

**Luke 21:5-19**  
**August 2, 2020**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

When we see major events like wars, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, and COVID-19, it tends to get our attention! How many of us have wondered if COVID-19 is a sign that Jesus's return is soon? We have a natural curiosity about the spiritual implications of these kind of events because the Bible attaches catastrophic events with His return.

**Transition:** The disciples are like us. They, too, had a curiosity about the "signs of the time," and they had the advantage of getting to ask Jesus three questions:

- (1) When would the temple be destroyed?
- (2) What would be the sign of His coming?
- (3) What would be the sign of the end of the age? (see Mark 13:3-4; Matt. 24:3)

The disciples thought that these three events would occur at the same time, but Jesus explained things differently.

Let's read the text in Luke 21: 5-19, and then we'll cross-reference Matt 24:1-14 and Mark 13:1-13 to reinforce the content. And then let's look forward to how Jesus answers them. Let's start with Luke 21:5-19.

**Signs of the End of the Age**

<sup>5</sup> Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, <sup>6</sup> "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."

<sup>7</sup> "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

<sup>10</sup> Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. (Refers to the Great Tribulation, which will precede the return of the Lord to the earth)

<sup>12</sup> "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. <sup>13</sup> This will result in your being witnesses to them. <sup>14</sup> But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. <sup>15</sup> For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. <sup>16</sup> You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup> All men will

hate you because of me. <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup> By standing firm you will gain life.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that **you didn't understand**? [Let people engage]

V.7: “When will these things happen?” A: There is a dual perspective in Christ’s answer: some of the events described were to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by Titus and the Roman army, while some are yet to be fulfilled during the Tribulation days that precede His second coming.

V.11: Jesus added that tremendous **earthquakes** would occur, causing **famines** (*loimoi*) and **pestilences** (*limoi*; v. 11). But these events do not fit between Jesus’ day and the fall of Jerusalem. These **fearful events and great signs from heaven** refer to the Great Tribulation which will precede the return of the Lord to the earth.

V.12-17: Jesus taught that persecution of believers would be common and severe. The disciples did undergo persecution by the authorities (cf. Acts 2–4). Because of Jesus’ prediction in Luke 21:9–11, it seems that His words in verses 12–17 refer not only to the situation which would confront the disciples before the fall of Jerusalem but also to what will confront believers during the time of the Great Tribulation (cf. vv. 25–36).

V.14: Should persecuted Christians not prepare for their defense in court? Jesus’ point is that they are not to rely on their own ingenuity but on the power of the Spirit.

V.18: Ultimately, even though a believer dies, he or she will be protected eternally by God.

V.19: To “save yourselves” by “standing firm” means that believers show that they are members of the believing community in opposition to those who turn away from the faith during times of persecution (Matt. 24:10). The ones who are saved are those who are preserved by God’s sovereign power (cf. Matt. 24:22).

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

Remember, the things Jesus described here are not signs of His soon return, because they have been going on for centuries. However, as the coming of the Lord draws near, these things will multiply and intensify. No matter what our views may be of the coming of the Lord, we all need to heed His three admonitions: “Don’t be deceived! Don’t be afraid! Don’t worry!”

## Close in Prayer

### Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 260-262)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

The temple was a beautiful structure, embellished with many costly decorations that a poor widow could never give, and the disciples mentioned this to Jesus. But our Lord was not impressed. He told them that the day would come when the beautiful Jewish temple would be demolished (Luke 21:5–6). He had already announced that the city would be destroyed (Luke 19:41–44), but now He specifically mentioned the destruction of the temple.

Jesus left the temple and went to the Mount of Olives, and there, Peter, James, and John asked Him three questions: (1) When would the temple be destroyed? (2) What would be the sign of His coming? (3) What would be the sign of the end of the age? (see Mark 13:3–4; Matt. 24:3) The disciples thought that these three events would occur at the same time, but Jesus explained things differently. Actually, the temple would be destroyed first, and then there would be a long period of time before He would return and establish His kingdom on earth (see Luke 19:11–27).

Our Lord's reply comprises what we call "The Olivet Discourse," the greatest prophetic sermon He ever preached. It is recorded in greater detail in Matthew 24–25 and Mark 13, and you will want to compare the three passages. Since Luke wrote with the Gentile reader in mind, he omitted some of the strong Jewish elements of the sermon while retaining the essential truths that we must consider and apply.

Keep in mind that this was a message given to Jews by a Jew about the future of the Jewish nation. Though there are definite applications to God's people today, the emphasis is on Jerusalem, the Jews, and the temple. Our Lord was not discussing His coming for the church, for that can occur at any time and no signs need precede it (1 Cor. 15:51–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). "For the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22); the church looks for a Savior (Phil. 3:20–21).

