

December 2, 2012 by Steve Brandon



# The Applications of Prophecy

## Mark 13

I remember learning about the Mayan civilization in my history class in high school. The Mayans lived in southern Mexico before Columbus discovered the Americas. They were the only civilization in the Americas at that time that had a written language. As a result, they had a great culture. They built some great buildings and had a developed civilization. And yet, for some unknown reason, their culture collapsed. All we have is their ruins, which you can visit today.

I specifically remember two things about Mayans. First was their primitive game of basketball.<sup>[1]</sup> It was played in a long, narrow alley, with big walls on either side. These walls were usually sloped, but sometimes were vertical. On the walls were large stone hoops, high above the ground. There would have been no dunking for these people. Rather than horizontal, like our basketball hoops, they were placed vertically, so that a ball needed to go through it sideways.

Now, because we don't know much about the ancient Mayans, we don't know much about the rules of this game. We don't know if it was like basketball, where the teams attempted to shoot the ball into the holes, or whether it was like soccer, where you kick the ball into the holes. All we know is that it was a brutal game, resembling our football. Perhaps there weren't many rules. And I remember being told about the Mayan games -- that the losers were killed when they lost. As a young boy who loved playing basketball, this captured my attention.

The second thing that I remember from learning about the Mayan civilization was their well-developed calendar. It was based upon a calendar year of exactly 365 days, without taking into account the leap year. So, every four years, the calendar was off a day, which only perpetuated as time went on. So, a thousand years in, their seasons would be flipped.

But, this missing day isn't the distinct feature of this calendar. The distinct feature of this calendar is that it had an ending. It would stop at some point. And I remember my teacher saying that the calendar would end in December 2012. Many have surmised that the Mayans thought that the world would end on this date. Perhaps, they never thought much about still being around 5,125 years later when the calendar ran out.

As a young boy, this also captured my attention. I remember thinking that perhaps they were right and the world would end in December 2012. I remember thinking that this might be a clue that the Lord has given to us regarding His coming.

Now, "Mayanist scholars state that predictions of impending doom are not found in any of the extant classic Mayan accounts." <sup>[2]</sup> In other words, the thought that the Mayans expected the world to end has never been documented. There has never been any proof found of this. Furthermore, with the calendar ending, I believe that the Mayans (would they still have been around) would have simply flipped their calendar and started over, much like the odometer in your car does. They would probably have great celebrations on that day and gladly start in on a new era.

Nevertheless, the year 2012 has set off a firestorm of activity. Some have thought that the date would bring in a spiritual transformation. And that 2012 would mark a new era in world history. Others have really believed that 2012 is going to be the end of the world, coming on December 21st. Some have even sought astronomical proof of the significance of this date, when a planet comes and collides with the earth, or when there is some unusual solar activity, or when the earth has some sort of interaction with the black hole in the center of our galaxy, or there will be some sort of galactic alignment, where the planets and the stars all line up. Since 2007, the "Ask an Astrobiologist" section of NASA's website has received over 5000 queries about the Mayan calendar, especially as it relates to the stars and planets on December 21st, 2012.

Those in our pop culture have not missed the opportunity to cash in on the public sentiment. Songs have been written. Movies have been made. One movie is simply called, "2012." On the website, the movie is described as "an epic adventure about a global cataclysm that brings an end to the world and tells of the heroic struggle of the survivors." <sup>[3]</sup> The History Channel has done several special programs on the Mayans and this date.

The one I love the best was the commercial aired during the Super Bowl this past February. It pictured the world-wide destruction on December 21, 2012. Everything was in dust and shambles. Buildings were taken down. Yet, out from under the debris, you hear a car start. It's a Chevy Silverado. It drives through the mess that is left. Pretty soon, you see several buddies who were also driving their Chevy Silverado's. They alone survived the catastrophe. When they were all together, one guy asked, "Where's Dave?" One of the buddies had his head down and said sadly, "Dave didn't drive the longest lasting, most dependable truck on the road. Dave drove a Ford."

Well, here it is December 2012. And how appropriate it is for us to arrive in our exposition of the gospel of Mark at chapter 13, which deals with the question of what will happen at the end of the age. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to Mark 13.

This chapter begins with Jesus walking out of the temple. This chapter ends with Jesus sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, and telling His disciples about His return. I think that it would be best if we simply read through the entire chapter to get it all in our minds.

### Mark 13

As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down."

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

"But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter. For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

There is much controversy in the church today over the understanding of these words. They all have to do with when these things will take place. Some place all of these words in the past and hold that they have already happened. Some place all of these words in the future and hold that they have yet to happen. Most would land somewhere in the middle. Some of these things have been fulfilled. Some of these things are yet to be fulfilled. The controversy comes in where you draw the line.

