

# Mark 13: Excursus on Jewish Expectations

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## The Language of Jesus

Jesus was unique, but his language in Mark 13 is not. How he uses the language and his undertones may be, but the language would have been easily understood by his contemporaries. Note this text from the *Testament of Moses* (10):

And then His kingdom shall appear throughout all His creation,  
And then Satan shall be no more,  
And sorrow shall depart with him.  
Then the hands of the angel shall be filled  
Who has been appointed chief,  
And he shall forthwith avenge them of their enemies.  
For the Heavenly One will arise from His royal throne,  
And He will go forth from His holy habitation  
With indignation and wrath on account of His sons.  
And the earth shall tremble: to its confines shall it be shaken:  
And the high mountains shall be made low  
And the hills shall be shaken and fall.  
And the horns of the sun shall be broken and he shall be turned into darkness;  
And the moon shall not give her light, and be turned wholly into blood.  
And the circle of the stars shall be disturbed.  
And the sea shall retire into the abyss,  
And the fountains of waters shall fail,  
And the rivers shall dry up.  
For the Most High will arise, the Eternal God alone,  
And He will appear to punish the Gentiles,  
And He will destroy all their idols.  
Then you, O Israel, shall be happy,  
And you shall mount upon the necks and wings of the eagle,  
And they shall be ended.  
And God will exalt you,  
And He will cause you to approach to the heaven of the stars,  
In the place of their habitation.  
And you will look from on high and see your enemies in Ge(henna)  
And you shall recognize them and rejoice,  
And you shall give thanks and confess thy Creator.

This is a Jewish document, written sometime between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, before the destruction of Jerusalem. This language, like the language of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, was understandable Jewish thinking.

## The Deuteronomic Curse

**Deut 28:15**

As the Mosaic covenant begins, God promises blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Not only will the people be cursed in what they do but they will also suffer military defeat and exile for their sin.

### **Deut 30:1-10**

After being put under the Deuteronomic curse, if Israel repents, God promises to gather them back from exile.

This can be seen in Mark 13:27, as God sends out his messengers/angels to bring in the exiles.

## **The Prophetic Hope**

### **Zechariah 14**

Zechariah is a mixed prophecy, predicting both destruction and covenant removal from Israel (note the prophetic symbolism of the staves in chapter 11), as well as renewal within the context of the land.

There are parallels between Zech 14 and the Olivet Discourse. Jesus, like Yahweh, is on the Mount of Olives. Yahweh will come with His holy ones, Jesus with His angels.

### **Micah 7:2-10**

In its original context, the author laments the problems the wicked cause, and the judgment because of sin that must fall on the people. However, he looks forward to a final vindication where God will bless the remnant.

Mark 13:11-12 contain an echo of these ideas, both in terms of the family disruption and in terms of the ideas of being vindicated/saved in the end.

### **Isaiah 65:8**

Destroy all of Israel? No, just the wicked. The imagery of sparing a cluster of grapes is used to speak of the sparing of a remnant.

This is very akin to the statement of Jesus in Mark 13:20. God will curtail the judgment for the sake of the elect, to keep them from being wiped out. This is more directly applicable than the many places where it speaks of the remnant, but that idea is obviously common.

### **Ezekiel 7:12-16**

Ezekiel speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. Those within the cities and in the fields nearby will be killed by the invaders. Only those who hide in the hills/mountains will survive.

This is very reminiscent of Mark 13:14ff. People in the fields and rooftops should flee to the mountains immediately. Otherwise destruction will be on them.

### **Isaiah 13:6-19**

Isaiah proclaims an oracle of judgment on Babylon, the oppressor of the people of God. Earth-shattering language is used to emphasize the intense destruction to come upon Babylon.

Jesus borrows language from Isa 13:10 in Mark 13:24. This has two implications. The temptation would be to focus on the least important of the two implications, which is that the language is clearly not meant to be taken literally. More important, however, is the identification of the enemy of Israel back in the day (Babylon) with Israel of the day. Israel, the new Babylon, oppressors of the people of God.

