

A Study of Luke's Gospel
Week Twenty-Nine
Luke 21:5-22

Day One

5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6 "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." 7 "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

v. 5 – I don't think we can imagine how important the Temple was to the life and psyche of the Jewish people. It was the focus of their worship and identity and was also an important educational and commercial center. Just as church buildings today house gifts from individuals that enabled the church to install pews, windows and other special furnishings, I would imagine that the Temple had the same component. The disciples were admiring the beauty of it all and spoke to Jesus about the building's beauty.

v. 6 – At this point, Jesus commented that the whole building was coming down! What a shock that must have been to the disciples' ears. Their magnificent building, the focus of their religious life, was going to be destroyed. When the first Temple had been destroyed in 586 BC, it was because God judged the Jews for their idolatry and evil. Jeremiah tried to warn the Jews this would happen, but they persecuted him and refused to listen. Now the Prophet Jesus was announcing the same thing to a much smaller group, but the shock and impact was still great.

Why would this Temple be destroyed? For three reasons:

1. The sins of the Jews including their rejection of Jesus by their leaders;
2. The life and death of Jesus completed Judaism, which was now to focus on service and worship to Him;
3. The end of the sacrificial worship system that took place in the Temple.

There are many today excited that a Temple may one day be erected in Jerusalem. I say it is an irrelevant act where Christians are concerned. It may have implications for the return of the Lord, but it has no significance for a Christian, since we are now the temple of God where He lives. Jesus is the focus of our worship and that worship cannot be shared with any other system, building or doctrine. For the Christian, life and worship isn't about a building, it's about Jesus!

v. 7 – The disciples specifically asked about the destruction of the Temple, so Jesus' answer wasn't an answer about His ultimate return. It was a response to their question about when the Temple's end would occur. I would imagine that the disciples knew this event would be cataclysmic, and would perhaps happen in conjunction with the end of the age.

Day Two

8 He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. 9 When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." 10 Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

v. 8 – Spiritual deception is a powerful force. I pray regularly, “Lord, keep me from weird doctrines and strange beliefs.” I have watched many people walk in spiritual deception, majoring in minors and believing that the Lord has showed them some special revelation about this or that. In every case, they were convinced they were correct and were willing to go to great lengths to walk out what they purported to believe and understand.

Of course, our enemy, Satan, understands spiritual things and human nature better than we do. He is able to circulate counterfeit doctrines to try and take our focus off Jesus and put it on the things that seem to add to spirituality. Remember these points that Paul wrote:

1. As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work-which is by faith (1 Timothy 1:3-5).
2. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1).
3. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

vs. 9-11 – There seems to be a connection to upheaval in the natural world as a precursor to upheaval in the spiritual world. Before the end of such a monumental thing as the Temple, the earth itself along with its people, would go into convulsions, so to speak. When Jesus died, the earth and nature went into a seizure of sorts:

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. . . .At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:45, 51-54)

The centurion proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God because of what he saw happening in nature as Jesus died. Even in judgment, God would want to use the upheavals in nature to direct people to Him.

Day Three

12 "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13 This will result in your being witnesses to them. 14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17 All men will hate you because of me. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By standing firm you will gain life.

vs. 12&13 – Jesus isn't describing the end of the age, but the end of Jerusalem and consequently, organized Judaism. He warned the disciples that they would be persecuted and hounded, being brought before significant leaders for trial and judgment. Of course we know that God used this persecution to declare His word even to Caesar. Persecution is a way of life for Christians. Jesus said earlier in Luke:

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets (Luke 6:26).

