

4. Signs of Christ's Second Coming

Luke 21:5-11
The End Times

This study is also found in the [Gospel of Luke studies](#), number 55. Over the last few chapters in the book of Luke, we have followed Jesus as He walked to the city of Jerusalem, knowing what would befall Him over the Passover celebration. We witnessed the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus (18:35-43), and watched Jesus as He graciously reached out to the tax-man, Zacchaeus. We have seen His passion for God as He upturned the money tables in His Father's house (Matthew 21:12), i.e., desiring it to be a house of prayer instead of the den of robbers that it became (19:45-48). We listened to His words of wisdom as He has answered the sly, scheming questions of the chief priests, teachers of the law, and Sadducees (Luke 20:1-47), but now He began to prepare them for His death, resurrection, departure and His return in great power and glory.

Signs of the End of the Age

It was the Wednesday before the crucifixion. From early morning till nighttime, Jesus taught in the temple (Luke 21:37-38). Matthew records that, after His pronouncing the seven woes on the religious elite and as soon as it became dark, Christ made His way through the eastern gate to the hill called the Mount of Olives only a few hundred yards from the temple (Matthew 24:1). More than likely, He slept in the Garden of Gethsemane so that in the early morning when the eastern gate was opened, He could begin teaching those coming for the Passover. The word Gethsemane means *the olive press*. It was here that the Lord was pressed as the burden of His mission weighed heavy on Him. As they left the temple that Wednesday evening, the disciples took notice of how beautiful Herod's Temple looked and how it was embedded with precious stones. John the Apostle wrote that the building of the Temple started forty-six years before Jesus' crucifixion (John 2:20), and it was still many years from being fully completed. (It was finished seven years before being destroyed in 70 A.D.)

The temple and its courts were one of the wonders of the world. To view the temple from the Mount of Olives would have been a spectacular sight. In his commentary on Luke, R. Kent Hughes tells us what Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived in the time of the temple, wrote:

The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no soon up that it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers, it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain, for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. From its summit protruded sharp golden spikes to prevent birds from settling upon and polluting the roof. Some of the stones in the building were forty-five cubits in length, five in height, and six in breadth.¹

As they were heading east toward the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus spoke prophetically of the temple's destruction:

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Commentary on Luke, Published by Crossway Books, Page 296.

⁵Some 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" (Luke 21:5-6).

Question 1) When the Jewish people heard these words about not one stone left upon another, how do you think they may have reacted to this prophecy?

His reply was quite staggering to them. To hear that every stone of the temple would be thrown down had to be the end of the age as they knew it! Not that we should need confirmation of Jesus' words, but the prophet Micah also spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and the reason for it, too:

⁹Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, ¹⁰who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. ¹¹Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." ¹²Therefore because of you **Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins**, and the mountain of the house a wooded height (Micah 3:9-12).

Not only was the temple destroyed by Titus in 70 A.D., but it was also further demolished in 135 A.D. when the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed a second Jewish rebellion seeking independence. Simon bar Kochba led the second revolt. Cassius Dio, a second-century Roman historian, claimed that the Romans killed 580,000 Jews, and at that time, they destroyed Jerusalem and ran a plow over all or part of the city. All Jews were expelled and banned from returning to Jerusalem under pain of death.² Micah and Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. When the words of Jesus sank into the hearts of the disciples, they had to ask Him to explain when this would take place and what would be the sign of His coming to rule and reign:

⁷"Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" ⁸He 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. ⁹When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." ¹⁰Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:7-11).

Three of the Gospel writers give us parts of the same talk by Jesus; they are found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Matthew wrote that the disciples waited until they were seated together on the side of the Mount of Olives before they questioned Him about His prophecy (Matthew 24:3). Matthew and Mark record two questions they asked Him: "Tell us," they said, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

² <http://www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/e31.htm>

(Matthew 24:3). Jesus' words in reply are the most extended answer to any question posed to the Lord. These two separate events are the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in AD 70, and the time leading up to the return of Christ, which is already partly underway in our time, but this writer believes that the second part of their question, “**What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?**” (Matthew 24:3), speaks of a time, which is mostly still ahead of us.

