

The Coming of the Son of Man

Mark 13:24-37

By God's grace I came to know Christ at a young age, but for many years the Bible was not a very understandable book for me. And so upon completion of highschool, I enrolled at Biola College – and then went on to Talbot Seminary. All through college and seminary I was taught by Godly people that it is best to take the Bible literally, because if the Bible is allegorized and taken figuratively, then people can make it say whatever they want. And that has always made perfect sense to me.

But there are parts of the Bible we will find confusing and even contradictory if taken in a literal, 21st century, scientific way. And because I believe that 1) all the Bible is God's Word, and 2) all of God's Word is true – and 3) that truth does not contradict truth – I found myself in a quandary, when reading certain

passages, while wearing my “literal only” glasses.

This morning’s passage is one of the places in the Bible that I once found very perplexing. But then one day I studied a commentary, written by a scholarly, Bible believing pastor named Marcellus Kik. He went to be with the Lord in 1965, but was highly respected and served on the staff of “Christianity Today.” He gave me a better set of glasses to wear while reading the “difficult texts” of the Bible. When I put those glasses on, I found whole portions of God’s Word that finally came into focus and made sense. The apparent contradictions disappeared, AND I gained a new confidence for the great things God is going to accomplish during this New Covenant Age. And so let’s carefully consider together what our Lord Jesus is teaching in Mark 13:24-27. The context of Mark 13 is the destruction of the stone temple at Jerusalem,

“But in those days, after that tribulation [leading up

to the destruction of the temple], 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 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.²⁷ And 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.”

This always sounded like the end of the world to me. But the clear **context** is the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. And so what does Jesus mean when He speaks of the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from heaven? What we must do – is to widen our search and see how the Bible itself uses this language. And when we do, we discover that this language is used numerous places in the Old Testament to speak of God’s judgments upon nations that were carried out thousands of years ago. Let me give you a couple of examples. One is found in **Ezekiel 32:7-12**, where God describes His soon coming judgment upon Egypt,

“When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light.⁸ All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you . . .¹¹ ‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “The sword of the king of Babylon will come against you.¹² I will cause your hordes to fall by the swords of mighty men – the most ruthless of all nations. They will shatter the pride of Egypt, and all her hordes will be overthrown.”

The sun, moon and stars are at times used in the Old Testament to speak of rulers falling from their lofty positions of power. In Daniel 8:9-11, stars falling to the ground refer to people. Perhaps the Bible does this because in Genesis 1:16-18, the sun is said to rule or govern the day and the moon and stars are said to rule or govern the night.

Let’s now look at **Isaiah 13:9-19**, which records Babylon’s judgment by God,

“See, the day of the LORD is coming – a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger – to make the land [of Babylon] desolate and destroy the sinners within it.

¹⁰ The stars of heaven and their constellations will not

show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil [Babylon was a world empire] . . .

¹³ I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD

Almighty, in the day of his burning anger [sounds like the end of the world, until read what comes next] . . .

¹⁷ See, I will stir up against them the Medes . . . [and]

¹⁹ Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.”

God carried out that judgment against Babylon, using the armies of the Medes, in 539 B.C. And so why shouldn't Jesus speak about the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from heaven when Israel was judged – and the temple was destroyed by the armies of Rome? The surprise would be if Jesus **didn't use this kind of language.**

But Jesus says something else in Mark 13:26 that demands our attention, “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

Doesn't that have to be speaking about Christ's future Second Coming? No. Look with me at how God's judgment against Egypt is described in **Isaiah 19:1-4**,

“An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them [how was this carried out?] . . . ⁴ I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them.”

David also speaks of God riding on a cloud in II Samuel 22:10, when describing God's judgment against King Saul, using the Philistine army. However, in Mark 13:26, Jesus says that **He** will be the One riding on a cloud. The reason He said that is because of what Jesus taught in **John 5:22-23**,

“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.”

