trials and disappointments that await us all and on into eternal life with Jesus. And thank him today that even amidst the greatest tragedies in life Christians have assurance that the best is yet to come.