

**Luke 21:20-37**  
**August 9, 2020**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What does it mean to be spiritually alert and watchful? [Let people engage]

You will recall from last week's lesson that the disciples were admiring the beautiful stones of the Temple, and Jesus took the opportunity to give them a heads up that someday, not one stone would be left on another! So the disciples asked 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's answer describes two different events. The first event will be found in v.20-24, while the sign of the end of the age is described in verses 25-37. **But after Jesus describes what will happen, He gives them (and us) an action plan while we wait for these events to transpire.** Let's take a look at His admonitions. Let's start with v.20-24 and read the first event He describes.

**BOOK:**

<sup>20</sup>“When you see **Jerusalem being surrounded by armies**, [*X-Ref Luke 19:43 Refers to the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70.*] you will know that its desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to **all the nations**. [*X-Ref Luke 19:43 Refers to the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70.*] Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until **the times of the Gentiles** [*This was not the first time Jerusalem would be “trodden down of the Gentiles,” for the Babylonians had destroyed the city in 586 B.C. when “the times of the Gentiles” began. This significant period in God’s plan will end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, destroys all Gentile power, and sets up His own righteous kingdom (Dan. 2:34-36, 44-45; Rev. 19:11ff)*] are fulfilled.

**Transition:** Jesus has told the disciples when the temple would be destroyed, and now He tells them about His own coming at the end of the Tribulation period. Let's read the text.

<sup>25</sup>“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. <sup>26</sup> Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because **your redemption is drawing near.**” [*When Christ*

returns in great glory, He will usher in peace. So there is a safety in the kingdom brought by the returning King. He is the Redeemer after they endured persecution for the last 7.5 years]

<sup>29</sup> He told them this parable: “Look at **the fig tree** and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. <sup>31</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. [*The basic idea in this parable is that of knowing what is going on. As the budding of the trees indicates that summer is near, so the occurring of these signs indicates that the Lord’s return is near (see Luke 12:54–57 for a similar passage). The important thing is that the believer knows that God is keeping His promises and that His Word will not fail (Josh. 23:14)* <sup>32</sup> “I tell you the truth, **this generation [Jesus was probably referring to the generation that would be alive on earth at the time all these things take place. He was not suggesting that it would take a whole generation to accomplish these things, for they will occur with swiftness once they begin. The Greek word translated “generation” can also mean “race” and could refer to the people of Israel]** **will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.** [*Jesus was assuring the disciples that, in spite of all the difficulties Israel would endure, the nation would be protected by God and not be destroyed. Satan has wanted to destroy the nation of Israel, but he will not succeed*] <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

<sup>34</sup> “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. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> 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.” <sup>37</sup> 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, <sup>38</sup> and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

### **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]

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

### **LOOK:**

“Watch!” does not mean to stand around looking for signs. It means, “Be awake! Be alert! Don’t get caught unprepared!” This admonition carries a warning for us today, because it is so easy for us to “get weighted down” with the cares of this life and the temptations of the world and the flesh

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 262-264). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### **The Destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:20–24)**

This paragraph is peculiar to Luke; there is no parallel in Matthew or Mark, in spite of the similar language in Matthew 24:16–21 and Mark 13:14–17. However, it is clear that both Matthew and Mark were referring to events in the middle of the Tribulation when “the abomination of desolation” would be set up in the Jewish temple and the Antichrist (the world ruler) would begin to persecute Israel (Dan. 9:24–27; Rev. 13). Jesus warned the people to flee and go into hiding, for “great tribulation” was about to fall.

Luke’s account refers not to a distant event to occur during the Tribulation but to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 70, just forty years from that time (see Luke 19:41–44). This terrible event was in many respects a “dress rehearsal” for what will happen when Satan vents his anger on Israel and the believing Gentiles during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev. 12:7–17). The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that nearly a million people were killed by the Romans, and over 100,000 taken captive, when Titus captured the city.