This means that when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father, and the

apostate nation of Israel needed to be judged, it would be the ascended Lord Jesus – who would carry out that judgment – using the armies of Rome. I am not allegorizing this passage. I am merely letting the Bible interpret the Bible. And when we do that, it prevents the Bible from contradicting itself. Let me show you what I mean as we read on in Mark 13:28-31,

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place [famines, earthquakes, wars and rumors of war], you know that he [the Son of Man] is near, at the very gates.³⁰ **Truly, I say to you** [Peter, James, John and Andrew] **this generation will not pass away until all these things take place** [referring to everything Jesus has said from verse 2 through verse 30].³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

If Jesus has been speaking about His Second Coming in verses 24-27, and He now says that it would take place before Peter, James, John and Andrew’s

generation passed away, then Jesus and the Bible are wrong. And there are a host of Bible critics who point that out. Some conservative scholars try to fix this dilemma by slicing and dicing Mark 13 – so that some of it refers to the destruction of the temple and some of it refers to Christ’s Second Coming. Critics rightly say that interpretation is imposed upon the text.

Others say that all of Mark 13, refers to Christ’s Second Coming – and so in verse 30, “this generation” is said to be an “end of the world” generation or possibly referring to the “Jewish race” as a whole. **The problem is that “this generation” never has those meanings.** And so let’s reason together. If we insist on taking the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from the sky literally – even though the Old Testament uses this same language to speak of national judgments – it then forces us to make “this generation” mean something it never means. Isn’t it more

reasonable to understand the sun and moon being darkened and stars falling from the sky – as a nation wide judgment – the same way the Old Testament uses this language – so that we can then interpret “this generation” to mean what it is always means? I find that far more reasonable. Rightly understood, this is one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible.

Am I trying to give you a new slant on Mark 13? No. Fourteen hundred years ago, four Sundays of Advent [which means coming] were put on the Church calendar in order to reflect upon **four different “comings of Christ”** spoken of in the New Testament. Yes, you heard that correctly. The first Sunday of Advent celebrated Christ’s incarnation, His coming in the flesh to be our perfect sacrifice for sin. The second Sunday of Advent was a time to ponder and celebrate Christ’s coming for believers at our hour of death. When we die, Jesus promises to come and takes us to

the Father's house in heaven. This is the coming of Christ spoken of in John 14:1-3 – which is why that passage is often used at the funerals of Christians. The third Sunday of Advent was the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It was the imminent coming of Christ spoken of in the New Testament. Fourteen hundred years ago, most Christians understood that. The fourth Sunday of Advent focused on the final coming of Christ – which we refer to today as the Second Coming. This is when Christ will raise the dead, finalize eternal destinies and usher in the eternal state.

Please know that we are not speaking about a salvation issue this morning. Good Christians disagree about how to interpret this passage. But the way we view Mark 13, significantly affects our worldview.

Let's move on to verse 32, "But concerning that day or that hour [concerning the temple's destruction], no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,

but only the Father.” If we insist that Christ was speaking about His Second Coming, then it means that the ascended, glorified Lord Jesus, continues to be in the dark about the day and hour when He will return to earth to judge the wicked and raise the dead.

Let’s go back to the historic context of this passage. At the time Christ spoke the truths of verse 32, **He was the meek and lowly Jesus**. He was fully man, and yes, fully God – but He only used His Divine attributes, as the Father directed Him. In other words, when Jesus spoke the words of verse 32, He did not know the “day” or “hour” of the temple’s destruction. The Father had not revealed those details to Him – and He respected the Father’s decision. But God the Father had revealed to Jesus that the temple’s destruction would take place before that generation passed away. And it did.

Friends, we need to remember that when Christ ascended to the seat of power, at the right hand of God

the Father, He stopped being the meek and lowly Jesus.

I don't believe any of us could see the glorified Christ in these flesh and blood bodies and live. I say that because the Apostle John merely saw a vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1 – and thought he was going to die. Jesus limited His use of omniscience and omnipresence while He was on earth, but He doesn't limit His omniscience or omnipresence now.