Furthermore, the difficulty is compounded when you realize that prophecy of future events is often fulfilled in the close history, and there is also a greater fulfillment in the later history. For instance, take the prophecy of Jesus being born of a virgin in Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." When you go back to Isaiah 7 and read the verse in the context of the chapters surrounding these words, you will discover that there was a child born in those days, who seemed to meet these qualifications. Only the child wasn't born of a virgin, it was born of a "young maiden," which many have argued is a legitimate translation of the Hebrew at this point. Second, the reference to Immanuel, "God with us," is easily taken to mean that "God is on our side." He will win the victory for us.

And yet, we know that when Jesus was born, He fulfilled this prophecy. He was born of a virgin, no doubt. The New Testament quotation of the Isaiah 7:14 leaves no doubt that this child must be born of a virgin, not a maiden. He was "God with us," not just in the idea that "God is on our side" or "God is for us", but with the idea that God is literally here in the flesh, walking and talking with u.

And so, you look at Isaiah 7:14 and you ask yourself, a few hundred years after it was written and a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus, "Was this passage fulfilled or is this passage awaiting future fulfillment?" And you say, "Yes." It's the way that prophecy works. This is one of but many instances.

You could look at passages like Psalm 22 or 2 Samuel 7 or Hosea 11:1 and see the exact same thing happening. A fulfillment in the days when it was written, but a greater fulfillment later, in the days of Jesus. And a greater fulfillment still yet in the days of His coming kingdom!

And so, it makes working through any prophetic passage of Scripture difficult to fully know what's going on. How much has been fulfilled?

How much is yet to be fulfilled? How much will we see several fulfillments? Will we see the fulfillment in small measure during the days following the prophecy, but in larger measure later?

Now, as we work our way through Mark 13 over the next few weeks, I'll give you my take. You may see it differently. That's fine. But, regardless of where you and I land on the spectrum of things already fulfilled and things yet to be fulfilled, one thing we can get right from this passage: the application. This is the title of my message this morning, encompassing the whole chapter -- "The Applications of Prophecy".

In this chapter, Jesus gives 19 commands to His disciples. Regardless of how His disciples understood exactly what Jesus was saying, Jesus told them how to respond to the things He said. And we will know that we get this passage correct when follow these same commands. There is great encouragement to be found here. Even if we don't fully understand everything. When are these things going to be fulfilled? How exactly these things are going to be fulfilled? Even if we don't get it exactly right, we will get the passage right if we get the application right.

There are nineteen applications. In giving all of these applications, Jesus is consistent with all prophetic portions of Scripture. They all have a clear application.

Think about it. Jonah came to Nineveh, proclaiming, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). And what did the Ninevites do? They repented of their sins and cried out to God for mercy (Jonah 3:5-9). The response to the coming judgment is a response of repentance.

When Isaiah spoke of the day when the He would come and rescue His people, the application was this, "'Comfort, O comfort my people' says your God" (Isaiah 40:1). The response to the Lord coming for His people was one of comfort and assurance.

When Habakkuk was told that the Chaldeans were coming to destroy Judah (Habakkuk 1:6-11), He responded in trust, ...

Habakkuk 3:17-18

"Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in the LORD.  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

When Daniel read that the 70 years of captivity were soon to be finished, He "gave [his] attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:3). Daniel responded to the prophecy by praying.

According to Titus, the coming of Christ is our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). We should respond to the coming of Jesus with hope.

And this portion of Scripture in Mark 13 is no different. Jesus is prophesying of the future to come. He puts forth 19 applications to this truth. Before we dive into verse 1 of this chapter, let us spend a few moments looking at the application of these words.

The **first** application comes in verse 6, "See to it that no one misleads you." False Christs are going to arise. Don't be led astray by them.

The **second** application comes in verse 7, "Do not be frightened." There will be wars. There will be rumors of wars. People will be speculating about the wars to come. And Jesus says, "Do not be frightened" (verse 7).

The **third** application comes in verse 9, "Be on your guard." You are about to face some difficult things. You will be arrested. You will be beaten. You will stand before the civil authorities to account for your faith. So, "be on your guard"; be ready when such things come.

The fourth application comes in verse 11, "Do not worry." You are going to be arrested. You will stand before your accusers. Don't **worry** about what you will say. Rather, ...

As the **fifth** application says (verse 11), "Say what is given to you." God will give you the words to say. Even when your family hands you over (verse 12). Even when the world is against you (verse 13). Just say what the Lord gives you to say.

The **sixth** application comes in verse 14, "Let the reader understand." In other words, "Read the book of Daniel and understand what he means when he talks about the abomination of desolation." Be a good student so that you can recognize when this takes place.

The **seventh** application comes in verse 14, "flee to the mountains." When you see the abomination of desolation, flee. Jerusalem will not be a good place to be in those days.