Early Warning Signs of the End.

His first warning is of a time of great deception: “**Watch out that you are not deceived**” (v. 8). We are now living in that time of deceit. Our enemy, Satan, has individuals in place who have gained control of all types of positions of influence in politics, media, and education, and they are promoting values and deception that brings society to a new level of degradation. The enemy is out to corrupt and control minds. This bent toward evil has been with us since the Fall of Man, and we are in a spiritual battle until the time that Christ returns. Believers in Christ should be those who hold to the truth of Scripture and give no credence to the manipulation devices of the enemy, the media, television, and the Internet. It is not that all we see on TV is harmful, but we should regard with a healthy dose of skepticism anything on the airwaves. All should be tested against the standard of God's Word. Decide what and who you will believe. The Scripture tells us to not accept the media but to test the spirits. We measure everything against the truth of God's word.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Question 2) If deception is one of the early signs of the coming of Jesus, what things have you seen today that lead people away from a knowledge of God and His Word? Do you feel that the idea of truth is attacked today? How?

The Lord then went on to warn us about those who will come proclaiming they are the Christ (v. 8). This warning is undoubtedly a characteristic of the age in which we live. Many have already come proclaiming themselves as savior and thinking they alone have the answers to the world's problems. I am convinced that more is ahead. There will be one who will claim that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) and will look to be worshiped as God.

Along with him, there will be a religious figure, a man doing signs and proclaiming himself a lamb, but inwardly he has the nature of a dragon. He will demand that the world leader, the Antichrist, should be worshiped:

¹¹Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. ¹²He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. ¹³And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. ¹⁴Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:11-14).

Even though this man, commonly called the False Prophet, will perform great and miraculous signs, also causing a fire to come down from heaven to earth, we must ignore such signs and hold to what is taught in the Word of God. We must not be deceived! Even though there will be those seeking to trick us into following them, Jesus tells us that this is still an early sign: “**These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away**” (v. 9).

Wars and Revolutions

Deception, false leaders, wars, and revolutions are all early warning signs. Jesus warned us that nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom (verse 10). The statistics for those who died in the First World War is 31,508,200. For the Second World War, those who died amounted to 52,199,262.³ Over eighty-three million people died from just those two world wars in the Twentieth Century; that's without the many other conflicts fought by various nations against one another.

During the Second World War, more than six million Jewish people were killed by the Nazis. This war brought about the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland of Israel. Since then, the Jewish people have fought five significant wars since becoming a nation in 1948, i.e., 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. This is not to infer that Jesus was speaking about signs just in the nation of Israel. The prophetic signs spoken by Jesus are world events (Luke 21:35), but Israel has certainly had her share of wars and revolutions. The Lord said that there would be not only wars but also revolutions. When then Prime minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, controversially visited the Temple Mount on September 28, 2000, to pray as a Jew on their holiest site, the Palestinians rose up in revolution. Even though Jerusalem was recaptured from Jordan in 1967, the Temple Mount is still in Muslim hands. This act by Sharon started what is called the Second Intifada. Some Palestinian representatives dismiss Ariel Sharon's visit as the reason for the Intifada; instead, they feel that the catalyst for the violence was the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations on July 25, 2000. This uprising or revolution in Israel is only one of many that have happened in recent years. All over the world, we hear of unrest.

The word *revolutions* are a translation of the Greek word, *Akatastatos*. It means:

A fixed or settled condition, the establishing or settling of something. Commotion, tumult, unruliness, disruption, disorder. It is used of political or social revolution, insurrection, sedition; riot, uprising, and disturbance.⁴

We are now facing times of revolution against the accepted political order of all nations. The world is and will be in turmoil, and is all part and parcel of our enemy's plan to bring chaos, fear, civil disturbance, and political revolution. In such a climate, control over the population of the earth will be easier for one man to rule over a one world government over the whole earth.