This was not the first time Jerusalem would be “trodden down of the Gentiles,” for the Babylonians had destroyed the city in 586 B.C. when “the times of the Gentiles” began. This significant period in God’s plan will end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, destroys all Gentile power, and sets up His own righteous kingdom (Dan. 2:34–36, 44–45; Rev. 19:11ff).

Believers today who are looking for their Lord’s return should not apply Luke 21:20–24 to their own situation. Jesus was talking about Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In Matthew 24:15–28 and Mark 13:14–23, He was speaking about Israel’s situation at the middle of the Tribulation. Since our Lord’s coming for the church will take place “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52), no one will have time to go back home for a coat; nor will we have to worry about traveling on the Sabbath or caring for nursing babies.

Thus far in His message, our Lord has told the disciples when the temple would be destroyed and what signs would point to the end of the age. Now He tells them about His own coming at the end of the Tribulation period.

#### **The Return of the Lord (Luke 21:25–28)**

Revelation 15–19 describes the frightening judgment signs that God will send on the earth during the last half of the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). When these things occur, it will be evidence that the Lord’s coming is drawing near. The image of “waves roaring” describes nations rising and falling like waves in a storm (Ps. 46:1–6; Rev. 17:15). It will be an awesome time, and the population of the earth will tremble with fear, but men will not repent of their sins and turn to God by faith (Rev. 9:20–21; 16:9–11).

Matthew 24:29 informs us that the sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars will fall (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15). Matthew 24:30 states that “the sign of the Son of man” will appear in heaven. We do not know what this “sign” is, but it will produce fear among the nations of the earth. However, then Jesus Christ will appear, and every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7). The nation of Israel will at last recognize their Messiah, repent, believe, and be saved (Zech. 12:10–14; and see Mark 14:61–62).

These awesome signs will bring terror to the lost people of the world but hope to those who have trusted the Lord during the Tribulation period (Rev. 7), for these believers know that the Lord’s coming will be soon. Believers today look for the Savior, not signs. However, as we see “coming events casting their shadows,” we believe that the Lord’s return is near.

Christ’s appearing will be sudden, glorious, and with great power (Luke 21:27). The image here is taken from Daniel 7:13–14, a messianic passage that must have been familiar to the disciples. The angels promised that Jesus would return to earth in the same way He departed (Acts 1:9–11), and He will (Rev. 1:7).

There are those who ignore and even ridicule the doctrine of the return of Christ. After all, the church has been waiting for the Lord for 2,000 years, and He has not returned yet! Peter answered that accusation in 2 Peter 3. He pointed out that God keeps His promises whether we believe them or not, and that God measures time differently from the way men measure it. Furthermore, the reason He waits is so that *unsaved sinners may repent, be saved, and be ready when Jesus comes*. While His seeming delay is a trial to the church, it is an opportunity for the lost.

Having answered their questions, the Lord then “applied” the message to their hearts by giving them two closing admonitions: “Know!” and “Watch!”

### **The Responsibilities of the Believers (Luke 21:29–38)**

In the Bible, the fig tree is often an image of Israel (Hosea 9:10; Luke 13:6–10). Some students interpret this parable to mean that the emergence of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948 was the “sign” that the Lord would soon return. Surely it is a significant thing that Israel is now a free nation after so many centuries of political bondage. But Luke added “and all the trees” (Luke 21:29), suggesting that more than one nation is involved. Perhaps Jesus was saying that *the rise of nationalism around the world* is the thing to watch. In recent years we have certainly seen the growth of nationalism and the emerging of new nations, and this may be a “sign” that the coming of the Lord is near.

However, the basic idea in this parable is that of *knowing what is going on*. As the budding of the trees indicates that summer is near, so the occurring of these signs indicates that the Lord’s return is near (see Luke 12:54–57 for a similar passage). The important thing is that the believer *knows* that God is keeping His promises and that His Word will not fail (Josh. 23:14).

To what “generation” does Luke 21:32 apply? Some who doubt that Jesus will literally return say that this statement applies to the generation of the Apostles, so that “the coming of the Lord” was either the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) or the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. *But none of the signs Jesus mentioned took place before or during those events*. Nor did they climax with the deliverance of Israel and the establishing of the kingdom.

Jesus was probably referring to the generation that would be alive on earth at the time all these things take place. He was not suggesting that it would take a whole generation to accomplish these things, for they will occur with swiftness once they begin. The Greek word translated “generation” can also mean “race” and could refer to the people of Israel. Jesus used it that way in Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19. Jesus was assuring the disciples that, in spite of all the difficulties Israel would endure, the nation would be protected by God and not be destroyed. Satan has wanted to destroy the nation of Israel, but he will not succeed.

His first admonition was “Know!” and His second was “Watch!” (Luke 21:34–36) Both admonitions apply to God’s people in every age, though they will have a special meaning for the Jews of the Tribulation period. “Watch!” does not mean to stand around looking for signs. It means, “Be awake! Be alert! Don’t get caught unprepared!” This admonition carries a warning for us today, because it is so easy for us to “get weighted down” with the cares of this life and the temptations of the world and the flesh (see Luke 12:35–48).

During difficult times, it is easy to give up and start living like the unsaved world; and believers during the Tribulation period will face that temptation. They must “watch and pray” and resist the temptations around them, for they want to be ready when their Lord returns.

Luke 21:36 refers primarily to believers standing before the Lord at the judgment when He returns to earth to establish His kingdom (Matt. 25:31–46). The sheep will enter into the kingdom while the goats will be cast out. While some of God’s people will die during the Tribulation judgments and persecutions, some will “escape” and see Jesus Christ when He returns in glory.

If believers during that *difficult* age will be tempted to yield to the world and the flesh, Christians in this present age of comfort and affluence must face even greater dangers. We today do not know when our Lord will return, and it behooves us to be faithful and to be ready.

“I’m not looking for signs,” said the late Vance Havner; “I’m listening for a sound.”

The sound of the trumpet! The shout of the archangel!

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)

**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. 257-258)**

21:20–24. Jesus then returned to the disciples’ original question about when the temple would be destroyed. In these five verses He noted that Gentile domination included the destruction of **Jerusalem** which would come about when the city was **surrounded by armies**. Gentile domination would continue **until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled** (v. 24). The times of the Gentiles’ domination over Jerusalem actually began when the Babylonians took the city and the nation into Captivity in 586 B.C. Jerusalem will again fall under Gentile domination in the Tribulation (Zech. 14:1–2) just before the Messiah returns to restore Jerusalem. It is that restoration of which Jesus spoke next (Luke 21:25–28).

21:25–28. Here Jesus first noted that cosmic **signs** will precede the **coming of the Son of Man** and will cause people to be terrified. The **sun, moon, and stars ... will be shaken**, and **the sea** will roar and toss, signifying that the world will be in a chaotic state, out of control. Second, Jesus told about the coming of the Son of Man Himself. He drew His terminology from Daniel 7:13–14, in which Daniel saw “one like a Son of Man” coming with clouds and **glory** and receiving the kingdom from the Ancient of Days (i.e., God the Father). Jesus’ point was that the Son of Man will come to receive the kingdom—the same kingdom He had been proclaiming since the

beginning of His ministry. When these things **begin to occur**, His followers will **lift up their heads**, a symbol of rejoicing, **because their redemption** (i.e., safety in the kingdom brought by the returning King) will be **drawing near**.

21:29–33. In the **Parable of the Fig Tree** Jesus taught that one can tell what is coming by watching the signs. By looking at fig **leaves** sprouting in April, they know **that summer is near**. Similarly, when the Great Tribulation comes, people will **know that the kingdom of God is near**.

The clause, **this generation** (*genea*) **will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened**, has caused much controversy. Some think Jesus was telling His disciples that their generation would see the destruction of the temple. That interpretation stems primarily from verses 5–7 in which the discussion pertained to the temple’s destruction. However, because of verse 31 (in which Jesus spoke of the coming of the kingdom of God), and because of Matthew 24:34, it seems preferable to say His words refer to the generation living at the time of the cosmological events that will just precede His second coming. That generation will actually see the founding of the kingdom of God—something every generation of Jewish citizens has longed for throughout the nation’s history.

21:34–36. Jesus warned His disciples to be ready at all times. Though a believer will be able to anticipate the coming of the kingdom by the signs, it is possible to get so entangled with the affairs **of life** that some will not be ready for the kingdom when it comes—**unexpectedly** (v. 34) and universally (v. 35)—and therefore will not enter the kingdom. It was against this wrong attitude that Jesus said, **Be careful** (v. 34) and **be always on the watch** (v. 36).

*d. The crowd’s reaction (21:37–38).*

21:37–38. The crowd reacted to Jesus’ **teaching** with amazement. Jesus spent the nights on **the Mount of Olives**, and each morning returned to **the temple** in Jerusalem to teach. The people were so taken with His teaching that they would arrive **early in the morning** to get an opportunity **to hear Him**. Apparently, they were understanding His teachings about the coming of the kingdom in a way they had not understood before.

**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* (pp. 1555-1556). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**21:20–28** Here Lk begins to differ most significantly from Mt and Mk. The Olivet discourse began with a question concerning the timing of Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple, though Mt 24:3 makes it clear that the disciples understood that event as part of the final events of the age. Jesus’ response answered both questions—the timing of Jerusalem’s fall and the timing of the end of the age—by using the one event to characterize the other. Luke placed the emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem, while Matthew and Mark placed it on the end of the age. See note on Mk 13:30.

**21:28, 31–32** The references to “you,” “this generation,” and “these things” are interpreted in different ways. Matthew and Mark focused the remarks especially on the original audience and the question of the destruction of the temple. Here they seem to have referred both to the original audience, some of whom were alive at the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the generation of the end, who will witness the signs of the coming of the Son of Man. Presumably the latter

generation is spoken of as the former because of the close link Jesus drew between the two events.

**Butler, T. C. (2000). Luke (Vol. 3, pp. 352–358). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**21:20.** These things will start quite soon, Jesus continued. You will see enemy armies surround Jerusalem. Do not look for deliverance. God is not planning on delivering the city that will betray and crucify his Son. Jerusalem faces destruction.

**21:21.** Do not think Jerusalem has some holy power to save you, Jesus warned. Do not run back into the city for security. Do not hide in the city for safety. Get out of the city. Go, hide in the mountains. Stay out of the city no matter what you do. Jerusalem will be destroyed. Do not be destroyed with it.

**21:22.** How can God do such things to the holy city, David's city, Messiah's city? God sees Jerusalem in a different light, Jesus pointed out. Jerusalem rejected and mistreated the prophets. Jerusalem will reject and kill the beloved Son. Jerusalem has turned temple worship into big business. Jerusalem's religious leaders practice religion for show and personal gain. The prophets have warned you over and over again what will happen to a disobedient, sinful Jerusalem. Their Scripture is now being fulfilled. Jerusalem has called down God's wrath in judgment. God will take out his vengeance on Jerusalem. The city faces imminent destruction.

**21:23.** Woes in Luke foreshadow disaster and suffering (6:24–26; 10:13; 11:42–47, 52; 17:1; 22:22). The woe appears here unexpectedly, for it is on pregnant women and nursing mothers, those who populate the earth. These people are in fragile physical condition, and thus are more vulnerable. This woe does not represent a condemnation of these as especially wicked people, as woes often do. This represents a cry of grief and empathy for the suffering these special women will have to endure in this awful moment in Jerusalem's history.

**21:24.** Traditional wartime atrocities picture what Jerusalem's citizens and especially the young mothers will suffer. The sword will kill some. Long marches into foreign captivity await others. Unclean, impure, idolatrous foreigners will control Jerusalem, trampling everything left under their feet. But remember! This is the beginning part of God's signs, Jesus declared. Jerusalem's defeat will not mean God has been defeated. Nor does it mean God has lost control of history even for a moment. God has predicted this decades before it happened. He has set up a time for the Gentiles to reign over the city. Everything will follow his plan. That way you will know early on that God's Word is true as it paints the signs of the end for you.

**21:25.** Jesus seems here to revert to the original description in verse 11. Here he becomes more specific about the heavenly signs that lead up to the end times. He takes over Old Testament language (Pss. 46:2–4; 65:7; 89:9; 107:23–32; Isa. 13:9–10; 17:12; 24:18–20; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7–8; Joel 2:10, 30–31; 3:15; Hag. 2:6, 21). Sun, moon, and stars will bring warnings. This probably refers to eclipses, comets, and shooting stars. Such signs will fill the earth with fear and a sense of being trapped with no place to escape. No nation will be exempt. The whole earth will stand perplexed as seas and oceans pound their roaring waves onto the beaches.

**21:26.** The heavenly signs will cause people to swoon in fear. Not knowing that I have told you the signs that must come before the end, Jesus said, they will have no source to trust and no reason for hope. They will be frightened to death.

**21:27.** Finally the end comes, Jesus continued. The great sign of the end is the return of Jesus, the Son of Man. You will see the full power and glory of Jesus. Yes, in Jesus God's full

glory will be revealed to the earth. All the earth will see. This will bring greater fear and consternation to those who are unprepared, but not for you.

**21:28.** How will you react when this occurs? Jesus asked. You will know this is the sign I told you about. Do not bend over with fear and trembling. Stand up straight. Lift your head high. Why? Now your redemption is near. Persecution is over. Dying for Jesus' name is past history. The Redeemer has come in full glory. He has your rewards. Now you will know for sure why you endured all you had to endure. No longer must you live by faith. Now you see the Redeemer coming to judge and rule the earth.

**21:29–30.** At last, Jesus resorted to his favorite teaching method to try to prepare his followers for the end time. The fig tree is a sign for us. In winter it stands bare of leaves, a stark sign of the barren winter. Then it finally puts on leaves. Now everyone can tell summer is near. These signs of nature we can read easily.

**21:31.** If you can read nature's signs like the fig tree, Jesus said, you can also read the signs I am describing. When these things happen, you can be sure that God's kingdom is coming to you in all its fullness. Be prepared to see the signs and know the kingdom is coming.

**21:32–33.** Here Jesus gave us one of his most difficult sayings to understand. He had pointed to things far beyond A.D. 70, forty years after his death. Now he said everything would take place before this generation of people died out. How do we understand this? One thing is sure. The saying is paired in contrast with the next saying (v. 33), where the strong emphasis lies. The signs point to the time when heaven and earth will pass away. Then one thing remains: God's Word. You can trust God's Word above everything else on earth. What God has said will happen. Signs he gives will come to pass. The truths he teaches are true. His demands for obedience must be obeyed, since the judgment he threatens will be enforced.

If this verse is to be believed, then verse 32 must be true, but how? Scholars have argued for centuries over this. Many views have come forward. (1) Jesus' coming to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70 before all that generation died fulfills the saying, but the saying in no way limits itself to that one sign. (2) Jesus made a prediction that was correct, but he used hyperbole in specifying the time to get the people's attention and to make them obey. (3) The destruction of Jerusalem began the signs that continue to appear, so that that generation saw the beginning of the end times. (4) This generation means this nation, the Jews, or even the human race. (5) The statement is like so much prophecy that foreshortens history or uses one event in history as a type for a future event of greater magnitude, so that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 becomes a type of the final catastrophes leading to the coming of the Son of Man and of the kingdom. (6) The disciples are representatives of God's people in the last generation, so this becomes a promise that all the signs will take place quickly within the lifespan of that one generation.

What can we conclude about these verses? With such a complex and divided history of scholarship, we must be humble and admit from the beginning that any conclusion we reach is tentative and far from final. Following is an approach that tries to take seriously the authority of Scripture and the difficulty of understanding the text.

The time span here corresponds to what has been said in the first part of this end-time discourse. More than just the fall of Jerusalem must be in view.

Jesus spoke here as a prophet. He sought to impress on the generation to which he spoke the need for immediate action and change of attitude. As the prophetic word often had more than one moment of fulfillment, so Jesus' word was open to subsequent fulfillments that make it relevant to each new generation. The A.D. 70 fulfillment for that generation showed the true and fearsome power of Jesus' prophetic warning. What happened once can happen again. End-time signs



reappear throughout history. The final end time will fulfill the words in even more dramatic fashion than our most creative imagination can picture.

Jesus' words will never pass away. Their warning pictured events that his generation faced and saw as the most drastic moment in the nation's history and the end of the nation's hope for self-rule and power among the nations. Their warning pictured the plight of the church under the same evil government that destroyed Jerusalem. In A.D. 68–70 the church certainly saw the coming of Jesus to fulfill his words of warning. This was not the ultimate coming of the Son of Man in glory, but it was one coming to bring to pass what he prophesied.

In summary, the generation to which Jesus spoke saw a massive act of God bringing final destruction on his holy city and its magnificent temple—destruction that in many ways outdid the turmoil and terror of Babylon's capture of the holy city in 586 B.C. The church of that generation saw God's power directing them through persecution and empowering them to witness under unpleasant conditions. The believers of that generation saw the destruction of Jerusalem as a manifestation of the Son of Man coming in power to fulfill his prophecy. All of this together represented the first fulfillment of Christ's prophecy, but certainly not the last. Jesus pointed to A.D. 70 and used it as a precursor for the final end time coming in glory to bring judgment to the whole world.

As Bock (*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 1675) describes Luke's emphasis: "It would seem that Luke sees in Jerusalem's collapse a preview, but with less intensity, of what the end will be like.... He wants to make clear that when Jerusalem falls the first time, it is not yet the end. Nonetheless, the two falls are related, and the presence of one pictures what the ultimate siege will be like. Both are eschatological events in God's plan, with the fall of Jerusalem being the down payment and guarantee of the end-time."

**21:34.** The conclusion of the matter is not a review of signs to be sure you caught each one, Jesus pointed out. It is an ethical commandment to be sure you prepare yourself for the days to come. Two things may easily distract you and make you forget and/or miss the signs and not be prepared for the return of Jesus. The first of these is drunken parties in which you dull your mind with alcohol until you have no capacity to think about Jesus and his coming. The second is the stress of life so that you concentrate so much on worldly matters and your position in the world that you forget that this world is not eternal and that your eternal life depends on your readiness for the next world. Jesus has given you the signs. You have no excuse not to be ready. He has warned you of ways that will keep you from being ready. Do not get caught up in drunken partying or in this world's stress. Keep your eye on the signs of the times.

**21:35.** If you follow the two errant ways of life, Jesus continued, you will find yourself in a trap. Also, do not think you can escape the second coming and its judgment. It comes on the whole earth. Everyone is involved and no one escapes.

**21:36.** Jesus' emphasis is not on knowledge but on action. Pray! Stay alert! Ask God for strength to escape the persecutions and wars and destructions. Pray that you may be one of those fortunate ones who sees the Son of Man when he returns. Then you will stand before him as he judges the world, and you will receive the reward coming to his faithful ones who maintain their faith, trust, and testimony through all the hard signs.

