

Spoiler alert!: I'm about to give you the punchline.

Stay awake!!!

I thought I'd share that right at the beginning, just in case anybody's preparing themselves for a bit of a snooze... And, if I see anyone going to sleep during the message, I might say it again.

Stay awake!!

That's the punchline, but now let's begin at the beginning...

And the thing is, the beginning (the first **2** verses of ch13), are **also** a punchline, only they're the punchline for what we've been studying over the last 7 weeks (ch11 & 12), ... **But** they also serve to introduce Chapter 13, and so that creates a bit of a problem for preachers.

You see, there's so much going on in Chapter 13, and there's so much intrigue over all these

- political upheavals; and
- geological upheavals; and
- astronomical upheavals;

- And there's even a tantalising hint, that there might even be a few clues here, to Jesus' return,,,,,

There's so much going on here, that when we get to ch13, we usually want to sink our teeth right into it, before we've fully chewed over what these 2 verses reveal about what Jesus has **already** taught us in ch11 & 12.

And if we don't recognise that these 2 verses are the key and the **punch-line** to help us understand chapters 11 & 12, we're going to miss a lot of really important stuff, and it's critical that we **don't** miss it, because what we learn in ch11&12, is what we apply in ch13.

So, let's have a little recap (so we get the application right):

Throughout chapters 11 & 12, Jesus hasn't said it overtly, but He's quoted Old Testament Scriptures that make the point, and He gave the illustration of the Fig Tree (when He killed it) (ch11) And the message has been: That just like the fig tree (all lush and green and leafy, but no fruit), Temple worship had become all show and no fruit – it gave every appearance of being productive ,,,, But there was no fruit of righteousness...

They were all very religious, but they weren't living how God wanted them to live.

And what God requires, is this: **12:30** ... **you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'**

In other words: Love God, with every part of your being:

And

31 **'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'**

There is no other commandment greater than these."

And that's better than all the burnt offerings and all the sacrifices..."

But the temple and the religious leaders, and many who worshipped at the temple, had **all** of the burnt offerings and all the sacrifices happening, but what they **didn't** have, was a heart that was right with God. They **didn't** love God with the whole of their being, and they **didn't** love others... And when Jesus killed the fig tree, this was a living, breathing and now dead allegory/metaphor, for what God was about to do to the Temple...

Why was God going to destroy the temple? Because when He **visited** His temple, what He found, was a den of robbers. And so He's made the judgment: The whole Jewish temple sacrificial system is coming to an end... I'm not just going to reform it – I'm going to destroy it...

But up until now, Jesus hasn't said this overtly – – – But now He does. The temple, is going to be destroyed...

That's the punch-line and **that's** the key, to understanding ch11 & 12. And we've got a lot of visitors here today, and if you want to see how these 2 verses unlock ch11 & 12, all the Bush Disciples messages are available on our website www.bushdisciples.church...

Righto.

Today, we come to ch13, and the punchline, is to “be on our guard” and to “stay awake” (while we're waiting for the return of Jesus). And what we learned in ch11 & 12, will help us to understand what it **means** for us to “be on our guard” and to “stay awake”...

So, it's all tied together. Now, let's now move on to this week.

Jesus and His disciples have been going to-and-fro from the temple for a few days now, and this time, as they come out of the temple, one of His disciples (we're not told which one), said: MB translation "Look teacher: **Wow** – look at the stones. **Wow** – look at the construction..."

The temple was an **amazing** building... It was massive. In 1st century BC it was one of the larger construction projects in the **world**. It was a renovation (although more like a rebuild) by King Herod, probably as a memorial to Himself (more than anything).

It's construction began circa 20BC, and wasn't finished until the early 60'sADⁱ, only to be destroyed by the Romans in AD70. So, it was under construction for about 80 years.

You can see a picture of it up on the screen: And look at the size of it compared to the original temple.

And it was something to behold. *Josephus was a Jewish historian, who lived around this time. And he describes it as being sheeted in gold (heavy gold plates)... And when the sun was rising, the reflection of the sun off the golden walls, was so bright, it was blinding... And from the distance, it gave the image of being a snow-capped mountain, because the stones that weren't covered in gold, were so white...*

And they even had spikes along the top of it, to stop birds from perching on it and pooping on it.ⁱⁱ

But the stones: Wow!!!

*Some of the stones were more than 100 tonne. In fact, the largest stone was >13.5m*3.3m*5m and weighed more than 500 tonneⁱⁱⁱ... I mean that's far greater than the biggest of stones used in the Egyptian pyramids (about 80 tonnes)^{iv}... It was an engineering marvel.*

It's no wonder that the disciples went "Wow! Look at the stones. Wow! Look at the building.".... Even though it wasn't finished at that stage, it was still truly impressive...

² And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these [mega] [μεγάλας megalas] buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

Now, that's a big call: Here it is - It's still being built. It won't be finished for about another 20-odd years... And Jesus is saying, there won't be 1 stone left upon another, that won't be thrown down... And only a few years after it was completed, that's exactly what happened...

All the greatest efforts of man will be destroyed... But nobody other than Jesus could've possibly perceived that this mega building, of mega stones, could be so completely and utterly destroyed, only a few years later...

It was the year 70AD.

The Jews had rebelled against Rome, and of course Rome wasn't going to take that 'lying down'. And Titus (a Roman General, who later became an Emperor himself [Built Colosseum]), besieged the city, and starved the city, until it fell.

BTW I think I may have made a mistake a few weeks ago earlier Antiochus Epiphanes who conquered the city in 70AD.

These were terrible times. 97 000 Jews were taken captive, and 1.1 Million people died^v... And the temple was burned to the ground. And then, it was disassembled.

Anyway, opposite the temple, at the Mount of Olives, 4 of Jesus' disciples (Peter; James; John; Andrew) came to Him privately and asked Him to elaborate. "... when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

(Probably thought this would have to be at the end – Day of the Lord)

And I think, the answer that Jesus gave them, was far more than what they bargained for... And at this point, is where ch13 begins to get quite confusing...

Is Jesus talking about the year 70AD and the siege of Jerusalem? Or is He talking about something else???

You see, Jesus' answer, seems like a mixture of:

- Old Testament prophecy;
- History;
- the near future; and
- the coming Day of the Lord...

And it's all intermingled together, giving a picture of:

- political upheaval; and
- geological upheaval
- a picture of times of immense human torment and suffering...

But the point is, and I'm going to keep coming back to this punch-line – **the end is not yet** – this is **not** the sign, so **stay awake** for when Jesus **does** come...

Now, I'm going to keep saying that punch-line over and over again – not because I'm worried that you're going to fall asleep in church, but so that you will get the point of what Jesus is teaching... **Stay awake!!!**

So: Jesus said:

that many people would come in His Name. Many would proclaim that they are the Christ.... And during the years of siege in Jerusalem, many **did** claim to be the Messiah, But they were false...

And He says: **when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.** ⁸ For nation will rise against

nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

Do you see what He's doing here??? The disciples were asking for a sign: What's the sign that this is about to happen??? But Jesus tells them, what are **not** signs....

Now, these verses have become one of the favourite haunts of just about every religious crazy; nut-job & wacko, trying to piece together a timeline of events of when Jesus is going to return... And I've heard so many people say, "*Oh, there's so many wars and earthquakes, and famines... Jesus must be coming soon...*"

Really???

Have you heard people speak like that??? They miss the whole point...

These things **will** happen... They **have** happened... They are **always** happening... **There will be:**

- people claiming to be Jesus;
- wars
- rumours of wars
- earthquakes
- famines

All these **must take place, but the end is not yet.**

You see, some people spend every moment of their devotion to God, trying to figure out when Jesus is coming back... And

they think that these signs are going to tell them... But the whole point is, these are **not** the signs...

