

The Lord's Discourse about the Future of Israel

Luke 21

Luke 21:1-19: And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, 2 and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. 3 So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; 4 for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." 5 Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, 6 "These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." 7 So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?" 8 And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. 9 But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately." 10 Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. 13 But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. 14 Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head shall be lost. 19 By your patience possess your souls.

Background Notes

This chapter opens with the account of the poor widow who put two small copper coins – “all the livelihood that she had” - into the collection chest in the Temple courts. The Lord said that this widow gave more than the rich people who were putting larger amounts into the treasury. Why? Because in God's eyes the amount you give is determined by how much you have left!

Then the Lord turned His attention to the future of the Temple and Jerusalem and Israel. He was responding to the questions the disciples asked after He told them that the beautiful Temple would be torn down (v5-7).

This discourse is known as the “Olivet Discourse,” and it is also found in Matthew 24 and 25 and in Mark 13. An outline of the Discourse here in Luke would be as follows:

Verses 8-19 - the general conditions that will characterize the future, from the time of Christ all the way to the End Times.

Verses 20-24 - the details of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Verses 25-28 - the signs that will precede the Lord's second coming.

Doctrinal Points

1. The future of Israel was predicted by the Lord's prophecy.

Now it is important to realize that this Discourse, in context, was not addressed to the Church. It was addressed to the Lord's Jewish disciples in answer to the questions about the Jewish Temple, and Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel. Obviously the Lord's answers extend beyond Jerusalem and Israel when He said there would be false messiahs, and wars, and disturbances, and that nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. But remember, it was specifically given to His Jewish disciples, and discusses the future of the Jewish Temple, Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel.

The persecution of Jewish believers (v12-19) began immediately, as we read in the book of Acts, and it continues now, as does the persecution of all Christians. Many Jewish believers have been disowned by family and friends, and some even put to death (v16). But the persecution of Jewish believers will intensify during the Tribulation Period of the End Times. In fact, there will be a time of intense persecution for all believers. In Jeremiah 30:7, the Tribulation period is called "the time of Jacob's trouble."

Verses 18 and 19 cannot be a contradiction to verse 16. It may be a reference to the faithful 144,000 Jewish evangelists of the Tribulation Period who are sealed and preserved from death according Revelation 7. However, it could mean that in death, a believer suffers no loss.

In verses 20-24, the Lord gives the details of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70AD: *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. **21** Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. **22** For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. **23** But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. **24** And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

This prophecy was fulfilled in 70AD, when the Roman General Titus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. As a result, the Jewish people were scattered among the nations. To this day, there is a victory arch in Rome that celebrates the Roman army's triumph over Jerusalem in 70AD.

The Lord predicted that the Gentiles would trample Jerusalem down until the "times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled (v24). The "times of the Gentiles" began when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586BC. The times of the Gentiles will continue until the Lord returns, liberates Jerusalem and sets up His earthly Kingdom.

The Jewish people have controlled Jerusalem for only relatively brief periods of time since then (as they do at the present time), but overall, Jerusalem has been subjected to continual Gentile invasion and domination. When the Lord returns, the times of the Gentiles will be over.

In verses 25-28, the Lord gave the signs and conditions that will precede His second coming: *"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26 men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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 happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."*

We know that the Rapture of the Church could occur at any time. No signs are required. And we believe Scripture teaches that the Rapture of the Church will occur before the Tribulation Period of the End Times, which precedes the Lord's return to this earth. However, some of the signs and conditions of the Tribulation may begin even before the Rapture, such as cosmic disturbances, tsunamis, fear of asteroid collision, etc. The good news here for the godly remnant of Jewish believers of the End Times is that their redemption and deliverance as God's people will be at hand! The Lord will return to this earth and Israel with power and great glory (v27) - what a great day that will be! The future of Israel was predicted by the Lord's prophecy.

2. The future of Israel was predicted by the Lord's parable.

Verses 29-33: Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

Notice that the Lord did not just give an *illustration* of a fig tree, but a **parable** of a fig tree. Parables have deeper meanings. They represent real events and real entities. We believe the fig tree in the parable represents Israel, because the fig tree represents Israel in other Scriptures, in both Old and New Testaments. (See Hosea 9:10 and Luke 13:6, for example.) The Lord's point in this parable was: **Keep your eye on the nation of Israel.** When it begins to put forth

leaves (not fruit, just leaves), then know that the End Times are near, and the return of the Lord to this earth to set up His Kingdom is at hand.

The other trees in verse 29 may represent the End-Times nations surrounding Israel. When we look conditions in the Middle East today, it doesn't take much insight to realize that we are probably on the threshold of the End Times.

There are several interpretations of *"this generation will by no means pass away until all these things take place"* (v32). One good and likely interpretation is that the Jewish people will be preserved. They will not pass away, but they will remain in unbelief until the End Times. The Lord's prophetic word will come true and will never pass away (v33). The future of Israel was predicted by the Lord's parable.

Practical Application

Don't be caught off guard!

Verses 34-38: *"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." 37 And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. 38 Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.*

Again, these words were addressed specifically to the Jewish people, in view of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the need to escape. This exhortation also previews the coming Tribulation Period that will come upon "all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (v35). In the Tribulation Period, the small remnant of godly people will need to stay alert and not be caught off guard when the Lord returns to this earth.

However, this warning and exhortation can certainly be applied to ourselves as we wait for the Rapture, the Lord's return for the Church. Let's not waste our lives or squander our limited time (v34). Let's keep alert and pray. Let's remember that we are going to stand before the Lord (v36).

The Lord can return for His Church at any time. Don't be caught off guard!