**21:37.** Having given the signs of the end times, Jesus did what he expected his disciples to do. He returned to his daily routine of faithful service to God. He taught in the temple. At night he retreated to the Mount of Olives, probably to Bethany with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

**21:38.** The Jewish leaders continued to try to kill him, but they could not because of the people. They converged around him each morning to hear his authoritative teaching about the kingdom of God. A chasm had formed between the Jewish people and their leaders. The people hung on his words, but the leaders wanted to kill him.

**MAIN IDEA REVIEW:** *Christ is coming again and has given us the signs that ought to make us pray and get ready for his coming to establish his kingdom.*

### III. CONCLUSION

#### Watch and Pray

It has been two thousand years, and no generation has yet seen the signs of the last times. Maybe it is time to give up on this and look elsewhere for truth about the nature, endurance, and end of our universe. Luke 21 shows that Jesus was well aware of this temptation. He constantly warned us to be alert and pray, not to be led astray by doubters. We are to be as faithful in watching as the widow was in giving. The first signs have happened. Jerusalem has been destroyed and occupied. Have any of the other signs come? Once these begin, we can expect the other signs to follow quickly—so quickly that we will not have time to change our mind. Our preparedness now determines our place in God’s kingdom at the end. Reason may say, Forget it. Faith says, Trust him. The kingdom is coming. Watch for the signs.

#### PRINCIPLES

- God expects us to give our best and our all to him.
- Signs of the times will help us realize the end is near so we can make final preparations for Jesus’ return; meanwhile, alertness and prayer are the right attitudes and actions.
- Deceivers will always try to gain glory and power by pointing to false signs of the last times.
- Persecution is certain, but even in persecution Christians can depend on God for the right words to use in testifying to him.
- Jesus’ followers can expect persecution and death in this world, but God will protect them for the next life.
- Betrayal by friends and relatives is inevitable for followers of Jesus.
- God’s Word is true and can be trusted for now and eternity.

#### APPLICATIONS

- Count how much you can give to Jesus, not how much you can keep for yourself.
- Do not depend on fortresses or beautiful architecture for protection from the final punishment.
- Pray that God will give you strength and protection for the last days.
- Be alert to what is happening and be prepared to stand before your Judge as a faithful and true follower.
- Forgive those who betray you.
- Learn to read God’s signs.
- Study and trust God’s Word.

## IV. LIFE APPLICATION

### Making the Choice

Jim Jones ... Waco ... sidewalk preachers ... people on a mountain in Tennessee ... television hucksters ... you add to the examples. Our time has seen so many people led astray. Charismatic leaders and smooth talkers become convinced they have read the signs of the times. They can give dates and places. The end of the world is coming. How many cartoons make fun of such predictions? How many tragedies have resulted from such predictions?

Luke 21 merits our close attention. It assures us that enough signs are there to cause us to prepare. But its emphasis is not on setting a date and getting in the right place. The biblical emphasis of its apocalyptic, end-time materials is almost always ethical. Get your life in order. Pray. Stay awake and alert. Do not get involved in drunken parties. Do not let the temptations and stresses of life encompass you. Pray that you may have strength to escape the persecution and death. Be ready to stand before the Son of Man as he brings the last judgment.

It is simple to condemn those who go off the deep end with dates and places and withdrawal from normal living. Jesus invites us back into the everyday routine of life—but back with a consciousness that this routine is not the central part of life. You must choose what is central. Does life center on drunken parties and the stresses of life in this world? Or does life center on Christ and on waiting for him to return? Are you ready? Pray!

## V. PRAYER

God, who holds all eternity in your hands, thank you that you care enough to show us the signs that must come before you come again. Wake us up. Do not let us slumber. Forgive our sins. Show us how to be alert for your signs. Show us how to be prepared to stand before the Son of Man at the last judgment. Give us faith in you. Amen.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 21:20-37). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**