This should not surprise us, nor should we do stupid things that draw the anger of men. But if we are standing for truth and God, we will inevitably upset those with money and power. And we should rejoice when it happens:

They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:40-42).

vs. 14&15 – We are to have peace even when we are persecuted and forced to defend ourselves and God. God will always give you what you need when you need it, including the words to refute your enemies. What a promise! Jesus was saying, "When they arrest you and bring you to trial, relax. The Spirit will work with you and speak through you." We see this happening in the case of Stephen, the first martyr, as described in Acts 7. But he did such a good job defending his faith that they stoned him to death. But God used his death to spread His word and many came to faith in Jesus. I suppose we must take seriously what was written in Revelation:

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! (Revelation 12:11-12).

vs. 16&17 – Wow! I would imagine that the disciples were sorry they asked anything by this point. Now they were told that family would turn against them and that some of them would be killed. I think Jesus waited until the end of His time on earth before He shared this truth with them. I am sure that there are things that Jesus has yet to show me because He knew I couldn't handle them until now.

Family betrayal may be one of the hardest issues to endure. My wife and I went through this years ago when we first became Christians. Our families weren't happy at all, and at one point, we didn't see my wife's folks for six years. But we endured and rejoiced and today our relationships are restored. But it was a hard time, but it definitely taught us to look to Jesus and keep our eyes fixed on Him.

Are you facing any persecution? Is it because of sin or because of your stand for Jesus? If it's sin, then you need to repent. If it's because you are a Christian, then you need to rejoice.

vs. 18&19 – We may lose our earthly lives, but God will preserve us for all eternity. That should give us confidence and the ability to stand firm.

Day Four

20 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

vs. 20&21 – This referred to what would happen in 70 AD, almost 40 years later, when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that not one Christian lost a life during this siege; the reason was that they took Jesus' words to heart and fled to the mountains.

I can't emphasize enough that Jesus wasn't talking about His return, but about the fall of Jerusalem in these verses. Because this is also mentioned in Matthew 24 where he discussed the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the age, many people automatically use these verses to describe what the end of the age will be like. When they do this, they are mistaken.

Please don't be preoccupied with end time issues. Rather be preoccupied with God's will now. The end times will take care of themselves.

It is of note that Jesus was making prophetic statements about the future in these verses. Jesus was an apostle, prophet, evangelist pastor and teacher. Those who function in those roles today should have Jesus as their model. Is Jesus your model for ministry? If so, how do you act like Him when you minister? Did Jesus wear fine clothes? Have a title? Carry a gold cross?

vs. 22&23 – When Israel rejected the new covenant in Jesus, all the curses of the old covenant came on them. These curses were summarized and focused on the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This wasn't just a Roman military exercise. This was the judgment of God.

All the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. Therefore the LORD's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now. 29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:24-29).

v. 24 – Estimates are that 110,000 people lost their lives (another 90,000 were taken into captivity) in the fall of Jerusalem, and the city has been ransacked, torn down and burned 14 times since 70 AD. What does this mean that it will continue until the times of the Gentiles have been completed? We are still in the era of the Gentiles coming into the Church, therefore the focus cannot and should not be on Israel, although outreach should happen to Jews. But we cannot expect large results until the time for the Gentiles passes and a season of evangelistic success among the Jews begins.

Day Five

25 "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these

things have happened. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

vs. 25-33 – I want to treat these words as one unit here and not take them one by one. When it says that they would see the Lord coming in cloud with power, almost every commentator takes this to mean the literal Second Coming of Jesus. But this isn't what this verse means, for later Jesus promised that the current generation would not pass away until all the things He talked about took place.

You cannot separate a verse from its context and expect to have an accurate interpretation. I would “love” to say that Jesus was talking about His return, but the evidence just doesn't support that claim.

So what could it mean? The Lord was using apocalyptic language here, which denoted a terrible tragedy in dramatic terms. But it wasn't to be taken literally—it was simply to say that terrible things would happen, similar to the World Trade Center buildings being attacked and collapsing. Look at these other Old Testament references that use this apocalyptic language:

See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt (Isaiah 19:1).

The Lord doesn't actually ride on a cloud. This language is symbolic and not literal.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal (Ezekiel 1:4).

This cloud was a cloud of judgment, just as the one in 70 AD was to be.

When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring about your destruction among the nations, among lands you have not known. I will cause many peoples to be appalled at you, and their kings will shudder with horror because of you when I brandish my sword before them. On the day of your downfall each of them will tremble every moment for his life” (Ezekiel 32:7-10).