### **Isaiah 14:3-4, 12-23**

Isaiah writes of a taunt against Babylon, the nation that thought it could be as great as God. Though it would raise itself to the stars it is thrown down to the ground, rejected and destroyed.

This language is borrowed by Jesus in Mark 13:25. Like with the language of Isa 13, this is not to be taken literally (nor is it to be taken as an actual reference to Satan, as is common since at least Handel's *Messiah* – in my opinion this actually tells us nothing about the fall of Satan). But also like Isa 13, Jesus identified Israel with Babylon.

### **Daniel 7**

This chapter is about the reign of God (it does not use the words “the kingdom of God” but this is what it is talking about). God reigns on his throne (7:9) and defeats his enemies. He also exalts a human figure (7:13-14), which Jews at the time would either take as a reference to an individual or perhaps a collective reference to Israel, as they would have interpreted the Servant Songs of Isaiah. There is a prediction that the saints of God, i.e. the faithful people of God will be persecuted, but all things will be put right in 7:27ff.

Jesus quotes part of this and applies it to himself, but the context cannot be ignored. His exaltation will lead to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Note the cloud language. In the context of Daniel, if there is any traveling between heaven and earth it is not from heaven down but from earth up. If this is an individual or if this is Israel collectively, to approach the ancient of days, they must go up.

### **Daniel 9**

In Daniel 9, he is trying to figure out the time-frame. He starts with 70 years, but Gabriel corrects him and says it is 70 weeks. Of course that is much shorter and is hardly time for multiple kingdoms to rise and fall, so it is generally interpreted as  $70 * 7$  years, or 490 years. In his discussion, Daniel brings up the warnings of the prophets and sees all of the destruction he has witnessed as the working out of the Deuteronomic curse. A promise of destruction is made as well as a promise that the “anointed one” would be killed, but at the end the Kingdom is to be established, and the sin problem removed.

This time frame was taken by some Jewish groups as an indication of when the Kingdom of God would be established. If the decree to rebuild the temple in the fifth century is taken as your starting point, 490 years put you in the middle of the first century. This likely contributed to the messianic and rebellious fervor of the time.

Looking in hindsight, clearly a Kingdom of God on earth was not established in Jerusalem at that time. However, that was the time when Jesus was exalted and the Kingdom of God did come.

## The Maccabees

**1 Maccabees 2:15** The officers of the king in charge of enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to organize the sacrifices. **2:16** Many of Israel joined them, but Mattathias and his sons gathered in a group apart. **2:17** Then the officers of the king addressed Mattathias: "You are a leader, an honorable and great man in this city, supported by sons and kinsmen. **2:18** Come now, be the first to obey the king's command, as all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those who are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons shall be numbered among the King's Friends, and shall be enriched with silver and gold and many gifts."

**2:19** But Mattathias answered in a loud voice: "Although all the Gentiles in the king's realm obey him, so that each forsakes the religion of his fathers and consents to the king's orders, **2:20** yet I and my sons and my kinsmen will keep to the covenant of our fathers. **2:21** God forbid that we should forsake the law and the commandments. **2:22** We will not obey the words of the king nor depart from our religion in the slightest degree."

**2:23** As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king's order. **2:24** When Mattathias saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused; he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar. **2:25** At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. **2:26** Thus he showed his zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did with Zimri, son of Salu. **2:27** Then Mattathias went through the city shouting, "Let everyone who is zealous for the law and who stands by the covenant follow after me!" **2:28** Thereupon he fled to the mountains with his sons, leaving behind in the city all their possessions.

The Maccabees revolt against their gentile oppressors, standing up for the commandments of God. Because of this they become heroes among the Jewish people.

It is possible that the statement to run to the mountains in Mark 13:14 is meant to evoke the ideas of 1 Maccabees 2:28 instead of Ezekiel, mentioned above. In reality both echoes work well, as the followers of Jesus both fled the city to save their lives (Ezekiel) and also formed a group faithful to God and against their oppressors, the Jewish leadership. Note also the parallel of leaving all possessions behind when fleeing the city.

