
Weekly Word

for the week leading to
November 8, 2009

Mark 13, the overview

NOTE: Chapter 13 is the longest uninterrupted block of Jesus' teaching in Mark. In order to better understand the challenges of this teaching, we begin this week with an overview of the entire chapter. Next week we will look at some specific parts of the chapter. The week after that is our final week in the year of Mark, and we will summarize and review the entire gospel. (The Sunday reading schedule will divide Mark into three parts over the next three weeks, as originally planned.) Also please note that Weekly Word groups will continue into the new church year! The study will use the weekly lectionary, rather than be a continuous reading of a single book.

Encounter

BEFORE reading from the gospel this week, review together these interpretive guidelines for understanding the chapter:

The "end of times" teaching by Jesus is far less visionary (about the future) than it is cautionary (about how the disciples live in the face of the future). To that end, Jesus cautions against false understandings of the future more than he gives a clear picture of a true understanding. Since no definitive description of the future is given, we should be cautious in using it for that purpose. Some of the false understandings of the future Jesus argues against

- that the temple would endure forever,
- that any human being, any prophet, or even he himself, knows the date of the fulfillment of God's reign.
- that political rebellion would usher in God's reign.
- that turmoil in earthly events are uncommon and are specific signs of the end times.

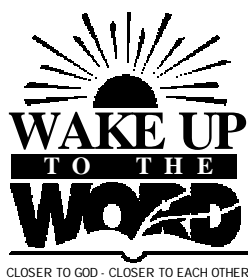
Jesus' message is more about reflection and deliberation than it is about prediction. It is "look" and "watch" rather than "mark this date on your calendar."

Most the events Jesus describes happen before 70 AD, so they are past events. First century Judaism as a temple-centered faith has given way to a Word-of-God-(Jesus)-centered faith for those who follow him.

Virtually every idea in this chapter has roots in the Old Testament. This material is not an innovation. Jesus affirms that what God has long been doing was then coming to new expression.

Jesus leads the disciples to understand that they will be witnesses to him in hostile environments. Their witness to him—not their understanding of the future—is what matters most.

Now read chapter 13 aloud. Then review the interpretive guideline above. Are they confirmed by your reading? Do any of them seem off base to you?



“ Mark's gospel asks its readers to replace the temple and its cult with obedience to Jesus, doing what Jesus asks of them. Certainly in the fig tree episode the spiritual focus shifts away from the temple as a place of prayer, to prayer itself as the "place" where the faithful meet God. ... Maybe it overstates the case, but I think Mark's whole gospel moves to supplant Jerusalem and the temple. And we see this most clearly when Jesus is actually in Jerusalem. ”

BONNIE THURSTON, THE SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE OF MARK

Reflect

How does reading Mark 13 make you feel?

What would you do differently if you knew for sure that Jesus was returning to fulfill God's reign this coming January 1? What aren't you doing those things now?

Christian media (TV, radio, books) often seem obsessed with predictions of the end times. Why might that be? (positive and negative assessment are OK) Do you watch, listen to, or read these sorts of items? Why or why not?

What would you say to a friend who was worried about the end of the world?

Act

Continue in faithful use of daily devotions.

Review your "Make It Simple" packet. Prayerfully consider your response.

Plant a tree, or commit some other act of long-term confidence in God's love for the world.

This week I intend to ...

Next Week
Mark 13, the details

Closer to God—Closer to Each Other