They're not the signs, but they are **the beginning of the birth pains.**

What a great analogy that is... And at this point, I probably take my life into my own hands, because what woman wants to have a middle-aged Grandpa tell her about birth pains... Birth Pains are probably nothing compared to the pain I'm going to bear when the mothers all have roast preacher for lunch...

But it's a good analogy... I was a very good husband and a very good dad to be – I must've been, because I know what a "Braxton Hicks contraction" is...

What are they??? They're little contractions (that a pregnant woman experiences), (sometimes accompanied by pain), and they're perfectly normal. Braxton Hicks contractions, are the muscles clenching and releasing, building themselves up, to prepare for the delivery of a baby...

It's sometimes called 'false labour', but it's **not** labour... They **are** however, a preparation for the labour... They **are** a reminder to be **prepared** for the labour... But they're not labour.

And even when it comes closer to the time of confinement, there may be a few false-starts – you think that labour is

beginning... The labour pains come on,, and you think “This is it” ... No, not this time...

But you know what??? You know there’s a baby in there, and it’s gotta get out some time... And so, you’d better be ready for when it does come ... And all of a sudden, the birth is on...

And just like that, there **are** going to be awful political and even geological events (cataclysmic world events) ... And at such times, there’s going to be a rush of people feeling “The end is nigh...”

Well “Yes”, and “No”...

- “Yes, the end **is** nigh, but not because there’s been an earthquake...”
- “Yes, the end **is** nigh, but not because there are multiple wars raging in the world at the moment...”

The end is nigh, because there **is** one thing that we know for certain: Just like there’s a baby in there, and it’s gotta get out::: **Jesus is coming**, and nothing’s going to stop Him when it’s His time.

Up until then, creation is going to continue to groan under the weight of sin... But on an **unannounced** day, Jesus is (all of a sudden) going to return... No one knows the day or the hour. Not even the angels; Not even Jesus knew... - Only the Father...

Now, if **you** believe that you have better Spiritual insight than the Son of God”, well by all means, go ahead figure out when it’s going to be (and you’ll look like an idiot, along with everybody else who’s tried it throughout history)... But for the rest of us (who **don’t** believe that we’re smarter than Jesus), we’re going to do what He told us to do: Be on guard, and **stay awake**...

Righto:

Why did Jesus intermingle discussion of His return, with the historical event of the destruction of the Temple??? I think there’s 2 reasons: Firstly, They will both be times of judgment, and so in some aspects, both events will have a similar feel to it. But here’s the 2nd reason:

If Israel had known what day God would visit His temple, and if Israel knew what God required, don’t you think they would’ve been ready for Him??? Quick, tidy up. Quick, look busy. Jesus is coming...

What God requires (though):

- is for us to love Him with every part of our being;
- to know Jesus Christ as Lord; and
- to love our neighbour as ourself...

That’s what Jesus was looking for when He visited the temple, but that’s not (at all) what He found... Instead, He found a den of thieves... And He found fruitless religion – all show, but no fruit of the Spirit – and no fruit of righteousness...

What do you think Jesus wants to find His disciples doing when He returns? He wants us to be fruitful...

You see, we **don't** get ready for Jesus by searching the pages of scripture to work out the day He's going to come... We get ready for Jesus by:

- loving God with every part of our being,
 - knowing Jesus Christ as **our** Lord; and
 - by loving our neighbour as ourself...
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- That's what it means to be fruitful;
 - That's what He wants to find us doing when He returns.
 - That's how we stay awake.

We do not know when Jesus is coming, but when He **does** come, we know that He wants to find His disciples bearing fruit – and certainly not just caught up in showy religion....

The only right way to consider the return of Christ, is to view it as if it is imminent... There **is** no barrier to Jesus returning. There **is no sign** that is yet to be fulfilled... Jesus could return before I finish this sermon... *Don't laugh – yes, it is going to be a long one, but Jesus might return sometime in the 2nd hour of it (near the beginning)...*

Righto, I've given you the punchline again "Stay awake!" But another instruction He gives, is to: ⁹ **But be on your guard.** Why? Because of Persecution.

