

Week 4: On the Horizon (Mark 13:1-37)

Take some time before you meet to read through Mark chapter 13.

1. Mark 13 is a tough chapter! What was helpful to you in the message on Sunday? What did you find surprising or uncomfortable? What did you disagree with?
2. Read Mark 13:1-2. The disciples were clearly impressed by the temple, despite Jesus' description of it as a "den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). Do you see any similarities between the popular view of the temple in the first century, and people's opinions of the church today?
3. Read Mark 13:3-13. It is believed that Mark's readers were experiencing persecution for their faith. In addition, Israel was probably about to enter into, or was already in the midst of a violent uprising against Rome. How does this context influence how you read this passage? How do you understand the statement in verse 13: "the one who stands firm to the end will be saved"?
4. Read Mark 13:14-27.
 - In this passage, Jesus draws on well-known Jewish apocryphal literature, which provided cryptic revelations about sudden and dramatic interventions of God in history. Why do you think Jesus does this instead of giving an unambiguous answer to the disciples' questions?
 - Read Isaiah 13:10 and Isaiah 34:4—Isaiah's prophecies concerning the downfall of the ancient kingdoms of Babylon and Edom. What might be indicated by the fact that the language in Mark 13 is not unique, but has been used of past "disasters"?
 - In verse 26, Jesus references Daniel 7:13-14, where one like the son of man comes with the clouds of heaven into the presence of the Ancient of Days (God). This implies Jesus is talking about going *into* heaven, rather than coming down *from* heaven. How does this understanding impact how you read the passage?
5. Read Mark 13:30-33. What does Jesus say in response to the disciples' questions about *when* these things will happen? What can we learn from this?
6. How does this chapter make you feel? The speaker on Sunday said Mark was writing to comfort his readers, rather than to frighten or disturb them. What comfort can you take from this chapter?
7. Are there aspects of the future about which you feel anxious? If you are reflecting in a group, break into smaller groups to share your response and to pray for one another. If you are reflecting alone, talk to God about your fears. Trust in Jesus' words: "don't be afraid," "this is not the end" (verse 7).

Practice for the week: A review of life

Take some time this week to think about how God has been present in your life over the years. Break it down into manageable time periods:

- childhood (1-12 years)
- adolescence (13-18 years)
- young adulthood (19-35 years)
- midlife (36-65 years)
- senior (>65 years)

What major events come to mind? Where was God in these events? Were there any times that seemed like “the end”? How do you feel as you look back on them now? What insights did you gain?

As you reflect back, talk to God about your sense of God’s presence and absence in your life. Ask God to increasingly open your mind and heart to God’s loving, calming presence with you.

If you are interested in learning more about the temple structure in the time of Jesus, check out <https://tinyurl.com/yc3n96wk> for a 20-minute tour with Rabbi Dr. David Moster, director of the Institute of Biblical Culture and an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary.