

CONCERNING THE WAY

May 29, 2012

LESSON 139: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 21

Luke 21:1-4 Now Jesus looked up and saw rich people dropping their gifts into the offering box. (2) Then he saw a destitute widow drop in two small copper coins. (3) He said, "Truly I tell you, this destitute widow has dropped in more than all of them. (4) For all the others contributed to the offering out of their surplus, but she, in her poverty, dropped in everything she had to live on."

- In the Court of the Women in the Temple there were thirteen collecting boxes known as the Trumpets. They were shaped like trumpets with the narrow part at the top and the wider part at the bottom. Each was for different offerings – one for the wood that was used to burn the sacrifice, one for the incense that was burned on the altar, one for the upkeep of the golden vessels, and so on. Jesus must have been sitting near the Trumpets here.
- At the end of the last chapter Jesus had spoken out against the scribes for the way they took advantage of widows. Now Jesus sees a widow putting two small coins in the offering box. They were two "lepta", the smallest of all coins, smaller than our dime. It was worth one eighth of a new penny; and so the offering of the widow woman was only one quarter of a cent. But Jesus said that it far out valued all the other offerings, because it was everything she had.
- Most of us realize that the value of any gift depends on more than just the monetary amount. There is the spirit in which it was given. If you give a gift grudgingly, or for the sake of prestige or pride, then the gift isn't worth much at all, no matter how much was spent. But if it is given out of love and from a generous heart, then it is worth much more. In this case of the widow, there is sacrifice involved. The gifts of the rich people who went by flinging their coins into the boxes didn't cost them much, they could easily afford it.
- But the widow gave generously even though she couldn't afford to, wanting to give something even though she had nothing, trusting God to take care of her. By Jesus' standards, her gift was priceless. How few people give to God like that!
- Is Jesus saying we need to give all our money to God?

Luke 21:5-7 Now while some people were talking about the temple-how it was decorated with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God-he said, (6) "As for these things that you see, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another that will not be torn down." (7) Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign that these things are about to take place?"

Matthew tells us that the disciples also asked Jesus about His 2nd coming: "Tell us, when will these things take place, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)

- This discussion started what has come to be known as Christ's Olivet discourse, prophesying things to come, beginning with the destruction of the temple in verse 6, then the worldwide dispersion of the Jews (verse 24) and the age to come (the times of the Gentiles), ending with the second coming of

Christ (verse 27). The discourse is also in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, and you have to carefully study all three to see everything. Matthew's seems to be the most complete, and that makes sense when you consider that Matthew's gospel was really targeted to Jewish people. Luke was primarily speaking to Gentiles with his gospel, and he gave us what he thought was important for us to know in our age.

- Since we have done a verse by verse study on Matthew 24 already, which can be downloaded from the website, in this study we'll focus on what Jesus said in Luke's gospel.
- There is a dual perspective in Christ's answer—the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 and the Tribulation days just prior to His second coming. Verses 8-19 and 25-28 seem to be about what happened in a.d. 70, and verses 20-24 refer to the Tribulation. I believe Jesus did this because some of the things that happened in 70 A.D. will be repeated in the Tribulation.
- Before we go on, since the passage speaks about the temple, let's review a brief history of the temples in Jerusalem:

The Holy Spirit put in the heart of King David to imagine and build a permanent temple to the Lord. But because David was a man of war, the Lord said in 1 Chronicles 28:3 that David's son would be given the privilege to build it. Solomon started construction in the 4th year of his reign, about 969 b.c. (1 Kings 6:1). It was finished seven years later. Cedar and Cypress wood from Lebanon, and white marble were used in the building. Because the mountain the temple was to be built on (Mt. Moriah) had limited space, the area had to be built up and the foundation had to be laid very deep and filled in (You can read about the temple dedication in 1 Kings 6-8).

Over many centuries and godly kings and evil kings the temple was neglected, then restored, and often desecrated (1 Kings 14:26; 15:18; 2 Kings 14:14; 15:35; 16:17-18; 23:4). After repeated warnings from the prophets to turn away from worshipping false Gods and return to the Lord, judgment finally came in the form of the Babylonian empire, led by King Nebuchadnezzar. The temple treasures were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:13), and it was finally destroyed, along with the city of Jerusalem, in 586 b.c. Solomon's beautiful temple was gone.

