Chapter 3: the Great Tribulation, the Coming of the Messiah, and the End of Exile

Pitre moves on from examining the enigmatic sayings of the last chapter to focusing his attention on Mark 13. It is here that Pitre seeks, at length, to show that tribulation, new exodus and return from exile are dominant themes within Jesus ministry. From the outset it is helpful to know where Pitre intends to take us in this exegetical tour of Mark 13, for the details and the flow of the argument are dense. Essentially he goes through the passage verse by verse to show that the 'apocalyptic' discourse draws on several Old Testament and Intertestamental echoes which are united in the narrative of a coming tribulation, which, when it has reached its climax in the destruction of Jerusalem, will unveil the Messiah and see the return from exile of the People of God,

"For Jesus it appears that the messianic tribulation, the Great tribulation, is nothing less than the climax of Israel's exilic sufferings. It is the final period of suffering which would precede the Return from Exile, the restoration of the twelve tribes, and the coming of the Messiah."

Pitre offers an interpretation of Mark 13 which resembles recent work by N.T. Wright, Dick France and the recently published monologue by Andrew Perriman. Edward Adams who defends a 'second coming' and cosmic catastrophe view of at least some of Mark 13 offers a helpful summary of the scholarly options available.

"As to the subject-matter of the discourse, while a few think that the speech is essentially looks beyond the destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE to a future time and the parousia of Jesus and the final end[ C.A. Evans]. Of this majority, most assume the discourse reflects or anticipates (depending on the extent to which it is prophecy or ex eventa) the events of 66-70CE in particular [Hengel, Marcus], but some argue that it more strongly echoes the Caligula crisis of 40-41 CE and its aftermath. Whether the parousia is expected within the time frame of the 'generation' mentioned in v. 30 is debated. The view of Mark 13 taken by Wright, though not without pedigree, stands apart from the consensus approach. For him, the entire discourse, from beginning to end, is about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple; it has nothing to do with the second coming of Jesus or the putative end of the world. Wright calls the speech 'Jesus' Temple discourse'... Wright takes Mark 13 as an authentic prophetic speech by Jesus; this prophecy stands as fulfilled. It does not exactly what happened in 66-70 CE, but Jesus was not making literal predictions. Rather, he was using the metaphorical and symbolic language of Old Testament prophecy and Jewish apocalyptic to speak of"

1 'if the only authentic Jesus traditions we possessed regarding the tribulation were those examined in the last chapter, we would not be able to say much at all about how they fit into his overall message about the coming of the kingdom of God' JTEE 219
2 JTEE 379
events he saw as coming upon Israel.\textsuperscript{4}

Pitre focuses only on those passages in which Jesus describes the future period of tribulation.

1) Jesus warnings of the 'birth pangs' (Mark 13:5-8)
2) his forecast of future persecutions and the coming of the holy spirit (Mark 13:9-13)
3) the prophecy of the Great Tribulation that will be inaugurated by the appearance of the 'abomination of desolation' and will culminate in the coming of the son of man. (Mark 13:14-27)

Pitre recognises the scholarship which has already gone into understanding Mark 13 but he seeks to offer something new to the discussion. To date, according to Pitre, there is no extensive treatment that both (a)'examines these passages in the light of eschatology of Second Temple Judaism' (b) and applies the criteria of authenticity to each block of tradition. Pitre's analysis of these passages(a) essentially involves lining them up with various Old testament/Intertestmental literature. To show the scope of the unity he finds in this approach I have represented some of his findings, diagrammatically.

1) Jesus warnings of the 'birth pangs' (Mark 13:5-8)

Jesus responds to a question about the time of the destruction of the temple with an 'an oracle of future tribulation that describes a threefold series of events\textsuperscript{5}

a) the coming of deceivers: (v5-6)
b) the onset of war (v7-8)
c) the outbreak of natural disasters (v8)

All three of these events, deceivers, wars and natural disasters, "constitute the birth pangs of some greater event."\textsuperscript{6}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark's Gospel</th>
<th>O.T Echoes</th>
<th>Intertestamental Literature</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Coming of Deceivers (v5-6)</td>
<td>Jer 29:8-9 [LXX 36:8-9]</td>
<td></td>
<td>'As the Old Testament amply attests, similar prophetic figures had always attempted to lead astray the people of Israel in times of strife, exile and overall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{5} JTEE 224

\textsuperscript{6} JTEE 224
| The Onset of War (7-8) | Jer 51:46, Dan 2:36-45; cf. 9:26 | 'Jesus appears to be speaking of the end of Jerusalem and its Temple, the catastrophic destruction of which will take place, according to Daniel, at the climax of the eschatological tribulation.'

7

| The Outbreak of Natural Disasters (v8) | Earthquakes: Isa 29:6; Exek 38:19-20, Jer 4:24, Joel 2:10-11, etc Famines: Is 5:13;14:30, Jer 11:20 | Numerous. See Davies and Allison 3.341 'the imagery of coming earthquakes and famines are part of the standard eschatological topos.'

8

| Birth Pangs: | Birth pangs and a cities destruction (Hos 13:12-16, Isa 13:6-14:2, etc) | 1 QH 11:7-10, 1 En 62:4-6 'This first wave of this truly messianic tribulation will consist of a series of increasingly disturbing events: the arrival of deceivers who will claim to be Jesus (and, as such, The Messiah), the outbreak of wars between nations, and the onset of earthquakes and famines. All of these events taken together will signal the beginning of the 'birth pangs'--the birth pangs of both the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple and of the coming of the Messiah.'

9

—

Pitre's eschatological chronology, taken from these verses, seems to be as follows.

Destruction of Jerusalem

Deceivers ---> Wars ---> Earthquakes and Famine ---> Birth Pangs

Messiah

Pitre's work is persuasive to some degree but fails, in my opinion, regarding the chronology which he puts forward, for there is no place in these verses that it say that the Messiah will come at the end of these days of tribulation. Pitre calls attention to Daniel 9:25-27 as an echo to Jesus' teaching which brings together the two themes of Messiah and the destruction of the temple. However, Daniel 9:25-27 does not necessarily support this 'tribulation before the Messiah' chronology for the Messiah is cut off prior to the temples destruction.

7 JTEE 227

8 JTEE 228

9 JTEE 228-229

10 JTEE 231
After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. (NRSV Daniel 9:25-27)

Pitre's work in the previous chapter called to attention that Jesus, at least since the time of John the Baptist's death, saw himself and his disciples as living through the tribulation. However, this initial forage into Mark 13 states that the tribulation is a future event connected with the destruction of the temple. This suggests that the concept of tribulation, as with the language of kingdom, is not easily pinned down and like the kingdom may be described as now/not yet—as present in the ministry of Jesus and an imminent expectation.

2) His forecast of future persecutions and the coming of the holy spirit (Mark 13:9-13)

Pitre understands, from several different angles, the persecutions in this passage as 'manifestations of specifically eschatological tribulation.'

1) Gospel and Gentiles: καὶ εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη πρῶτον δεῖ κηρυχθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (v10) τὸ εὐαγγέλιον and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are clearly eschatological. The good news is to be understood, on the basis of Isa 52:7-12, Joel 2:28-5:9 and Pss. Solomen 11:1-4 as the proclamation of the (I) return of the scattered tribes of Israel and the (II) ingathering of the Gentiles. Added to this is the LXX version of Joel which not only refers to (I) gathering of scattered tribes, and (II) welcome of Gentiles but also to the (III) outpouring of the Spirit. Jesus is referring, for Pitre, to a period of tribulation which will take place before the end of exile and gathering of the gentiles.

2) Interfamilial Strife: Pitre has previously discussed this in his exegesis of Matt 10:34-36. He adds to this by noticing that Micah 7:6-18 situates this period of interfamilial strife immediately before the restoration of Israel in the 'New Exodus that will be witnessed by the nations and thereby lead to their conversion.' This prophecy in Micah also refers(Micah 7:7) to the prophet, during this period of strife, as 'waiting ὑπομενῶ (LXX ύπομενενῶ) the God of my Salvation (θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου) which finds a parallel in Jesus promises that he who endures to end will be saved (ὁ δὲ υπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται).

3) Disciples will be handed over (παραδόσουσιν): This appears, to Pitre, to echo Daniel 7:25 in some are handed over (παραδοθήσεται) to a Gentile King during the eschatological tribulation.

---

11 JTEE 199-216. In this essay Chapter 2
12 JTEE 259
4) Jesus predicts that his disciples will be 'hated': An important parallel is found in the Isaiah 66:5.

   Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: Your own people who hate you and reject you for my name's sake have said, “Let the Lord be glorified, so that we may see your joy”; but it is they who shall be put to shame. (NRSV Is 66:5)

Is 66:5 when read in contexts 'is identical to that of the other Old Testament texts... the end of exile and the ingathering of the Gentiles.'\textsuperscript{13}

Pitre concludes this section by summing up his interpretation.

'In sum, Mark 13:9-13 is both a warning and a promise, a dark description of a time of tribulation to come and an emphatic pledge that the disciples will be given the means to preach the good news in the face of all manner of opposition and to be saved through whatever sufferings they may endure.'\textsuperscript{14}

By themselves each of these scriptural echoes would not provide a convincing case for return from exile/new exodus being the implicit narrative of Mark 13. However, the frequency of these parallels and illusions suggest that Pitre may indeed be on to something.

3 The Temple Destruction, the Coming Son of Man, and the Ingathering of the Gentiles (Mark 13:14-27)

In recent years, one think of Wright, France and Perriman, a number of scholars have suggested strongly that this passage is to be understood as referring to the events of AD70 rather than referring to the end of the world and/or the second coming of Christ.

Pitre seeks to understand this passage in its immediate context and in light of the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism.

The Abomination of Desolation: This passage presupposes that the reader is aware of the book of Daniel which refers to the 'abomination which makes desolate' (Dan 9:24-27, Dan 11:31-35, Dan 12:11). Four things are to be noted from the Daniellic passages which can be used to make better

\textsuperscript{13} JTEE 262
\textsuperscript{14} JTEE 255-256
In the book of Daniel the (I) abomination of desolation always 'refers to the profanation of the Temple' which is carried out by (II)'forced cessation of sacrifice', in particular, the tamid.\textsuperscript{15} (III) The cessation of sacrifice is carried out by a royal figure. (IV) The profanation of the Temple is fatal for it 'brings about the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem.' This destructive profanation is the 'eschatological event which precedes the Great Tribulation.'\textsuperscript{16}

In the light of Daniel Pitre draws the following conclusions about the Jesus prophecy of the 'abomination of desolation.'

(I) Jesus is warning of the coming profanation of the Jerusalem Temple.

(II) It is carried out by a royal figure

(III) It will lead to the cessation of sacrifice

(III) the profanation of sacrifice and the cessation of sacrifice will lead to Destruction of the temple.

(IV) The abomination of desolation will signal the onset of the final tribulation.

As Pitre says,

'Jesus is drawing on prominent images from the book of Daniel to say, in effect: 'When you see the one who will profane the Temple and enact the cessation of sacrifice that will bring about its desolation and the destruction of Jerusalem, flee to safety from Judea, for the final days of the Great Tribulation have begun'.\textsuperscript{17}

It may be argued that Pitre is making to much of the Danielic echoes. Pitre safeguards this, to some degree, by saying that the phrase 'let the reader understand' is not understood to be the editorial hand\textsuperscript{18} but are the words of Jesus,

'They are meant by Mark to be taken as the words of Jesus to the disciples, calling their attention to the book of Daniel (to which he has just alluded), not to the Gospel itself.'\textsuperscript{19}

Jesus warns his followers that during this time, the desecration and destruction of Jerusalem, that

\textsuperscript{15} JTEE 304
\textsuperscript{16} JTEE 305
\textsuperscript{17} JT309
\textsuperscript{18} Pitre is in disagreement with Moloney, Hooker, Nineham, Wright, Cranfield, As france notes, Matthew refers explicitly to Daniel’s prophecy, so that in his version of the discourse the aside ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω could be understood as part of the reported speech, calling on the reader of Daniel to take note. Mark has not left us that option, since he refers to no written text. The clause must therefore be an aside by the author (for similar asides see 2:10; 3:30; 7:3–4, 19), calling on the reader of his discourse to take note of the preceding clause. France, R. T.: The Gospel of Mark : A Commentary on the Greek Text. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle : W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002, S. 523
\textsuperscript{19} JTEE 310, a full argument is presented 309-313
they should flee to the mountains. Pitre rejects any notion that this passage is a retrospect look at the Christian escape to Pella. However, for Pitre, the 'flight to the hills' finds echoes of the story of Lot and his family when they flee Sodom. (Gen 19:15-17). As is Pitre's academic habit he also finds a string of intertestamental allusions which show that Jesus is drawing on 'the widespread notion of the flight of an eschatological remnant from a doomed city, often during the final tribulation.' Jesus declares a narrow escape for the remnant but declares a woe to women who are pregnant or nursing—"Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days!" The suffering of women, which occurs in all conflicts, is mentioned in early Jewish literature as something that 'takes place during the Great Tribulation.'

