Community Group Discussion Guide

November 1, 2026

Mark 13:1-16, 24-27, 32-33 | Persecution to Gathering

MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: What is it about end times that fascinates so many people?*

DISCUSS

During His ministry, as He did in Mark 13:1-16, 24-27, 32-33, Jesus provided information about end times. Some elements we know for certain, while others aren't revealed with clarity. In the final days before His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples what to expect upon His return at the end of the age. His looming death on the cross would not be the end of the story. There would be much more to come for His followers: The gospel must be preached, people must be saved, and Jesus will return in glory. Though Jesus' message can be difficult to understand, it is a gift of grace to us all. He told us what to expect in the future. He assured us that, come what may, He is in control, He is coming back, and He will make all things right.

⇒ *Amidst all the various beliefs about end times, how should Christians live?*

1. Mark 13:1-13: The end times will bring false rumors and persecution.

Mark 13:1-8: *[1] And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" [2] And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." [3] And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, [4] "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" [5] And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. [6] Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. [7] And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.[8] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

Mark 13 contains what is called "The Olivet Discourse." In this teaching, Jesus spoke about the future and frequently used phrases such as "keep watch" and "be on your guard." As Mark 13 opens, Jesus and his disciples had just left the temple for the final time. As they left, the disciples marveled at the impressive building. But Jesus told them, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

The temple was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world. It had been under construction for 46 years and was just nearing its completion. The temple complex covered about one-sixth of the area of the city of Jerusalem. The stones the disciples referred to were 40 feet long by 12 feet high by 18 feet wide. They were pure white in appearance, except for what was covered in gold.

⇒ *In Jesus' day what did the temple mean to the Jews? As such, why would Jesus' words have been shocking?*

Jesus then went to the Mount of Olives, where Peter, James, John, and Andrews asked Him to tell them when these things would happen. Their question was twofold:

- When will the temple be destroyed? The disciples likely thought that the destruction of the temple would happen at the end of time, when God would start a new age in His kingdom.

- What sign should we look for? The disciples wanted a sign to show them that the end of the age was happening.

⇒ *Do we still long for signs today of when Jesus will return? Why are we inclined to need these signs?*
⇒ *Whether we have signs or not, does it change the ultimate outcome of Jesus' return?*

Jesus did not initially focus on signs in this conversation. Instead, Jesus warned His disciples to watch out that they were not deceived by anyone falsely claiming to be the Christ. He indicated that many would come in His name, claiming to be the Messiah. Feeding on people's hopes, these deceivers would claim to possess divine authority. Jesus' disciples had to be prepared to see through their deception. Christians today must also heed Jesus' warnings so we are not deceived. False teachers have come and will continue to come until Jesus returns.

⇒ *Why are we prone to believe lies, conspiracy theories, and rumors?*
⇒ *How can we discern the truth between Christ and those claiming to be Him*?

Jesus also warned of wars, rumors of wars, and natural disasters like earthquakes and famines that will happen in the future. Jesus described these as "the beginning of the birth pains." Labor and childbirth are used throughout the Bible as a picture of suffering that will eventually lead to joy—a child. We do not know how long the labor will be, but Jesus warned that it would be difficult.

⇒ *How does Jesus' warning about wars and natural disasters remind His followers of the fallout of living in a world broken by sin?*
⇒ *In such circumstances why is it vital we remember that God is sovereign over all the events of history?*

Mark 13:9-13: *9 "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. 10 And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. 11 And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

The general hardships and conflicts faced by previous verses now become personal as Jesus warned: Be on your guard. Persecution will come. God's people will be handed over to courts, beaten, demanded to bear witness, and even to deny the faith. We have seen many such instances in the history of the church. Jesus wants us to know that such things are not glitches in the system but features of the Christian life. He wants His followers to understand that through the suffering of His saints, His gospel is proclaimed and goes forth. The central issue that Jesus addresses is not how disciples can learn the timing of the end from external events but what they will do when they are handed over.

⇒ *When you pray for an opportunity to share the gospel, do you understand that the opportunity might come through persecution?*
⇒ *How does Jesus' teaching on persecution strengthen your confidence to remain faithful when trials come?*

Warnings of persecution can cause intense anxiety, even in believers. When dragged before governors and kings—important and powerful judges—what can a Christian say? Should we prepare our speeches now? Should we take courses in apologetics to have all the answers at the ready? What if the officials ask a question we can't answer or make a demand we cannot meet? The good news is that Jesus told us we need not worry about what we will say in those moments. The Holy Spirit will speak for us and through us. When everything is

on the line, we will not be alone.

- ⇒ *Discuss this statement: The point is less about the specifics of the suffering and more about the specifics of the support. When the day of trouble comes, we are not left to ourselves. Jesus is with us. The Holy Spirit is with us. God Himself will be our comfort and our support.*
- ⇒ *Does the promise of their presence with you in persecution give you comfort or raise questions? Explain your answer.*

While the thought of persecution can be discouraging and frightening, Jesus told the disciples plainly that persecution would come as a catalyst for the gospel to spread to all the nations. Through this persecution they would have opportunity to be a witness for Christ. But Jesus' followers do not experience any form of suffering that Jesus Himself did not already suffer. Days after Jesus told His disciples these things, He stood before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod before heading to the cross.

Not long after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, many of His disciples were arrested and persecuted. Yet they were joyful to suffer for Jesus. In Acts 5, the apostles were arrested for preaching about Jesus. After they were beaten and let go, "they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully" on Jesus' behalf.