For they will deliver you over to councils [religious trials], **and you will be beaten in synagogues** [religious persecution], **and you will stand before governors and**

kings for my sake [civil & political authorities], **to bear witness before them.**

Christians will be persecuted... I don't think there's ever been a time, when the Christian church **hasn't** been persecuted... The early church suffered persecution – we can read about it in the book of Acts... Most of the letters of the New Testament, are written, to prepare Christians for the suffering involved in persecution....

As a preacher of God's word today, I have a duty to tell you, that the whole prosperity theology thing, that is so popular in the church of today, is a nonsense and a lie of the Devil... – The kind of preaching that tells us that Christians should expect to have a wonderful, prosperous existence, with no troubles and we should expect to receive every worldly blessing & honour and respect – it's a lie...

Times of non-persecution, are an anomaly. In many places in the world today, Christians **are** being persecuted... **Religious** persecution is rife...

I have a friend who's daughter is a missionary in a Muslim country. I'm sworn to secrecy – I can't even tell you what country she's in, because if she is exposed as someone who is preaching the Gospel, she'll be arrested...

And it's not only the Muslims... You know, New-age spiritualism (which is readily embraced by many in our communities) idolises the eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism (light & love)...

- *And yet in a place like India, Christians are being severely persecuted by Hindus (especially those who have converted from Hinduism).*
- *I had a meeting only a couple of weeks ago, with a Myanmar pastor, who's looking at the possibility of facilitating Myanmar Christian Refugees settling here in St George... Why are they fleeing Myanmar (Burma)? It's because Christians are being persecuted by Buddhist monks^{vi} ...*

Religious persecution against Christians, is downplayed in our media, but it is bitter...

As are political persecutions... *On the Open Doors watch list, North Korea (once again) is listed as the #1 persecutor of Christians... You see, the leader demands their adoration, and Christians reserve their greatest adoration for Jesus...*

Jesus said: **be on your guard**.... Don't be surprised when you're persecuted... As Jesus' disciples, we should expect to be hated... *And politically at the moment, we've got this whole discussion happening over religious freedoms... Yeah, it'd be good to have religious freedoms, but don't be surprised when they disappear...*

The world doesn't seem to mind Christians, as long as we keep our Christianity a secret personal thing... But it's a very different matter (even in Australia today), when we **don't** keep it a secret. It's a very different story for those Christians who are willing to publicly name sin, and call the world to repentance with the Gospel of Christ...

Even though the reason we preach the Gospel, is because we love our neighbour and want them to be saved, those who don't keep their faith private, are sometimes publicly smeared; They're targeted with social media campaigns; Some lose their businesses; Some lose their jobs...

Be on your guard... Don't ever get it into your head that being a disciple of Jesus is going to be easy. It never has been. It never will be. And let's not ever feel that being disciples of Jesus will make us popular... If your version of Christianity is all very easy and leaves you very popular in the world, it might be time to ask the question "Am I missing something???" Jesus said to His disciples, ¹³ **and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**

But here's a thought: If preaching the Gospel, is what gets us persecuted, let's just stop... Never.... Jesus said: ¹⁰ **And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.**

Now, some people use that statement as a measure of when Jesus can return, as if it has to be a fully completed action "Jesus **cannot** return until the Gospel has been proclaimed to completely every nation..." Now, if that was the case, why were the early church expecting Jesus' return to be imminent???

You see, I don't think that's at all what this is saying... The Gospel **is** being proclaimed to all nations... It started out as just a Jewish thing... But when the early church had to flee

Jerusalem (because **they** were being persecuted), they took the Gospel beyond the Jews, to the Gentiles. The Gospel **was** being preached to **all** nations – not just one...