Please follow as I read Mark 13:33-37,

“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come [for the temple to be destroyed – over the dead bodies of countless Jews. Jesus said it would happen within the time span of that generation, but it still occurred unexpectedly for many people living at that time. Jesus now explains this truth by means of an analogy].³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.³⁵ Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning –³⁶ lest he come

suddenly and find you asleep.³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

In Matthew 24, which is a parallel passage of Mark 13, Jesus said that because of lawlessness and severe persecution against the early Christians, the love of many would grow cold. And even though the Apostle Paul understood that a falling away from the faith would occur in his day [see Acts 20:29-31], he was still surprised at how early it began. Around A.D. 48, Paul writes in **Galatians 1:6**, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ” And who was causing these people to desert the faith? It was the Judaizers, who were professing Jewish Christians, who brought confusion and turmoil upon Gentile congregations by teaching them they could not be saved if they did not keep the Ceremonial law of circumcision [Acts 15:1] – and they probably included eating a kosher diet and

observing the Jewish Festivals [Colossians 2:16-17].

Do you all know what happened to the Judaizers at the fall of Jerusalem? Let me review what happened. The Jews revolted against Rome in A.D. 65 and it caused all the Jews throughout the Roman Empire to become public enemy number one. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered shortly after that revolt was declared. Panic set in and multitudes of Jews [including Christian Jews] fled to the highly fortified city of Jerusalem for protection. When Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, the unbelieving Jews within the city were either slaughtered by the armies of Rome or carried off to the salt mines [the Judaizers were among them]. In contrast, the faithful Jewish followers of Christ, had left Jerusalem in A.D. 66. Why? Because they paid attention to what Jesus said in **Luke 21:20-21**,

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies [which happened in A.D. 66], then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in

Judea flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city depart”

By doing this, Jewish believers, who had fled to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire, escaped that dreadful fate – just as Jesus promised in Mark 13:27 [in Acts 2:5, Jews from every nation under heaven is referring to Jews from all over the Roman Empire].

Are there other New Testament passages that speak of professing Christians in the early Church, who did not stay alert? Yes. The book of Hebrews was written because many “professing” Jewish Christians decided to go back into Judaism – so as to escape the harsh persecution Christians were suffering at that time. Those who did, were either killed or carried off to the salt mines. They fell away from the faith – because they never really possessed it.

What are some of the ramifications of understanding

Mark 13, as a prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem?

It means that the imminent coming of Christ, which was on the horizon when the Gospel of Mark was written, was the coming of Christ in judgment against apostate Israel. It was not His Second Coming. The destruction of the temple, was the official end of the Old Covenant Age – with its animal sacrifices, offered at the stone temple [Hebrews 8:7-13]. And because Caesar Nero had also began to severely persecute Christians, he too was judged and his death plunged the Roman Empire into civil war. They experienced four different emperors within an 18 month period of time. It was chaos. The sun, moon and stars were darkened.

I have heard it said many times that if we are to live effectively for Christ, then we must believe that His Second Coming is just about to happen. I disagree with that notion. Without doubt, the Lord Jesus **may come** to take Mark Alvis to the Father's house at any time.

I may not get my next breath. That truth gives me a sense of urgency – to live my life fully for Christ. But if we live our lives thinking that the **world is just about to end** – then logically Christians will be short term thinkers, who do not engage in long term planning to make disciples of all the nations.

I believe there is one original meaning for every text of Scripture, but many legitimate applications. Let me make an application for the United States from the original meaning of Mark 13. I believe that if the United States continues to thumb its nose at what God's says is right and wrong, without repentance, then we can expect a "coming of Christ" in judgment, like Old Covenant Israel experienced in A.D. 70. As a matter of fact, we have already had one – its called the Civil War, which resulted in the deaths of more Americans than all the others wars we have fought – **combined**. Sometime pay close attention to "The Battle Hymn of the

Republic” – which is speaking about the Civil War – as a coming of Christ in judgment upon America in the 1860's. But let's remember, that Israel's judgment in A.D. 70 and our Civil War were not the end of the world. God judges wickedness, so righteousness can continue to move forward. If the United States experiences another “Day of the LORD” it will not be the end of the world. The vast majority of Christianity is now in other nations. Christianity is growing, it is not shrinking.

What Christians in the United States need to do is to humbly pray and ask God to help us become mature disciples of Christ, who then help others become mature disciples of Christ. Why? Because God's plan is for Christians to bless all the nations of the earth [Gen. 22:16-18; Rom. 15:8-13; Gal. 3:6-9, 29; Heb. 6:13-20]. The more people who embrace Christ as Savior, Lord and King – the more Christ's Kingdom will advance

and the more the nations will be blessed. Let's pray.