The Lord didn't actually darken the stars, but it certainly spoke of events that were out of the ordinary and caused terror and anguish.

No prophet that ever predicted doom for Israel was received or accepted. The Lord urged His followers to trust His word on these issues, for there would be many false prophets who would come and say that this could never happen—the Lord would not allow this to happen to His chosen people. But He did and it did.

Day Six

34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. 35 For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." 37 Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, 38 and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

vs. 34-38 – The letter to the Hebrews was written to believing Jews who were discouraged and disillusioned about what Christianity meant for them. I don't think they thought that the focus would shift from Israel to the Gentiles and they were "missing" the Temple worship and all the cultural aspects of the old covenant.

So when Jesus said for them not to be weighed down as the events He predicted delayed in coming to pass, He knew what He was talking about. Many were probably caught off guard by the fall of Jerusalem and that means they would have abandoned the Lord and His new covenant.

Of course the same principle can be applied today. It may seem like the Lord and His promises are delayed, but one day you and I will be glad we served the Lord, even when it didn't seem like there was a reward in doing so. Don't give up in doing good by being weighed down with the anxieties of life.

The people came to hear Jesus, but where were the leaders. As previously stated, the people had more spiritual discernment than their leaders. Jesus did not teach these things in a secret or private seminar; He did it publicly so that everyone had access to the truth. No one could say that they weren't warned.

I also suppose that Jesus was "camping out" on the Mount of Olives somewhere, for His time was short and there was danger all around. The leaders wanted to kill Him and perhaps He didn't want to endanger anyone else. I think of what Jesus said earlier:

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

Jesus had to remain on the move during His three plus years of ministry. First He wanted to reach as many people as possible and then also to keep out of harm's way. What the Father gave Jesus to do wasn't easy. What He gives you to do may not be easy as well.

Day Seven

22:1 Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, 2 and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get

rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. 3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. 5 They were delighted and agreed to give him money. 6 He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

vs. 1&2 – What cowards. How can you lead a people when you afraid of them? And how can you ignore what the people were sensing to pursue your own agenda, which was to kill Jesus? These leaders were mean then, and many of them remained mean even after they came into the church, for they opposed the Gentiles coming into the Church with the same vigor with which they opposed Jesus.

Leaders must be out front of the people, yet be in touch with the people. They must lead with one eye on the Lord and one eye on the people. Leaders cannot assume that they have all the answers, but they also must assume that God will give them wisdom to lead that the people don't have. So you say to me, "Make up your mind! How can a leader do both things at once?"

For the answer I send you to Proverbs 26:4-5:

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.
Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.*

How can you answer a fool and not answer a fool? There is only one way and that is to follow the lead of the Spirit to do what He requires, for He knows the need of the moment. We are always trying to pin God down to always do things one way or the other. He never allows Himself to be cornered into functioning according to a principle or system.

vs. 3-6 – We now end into the story of the end of the end of the beginning for Jesus. It all starts with Judas betraying Jesus to the leaders, who paid him money for his intrigue. A lot of theories exist as to why Judas did this. Some say he was disillusioned with the spiritual nature of Jesus' message; others say it was because he wanted to help preserve the Jewish traditions that he perceived Jesus was going to end. My own opinion is that he was a thief and wanted money, nothing more or less. Do you agree or disagree?

The question always comes up that since the Bible predicted this would happen to Jesus, did Judas really have free will? Of course he did. He chose to do this and the Bible predicted it and God used it for His purposes. But Judas was judged as a free moral agent because he was never a pawn in God's hands. He chose to do what he did, thinking he could undo God's plan. Instead, he was part of God's plan.

The Passover was approaching when every family would slay and eat the Passover lamb. Of course, Jesus was the real Passover lamb, all other lambs just pointing to His eventual role. After this Lamb, there was or is no need for any other Passover lamb. Jesus is it. If you ever celebrate a Passover meal, keep that in mind. Every lamb ever sacrificed or to

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be sacrificed in Israel is a statement about Jesus. That is part of the reason why God tore down the Temple; there was no need for any more sacrifices once the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus' blood was made.