The sermon focuses on a period in God's program called "the Tribulation" when God will pour out His wrath on the nations of the world. Many Bible students believe that the Tribulation will begin after the Lord comes *in the air* and takes His church to heaven (1 Thess. 4:13–5:11). It will climax with the return of Jesus Christ *to the earth*, at which time He will defeat His foes and establish His kingdom (Rev. 19:1–20:6).

It is helpful to see the development of the sermon as a whole, so here is a suggested outline:

#### *The first half of the Tribulation*

(Matt. 24:4–14; Mark 13:5–13; Luke 21:8–19)

#### *The middle of the Tribulation*

(Matt. 24:15–28; Mark 13:14–18; note Dan. 9:24–27)

#### *The last half of the Tribulation*

(Matt. 24:29–31; Mark 13:19–27; Luke 21:25–27)

#### *Closing admonitions*

(24:32–25:46; Mark 13:28–37; Luke 21:28–36)

Jesus answered the disciples' questions by discussing three topics relating to the future of the nation of Israel.

### **The Description of the Age (Luke 21:8–19)**

The characteristics Jesus stated can be seen in every age of the church, for from the beginning there have been counterfeit messiahs, national and international upheavals, and religious persecution. But these things will increase and intensify as the time of Jesus' coming draws near. Thomas Campbell, British poet and educator, said that “coming events cast their shadows before” and he was right.

There will be *religious delusion* (Luke 21:8), and even God's people will be in danger of being deceived. Satan is a counterfeiter who for centuries has led people astray by deceiving their minds and blinding their hearts (2 Cor. 4:1–6; 11:1–4, 13–15). Israel was often seduced into sin by false prophets, and the church has had its share of false teachers (2 Peter 2).

Most people are naturally concerned about the future, especially when world events are threatening; therefore, religious racketeers can prey on them and take advantage of them. In every age, there are those who either claim to be the Christ or claim to know when He will return. These false prophets often “use” the Scriptures to “prove” the accuracy of their predictions, in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly stated that nobody knows the time of His return (Matt. 24:36–44).

“Be not deceived!” is our Lord's admonition, and we must take it to heart. The only sure way to keep our balance in a deceptive world is to know the Scriptures and obey what God tells us to do (2 Peter 3:17–18). It is foolish and hurtful to become so obsessed with Bible prophecy that we start to neglect the practical things of the Christian life. Blessed are the balanced!

There will also be *international distress* (Luke 21:9–11). I have a friend who has been keeping track of the earthquakes that have occurred in recent years. Another prophetic student has a list of all the wars and attempted invasions. Both have overlooked the fact that Jesus said that wars, earthquakes, pestilences, and famines by themselves are not signs of His soon return. These things have been going on throughout the history of the world.

However, during the first half of the Tribulation, these events will multiply and intensify. Matthew 24:1–14 lists them in detail, and if you compare Revelation 6, you will see the parallel:

<i>Events</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
false Christs	24:4–5	6:1–2
wars	24:6	6:3–4
famines	24:7a	6:5–6
death	24:7b–8	6:7–8
martyrs	24:9	6:9–11
worldwide chaos	24:10–13	6:12–17

In fact, most of Revelation 6–19, describes the Tribulation period in detail and follows the outline of Matthew 24: (1) first half of the Tribulation, chapters 6–9; (2) middle of the Tribulation, chapters 10–14; (3) last half of the Tribulation, chapters 15–19.

Our Lord's admonition to His people is, "Don't be terrified!" These things must come to pass; there is nothing anyone can do to prevent them. This does not mean that God's people are submitting to blind fate; rather, it means they are yielding to the plan of a loving Father who works all things "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Finally, there will be *religious persecution*, both official (Luke 21:12–15) and personal (Luke 21:16–19). Of course, there has been religious persecution ever since Cain killed Abel (Matt. 23:34–36; and see Acts 4:1ff; 5:17ff; 6:9ff; 8:1ff). Jesus promised that His people would suffer (John 15:18–16:4, 32–33), and that promise holds true today (2 Tim. 3:12). But the persecution in the end times will be much more severe and many will give their lives for Christ.

Notice the encouragements Jesus gives to all who suffer persecution. To begin with, we must remember that when we are persecuted, we suffer *for His name's sake* (Luke 21:12), and this is a high honor (Acts 5:41). It is not important what people say about our names, but it is important that the name of Christ be glorified.

Second, times of suffering provide opportunities for witness (Luke 21:13–15). The Apostles made good use of the witness stand when they were arrested and taken before the council (Acts 4–5), and Christ's servants and martyrs down through the centuries have followed their example. The English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word *martus* which means "a witness" (see 1 Peter 3:13–17).