## Jewish Movements and Jesus

Though Jesus was obviously unique (he was, after all, uniquely the Messiah), he was not so unique as to be completely odd. In terms of his language, he was thoroughly Jewish. He spoke like he knew the Scriptures and followed them, and his language was not always unlike his contemporaries. He had his own unique emphases and role, and redefined enough so that his disciples were not able to fully grasp what he was talking about, but he was not a complete oddball.

One group that Jesus could be included in is the group called the counter-temple movements (a modern-day term). Some Jews thought that the temple was right and good and its leadership okay. Both Pharisees and Sadducees would fit into this group, though they had squabbles amongst themselves.

Counter-temple groups were those who did their work either outside the context of the temple (like John) or were against the temple as they thought it was corrupted and needed to be cleansed (the community at Qumran). Jesus fit into this group nicely. The Olivet Discourse is in many ways a sermon about this very thing: Israel is now an oppressor of the people of God, so her city and her temple needs to be destroyed before the true Kingdom of God could be established.

## Concluding Questions and Thoughts

1. Who would be considered as a part of the remnant, the faithful, the vindicated, and who would be those who were rejected by Yahweh?
2. The disciples are unprepared for a redefinition of Israel. Their Scriptures pointed primarily to a renewed physical kingdom. Their contemporaries did the same, and that is what they wanted as well. This is at least one reason why they were so thick-headed about such things.
3. Paradoxically, to stand with the temple is to stand against Yahweh. It is utterly corrupted. The potential of repentance is no longer in view; destruction is the proper course.

## Epilogue – Epistle of Barnabas

What is the spiritual significance of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 for Western Christians? None, though there should be. The following is a selection from the late first/early second century Christian document *The Epistle of Barnabas*. Barnabas sees in the destruction of the temple a sign of a change from a temple made by human hands to a temple made by God in His people.

**16:1** Moreover I will tell you likewise concerning the temple, how these wretched men being led astray set their hope on the building, and not on their God that made them, as being a house of God. **16:2** For like the Gentiles almost they consecrated Him in the temple. But what saith the Lord abolishing the temple? Learn ye. Who hath measured the heaven with a span, or hath measured the earth with his hand? Have not I, saith the Lord? The heaven is My throne and the earth the footstool of My feet. What manner of house will ye build for Me? Or what shall be my resting place? Ye perceive that their hope is vain. **16:3** Furthermore He saith again; Behold they that pulled down this temple themselves shall build it. **16:4** So it cometh to pass; for because they went to war it was pulled down by their enemies. Now also the very servants of their enemies shall build it up. **16:5** Again, it was revealed how the city and the temple and the people of Israel should be betrayed. For the scripture saith; And it shall be in the last days, that the Lord shall deliver up the sheep of the pasture and the fold and the tower thereof to destruction. And it came to pass as the Lord spake.

**16:6** But let us enquire whether there be any temple of God. There is; in the place where he himself undertakes to make and

finish it. For it is written And it shall come to pass, when the week is being accomplished, the temple of God shall be built gloriously in the name of the Lord. **16:7** I find then that there is a temple, How then shall it be built in the name of the Lord? Understand ye. Before we believed on God, the abode of our heart was corrupt and weak, a temple truly built by hands; for it was full of idolatry and was a house of demons, because we did whatsoever was contrary to God. **16:8** But it shall be built in the name of the Lord. Give heed then that the temple of the Lord may be built gloriously. **16:9** How? Understand ye. By receiving the remission of our sins and hoping on the Name we became new, created afresh from the beginning. Wherefore God dwelleth truly in our habitation within us. How? The word of his faith, the calling of his promise, the wisdom of the ordinances, the commandments of the teaching, He Himself prophesying in us, He Himself dwelling in us, opening for us who had been in bondage unto death the door of the temple, which is the mouth, and giving us repentance leadeth us to the incorruptible temple. **16:10** For he that desireth to be saved looketh not to the man, but to Him that dwelleth and speaketh in him, being amazed at this that he has never at any time heard these words from the mouth of the speaker, nor

himself ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple

built up to the Lord.