

7.12

When Will Jesus Return?

Mark 13 makes three points with regard to the time of Jesus's second coming.

The Time of Jesus's Coming Is Not Yet

"Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." (13:5–8 [see also 13:21–22])

The Time of Jesus's Coming Is Soon

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. (13:28–30)

The Time of Jesus's Coming Is Unknown

"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come." (13:32–33)

Summary

At the time Mark wrote his Gospel, the most prominent leaders of the Christian church had been murdered in horrifying spectacles, and the holy city of Jerusalem was on the verge of being decimated by pagan armies (if, indeed, it had not already suffered that fate). It probably seemed to Mark and his readers that the end was at hand (13:28–30; cf. 9:1). Nevertheless, Mark records words of Jesus that caution readers against fanaticism: the end perhaps is not yet (13:5–8, 21–22), and in any case it cannot be predicted with certainty (13:32–33). In general, Mark wants to encourage readers to live always on the edge, expecting the end to come very soon but realizing that it might not come as speedily as they hope.