

# The Ascension of Jesus Christ and the Great Tribulation – *Mark 13*

**Introduction** – Forty days after the Resurrection, the disciples watched their Lord ascend into the heavens (Acts 1:3, 9). That ascension would elevate the risen Jesus to a place where His name would be exalted and vindicated (Phil 2:9-11, Matt 28:18, Rev 11:15-16, 19:16). His ascension would bring forth the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the beginning of the end of the old covenant order, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70AD. What we read about in Mark 13 (or Matt 24, Luke 21) are the first executive orders of the King of kings enthroned on high. To use another metaphor, the Ascension marks the day when there was now a new Sheriff in town.

**These Great Buildings** (vv1-4) – Jesus had been teaching and causing a ruckus in the Temple (chapters 11-12) and as He went out, the disciples seemed to want Him to notice how grand the Temple was (v1). Jesus made a prophecy that the Temple would be leveled (v2) and later, some of the disciples asked Him “*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?*” (v4). The following discourse is an answer to those specific questions and in that answer, Jesus said that these things would be fulfilled within one generation (v30). And that verse tells us that the one generation was the generation Jesus was speaking to. Either these things were signs that would lead to the fulfillment of that Temple’s destruction or they were not. History shows us that they were.

**The Early Part of “This Generation”** (vv5-13) – Various attacks would come upon these disciples and the early ministry of the new church. Josephus records that there were many false messiahs between AD30-70, and scripture confirms this (1 John 2:18). There was international turmoil, with nation rising against nation, various earthquakes and diseases, recorded in the histories of Eusebius and Josephus, and the book of Acts chronicles many persecutions by the Jews. History teaches that all the apostles were martyred for their faith in Jesus except for John. The Pax Romana enjoyed at the time of Christ’s birth until the time of Nero was then torn apart with the outbreak of the Jewish War and the Roman Civil Wars leading up to the violent Year of the Four Emperors in AD68-69. During that turmoil the Christians would be betrayed and turned over to Nero undergoing savage persecution.

**A Witness to the Nations** (v10) – In the parallel passage, Matthew says, “*this gospel will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come*” (Matt 24:14). Objectors to the view that Jesus was speaking strictly about what would occur in that first generation will point to this verse. But this is not the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) where all the nations would be discipled. According to Paul, this gospel was preached to the world in his day (Col 1:6, 23, Acts 2:5, Rom 1:8).

**The Abomination of Desolation and the Great Tribulation** (vv14-23) – Jesus then told His disciples to watch for particular signs as a warning to flee Jerusalem before it was too late. The “*abomination of desolation*” referred to a prophecy by Daniel (Dan 9:26-27) of judgment upon those who had cut off the Messiah. Luke describes this event as Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20-22), though it may also refer to the times during the Jewish Wars when the Temple was desecrated with abominations by fanatics who occupied it. According to Eusebius, there was a temporary withdrawal of the siege of Jerusalem (AD67-70) by the Romans when the Christians took advantage and hurriedly fled to Pella, about sixty miles from Jerusalem.

Josephus left us an eyewitness record of much of the horror of those years (AD68-70); it was a time when “*the day-time was spent in shedding of blood, and the night in fear,*” when the whole land “*was all over filled with fire and blood*”; when the lakes and seas turned red; when the Roman soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified them – at a rate of 500 per day. Over a million Jews were slaughtered and tens of thousands were captured and carried away into slavery.

Terrible, but some would argue against v19 that this wasn’t the bloodiest loss to the Jews in all of history. But what makes a tribulation “*such as has not been since the beginning of the creation...nor ever shall be*” is not so much the body count, but the covenantal significance surrounding the event. This marked the end of the Levitical priesthood, the ceremonial sacrifices that could only be done at this Temple and only by certified Jews. This was the end of the Old Covenant order and the old creation.

**Decreation Language and the Ascension of the Son of Man** (vv24-27) – Verses 24-25 baffle those who do not have a good understanding of Old Testament apocalyptic language; they think this must refer to the end of the universe and world, the “*end times*.” But this is common prophetic language used to describe judgments of God upon nations and cities (Isaiah 13:10, 34:4, Ezek 32:7, Amos 8:9, Joel 2:28-32). Similarly, there is confusion on the phrase, “*they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds*” (v26), or in Matthew 24:30, “*then the sign of the Son of Man in heaven will appear*.” Jesus is alluding to Daniel 7:13-14, where the Son of Man ascends to the Ancient of Days to receive all the dominion that had belonged to the Gentile empires of the ancient world. How will this be seen since it will be occurring in heaven? It is seen, or perceived, when Jerusalem is destroyed as Jesus predicts. Jesus then concludes that He will send out His angel-messengers (preachers of the Gospel) to gather His elect from all over into the New Temple, the church (v27).

**Learning from the Fig Tree** (vv28-31) – When the trees are budding, you know that a particular time is near. Remember the question they asked (v4), remember the context in which Jesus answers (Luke 21:20, 22), remember the historical accounts of the generation which ended in 70AD and hear the words of Jesus, “*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place*.” Considering all of this, it really does not seem that difficult to interpret this verse quite naturally.

**Heaven and Earth** (v31) – A new heavens and a new earth were established in this new reign as well. The old ways will pass away, but the words of Christ will never pass away. His prophecy was exact.

**Take Heed, Watch, and Pray** (vv32-37) – Jesus is “*the man going to a far country*” in this parable. This occurred on Ascension Day, His coronation as the King (Psalm 110:1) over all nations. These events occurred because Israel did not take heed of His warnings, watch their hearts, and pray exclusively to the God of Abraham with the faith of Abraham. Years later, Paul would warn the Gentile Christians in Rome to not be haughty, for if God could cut out the natural branches, He certainly could cut out those who had been grafted in (Rom 11:16-24). And so, every generation must take heed, watch, and pray to the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, King Jesus. If Jesus conquered Jerusalem, it follows that He has conquered and is Lord over every city, every nation, every people-group, including Woodinville, Olympia, D.C., and the world. We are all on notice. Jesus Christ has ascended to His throne. His name is exalted and vindicated. There is a new Sheriff in town.

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*Dave Hatcher, Ascension Sunday, May 21, 2023*