

THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (17 November 2024)

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

“Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. 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.”

“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. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:24-32 – NRSV).

Introductory notes

General

You will find similar texts in Matthew 24:29-44 and Luke 21:25-36.

This is an example of apocalyptic literature. Our English word, “apocalyptic”, comes from the Greek word, *apokaluptein* meaning “uncover” or “reveal”. So the final book of the Christian Scriptures is called “The Apocalypse” or “The Book of Revelation”. The central focus of Christian apocalyptic literature is the uncovering or revealing of the glory of God in Jesus who is the Christ. Such an uncovering or revealing will be a momentous and definitive moment in the history of the cosmos, a manifestation of the victory of God.

The apocalyptic writers reach for extreme imagery to convey the drama of this event. The first Christians see a continuity here with the unfolding of God’s revelation throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. It is not surprising therefore that Mark’s – subsequently Matthew’s and Luke’s – apocalyptic passages echo earlier apocalyptic texts. For example:

- Isaiah 13:10: For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.
- Ezekiel 32:7: When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light.
- Daniel 7:13 – 14: As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting

dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

- Joel 2:10: The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

“The most extensive Jewish apocalypses are Daniel, *1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra* (*2 Esdras* 3–14), and *2 Baruch*. Other Jewish writings from Jesus’ time (including some of the Dead Sea scrolls), though not formally apocalypses, contain many eschatological or apocalyptic elements” (J R Donahue, & D J Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002, 378). Enoch, Ezra and Baruch are apocryphal. That is, they are not included in the Bible as we know it.

“The great critical question regarding Mark 13 concerns the origin of the material in it. How much comes from the OT and Jewish apocalyptic sources, from Jesus, from the early church, and from Mark? Some elements are clearly biblical quotations and allusions (see the Notes on 13:14, 19, 24–25, 26, 30). Other elements very likely echo the voice of Jesus (see the Notes on 13:2, 32) and the experience of early Christians and especially Mark’s community (see the Notes on 13:6, 9, 11–13, 21–22). Still other elements reflect Mark’s distinctive vocabulary and style (see the Notes on 13:10, 19, 20, 28–37)” (J R Donahue, & D J Harrington, 379).

“While apocalyptic writing is recognized by its scary and dark imagery of trials, tribulations, and turmoil in the heavens (vv. 24–25), there is also the consoling light at the heart of it all, which overcomes the darkness. Here that consolation takes the form of the glorious Son of Man, Jesus, coming on the clouds to gather his chosen and faithful ones from all over the earth (vv. 26–27). Mark borrows this encouraging picture of God’s deliverance from the promises of the Old Testament prophet Daniel (Dan 7:13–14). Mark’s readers today, as well as his first readers, might well be lifted up by this promise of God’s final victory over whatever difficulties or darkness envelop them and their world. Encouraged by this hopeful vision, they can accept more readily their responsibilities to be a consoling light for those who may not yet have experienced the hopeful side of the gospel promises” (D Bergant, & R J Karris, *The Collegeville Bible commentary : based on the New American Bible with revised New Testament*, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1989, 930).

Specific

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place: This sentence presents a serious challenge. One commentator sums up: “The saying is linked backward to 13:29 by ‘these things’ and forward to 13:31 by ‘pass away’. It receives the solemn introduction, ‘Amen I say to you’. The most obvious meaning of *genea* is ‘generation’—that is, the contemporaries of Jesus (or Mark) who would be expected to have died in the next twenty to thirty years (see 8:38–9:1). This suggests that the expectation was that ‘all these things’ would occur fairly soon, at least by the end of what we call the first

century C.E. Efforts to interpret *genea* as referring to the Jewish people ('race') are not convincing. As in 13:29 "all these things" is problematic. The most obvious meaning is the coming of the Son of Man and the vindication of the elect (see 13:26–27). The expression may also have been taken to refer to Jesus' death and resurrection as the decisive event in salvation history and/or to the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 C.E. If indeed 'all these things' does refer to the return of Jesus as the glorious Son of Man, his non-appearance does not seem to have created much consternation for the evangelists (who insisted on constant vigilance). The specificity (and imminence) of the timing stated here ('this generation') is balanced by the claim in 13:32 that no one knows the day or the hour" (J R Donahue, & D J Harrington, op cit, 376).

no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father: "That God should know the precise time for "these things" is understandable, since they take place according to God's plan. But that the Son (who is placed on the same level as the angels) should not know this too strikes most Christian readers as surprising. There has been some preparation for this statement in Jesus' admission to the sons of Zebedee that it is not within his power to decide who will sit at his right or left hand in the kingdom of God (see 10:40). These sayings are not the kind of material that early Christians would have created on their own, and so they may well represent the authentic voice of Jesus and provide an important perspective on the meaning of the Incarnation (see Phil 2:6–11). However, they have also provided ammunition throughout the centuries for those who question Jesus' divinity and equality with the Father in the Trinity" (Ibid).