- ⇒ *Why does persecution not stop the advance of the gospel?*
- ⇒ *Why is taking the gospel to all the nations more important than looking for signs of Jesus' return?*

2. Mark 13:14-16, 24-27, 32-33: Though we know not when, Jesus will return.

Mark 13:14-16: *14 "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.15 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, 16 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.*

Verse 14 opens with an allusion to Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 and a great tragedy regarding "the abomination of desolation." This was thought to have been fulfilled or partially fulfilled several times throughout Jewish history. An *abomination* is "something that causes disgust or hatred;" and *desolation* is "a state of complete emptiness or destruction." Stemming from Daniel's prophecies, the phrase "abomination of desolation" refers to a sacrilegious act in the temple.

In 168 BC, during the Intertestamental Period, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the temple by placing an altar to the Greek god Zeus in the place where burnt offerings were made to God. Then, also in the temple, he sacrificed a pig—an unclean animal and unacceptable sacrifice. It was natural for everyone to look upon that event as the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, but here Jesus indicated it was only a partial fulfillment.

Jesus was also pointing to days not long after His ascension when the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans and the Jews would have to flee from Jerusalem. Of course, Jesus' apostles didn't know that would happen when He spoke these words to them. They did not have the advantage of hindsight that we do.

- ⇒ *How might not knowing the full outcome have felt for them, and how does having hindsight change how we read warning passages today?*

Jesus also spoke beyond AD 70 to a point in the future when the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy would come at a point in the future. This "telescoping of prophecy" is described as:

- Double reference prophecy: A near event serves as a partial fulfillment and symbol for the fulfillment of far events.
- Double fulfillment prophecy: The near fulfillment of the prophecy foreshadows the far. God is showing a picture of two things at once. One is near, one is far—the latter is worse.

⇒ *Why do you think biblical prophecy often operates on multiple layers or fulfillments?*
⇒ *What are some wrong ways to respond to the Bible's end times prophecies?*

Next, Jesus issued imperatives for the people of Judea to not hesitate in fleeing into the mountains. He told them not to go back into their houses for anything because their situation would be dire. In times of war, the people of Judea would usually flee to the city of Jerusalem for protection within the fortified walls. Jesus warned, though, that the city would be destroyed, the coming judgment would be immediate, and they would have to flee the city quickly. Jesus' instructions demonstrated the urgency of the moment.

⇒ *What does this extreme sense of urgency teach us about how to respond when God gives a clear warning?*
⇒ *Do you feel like you are living your life with a sense of "holy urgency?"*

Mark 13:24-27: *24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

These verses are filled with Old Testament imagery. In Joel 2:10; 3:15, the prophet Joel spoke of the sun, moon, and stars darkening. When Jesus finally returns to redeem and restore this broken world, there will be spectacular celestial phenomenon and cosmic disturbances that the world has never seen—a kind of "de-creation." Everything will be shaken so that what remains are only the things that cannot be shaken—the everlasting things of God (Hebrews 12:25-29).

⇒ *What "shakable" things are you tempted to cling to, and how might Jesus be inviting you to rest more deeply in what cannot be shaken?*

When Jesus returns; we'll know it's Him. His return will not be seen by just a few people, as was true of His first entrance into the world. All of humanity will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory as the ruler of the universe (Daniel 7:13). It will not be hidden or secretive and no one will miss it. At His return, Jesus will gather His redeemed people from all over the globe—north, south, east, and west—both living believers on earth and departed saints.

⇒ *How does connecting these verses to the prophets Joel and Daniel change or deepen how you picture Jesus' return?*
⇒ *When you imagine Christ appearing in glory to gather His people, what stirs in your heart?*

Mark 13:32-33: *32 "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.*

Some people make a whole career out of trying to predict the date and hour of Jesus' return. The truth is that information is not granted to us, to the angels, or to Jesus in His humanity. Only God the Father knows, assuring us that it will be unexpected and glorious. What is known is that Jesus wants us to be alert, awake, and watching for His certain return. It will happen one day. We must conclude that God does not deem it vital for us to know the specifics, but rather that we should look for opportunities to share the

gospel, to bear witness to Christ in the hard days, to rejoice in our suffering, to serve Him, and to live everyday as if it is our last.

⇒ *Why does not knowing when Jesus will return make every moment matter even more?*

⇒ *Why should end times prophecy fuel a vigorous involvement in missions and evangelism?*

TRANSFORM

Jesus' instructions not only impacted His disciples at that time, but those who will become believers in the future. Jesus wants to satisfy the curiosity of His disciples concerning the future, but He also wants to give us practical teachings on how to handle the future. No one knows when He will come, so until He does: Trust Him. Do not live in fear. Be vigilant. Live faithfully for Him.

1. HEAD: Mark 13 is a heady chapter, forcing us to think through the end times. There is no end to speculation about those days—when they will come, what it will look like, and so on. Jesus warned His disciples to be careful that no one would deceive them about His return, and we should pray for wisdom and discernment as we wait.

⇒ *How can you be sure that no one will deceive you about Christ's return?*

2. HEART: We have relative few Scripture passages that describe what the end times will be like, but there are two things that we can know for sure. First, we know that one day this age as we know it will end. Second, we know that Jesus will return to make all things new. Any scenario with Jesus at the center cannot ultimately be bad news for the Christian, even with the trials and tribulations to come.

⇒ *How does the promise of Christ's return fill you with hope today?*

3. HANDS: The appropriate response to Jesus' words in Mark 13 is faithful obedience. We should be alert and well-read with our Bibles to discern the truth. We should live prayerfully. And we should share the gospel with others, serving the Lord wherever He has put us. Our regular lives devoted to the Lord are the perfect ground from which to watch and wait for Jesus' return.

⇒ *In the ordinary rhythms of your life, what will it look like to watch and wait for Jesus' return?*

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