# Nothing Says Advent like the End of the World!

## Bible Study on Mark 13: 24-31

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 the 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.

*Mark 13: 24–31*

*New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*

## Overview of Session

This bible study is intended for an intergenerational (all-ages) group. There are activities that are conducive to sitting in the round, with a low table in the middle, or you can use the open floor. You could have this conversation in a coffee shop, a community space, someone’s living room, or in worship on the first Sunday in Advent. Like most great resources, this is a starting point for your leadership—adapt, change, add to your session as you wish!

Things you will need:

* Your favourite biblical translation (we use the [New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition](https://www.bible.com/bible/3523/GEN.1.NRSVUE))
* Black markers or pencil crayons (one for each participant)
* Slips of white paper no larger than 4 x 4 inches (one for each participant)
* A Christ candle in the centre of your gathering circle (on a low table or on the floor) with a large yellow, white, gold, glittery piece of fabric underneath (large enough for each person to put their slip of white paper on the fabric and for the fabric to still be seen underneath)
* A way to play “Anthem”by Leonard Cohen so everyone can hear
* A gathering place—the best space would be a circle of chairs with a low worship table in the middle

## Ancient Context: Understanding the Text

### Mark 13:24–31

An important thing to bear in mind when approaching Mark 13 #1: although this chapter describes Jesus in and around the Temple, by the time the Gospel of Mark was written it is quite probable that the Temple had been destroyed for the second time, and fairly recently at that. So, the first Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians and then rebuilt, and now the second Temple had been destroyed by the Romans. What would be rebuilt?

An important thing to bear in mind when approaching Mark 13 #2: although this is an apocalyptic speech (having to do with the revelation of things pertaining to the end/transformation of the world), it is also Jesus’ last big speech to his closest followers. He is, in part, giving them the tools to go on without him, and trying to instil in them an urgent sense of the necessity to keep going into an uncertain future along an unknown timeline.

It’s fair to think of this passage as directed to people living with devastation. So even though the first part of the chapter is full of harbingers of more devastation, this last part is about guiding the faithful who are trying to keep the faith in a context of physical, religious, cultural, and social upheaval—when everything powerful in the known world is telling them to give up and give in. It can offer encouragement along the way of patient endurance that will ultimately see the Kin-dom of God realized—if not in their lifetime, then in the not too distant future. The same instructions that were intended to keep those disciples going can help any of us who are living through times when God’s ways and promises seem very hard to hang onto.

Searching for signs of new creation—even in the midst of terrifying turmoil—is a key component of being able to sustain an attitude of hope.

It is a call to faithful living and patient endurance in times when uncertainty and anxiety have become persistently ordinary.

## Layout of the Session

### Welcome and Introductions

* Thank everyone for participating and ensure everyone knows each other names and pronouns (if they wish to share).
* Take a moment to notice the acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which you gather. You may want to also share a bit about the Indigenous peoples in your area.
* If it is your community’s practice, share your values about how the group will communicate with one another (respectful communication, deep listening, etc.).

### Light Your Christ Candle and Pray Together

At a time of darkening days and lengthening nights,  
We light a candle, O God.  
We light it as we wait,   
and watch,   
and wait,   
for signs of hope.  
We light it as a sign of our anticipation.  
We light it in expectation of your coming to us,   
here   
and now   
and always.  
We light it because you are here   
waiting and watching   
with us.  
Amen.

### Read the Scripture

* Tell your group you are going to read the scripture twice. Tell them you hope they might share what they notice about the text after you have read it—what perplexes/uplifts/inspires/frustrates them about the text they are hearing. Caution everyone there will be no answering of any questions or commenting on people’s thoughts.
* Read it once, ask for people to share, and after a few minutes, read the scripture again and ask for final thoughts.

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 the 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.

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## The Lament of the Text

* Notice with your group that there is a lot about this text that is difficult, and there are places and circumstances in our world that resonate.
* Read Verses 25–26.
* Distribute the white slips of paper and black felt markers or pencil crayons. Ask participants to list or draw the places or people in their community where they notice suffering or challenges or despair. They can use every part of the slip of paper. Allow time for participants to consider this task—don’t be in a rush to move on.
* In groups of 2 or 3, invite participants to share a piece of what they drew or wrote on their paper or how they are feeling about the act of doing this.

## Share a Prayer of Lament

We pay attention.   
We listen.  
And all around us are signs,   
overwhelming signs,   
pointing to what is wrong.  
There are so many places where your love is not found,   
so many circumstances where your justice is not known,   
so many ways that your hope is denied.  
We know that there are waters rising,   
storms brewing,   
a world in trouble.   
We are aware of floods,   
and fires,   
of hurricanes   
and heat domes,   
of climate refugees   
and poisoned drugs,   
of droughts and disasters.

We are reminded that thoughts and prayers are rarely enough but still we pray.   
We pray for the strength to change.   
We pray for the ability to see beyond now to a time to come.   
We pray for our power as people who pray and think and work and act   
alone and in community.

We pray that in our prayers we may discover   
the glimmers of hope,   
of possibility,   
by which we begin   
to imagine   
a new beginning,   
rebuilding,   
together.   
We pray because our prayers remind us that we are not alone.   
We are with you,   
and you are with us,   
and your love is stronger.   
We pray in the name of the One who is you-with-us.   
Amen.

* When you are finished the prayer, ask participants to lay down their slip of paper onto the fabric around the Christ Candle.

## The Hope of the Text

* Ask participants what they notice about what you have created.
* “Anthem” by Leonard Cohen
  + Ask participants to come to the middle of the circle or find a space in which they can listen to this piece of music.
  + Find the music on a playlist or from YouTube (or alternatively find the poem or lyrics and have someone read it).
* Read verses 28–29.
* Have participants share their thoughts about these questions:
  + In our world, where are the fig leaf places, where there is growth?
  + What part of this story is about you?
  + What is hopeful about this text for you (if anything)?
* As you are closing the circle, if time allows, ask each participant to share a word that expresses their experience in this study together.

## Share a Prayer of Hope

God of signs who has always known   
how hard perfection is,   
in a world struggling to hang on to hope,   
may we find -together - the places   
where tender leaves are sprouting.

May we realize   
that the cracks let light in   
and us out—  
out of despair  
into hope,   
out of futility   
into possibility,   
out of giving up   
into rediscovery.   
And may we never stop looking for the signs of your coming.   
We pray in the name of the One who came and comes and comes again,   
Amen.