Luke then went on to tell us that Jesus spoke next about earthquakes, famines, and pestilences happening to the human race along with fearful events and great signs from heaven:

³ Statistics are taken from the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A2854730>

⁴ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Page 192 in the New Testament Lexical Aids.

There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11).

Is COVID-19, the End Time “Pestilence?”

Revelation 6:5-8 says that among other signs of Christ’s soon-coming there will be many who die due to famines and plagues. At the time of writing (March 23, 2020), there are many thousands dead due to COVID 19. In the passage above, Luke writes of famines and pestilences that cause fear, as well as fearful events and great signs from heaven. We don’t know if the COVID 19 is the pestilence mentioned by Luke, but it could be a sign from God to wake us up to the reality that this world is not all there is, and that we are to prepare ourselves for the coming of our King. The word pestilence comes from the Greek word “*loymos*” which means plague, a fatal epidemic disease. This writer believes that COVID 19 is allowed by God to shake us and to get our attention.

Matthew adds a few words more about the signs that should wake us out of spiritual slumber. He speaks about the signs mentioned being the beginning of birth contractions: “**Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ^sAll these are the beginning of birth pains**” (Matthew 24:7-8).

Question 3) What do you think Jesus is referring to by using the analogy of a woman in birth pains?

When a pregnant woman begins the birthing process, the pain is not severe, and the birth contractions are several minutes apart. The closer she gets to the birth of the child, however, the more frequent the contractions are, with the level of pain much more significant. In using this analogy, Jesus is saying that the closer the world gets to the end of the age, the more frequent will be the wars, revolutions, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. Just as the contractions of a woman get more painful, so will the amount of pain, anguish, sickness, and death of many on planet Earth. The wars and revolutions will be very severe, with much loss of life. Matthew tells us that:

If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:22).

It will be cut short by the appearance of our Lord Jesus. He will come for those who are His. What does all this mean for you and me? It is time to make sure that we belong to Christ so that, when He comes, we will not be ashamed at His coming. We are living in awesome days, but we need not be afraid. We should look forward to the time when Christ returns. Confidence and peace fills all who are in Christ and understand that He holds all world events in His hands along with our own lives. In light of this, we do not need to hold tightly to the things of this world. God is in control, and we need to remind ourselves of this fact.

In a parallel passage to Luke spoken at the same time, Matthew gave us seven woes that Jesus said about the religious leaders, ending with the Lord saying these words:

³⁷"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹**For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'**" (Matthew 23:37-39).

We are living in a time when that prophecy is being fulfilled. I have been told that there are now 200 congregations of Messianic believers in the land of Israel. Jesus said that He would not come again until the Jewish people would welcome him. How exciting to live in a time when many in Israel are reaching out to their Messiah!

Even though there are dark times ahead before the end comes, it is not all bad news. The darkness will not overcome the light. The Scriptures give us light as to what will happen in the last days:

Peter addressed the crowd on the days of Pentecost, saying,

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophecy (Acts 2:17-18).

Despite what we may go through in this lifetime, I want to end with another quote Peter offered to the crowd on the day of Pentecost as he echoed the words of David, saying:

I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices, my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence (Acts 2:25- 28).

Peter told the crowd that this verse pointed ahead to speak of Jesus of Nazareth. He made way for you and me so that we can also quote this verse and hold on to it in times of trouble. God has made known to us the paths of life! He has promised us joy in His presence, and never to leave us or forsake us. We can trust that He is in control, regardless of what we see around us. We say, "Lord, we trust you! Because You are at my right hand, I will not be shaken!"

Prayer: Father, as we see the unfolding events of this world, help us not to be troubled but, instead, live each day to the fullest. Help us to take each day as it comes and do our best to follow You. We want to focus on essential things, i.e., those things that have eternal value. We say, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"** Amen.

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