



Robert H. Stein is senior professor of New Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. He is the author of *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus, The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings, Difficult Passages in the New Testament, Luke (New American Commentary), A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible, Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation* and *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*.

## The Meaning of Mark 13

### When did you first become interested in the Gospel of Mark?

**Robert H. Stein:** My love affair with the Gospel of Mark began as a doctoral student at Princeton Theological Seminary and resulted in a dissertation, "The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Marcan Redaktionsgeschichte." After graduation it led to the writing of various articles on Mark and ultimately culminated in my commentary on Mark in the Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament. This interest has not waned as is evident in the publication of *Jesus, the Temple and the Coming Son of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13*.

### What do you believe is the key to understanding this seemingly confusing passage known as the "Olivet Discourse"?

**Stein:** The key for understanding Mark 13 involves how to interpret the two questions of the disciples in 13:4. Are they essentially a twofold question dealing with *when* "these things" (the destruction of the Temple and its associated buildings) spoken of in 13:1-2 and the *sign* preceding "all these things" (a synonym for "these things"), or are they two different questions—one dealing with the Temple's destruction and the other with the coming of the Son of Man at the end of the age? The use of "these things" and "all these things" in 13:4 and then in 13:29-30 indicates that these expressions are synonyms. Luke's reference in his parallel to the Markan account to "when 'these things' will be" and what the "sign will be when 'these things' are about to take place" indicate that he understands Mark's twofold question as being an example of synonymous parallelism. Thus Mark 13 is best understood as follows:

13:1-4	Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple	
13:5-23	The coming destruction of the temple and the sign preceding it	(A)
13:24-27	The coming of the Son of Man	(B)
13:28-31	The parable of the fig tree illustrating the temple's destruction	(a)
13:32-27	The parable of the watchman and the exhortation to be alert for the coming of the Son of Man	(b)

### How does the question of the authorship of Mark affect your work on the text?

**Stein:** The present work is based on a traditional, author-oriented hermeneutic and seeks to understand the meaning that the author of Mark 13 sought to convey to his first-century readers. It is not primarily an attempt to investigate its subject matter as to what the historical Jesus taught concerning the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem or the coming of the Son of Man. It is not an attempt to learn about the history of the early church between the resurrection of Jesus and the time when Mark was written. At times these issues may be discussed briefly but only if they help us better understand the Marcan meaning of the text that we possess. The goal of this work is to understand what the author of the Gospel we call Mark meant and sought to convey by the present text of Mark 13. The issue of who actually

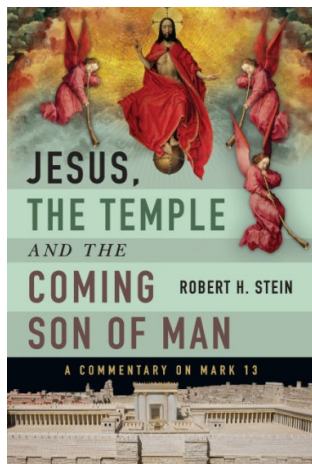
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wrote the second Gospel in the New Testament is not important for our quest of the meaning of Mark 13. The meaning of this chapter is what its author, whoever he may have been, meant by the Greek text he has given to us. Concerns about authorship usually involve the significance or value a person places on the message of the author. If the Mark of Acts in whose home the early church met (Acts 12:12) wrote this Gospel, its value as an accurate and reliable account of the life and teachings of Jesus is considerably enhanced. If it was written by some unknown Mark whose relationship to the eyewitness reports of the Gospel witnesses is uncertain, its historical value is considerably diminished.

The meaning of Mark 13, however, is not affected! The meaning of Mark 13 still means what its author meant when he wrote it, whoever the author may have been. Support for the traditional Markan authorship of the second Gospel is strong and convincing. Nevertheless, in using the name “Mark” in this work, we will be simply using this traditional name associated with this Gospel without making any claim as to its actual authorship.

#### **Did Jesus actually deliver this talk with his disciples as it is written?**

**Stein:** The probability, acknowledged by most scholars, is that the sayings of Jesus in Mark 13 were not all proclaimed at the same time and in the same order. If, as is probable, some were taught by Jesus at different times, the order and the logical progression of the argument in 13:5-37 is not so much that of Jesus as that of Mark. Nevertheless it appears reasonable to conclude that the Jesus of Mark 13 taught the following:

- The temple and city of Jerusalem would be destroyed in the lifetime of the disciples.
- Wars, natural disasters, false prophets and messianic pretenders would arise, but these were neither signs nor immediate precursors of the temple’s destruction but part of the natural order of things.
- The followers of Jesus would face persecution and, either through or despite this, spread the gospel to all nations.
- In their persecution the Holy Spirit would be with them and aid them in their defense.
- An “abomination of desolation” would precede Jerusalem’s destruction, and the believing community should take this as a sign to flee the city immediately.
- The Son of Man would come from heaven and gather his elect from throughout the world.
- No one knows the time of his return but God alone, and as a result believers should live a life prepared for his arrival.

— Adapted from the preface, chapter one, “Determining our Goal,” and chapter two, “Key Issues Involved in Interpreting Mark 13”