

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Luke

SB_21_Jesus Prophecies Regarding Israel's Last Days

The Widow's Mites (21:1-4)

Jesus has just instructed His listeners regarding the dangers of the religious leaders of Israel who were more interested in approbation and providing for themselves than they were diligent shepherds of God's people (20:45-47 cf. Isa 40:11; Ezek 34). Jesus had just pointed out the dichotomy between what the teachers of the Law taught and what they practiced. In pursuit of their greed, these men exploited the destitute widows (20:47). There were various places around the temple where people could leave contributions. The receptacles were made in the shape of trumpets.¹ The poor widow contributed two mites which were the smallest currency in circulation.

This is a well-known incident in the last days of Jesus' public ministry and it provides us yet another glimpse into Jewish society at that time. Through it, we see that human nature has not really changed very much. We do not need to look very hard to see similar contrasts between the spiritually motivated, yet materially poor individual with the merely religious, yet materially prosperous individual. Contrary to the popular myth both then and now, material prosperity does not equate to spiritual approval by God. A rich person can enter heaven (e.g. Zacchaeus – 19:9-10); however, few will (e.g. the rich, young ruler – 18:23) and even fewer who are wealthy will become spiritual (e.g. 9:23-27).

Principle: Wealth and the pursuit of wealth can be a distraction from spiritual matters just like adversity of various sorts can be a distraction from spiritual matters.

Question: Is there any area of your "spiritual" life in which there is a dichotomy between the way man sees you and the way you know God sees you? Anger? Selfishness? Approbation lust? Sexual practice? Cheating in business and financial matters? Tithing verses grace giving?

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple (21:5-6)

Evidently, Jesus addressed His disciples and others while He was in and around the Temple. The first temple of Israel was built by Solomon and was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians. The year 586 B.C. marks the beginning of the 70 years of Babylonian rule over Israel and the beginning of the 5th cycle of discipline per Leviticus 26 that ended in 516 B.C.

The second temple was built under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (Hag 1:1) and with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah. It was completed in 516 B.C.

The third temple was a renovation of the second temple by Herod which began circa 20 B.C.; however, the renovations were not completed until A.D. 64. Therefore, Herod's temple stood for only six years before it was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The destruction of Herod's temple was so devastating that the precise location of the sanctuary is still unknown today.

Question: Is the destruction that Jesus predicted in Luke 21:6 fulfilled in the events of A.D. 70? *Answer:* In my opinion, the answer is No. As we have discussed on previous occasions, the destruction that Jesus had in mind was a destruction that will occur in Israel's last

¹ Earl D. Radmacher, General Editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1741.

days in fulfillment of Daniel 9:26 and consistent with the 5th Cycle of Discipline found in Leviticus 26:27ff.² This is why the believing of Israel during the last days are commanded to flee to the mountains when they see the “abomination of desolation” (Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15-28; Lu 21:21 cf. Re 11:1-3; 13:5-6). Unbelievers of Israel who remain in Jerusalem will be subjected to the anti-Semitic activities that will be unleashed against Israel during her last days (e.g. Re 11:1-3). In addition, they will be the focus of the judgment associated with the Second Advent (Dan 9:44-45; 7:23-27; Matt 24:29-31, 36-25:13, 31-46; Lu 21:20-28). Jesus’ eschatological paradigm was shaped by the prophecies contained in Hebrew Scriptures. The events of A.D. 70 surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem were in no way related to the prophecies of the Old Testament and were not part of Israel’s last days. Certainly, they could have been IF Israel had heeded the exhortations of John the Baptist (Matt 3:1-12; Lu 3:1-20), Jesus (Matt 4:17) and Peter (Acts 3:19). But they did not and the last days of Israel and the establishment of the earthly kingdom were postponed until the completion of a new body of believers consisting largely of Gentiles is complete.

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age (21:7-19)

These verses in Luke 21 provide further evidence of the fact that even the humanity of Christ was not anticipating the intervention of the Church prior to Israel’s last days. Jesus speaks to His disciples as if they will personally experience these things. If Jesus in fact knew of the Church Age at this point in His ministry, it seems rather strange that He would be teaching His disciples as if they would personally experience something that we know to have been at least 1,970 years in the future.

In verse 8, Jesus mentions that many would come in His name and indicate that they are the Messiah. This is consistent with Matthew’s Gospel account and Jesus’ teaching regarding those who would experience judgment at his Second Advent (Matt 24:4-14; 25:44-46).

The “wars and commotions” (21:9) and nation rising against nation (21:10) are most likely related to the forces of the Antichrist and the forces of each of the other major power blocks during Israel’s last days consolidating their power.

The famines, pestilences, earthquakes, fearful sights and great signs from heaven (21:11) are more fully described in Revelation (e.g. Re 6:1-8; 8:5-13; 9:13-21; 16:2-21).

Jesus’ statements in verses 12-19 is very consistent with statements He made to His disciples shortly after their commissioning as apostles to Israel in Matthew 10:16-26. Perhaps the most satisfactory explanation of the phrase in verse 18 that “not a hair of your head shall be lost” is that Jesus was perhaps considering that His disciples would be a part of the Jews who would endure to the end and be delivered into the Messianic kingdom (Matt 24:13 cf. Re 7:2-4). Otherwise, this statement presents a contradiction with verse 16. Another possible interpretation is that Jesus was referring to their eternal security.

The Destruction of Jerusalem (21:20-24)

² In His humanity, Jesus knew exactly how many years Israel had left for her dispensation to run its course. The Holy Spirit taught His human spirit using such passages as Daniel 9:24-27. On the basis of that passage in particular, Jesus knew that He fulfilled the portion regarding “Messiah the Prince” (v. 25) and the sixty-nine weeks (483 years) that extended from “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince” (v. 25). He also knew that after His death, there would be one additional “week” of years (seven years) of the Age of Israel also known as the Tribulation since the total number of years predicted by Daniel for the Age of Israel was 490 years (v. 24 cf. vv. 25-27).

We have examined the parallel passage in Matthew 24:15-28 in depth in our study of that Gospel. Therefore, I will not repeat that information here. However, suffice it to say that the "times of the Gentiles" represents the period of time covered by Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in Daniel 2:24-45.

The Coming of the Son of Man (21:25-28)

The close of the Tribulation is marked by monumental cosmic disturbances and this fact was prophesied in the Old Testament also. See such passages as Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7, 8; Joel 2:20, 31; 3:15; Haggai 2:6; and Zechariah 14:6. The New Testament contains similar prophecies. See Revelation 6:12-14.

The Parable of the Fig Tree (21:29-33)

The fig tree is not Israel in this passage. The fig tree is just an analogy for Jesus' lesson. When the fig tree puts on leaves, anyone knows that summer is soon to come. In the same way, when these prophecies transpire, the disciples would have known that the Second Advent is at hand. The phrase "this generation" has at least two acceptable explanations:

- It can mean "race" as in the Jewish race, OR
- It can mean the generation that sees these prophecies fulfilled.

The Importance of Watching (21:34-38)

This passage emphasizes the importance of understanding eschatology. It has very practical ramifications in regards to how we live our lives. When we evaluate our daily lives in view of the Bema Seat Judgment for the Church Age believer and the judgment of the Second Advent for the Tribulation saint, we are forced to pause and perhaps reconsider our involvement in certain activities. Some of these activities are not sinful, yet they have no eternally redeeming qualities (i.e. human good activities). Others may be sinful and we should confess that sin (1 Jn 1:9) and repent of the thinking that tries to justify the activity. Otherwise, as believers in this age, we face loss of reward at the Bema Seat (1 Co 3:11-15 cf. 2 Co 5:10).