About 50 years later, a remnant of Jews that returned from Babylon began rebuilding the temple. The 2nd temple at that time was nothing like the glory of the temple Solomon built, in fact the older people who remembered that temple wept (Ezra 3:12-13). But at least the Jews had a temple to worship in again. However, this temple was desecrated and plundered by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 b.c. Three years later it was cleansed and rededicated by Judas Maccabaeus. Then the Roman general Pompey, wanting to suppress yet another Jewish rebellion, captured the temple but did not destroy it.

Next came Herod the Great who renovated and enlarged the temple and expanded the area. Herod improved it so much that you could really call it a new temple. Herod did this to please the Jewish people and make them think well of him. He started the construction work around 19 b.c. But many years after his death it was still not completed (John 2:20). But by the time of

Christ it had been built to the extent that it was very beautiful (Luke 4:9, 21:5, Matthew 4:5, 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2). It was not fully completed until just a few years before it was destroyed, as Jesus prophesied, by the Romans in a.d. 70.

In the Temple the pillars of the porches and of the walkways were columns of white marble, forty feet high, each made of one single block of stone. The sanctuary itself was over 100 feet high. What wasn't covered with plates of gold was covered in white marble. The most famous decoration on the temple was the large vine made of solid gold, with clusters each as tall as a man. The best description of the Temple as it stood in the time of Jesus is in Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, book 5, section 5. At one point he writes,

"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. But the 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." To the Jews it was unthinkable that the glory of the Temple would be reduced to dust.

Luke 21:8-9 He said, **"Be careful that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name and say, 'I am he' and 'The time is near.' Don't go after them. (9) When you hear of wars and revolutions, never be alarmed. For these things must take place first, but the end won't come right away."**

- Most of what Jesus said was going to happen in the future was beyond the lives of the disciples. It seems pretty clear that when Jesus said "you", He was using a generic "you" that included the nation of Israel, and for the most part not referring to the disciples He was speaking to. Here Jesus is speaking to a future generation of Jews that would see the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in a.d. 70 or beyond. Almost all of the disciples had been martyred before that time. Only John had survived by a.d. 70.
- These events seem to be much further in the future than a.d. 70, and Jesus is telling the Jews of that generation that the end won't come after the events He's about to speak of.

Luke 21:10-11 Then he went on to say to them, **"Nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. (11) There will be great earthquakes and famines and plagues in various places, and there will be fearful events and awful signs from heaven."**

- Jesus told His disciples about three things that would start to happen before the end. First, Jesus said others would claim to be Messiah (v. 8). He gave this warning so that the disciples would not be deceived. Second, Jesus said that worldwide wars would occur (vv. 9-10). When these things happened, the disciples were not to be frightened, for the end would not come right away. Third, Jesus said that tremendous earthquakes would occur, along with famines and plagues. But these events do not fit between Jesus' day and the fall of Jerusalem. These events and great signs from heaven refer to the Great Tribulation which will come before the return of the Lord to the earth.

- The type of wars Jesus is speaking of here are not small squabbles between two countries. This type of war really didn't occur in history until World War 1, where for the first time you had worldwide alliances of nations against alliances of other nations.
- Only Luke's gospel includes "fearful events and awful signs from heaven" among the signs of the nearness of Christ's return. Yes, we seem to have an increase of UFO sightings and alien abductions, but we don't know if that's just the beginning of some big demonic deception, or if it is not at all related to this prophecy. The other signs (world wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes) we're all familiar with in recent history.
- But the scale of these things may increase sharply in the future, especially in the Tribulation. The term "great earthquakes" don't appear to be normal earthquakes like the world is experiencing right now, but the kind of earthquakes the prophet Isaiah says is coming in Isaiah 24:19-20 and John describes in Revelation 6:12-14. These will be concentrated and sudden earthquakes like nothing the world has ever seen.

Luke 21:12-15 "But before all these things take place, people will arrest you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. (13) It will give you an opportunity to testify. (14) So purpose in your hearts not to prepare your defense ahead of time, (15) for I will give you such speech and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute it."

- Jesus pauses from speaking about far future events that will happen in that terrible Tribulation period, to say that before those things happen, these things are going to happen. The Gospel of Mark here adds that they will also be handed over to local councils and that, in the synagogues they will be beaten (Mark 13:9). This prophecy could reach beyond the apostolic period, looking ahead to the persecution of Christian believers during the entire church age.
- This kind of thing continues even today, where in places like China you have disciples of Christ brought before the ruling officials and they speak with the power of the Holy Spirit about the truth of Jesus Christ.

Luke 21:16-19 "You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. (17) You will be hated continuously by everyone because of my name. (18) And yet not a hair on your head will be lost. (19) By your endurance you will win your souls."

- Jesus is teaching that persecution of believers would be common and harsh. The disciples did experience persecution by the authorities (see Acts 2-4). Because of Jesus' prediction in Luke 21:9-11, it seems that what He said in verses 12-17 applies not only to what would happen to the disciples before the fall of Jerusalem but also to what believers will experience during the time of the Great Tribulation (verses 25-36 coming up are obviously about the Tribulation). The same kinds of persecution would be present at both times—imprisonment (verses 12-15), betrayal (v. 16), and hatred (v. 17).
- What Jesus' said in verses 18-19 has confused many people. No one really knows for sure what He meant.
 - Some say Jesus meant that the disciples He was speaking to would be supernaturally protected for a time. But most of them standing there would be martyred.
 - Some interpret these verses as speaking of spiritual realities in a believer's life. Ultimately even though a believer dies, he or she will be protected eternally by God. But it doesn't seem like Jesus is

speaking spiritually here.

- Some believe that during the Tribulation, although many believers will be killed, a remnant of faithful believers will be supernaturally protected during the Tribulation and will enter the Kingdom alive (Matt. 24:9-13, 22). Enduring this persecution will prove the reality of their salvation. It is most likely that Jesus is referring to the 144,000 Jews that are sealed during the Tribulation as His witnesses (Revelation 7:4, 14:1-5). They will be persecuted more than any other time in history, but they will be protected by God Himself.

Luke 21:20-24 "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then understand that its devastation is near. (21) Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in the countryside must not go into it. (22) For these are the days of vengeance when all that is written will be fulfilled. (23) "How terrible it will be for those women who are pregnant or who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath on this people. (24) They will fall by the edge of the sword and be carried off as captives among all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled."

- In context, this sign refers to the future siege of Jerusalem by Titus, ending with its invasion and destruction in a.d. 70. Seeing Jerusalem surrounded by Roman armies would be the signal for believers to escape to the mountains. This can also be considered as a type of a similar event which will happen during the great Tribulation period, except that then the sign will be seeing the abomination of desolation set up in the rebuilt temple by the Antichrist (Matthew 24:15, 16). After the destruction of the temple by Titus in a.d. 70, Jerusalem was more completely “desolated” by Hadrian’s armies in a.d. 135.
- This amazing prophecy of Jesus was made a whole century before it was finally fulfilled in a.d. 135, and it continued in effect then for about eighteen centuries, until the Jews finally began to return to their promised land of Israel, beginning after World War I.
- Jerusalem, the great capital city of the Jews, continued to be under Gentile control until the Israelis recaptured it from the Arabs in 1967. In fact, the critical area of Jerusalem—that is, the Temple Mount, the sacred site of its ancient temple—is still to this day under control of the Muslim Arabs. So, we are still in the “times of the Gentiles”, and will be until Christ returns to reign there.

Events Leading Up to the Fall of Jerusalem

1. Roman procurator Florus steals gold from the temple treasury – A.D. 64
2. A riot begins
3. Jewish resistance groups, the Sicarii and the Zealots, vow to kill all supporters of Rome
4. Civil unrest and riots break out and last for three years
5. Roman general Vespasian gains back control over Galilee – A.D. 67
6. Vespasian marches south to besiege Jerusalem – A.D. 68
7. Roman emperor Nero commits suicide; Vespasian is declared emperor and returns to Rome
8. General Titus replaces Vespasian and surrounds Jerusalem. His troops storm the city and burn the temple down on the ninth of Av, the anniversary of the fall of the first temple in 586 B.C.
9. One hundred thousand Jewish men and women are captured and sent to the salt mines of Egypt.

10. The temple vessels and the menorah were taken to Rome, where an arch was later constructed to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem.

- During the time of the siege of Jerusalem, it went on for so long that the people began to starve. The historian Josephus tells us that mothers ate their own children. People died like flies, and the dead bodies were thrown over the walls. Everyone who did not pay attention to what Jesus said here and get out of the city either died of starvation or were sold into slavery.
- The reason Jesus is mixing prophecy that was fulfilled within the next 100 years with prophecy that still has not been fulfilled in our day is because the things that happened in A.D. 70 and 136 are going to happen again in the Tribulation.

Luke 21:25-28 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and there will be distress on earth among the nations that are confused by the roaring of the sea and its waves. (26) People will faint with fear and apprehension because of the things that are to come on the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken loose. (27) Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. (28) "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, for your deliverance is near."

- Jesus says that cosmic signs will come before the coming of the Son of Man and will cause people to be terrified. You can see by the language here that the world will be in a chaotic state, out of control. Nothing like this has happened before in history.
- In verse 28 Jesus tells about the coming of the Son of Man Himself. He took His terminology from Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel saw "one like a Son of Man" coming with clouds and glory and receiving the kingdom from the Ancient of Days (God the Father). Jesus' point was that the Son of Man will come to receive the kingdom—the same kingdom He had been proclaiming since the beginning of His ministry.
- When these things begin to happen, believers in the Tribulation are to lift up their heads, a symbol of rejoicing, because their redemption (safety in the kingdom brought by the returning King) will be drawing near.
- We see the distress and confusion of the world's nations increasing every year, but this is nothing compared to what is coming (Mark 13:19). Compare verse 26 with Revelation 6:15-17.
- The coming of Christ in glory to reign on earth immediately follows the great tribulation (Matthew 24:29-30).
- Verse 28 "begin to take place" - When all the signs given by Jesus in the Olivet discourse are just beginning to be fulfilled, then Christ says His coming is very near! Although we can't know the exact date, we can be sure that He is coming very soon.

Luke 21:29-31 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. (30) As soon as they produce leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. (31) In the same way, when you see these things taking place, you will know that the kingdom of God is near."

- In the Parable of the Fig Tree Jesus taught that you can tell what is coming by watching the signs. By looking at fig leaves sprouting in April, you know that summer is near. When the Great Tribulation comes, people will know that the kingdom of God is near.

- The fig tree represents Israel and “all the trees” the other nations around Israel. The budding fig tree refers to the then future return of the Jews to Israel, still in a state of unbelief (which we are seeing happen in our lifetimes). Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark’s version, says that “all the trees” would simultaneously “produce leaves,” along with the fig tree. This seems to say that Israel’s neighboring nations, for a long time undeveloped and of little importance in world affairs, would again grow and become significant in the latter days. This has definitely happened in recent decades with ancient nations as Egypt, Syria, Iran (same as Persia), Iraq (same as Assyro/Babylonia), and others.

Luke 21:32 "Truly I tell you, this generation will not disappear until all these things take place.

- This statement of Jesus has caused much controversy. Some think Jesus was telling His disciples that their generation would see the destruction of the temple. But Jesus says “all these things take place (including His return and His Kingdom coming). So it seems best to say He is referring to the generation living at the time of all the events that will happen just before His second coming. That generation will actually see the founding of the kingdom of God—something every generation of Jewish people has longed for throughout the nation’s history.

Luke 21:33-36 Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear." (34) "Constantly be on your guard so that your hearts may not be loaded down with self-indulgence, drunkenness, and the worries of this life, or that day will take you by surprise (35) like a trap. For it will come on all who live on the face of the earth. (36) So be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to take your stand in the presence of the Son of Man."

- These verses (Luke 21:34-36) appear only in Luke. Because He is speaking of the suddenness of the coming of “that day”, this can only be the first part of Christ’s second coming, or “the rapture.” See 1 John 2:28.
- “All who live on the face of the earth” - The suddenness of the event will take place on the whole earth simultaneously, as Christ had already told them (Luke 17:34-36).
- In verse 36 Jesus warns all who will live in that day to be alert at all times, and pray that we might have the strength to escape all these things that are going to place. What do we need the strength for? To obey what He said in verse 34. There will be many who think that they will escape God’s wrath, think that they are Christians. But because they live what Jesus is speaking against in verse 34, they have no real faith. Those people will not be able to stand in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should always check ourselves to make sure that our faith in Christ is real, genuine (read 2 Peter 1:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5).

Luke 21:37-38 Now during the day he would teach in the temple, but at night he would go out and spend the night on what is called the Mount of Olives. (38) And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

- So during this part of the week in Jerusalem Jesus did not go back to Bethany to spend the night, but went out of the city to spend the night under the stars on the Mount of Olives. Then He would return to the temple the next morning.
- Preterists say that all this prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. How do you think they reinterpret Scripture to support that?
- What is the “Times of the Gentiles”? When did it start, and when will it end?