*You know, I even heard one preacher say that Jesus can't come back yet, because they haven't finished translating the bible into all the languages of the world... And having a view like that, misses the whole point: **Stay awake**. Jesus can return at any moment. Be ready... What should we be doing in the meantime? Preaching the Gospel – not just to the Jews – but to all nations...*

The Gospel will even be preached when Christians are put on trial. There's examples of this in the Book of Acts: At times, the Apostles were hauled before the authorities, and put on trial. And even there in the dock, they were witnesses for Jesus, as they shared the Gospel.

And you might think to yourself, "But I'm not an apostle. I wouldn't have the words." You don't need worry about that... The Holy Spirit will give you the words you need, to be a witness for Jesus...

Now, I want to be really clear here: Jesus is **not** promising that He will give us the words so that we will be acquitted. I mean, do we even want to be acquitted???

- If you were charged with the crime of being a disciple of Jesus, do you want to be found "Not Guilty" of that crime? ; or
- if you were charged with the crime of preaching the Gospel, do you want to be found "Not Guilty"? ...

Jesus isn't promising that we'll be acquitted. His promise is that we will have the words, to be **witnesses** for Him, even when the going is the toughest...

BTW, do you know what the Greek word for "Witness" is? μαρτύριον (martyrion) from which we get our word "martyr", now does that give you some insight into how costly it can be, to be a witness for Jesus???

Being a disciple of Jesus, can put us at odds with the world. Even your own family might be against you, because you follow Jesus.... ¹² **And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.**

When one member of a family becomes a Christian, sometimes that divides a family... And hatred toward Jesus can be so great; or the fear of the recriminations that might come against the rest of the family (because **one** of them is a disciple of Jesus), means that even family members will do them into the authorities to get Jesus out of their family...

¹³ **... you will be hated by all for my name's sake.**

What,,,,, Jesus wasn't very good at marketing, was He... No, but He was good at saving and good at truth... And a lot of churches today are good at marketing, and they're all about showy religion without the fruit...

¹³ **... you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**

That's what it means to be on guard...

- Guard your faith...
- Remain true to Christ.
- Don't be taken off track by false prophets and false messiahs... And
- don't be discouraged by persecution and turn away from following Jesus because of the threat (a very real threat) of death...
- **the one who endures to the end will be saved.**

This is a troubling picture, isn't it....

But this, is "the life of discipleship" (alright, this isn't end-times stuff. This is ordinary, everyday life for a disciple of Jesus)...

Righto: Let's move on...

V14-23 is where this gets complex: Is Jesus talking about the year 70AD and the siege of Jerusalem? Or is He talking the great tribulation at end times???

Well, it could actually be both. **Yes**, the warning in these verses **definitely** applies to those who would live through the war in Judea^{vii} when the armies of Titus besieged Jerusalem... But we may also find that it applies (at some level) to the end times too. We'll just have to wait and see.... I suspect, that

what happened in 70 AD is a taste of what it's going to be like at the end..... But I don't know this...

When Jesus said that there's never been tribulation like this, and there never will be again, what that means, depends on whether He's talking about 70AD, or whether He's talking about end times – we don't know...

V14: **when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**

25th December 167BC^{viii}, Antiochus Epiphanes (A Greek King) (who had conquered Jerusalem), ordered that an altar of Zeus be built on top of the altar of God. And then a pig was sacrificed on that Altar. **the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be**

Now, that had happened a couple of hundred years before Jesus gave this warning. And when people heard Jesus talk in code about **the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be** the people would've gone "Ah Huh"... What Jesus is saying, is "When you see something like that again, it's time to get out...". When you see either a man or an object, being set up above God, in God's holy place, with the express purpose of desecrating that Holy Place, and usurping the place of God,, **Flee!!!**

Now, we don't know for sure, what this ended up being. When He said **(let the reader understand)**, I assume those who read Mark at that time, did understand... And if this is relating to end times, When we see a man or an object, being set up above God, with the express purpose of blaspheming God,, **Flee...**

Anyway, Jesus' advice is, "When all this starts happening, get out." And you know, a lot of the Christians had already fled Jerusalem, because they'd already been persecuted out of there... But those who weren't Christians, did the exact opposite... A lot of people in the surrounding areas thought they'd be safer in the city, and so they locked themselves in the city, thinking they'd be safe from the Romans. They were wrong...

