

THE LORD'S ESCHATOLOGICAL SPEAKING IN MARK 13 MOTIVATING HIS BELIEVERS TO LIVE PRUDENTLY AND SERVE FAITHFULLY

BY JAMES FITE

Despite many attempts to impose alternatives, the modern calendar demarcates a universally relevant historical event—the birth of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who lived an inconspicuous human life until He began to publicly minister for approximately three and a half years, was cruelly executed by crucifixion, was resurrected on the third day, appeared visibly for a period of forty days, and then publicly ascended to the heavens (Acts 1:3, 9). While the apostles who witnessed the Lord's physical ascension from "the mount called Olivet" were looking heavenward, "two men in white clothing" said to them, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven" (vv. 10-12; cf. Dan. 7:13; Zech. 14:4).¹

Concerning Christ's return, the synoptic Gospels provide overlapping accounts of the eschatological discourse of Jesus to His disciples on the Mount of Olives after His final visit to the temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36). All three accounts indicate that the disciples were awed by the physical aspects of that edifice—including its beautiful stones, wonderful buildings, and ritual offerings. In a prior visit Jesus had cleansed the temple from its commercial trappings by casting out those selling and buying within its confines and then declaring, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer...?' But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). As He left that temple for the final time, the Lord prophesied that all the stones of those great buildings would be thrown down (13:2; cf. Matt. 24:2).

After such a sobering statement in Mark 13:2, it seems that neither Jesus nor the disciples had anything more to say until He brought them to a specific spot on the Mount of Olives. Mark's account is unique in noting that their location on that mount was "opposite," that is, "across from," the temple (v. 3, NIRV), perhaps implying that the temple was clearly in view as Jesus spoke of its destiny. Four of the disciples, seemingly as spokesmen for the rest, asked, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" (v. 4; cf. Matt. 24:3).

There are multiple perspectives and attitudes toward the Lord's coming in the context of His divine economy. These perspectives differ with various categories of people and their explicit or implicit eschatological models. In His speaking on the Mount of Olives, the Lord provided key eschatological markers that enable His seekers to soberly discern the approaching end of this present age. In response, the Lord's lovers and servants should cooperate with Him, especially by prayer and by the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to further God's need, desire, and economy.

Attitudes and Perspectives concerning the Lord's Coming

Every human being has an eschatological "model," some perhaps more consciously than others. The unbelievers, the religious, and the seeking believers in Christ all have implicit and explicit assumptions concerning the coming of Christ.