

## Apocalyptic in Mark 13

Jesus' discourse in Mark 13 contains a number of features which are commonly present in apocalyptic. The dualistic view of history is present, setting forth a tension between this age and the age to come. Jesus describes a number of signs which will accompany the approach of the end:

- Wars (vv. 7-8)
- Earthquakes (v. 8)
- Famines (v. 8)

These Jesus describes as the “beginning of the birth pangs” (v. 8). He has in view the cataclysmic transition between the ages which is also a common feature of Jewish apocalyptic—the birth pangs are continued in vv. 24-25 with odd signs in the heavens, this time coinciding with the Parousia (v. 26).

The apocalyptic nature of Mk 13 is also evident in the extreme persecution of the righteous which Jesus describes:

- They will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues . . . (v. 9)
- You will be hated by all on account of My name . . . (v. 13).

As something of a corrolary to the persecution of the righteous is Jesus' mention of an anti-god figure, described as “the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be” (v. 14).

There is also a palpable pessimism about the present age. For a time, the persecutors and the wicked will prevail over the saints, but “the one who endures to the

end, he shall be saved” (v. 13). The upheaval which precedes the inauguration of the new age is a terrible time, whose days have been shortened for the sake of the elect (v. 20). In light of these facts, an expectation of the Parousia is encouraged:

When you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door (v. 29).

There are a number of features in Mk 13 that suggest Mark arranges the material of Jesus’ teachings on matters of the end in specific ways for the community to whom he is writing. There is a hortatory overtone to Mk 13, marked by the repeated use of the command, “Take heed,” or “Be on guard” (vv. 9, 33). This idea relates specifically to the proliferation of false Christs as the end approaches (v. 5). Moreover, Mark clearly mingles near-expectation and eschatological delay. The mention of the destruction of the temple (v. 2) relates it generally to eschatological developments, and it also corresponds with the statement of v. 30: This generation will not pass away until all these things take place (many of Mark’s readers would have lived to see the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.). Mark tempers this near expectation with statements such as, “but that is not yet the end,” and “. . . of that day or hour no one knows . . . .” (v. 7, 32). Perhaps Mark saw a need to counter an exaggerated near-expectation of the end in the community he was writing to (much as Paul did by introducing an eschatological delay in 2 Thess).