Because of official persecution, God's witnesses will stand before important people; and when that happens, they must not panic, for God will give them the words to speak. This promise is not an excuse for lazy preachers or Sunday School teachers who do not want to study! Rather, it is an assurance to faithful witnesses that God will always give them the words they need when they need them.

Not only will the saints endure official persecution from the government, but there will also be opposition from family and friends. Relatives will even follow in the footsteps of Judas and betray their Christian loved ones to be killed. Hatred, arrest, and death will be the lot of many of God's children during the Tribulation.

But they must not despair, for God is in control. Not a hair on their head can perish apart from His sovereign will (Matt. 10:28–31). Knowing this, they can have endurance and be able to face the challenge with faith and courage.

While many Christians today enjoy freedom from official persecution, or even family opposition, there are others who suffer greatly for their faith, and what our Lord said here is an encouragement to them. A friend of mine ministered in Eastern Europe, and a believer in Poland said to him, "We are praying for you Christians in the Western world *because you have it too easy*. The Lord must help you not to compromise."

Remember, the things Jesus described here are not signs of His soon return, because they have been going on for centuries. However, as the coming of the Lord draws near, these things will multiply and intensify. No matter what our views may be of the coming of the Lord, we all need to heed His three admonitions: "Don't be deceived! Don't be afraid! Don't worry!"

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 256-257)**

c. *Jesus' teaching in the temple about the end times (21:5–36) (Matt. 24:1–44; Mark 13:1–31)*

In this section, which parallels the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25), Jesus taught His followers what would happen immediately before His return to set up the kingdom. Being ready for the kingdom was the purpose of this teaching (Luke 21:34–36); thus, the Rapture is not in view in this passage. As with all prophecy in Scripture, the teaching had immediate application to the hearers. They were to live righteous lives because of events which would occur in the future.

21:5–7. **Some of the disciples** were impressed with **the temple** and were **remarking** about its **beautiful** craftsmanship. Jesus' comment that a **time** was coming **when not one stone will be left on another** immediately brought a question to the disciples' minds. Their question, recorded by Luke, concerned the destruction of the temple (v. 7). Matthew also recorded another question about the signs of the end of the Age (Matt. 24:3). The disciples wanted to know **what** things would **take place** before the temple complex fell.

21:8–19. Jesus told His disciples about three things that would start to occur before the destruction of the temple, by Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 70, and one that would occur later.

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 **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 added that tremendous **earthquakes** would occur, causing **famines** (*loimoi*) **and pestilences** (*limoi*; v. 11). But these events do not fit between Jesus' day and the fall of Jerusalem. These **fearful events and great signs from heaven** refer to the Great Tribulation which will precede the return of the Lord to the earth.

Fourth, Jesus taught that persecution of believers would be common and severe. The disciples did undergo persecution by the authorities (cf. Acts 2–4). Because of Jesus' prediction in Luke 21:9–11, it seems that His words in verses 12–17 refer not only to the situation which would confront the disciples before the fall of Jerusalem but also to what will confront believers during the time of the Great Tribulation (cf. vv. 25–36). The same kinds of persecution would be present at both times—imprisonment (vv. 12–15), betrayal (v. 16), and hatred (v. 17). The persecution the original disciples would experience was a precursor to the ultimate persecution which future disciples would undergo.

Jesus' next two statements (**But not a hair of your head will perish**, and **By standing firm you will save yourselves**; vv. 18–19) have confused many. Some interpret these phrases 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. However, it appears that Jesus was speaking here of salvation as entering into the kingdom alive (cf. Matt. 24:9–13). To "save yourselves" by "standing firm" means that believers show that they are members of the believing community in opposition to those who turn away from the faith during times of persecution (Matt. 24:10). The ones who are saved are those who are preserved by God's sovereign power (cf. Matt. 24:22).

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1555). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**21:12–13** Some scholars think the early church invented this prophecy based on its experience of persecution. But, aside from the question of Jesus' ability to prophesy, it is not hard to imagine

that Jesus could predict this based on His own experience of opposition and anticipated crucifixion. However, that He successfully prophesied not only these but also many other events (especially His own resurrection) argues strongly for real supernatural insight and for the future fulfillment of His remaining prophecies. See note on vv. 18–19.

**21:14** Should persecuted Christians not prepare for their defense in court? Jesus' point is that they are not to rely on their own ingenuity but on the power of the Spirit.

**21:18–19** Jesus prophesied that some of His followers will be killed but they will not be harmed. This seems contradictory. His promise was that though they may be put to death for His sake, ultimately, they cannot be harmed (see 12:4–5 for an elaboration of Jesus' meaning).

