

Mark 13:1-2

Read Mark 13:1-2.

It was Wednesday evening of Holy Week. Jesus had been teaching and answering questions in the temple area and then headed out, probably for a night's rest in Bethany. He, and at least some of the disciples, had arrived at the Mount of Olives and were looking back at the temple admiring its beauty. One of the disciples said, according to verse 1, **“Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”** Massive and magnificent they were. The temple was one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world. Much of it was overlaid with gold and silver. Josephus, the Jewish historian, described some of the stones as being 70 feet in length, 7-8 feet in height and 8-9 feet wide. Most of them weighed multiple tons. There are many historical reports of the beauty of the building.

The temple that they were looking at is usually described as the second temple, sometimes described as Herod's temple.

To appreciate how the disciples would have felt when they heard Jesus say, **“Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”** we need to back up to the book of Leviticus. In Leviticus we have the instructions God gave to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle, or literally a tent. Every part of the construction was given in detail.

The Tabernacle had two purposes. First, it was the place where God made known His presence with the people. In Leviticus 11 we read that God made a series of promises to bless the Israelites with the following condition according to verse 3, **“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands.”** After detailing various blessings that would come to the nation, Read Leviticus 11:11-12. The tabernacle would be where God would meet His people.

The second purpose of the tabernacle was to provide a place where the people could go to offer sacrifices for their sins as well as present offerings of thanksgiving for God's provision for them. The most important sacrifice was the once a year sacrifice for the sins of the nation and was called the Day of Atonement.

Fast forward about 500 years. The period of the Judges is over, Israel was granted a king and when Saul failed, God appointed David as their king. David captured what we now know as Jerusalem, making it his capital and building himself a palace there. Read I Chronicles 17:1.

David proposed to build a permanent house or temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence and power of God. Initially Nathan liked the idea but then God told Nathan to tell David he could not build it. Read I Chronicles 17:11-12. David collected most of the materials for the temple and in time Solomon built it. It is known as Solomon's temple or the 1st temple.

Fast forward again, this time to the year 586 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia captured Jerusalem and virtually destroyed the temple after taking from it all the items used in worship and stripping it of its gold and precious stones. Then 70 years later, exactly as God said, Cyrus the king of Persia permitted some Jews to return to Israel. Under the leadership of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple. There are no details of the structure except brief references that it was nowhere near as elaborate as Solomon's. Over the next 500 years it served as the place of sacrifice and worship, even through periods of desecration by invading armies.

About 20 years before the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great decided to rebuild it. The construction lasted 46 years, that is well past his life. The result was a temple that rivaled Solomon's temple. That is called the 2nd temple since worship continued during what was technically renovations. It truly was a "**magnificent building.**"

Try to picture the looks on the disciples' faces when Jesus announced (Mark 13:2), "**Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.**" As far as the Jews were concerned, that was impossible, but Jesus was declaring what would happen.

We are prone to think that the temple was first century Judaism and has little relevance to us today. That is partially true but there are important lessons in that declaration and its fulfillment 40 years later.

The **first** thing to note is that it all happened exactly as Jesus said it would. Every prophecy God has ever made has either already come to pass or will. Mark will record next the promise of Jesus to return. Many doubt that but God cannot lie and if He said it, it will happen. We can count it as already occurring. God always keeps His word.

I doubt that anyone ever imagined the temple could be destroyed in such a way as to result in no stone left upon another. Previously in Israel's history the temple had been desecrated and burned by invading armies. Its furniture was stolen, and its gold confiscated, but the building itself remained largely in place to be rebuilt. It hardly seemed reasonable when Jesus made that pronouncement that anyone would bother to topple those large stones. There was no reason for it. But in 70 AD that is exactly what happened. Josephus, the early Jewish historian, wrote that Titus had declared that the temple was not to be destroyed. He wanted to rebuild it into a temple to Caesar but his soldiers, in the frenzy of the moment, destroyed it exactly as Jesus said they would. Titus said "no" but God said "yes", and every stone was overturned. Be not deceived! Whatever God has promised will happen. Modern society can deny heaven and hell, but both are a part of God's authoritative Word. Every promise will be kept, and every judgement carried out exactly as God has determined.

The **second lesson** to learn from this is that God **will judge** sin and He will **not remain** where He is not worshipped and obeyed. The temple was intended to be the place where God met His people and they worshipped Him. Read Mark 11:17 for Jesus' condemnation on the way the

temple was being treated. God is love but He will never force His love on anyone. Each individual must make a personal decision to accept His love and all that love provided.

Not only was God not worshipped in the temple, but the people of Jerusalem refused to believe in His Son, Jesus. On the first day of that week Jesus was welcomed to Jerusalem by the people spreading palms before Him. Read what happened when Jesus was about to enter the city in Luke 18:40-44. God will **not remain** where He is not worshipped and obeyed. The people had abandoned God and He, in turn, abandoned their meaningless worship. To reject Jesus is to invite the inevitable judgment of God. To declare that God will never send anyone to hell is like the Jews of Jesus' day declaring that the stones of the temple could not be overturned. They were and hell is just as real. God takes no pleasure in judgment and in fact wept over the necessity of it, but His justice and holiness demands He judge.

A **third lesson** is that, in a real sense, God **no longer needed the temple**. The Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D., but the real destruction of temple began the very moment Jesus declared from the Cross, **"It is finished"** and the curtain that separated the Holy place from the Holy of Holies was torn in half, from top to bottom. God gave a symbol that access to Him would be available to all.

Remember, the temple had two major functions. First, it was the place where the Israelites went to offer sacrifices to God for their sins. The most important sacrifice was on the Day of Atonement when a lamb was slain for the sins of the nation. That sacrifice, or any of the others, is not needed any longer. The sacrifice of Jesus covered it all. Read Hebrews 7:27. Sacrifices are not needed. Jesus has done it,

The second function of the temple was to give the people a place where they could meet with God. God's presence was in the temple but after the Cross His presence is within each believer as the Holy Spirit takes up residence within. We no longer need to go to a building to meet with Him. He is within and therefore always with us. That is why Jesus could declare that He would never leave or forsake us. The temple would never again be needed so Jesus declared that not a stone would remain.

With the death of Jesus, the punishment for our sins would be paid in full. We have access to God, and we have the Holy Spirit living within. Because of that the temple was no longer needed.