

Mark 13:1-8, Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

If you have been to Jerusalem or seen films of it you will know that on the site of the temple built by Herod the Great stands the golden domed Mosque.

The only part of the temple Jesus was speaking about which has survived is the western wall, where for centuries even this surviving remnant of the temple was hidden under the rubble caused by the destruction of the temple and city. The wall shows the massive blocks of White stone almost 10m long which were the foundations of the Temple. An open space has been created so that people can come to the wall to pray. It is called the "Wailing Wall" because it is a place where Jews gather to pour out their laments and make their requests.

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving the magnificent Temple building on the way to the Mt of Olives. The disciples were enthralled by the stones and architecture and the historic associations of their national shrine. The façade was covered in gold. The reflected rays of the sun would be seen for miles. It was one of the wonders of the world at that time. Roman emperors were jealous of it and wanted to put their statues into it.

One of the disciples drew Jesus' attention to the beauty and grandeur of the building.

Jesus replied, **"Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."**

Jesus was saying, don't put your trust in the building. The disciples must have been stunned into silence. On their way back to Bethany they would cross the Mount of Olives. Sitting there they would be able to see the setting sun reflected back to them from the Temple's walls.

They asked Jesus,

**"Tell us, when will these things happen?
And what will be the sign
that they are all about to be fulfilled?"**

Jesus gave a private seminar to the original four disciples, Peter and Andrew and James and John, two sets of brothers.

Jesus wanted them to learn the lessons of history. He wanted them to be protected from the effects of Israel's nationalism.

600 years earlier Ezekiel the prophet had a vision of The Lord God withdrawing His protecting presence from the earlier temple. Solomons'

Temple had stood as a symbol of power & stability & the presence of the Almighty God in their midst. The Jews of Ezekiel's time believed that God would protect Jerusalem because His temple was in the city. It was a guarantee of security. But God's prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned of impending disaster because the nation had turned their backs on God. They failed to repent and turn again to the Lord God. In 586 BC the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple and deported many of the people.

In Jesus' time the Jewish people had as a whole rejected Jesus' way of peace just as they had rejected the prophets in the OT times. How sad Jesus must have felt as he spoke of the suffering that would come on the city that he loved.

St Luke (13:34f) records Jesus sad lament;

**"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the
prophets and stone those sent to you,
how often I have longed
to gather your children together,
as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,
but you were not willing!
Look, your house is left to you desolate."**

King Herod had built the magnificent temple for his own prestige and political ambitions in his efforts to ingratiate himself with the Jews. It was recognized as one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was large and beautifully made. It was the centre of the Nations worship.

**But Jesus says, "your house is left desolate"
the Lord God was no longer in residence.**

Jesus had come as God's King to God's Temple and the Temple authorities had rejected Him. When Jesus refused to be a military leader the crowds turned away from him.

There was a fierce nationalism bubbling close below the surface and there were plenty of people who were willing to take up arms against the hated Roman oppressors. But Rome had brutally put down many insurrections over the years and Jesus knew that they would put any future ones down too. Jesus set out to warn his disciples and prepare them for the time after his death and resurrection.

Jesus knew that eventually the hatred and nationalistic fervour of the Jewish people would lead to a final disaster for the nation.

- Watch out, He warned, others will come claiming to be the saviour, don't follow them

- The same things that have always happened will continue; wars, earthquakes, famines don't interpret them as signs of God coming to rescue.
- Political disturbance and natural disasters will continue as in the past.

Don't be deceived by dramatic events

Be on your guard

Even as Jesus approached His final conflict with the Roman and Jewish Authorities and with the Spiritual Powers of Evil Jesus' thoughts were for the welfare of his disciples.

Like a true shepherd for his flock He takes time to give practical instructions.

He gives a word of encouragement for confused minds and troubled hearts. What a loving God we have who looks out for our best interests.

They will need courage because they would be persecuted, betrayed and hated but their arrest would also give them the opportunity to be witnesses to the truth before governors and kings. They would preach the Gospel to all nations.

All of Jesus' words came true within that generation. People from many nations first heard the gospel on the day of Pentecost. They returned

to their homes with an amazing tale to tell and a new living experience of God to share with their families and friends.

We know from the Acts of the Apostles that as persecution of Christians intensified in Jerusalem many of the persecuted believers dispersed and they took the message out across the Roman empire and beyond as they shared the gospel wherever they went.

Those Christians who remained in and around Jerusalem needed special instructions too because of the particular horrors that Jesus foresaw taking place there as the direct fruit of nationalistic fervour.

Jesus warned them, [Mark 13:14-15]

"When you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains . Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house to take anything out and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak."

Jesus' imagery will seem obscure to us but it would not have been to the disciples. 200 years before one of the Greek rulers of Israel attempted to destroy the distinctive Jewish religion and make the Jews conform to Greek culture. He desecrated the Temple by putting in a Greek altar and sacrificing pigs on it. This caused a revolt led by the Maccabees family which after 3.5 yrs won the Jews their religious freedom again.

Jesus was warning that something similar would happen again. Leaders of these uprisings would call themselves

"Anointed Ones - Christ - Saviour or prophets".
Jesus warns His followers not to trust them.
Don't join in with these so called freedom fighters against the Romans.

Don't think that you will be safe in the city.
Instead, in the event of a revolt against Rome leave the area quickly before the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem.

A situation like this almost happened in AD 40.
The mad emperor Caligula ordered that his statue be set up in the Jerusalem temple so that the Jews should worship him. The crisis was avoided when Caligula was assassinated in January 41.

BUT eventually in AD66 the temple was desecrated by Romans and a revolt was instigated.

The Roman Empire had been weakened by a period of instability and infighting. There four emperors in 1 year.

But in AD 70 Jerusalem was re-captured after a siege and the city & temple were destroyed.

Many of the survivors were crucified and the rest sold into slavery.

The Christians in Jerusalem were saved because they heeded this warning of Jesus. One of the prophets in the Jerusalem congregation reminded them of Jesus' words and they had wisely left in good time. They travelled to a town called Pella, one of the 10 cities of Decapolis, on the other side of the River Jordan.