**Butler, T. C. (2000). Luke (Vol. 3, pp. 350–352). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

## **B. The Future Glory: Signs of the Times (21:5–38)**

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Christ will return in glory, following the signs he listed, and he expects his people to be ready for his return.*

**21:5.** The Jews gloried in the beauty and wonder of their temple. In the time of Jesus, repairs continued to fulfill the dreams of Herod the Great, who had rebuilt the temple along with other massive building projects. Josephus says Herod adorned the temple with white marble stones up to sixty-seven feet long, eighteen feet wide, and twelve feet high. The special gifts or offerings that decorated the temple included silver and gold gates and doors. Beautiful Babylonian tapestries veiled the entrance to the temple.

**21:6.** Adamantly, Jesus repeated his warning (19:41–44) that the total destruction of the temple was eminent.

**21:7.** A group of Jesus' followers asked when this would happen. They wanted to know, How will we know? What signs will warn us?

**21:8.** Jesus was not the only person who promised big signs for the future. Many teachers of that time claimed to have more knowledge than Jesus did. They wanted to name dates and places. They wanted people to follow them as God's Messiah. They were even audacious enough to use the mysterious divine name "I Am" (Gr. *ego eimi*) from Exodus 3:14 to describe themselves. Jesus could call this "My name," for he often used it in John's Gospel.

One word described these false messiahs: deceivers. Jesus gave one piece of advice about them: do not follow. The one who called people to "follow me" now said, "Do not follow them."

**21:9.** Wars and revolutions always excite people. This would be especially true for people who wanted someone, anyone, to overthrow the Roman government. Jesus reminded them that such was business as usual. Every generation has its wars or at least its rumors of wars. These are not signs of the end, though they must, by divine necessity, take place before the end comes.

**21:10.** International disturbance and fighting will take place. This is part of history leading to the end, but it is not the end.

**21:11.** Nature will join in giving signs. Earthquakes, famines, and plagues around the world should remind God's people that he controls nature and he has the power to bring it all to a halt. Not only does he have the power, but he has promised to do so one day. Be attentive to nature's signs, and know the end is coming.

What is more, the heavens will join in. In the skies you will see sights that terrify you, Jesus declared. You will realize that these heavenly happenings are signs to you that the end is on its way, but not yet!

**21:12.** Before international warfare and natural chaos come, the church will face persecution, Jesus continued. Belief in Christ and his name will be cause enough for you to be put in jail and punished by the government. Jewish religious leaders will join force with the government to make this happen.

**21:13.** And how will we respond to such an ominous moment? We can use it as an opportunity to tell about Jesus. Persecution will carry us into the highest government circles to plead our case. When this happens, tell even the governor about Jesus. We are not there to defend ourselves. We are there to be sure everyone knows about Jesus. We can tell them about Jesus by showing how Jesus is responsible for our being where we are—in prison.

**21:14.** Talk of persecution and imprisonment may scare you, Jesus said. Do not worry. The signs of the end are not given to you so you will have some special secret knowledge. They remind you how to act as the end approaches. You do not have to write out a prepared defense before the judge. You do not have to write out your testimony and know exactly what you are going to say about Jesus.

**21:15.** All you need do is trust Jesus. He will give you exactly the words to say, exactly when you need to say to them. You will have God's wisdom with you. No one can contradict your testimony or refute your evidence when you are on the witness stand. No one who accuses you will have the resource of wisdom that I will give you. Trust me. Do not fear. You will be able to defend yourself honorably and wisely.

**21:16.** Jesus did not mean to imply that all this would be easy. Jesus told them he was about to be betrayed. You will be betrayed, too, he told them. Your best friends and your closest family members will turn you over to the enemy. They will kill some of you. This is not easy, but it is a time to build your faith and trust. Pain will last for a moment, but glory will be yours for eternity.

**21:17.** This is not a popularity contest, Jesus continued. You are not running for office or trying to make as many friends as possible. You are testifying for Jesus. You are being an example of faith in God and faith in Jesus. You see how the religious leaders attack me and hate me. You will face the same. Yes, you will be greatly hated. Not because of who you are, but because of who I am. Are you ready for this?

**21:18.** Remember, we are talking about end time, Jesus went on. You will be persecuted. You may die, but nothing will be ultimately destroyed. God is protecting you for eternal life with him.

**21:19.** The flip side of God's protection is your endurance, he declared. I am giving you these signs so you will not be surprised. You will remember I told you they were coming. You will not yield to temptation to join the world or the devil. You are to remain true to me through all persecution and catastrophe. Only by such perseverance can you gain your life for eternity. Remember, I warned you these things were coming. Keep the faith. Trust me through everything. Stay under God's protection.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 21:5-19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**