But Jesus is saying, when this happens, it's not time for standing up and fighting for a cause. There is no cause. This is the judgment of God. It is God's plan for the temple to be destroyed, and nothing will stop it.

- Get out.
- Flee to the mountains.
- Don't even bother trying to get your possessions.

The life of a refugee, fleeing from an approaching army, is no picnic. It's extra tough for pregnant women and for those with young children... And if it happens in Winter time, it's even worse, as you have to brace against the elements...

And it's only because God is merciful and He cut the days short (for the sake of the elect), that anybody survived...

Now, at this point, I'm reminded of Rev 18 and the judgment of God is about to come upon Babylon, and there's a voice that says **“Revelation 18:4 Come out of her, my people...”**

Now, when the world (either locally or internationally) is thrown into chaos and upheaval... and we're confronted with immense human torment and suffering, that's a time when people are really vulnerable, and easily deceived...

22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders

Now, when that happens, don't be led astray. And if anybody ever tells you that Jesus is making a secret appearance – we'd better go and catch Him, you won't be deceived, will you...

When Jesus returns, nobody's going to miss it. Nobody could **possibly** miss it...

It happens **after** the tribulation – **after** the big trouble – **after** the suffering... You know, there's a popular view at the moment, (paperback novels & Left Behind series) that says that all the Christians are going to be taken out of the world before the tribulation; before the trouble; before the suffering... Rubbish... That's only wishful thinking... Jesus has told us to be prepared for suffering, and it's **after** the suffering that He comes back...

And there's no way we'll miss it...

- The sun will be darkened.
- The moon won't give its light; and

- there'll be all sorts of astronomical mayhem...
- The heavens are going to shake

Now, I don't think it'll go un-noticed when the sun gets turns off ... And the heavens begin to shake... I don't think we'll need a super-doooper radio telescope to see it – we'll know it...

26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And 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.

When's Jesus doing the gathering? After the tribulation. After His return... And we don't need to worry that we're going to miss out... Jesus will gather up those who are His...

What we **do** need to worry about, is being ready...

Stay awake... Don't let Jesus find us asleep. Stay awake...

Remember what that means??? We're back to the punch-line again.

We get ready for Jesus by:

- loving God with every part of our being,
- knowing Jesus Christ as **our** Lord; and
- by loving our neighbour as ourself...

- That's what it means to be fruitful;

- That's what He wants to find us doing when He returns.
- That's how we stay awake.

We do not know when Jesus is coming, but when He **does** come, we know that He wants to find His disciples bearing fruit – and not just caught up in showy religion.....

Jesus topped all this off with a parable: A man goes away. He puts his servants in charge (each with his work to do), And he expects to find them doing it when he gets back...

Let's be those servants. Let's be busy in the work that He's set for us. And let's be the **fruitful** disciples that Jesus has saved us to be.

Be on Guard... And Stay awake... Preach the Gospel to the nations...

And together, let's look forwards to His glorious coming...

ⁱ Barry, J.D. et al. eds., 2016. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

ⁱⁱ *Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. (223) But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white. (224) On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it...*

Josephus, F. & Whiston, W., 1987. *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*, Peabody: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple#Herod%27s_Temple

^{iv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza

^v [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_\(70_CE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70_CE))

^{vi} <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/myanmar/>

^{vii} *“The warning in these verses apply specifically to the first and second generation of Jesus’ disciples, who will witness the war in Judea, that will result in the destruction of the Temple”.*

Garland David E. *The NIV Application Commentary – Mark*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids. 1996. (p495)

^{viii} Rusten, S. with E. Michael, 2005. *The complete book of when & where in the Bible and throughout history*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.