The **eighth** and **ninth** and **tenth** applications are similar. When you are fleeing, don't waste any time gathering your things. Just leave Jerusalem. Verse 15 says: if you are on the roof of your house, "Don't go down into your house". Verse 15 also says that if you are outside of your house, "Don't go in your house". And verse 16 says, if you are in the field, "Don't turn back to get your coat." Just leave town and get out of Dodge.

The **eleventh** application comes in verse 18, again focusing upon the day when you flee Jerusalem. Jesus says, "Pray that it may not

happen in the winter." Up in the mountains it will be cold. If it's in the winter, then it will be really cold and miserable. So pray for God's mercy upon you, that it might not be in the winter.

The **twelfth** application comes in verse 21. Again, this one deals with deception. When anyone tells you that Jesus has returned and that He is over here or over there -- "do not believe him." When Jesus returns, all will know that He has returned (verses 24-27). You won't need anybody to point out to you where Jesus is.

The **thirteenth** application comes in verse 23, "Take heed." In other words, "Pay attention" to what Jesus is saying. He is telling His disciples about the future. It is for our good that He is doing so.

The **fourteenth** application comes in verse 28, "Learn." "Learn the parable from the fig tree." You know when summer is near; it's when the branch becomes tender and the fig tree puts forth its leaves (verse 28). So likewise, you will know when the coming of Christ is near.

The **fifteenth** application says, "Recognize that He is near" (verse 29). In other words, apply the parable of the fig tree by knowing when Christ is near. When the time comes, act appropriately.

The **sixteenth** application comes in verse 33, "Take heed." Again, this is a call to think about what's going to take place in the future. "Take heed." "Pay attention."

**Seventeen, eighteen and nineteen** are all the same. "Keep on the alert" (verse 33). "Be on the alert" (verse 35). "Be on the alert" (verse 36). As it comes to the events of the future, we are to be alert and ready for the return of Christ.

There they are. Nineteen applications of how to live in light of the events in the future.

Again, before we dig into the main portion of my sermon, I simply want to make a comment. I know a fair share of people who are into "prophecy." They love reading current events. They love hearing out what is taking place in Israel today. They love attempting to match up current events with the prophesied events of the Bible. They are longing for the return of Christ.

In this way, they are greatly to be commended. They are doing well at being "on guard" (verse 9) for what will happen in the end. They are doing well at reading the book of Daniel (verse 14), attempting to understand the abomination of desolation. They are doing well at "taking heed" (verse 33) and "being on the alert" (verses 33, 35, 36).

But, (and let me say this gently and carefully), they often do poorly at some of the other applications. I find that those who are the most engaged in researching and studying about prophecy and end times to be some of the most misled people I know. They concern themselves much with issues of the rapture and the anti-Christ. I find that those who are the most engaged in studying what will happen in the end to be some of the most frightened people that I know. I find that those who are the most engaged in studying what will happen in the end to be some of the most worried people that I know. Jesus says in verse 5, "Do not be misled." Jesus says in verse 7, "Do not be frightened." Jesus says in verse 11, "Do not worry."

Now, this is broad strokes. Not everyone falls into this category. But there are some who do. Let me show you what I mean, by taking you down memory lane.

Do you remember Y2K? For all of you adults in the room, you remember this. For the children in the room, let me tell you that this was the time when the world was going to collapse. This is the day that The Sunday Times (in London) said, "This is not a prediction, it is a certainty-- there will be serious disruption in the world's financial services industry. ... It's going to be ugly."

This is the day of which Sherry Burns, director of the Year 2000 office of the CIA said, "There is very little realization that there will be a disruption. As you start getting out into the population, I think most people are again assuming that things are going to operate the way they always have. That is not going to be the case."

This is the day of which Chris Dodd said in the Year 2000 Tech Committee Senate Hearings, "You wouldn't want to be in an airplane, you wouldn't want to be in an elevator, and you wouldn't want to be in a hospital. ... [Government and business leaders] are not thinking about the contingency plans that they ought to be thinking about today, not waiting a year from now. ... [These] need to be put into place to minimize the harm from widespread failures."

This is the day of which Ed Yardeni said, "Let's stop pretending that the Y2K isn't a major threat to our way of life. There is too much at stake for such uninformed wishful thinking. Perhaps, the time has come as though we are preparing for a war. This may seem extreme and unnecessary. However, if we prepare for plausible worst-case Y2K scenarios, then perhaps we can avoid at least some of them."

Looking back, it's almost laughable at the catastrophe that was predicted that never happened. But, here's my point: those who were most into "prophecy" and studying the "end times," were totally misled in this thing. I know of people in those days who stored up large supplies of food. I know of people in those days who purchased generators for when the power would go out. I know of people in those days who kept their swimming pool full of water (even during the cold days of December), so that they might have drinking water come January 1, 2000. I know of people in those days who purchased guns so as to protect their water supply. I know of people who were extremely worried in those days of the coming disaster. I know of people who were extremely frightened in those days.