The Fate of the Elect: The Shortening of the Great Tribulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark 13</th>
<th>Old Testament Echoes</th>
<th>Intertestamental</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The language of days Mark 13:19,24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'This is evidence 'for the two stage pattern of eschatological tribulation..(1) preliminary birth pangs (2) the Great tribulation'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'such as there has not been since the beginning of the creation' Mark 13:20</td>
<td>Ezek. 5:8-12,14 Jer. 30:3-9 Dan 12:1-2</td>
<td></td>
<td>'It is connected with the curse or punishment of exile' It is 'the final period of Israel's exilic suffering'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. Mark 13:20</td>
<td>Genesis 6-9 Sir 44:17-18</td>
<td></td>
<td>'Jesus is likening 'the elect' of the Great Tribulation to the Noahic remnant.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With all these allusions and echoes in mind, Pitre finally, after his exhaustive survey, arrives at the climax of this passage.

20 Eusibius, H.E 3.5.3; Epiphanius, Pan 29.7.7-7; 3-.2.7
21 JTEE 316 He cites, amongst others, T. Mos 9:6, Ps. Sol 17:11-18
22 JTEE 317 See 1 En 99:5, Jub 23:24-25; 4 Ezra 5:1-8
23 JTEE 319
24 JTEE 319
25 JTEE 321
26 JTEE 323
“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. Mark 13:24-27

Although some scholars argue that these verses are independent logion which is to be studied independently from the preceding verses, Pitre defends the thematic unity of the passage.

The passage describes events which take place with the sun, moon and stars. Is this language to be taken literally or, as with N.T. Wright, metaphorically. Pitre states that Jesus stands in line with both the Old Testament and late second temple literature for these 'heavenly events' are employed to refer to major events in history such as the death of a great leader (Exek 32:7-8), destruction of a city (Is 13:1-22) Once the background of Mark 13 is studied it becomes clear that Is 13:10-13 and Is 34:4 is likely to behind this, each of these passages describing 'desolation and destruction of a city or empire that takes place before the restoration of Israel.' However, Pitre differs from N.T. Wright in not reducing these cosmic signs to metaphor. He suggests, 'that is in fact literal language meant to describe the cosmic effects of an event that is both historical and eschatological: the destruction of Jerusalem.'

The cosmic signs give way to the 'coming of the son of man' who Pitre understands, in light of Daniel 7, as a messianic figure. A messianic figure who will gather the elect thus bringing in the end of exile (Mark 13:27). 'The elect are none other than the scattered remnant of Israel, regathered at last from among the nations,' which is made clear when read alongside Isa 11:10-12, Jer 31:7-8, Deuet 30:1-6, Ezekial 37:1-28 and particularly alongside 4 Ezra 13:29-49.

In conclusion to Mark 13 Pitre draws the following conclusions.

'For Jesus, it appears that the messianic tribulation, the Great tribulation, is nothing less than the climax of Israel's exilic sufferings. It is the final period of suffering which would precede

---

27 JTEE 333 The full list is
1. Death of a leader
2. a day of divine judgement
3. a theopany and/or God coming to earthquakes
4. the attack and/or destruction of a city/empire
5. the attack and/or destruction of Jerusalem
6. the desolation and/or destruction of 'the land' or 'the earth'
7. the destruction of creation/the cosmos (usually with a new creation)
8. the restoration of Israel (end of exile, coming of the Messiah)

28 JTEE 334
29 JTEE 337
30 JTEE 344
the Return from Exile, the restoration of the twelve tribes, and the coming of the Messiah.\textsuperscript{31}

**Conclusion**

In this chapter Pitre makes a convincing case for reading Mark 13 as a future warning of the destruction of Jerusalem, which is, in two stages, the tribulation. These tribulations, in which there is much suffering, will be followed by a time when the Messiah will be enthroned, and the exile will be over. Pitre's interpretation raises some interesting questions for historical Jesus research.

I) In Mark 13 Jesus looks ahead to a time of tribulation, yet anticipating the results of the next chapter, he did see his death as part of it. Did Jesus change his mind? Should tribulation themes be seen as 'now' and 'not yet'?

II) What is the relationship between Jesus' own sufferings and that of the destruction of Jerusalem?

III) Who are the 'lost tribes'? How did people expect them to return? Did Jesus anticipate the inclusion of the gentiles as being the 'return from exile'?

IV) When is a text an allusion or echo of the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, and when is it forced onto the text.