In those days, I had the good fortune to work in the computer department of a hospital. I was in charge of overseeing our Y2K program. As a result, I was in contact with representatives from every company that supplied any computer equipment to us, checking up on how prepared their equipment was for the changeover. I was also in direct contact with several of the institutions in our city that keep life going -- the banks and the power company and the city water department. I even spoke with someone from upper management in our local Walmart about how

they were preparing. (We figured this: if Walmart is up and running, there is no other store that you need.)

At the hospital, we hosted an event where representatives from these places came and spoke to the community. The water department, the city, the bank, and Walmart all said, "It's fine. We are ready. You will have water. You will have access to your funds in the bank. Walmart will remain open."

On two different occasions, I gave talks to church groups about these matters. Both times, I began with the Scripture, speaking from Matthew 6, in which Jesus tells us that we are not to worry about tomorrow. I went to Psalm 27, ...

Psalm 27:1

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

And I explained that if God is for us; we are not to worry; we are not to fear. Even in the days of war, our hearts should not fear.

Psalm 27:2-3

When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,  
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.  
Though a host encamp against me,  
My heart will not fear;  
Though war arise against me,  
In spite of this I shall be confident.

This all sets the stage. This all is the foundation to our mental state in times of crisis. God is on the throne. He will accomplish His purposes. I then went to talk about the Y2K "problem." Clocks flip. Just like the odometer in your car. Just like the Mayan calendar. It reaches the end. It just flips to begin again. The car doesn't stop when the odometer reads all zeros. Sure, there are some errors, but things keep working.

I then went on to talk about how I didn't believe there would be any problems on that day. Furthermore, I explained my interactions that I had with people from the organizations in the city.

One occasion in which I shared these things was a home Bible study of about 20 people. And I remember how afterward I finished with my short presentation, they began telling me how I didn't understand what was taking place. Pretty soon, they all were talking back and forth of the disastrous things that were going to take place. And I didn't say much after my prepared thoughts; they weren't interested in what I had to say. They had gathered to figure out what they were going to do during the Y2K crisis. Their minds were made up. They were very worried about the coming disaster.

Another occasion was at Kishwaukee Bible Church (our mother church), with about 50 or 60 people in attendance. I spoke for about an hour. Afterwards, several people came up and spoke with me, telling me that they didn't believe what I was saying. They thought that it was going to be a big problem. They left unconvinced that night.

For the most part, those who resisted my message were the same people who were really into "prophecy." They were really into studying what would take place at the end of time. And regarding the return of Christ, Jesus said, "Don't be misled" (verse 5). "Don't be frightened" (verse 7). "Do not worry" (verse 11). Such were the reactions of many during the Y2K crisis. There were many who were worried. There were many who were frightened.

Now, in saying these things, I don't think that I should be especially commended for not being frightened and not worrying. Because, I was convinced that there was no problem. And with no problem comes no worries. The bigger question would be this. If I was convinced that there was going to be a problem, how would I have responded? Y2K exposed the fear of many regarding the future. Y2K was a gift to us, that we might see how much we really trust the Lord when anticipating a world-wide upheaval.

And I say this, Church family, these things ought not to be. Let our study of Mark 13 be a study that finds us trusting in the Lord, free from fright (verse 7) and free from worry (verse 11). May we not be misled in these things.

But it's not just Y2K. There are plenty of people today who are into "prophecy." They see Iran developing a nuclear bomb. They see China and North Korea developing their military might. They see Israel and Gaza lobbing bombs back and forth. Might this be the start of the end? They fear the future. They fear the wars that are coming.

And what did Jesus say? Verse 7 says, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not the end" (Mark 13:7) Think about that -- wars and rumors of wars are coming. Iran may well get the bomb. North Korea may continue to be a rogue nation. These are real things! These are real things to think about and to act upon. But, Jesus says, "Do not be frightened." We have much to learn from Jesus.

There are plenty of people today who are into "prophecy." They see the corruption of the United States Government. They see the morals of our country turning away from God. They see the mounting debt in our society. They see Greece and think about our coming fiscal collapse. They see the "fiscal cliff."

And they fear the future. They fear the judgment of God upon us. They fear their financial stability. People are afraid of our debt, because of what it will do to our financial abilities in the future.

And what did Jesus say to His disciples? You will be delivered to the courts (verse 9). You will be flogged (verse 9). You will be arrested (verse 11). Family members who don't believe in Christ may hand you over to death (verse 12). You will be hated (verse 13). But, "Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour" (verse 11). These things make our financial worry look like child's play. But through these things, we are to trust in the Lord.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 2, 2012 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesoamerican\\_ballgame](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesoamerican_ballgame)

[2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012\\_phenomenon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_phenomenon)

[3] <http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/2012/>