

21:5 And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said,

21:6 "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down."

21:7 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

It is still Tuesday of the Passion Week. Jesus had been teaching in the temple earlier in the day but then walked across the Kidron Valley to the east to the Mount of Olives. From the Mount, the city of Jerusalem and the temple itself were visible. It was a spectacular sight. The disciples (Matt. 24:1; Mk. 13:1) were commenting about the beauty of the temple which prompted Jesus to predict the temple's destruction (Lk. 21:5, 6). If the temple was destroyed, Jerusalem would also be destroyed. As Stein says,

These two events are not identical but are intimately associated together. In Jeremiah 7:13-20; Lamentations 2:7-9; and Micah 3:12 they are tied together. Furthermore, since the temple lay within the walled city of Jerusalem, there was no way to destroy the temple without destroying the city. The fierce defense by the Jewish people of their temple and city would assure that the future destruction would involve both. (Stein, SBJT 16.3 (2012): 18).

This resulted in two questions: (1) "when therefore will these things happen?" and (2) "what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

It seems obvious that the disciples' questions are related to Jesus' comment about the destruction of the temple, for that was what prompted the questions in the first place. However, things get more complex as we read the parallel accounts in the synoptics. For example, Mark 13:4 reads, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" Some see these questions as dealing with two separate issues: one related to the destruction of the temple and the other related to the coming of Christ. Others see Luke as interpreting Mark and take both questions as a reference to the temple's destruction. But Matthew clearly links the end times to the discussion. Matthew 24:2-3 says, "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

After looking at all three gospel accounts, some conclude that Luke and Mark are only addressing the events surrounding the destruction of the temple while Matthew expands the question to include Christ's return (France, Matthew, NICNT, 895). However, it seems that the easiest way to harmonize the accounts is to understand that the disciples linked the destruction of the temple to the end of the age (Carson, Matthew, EBC, 497). Matthew's question regarding the sign of Christ's coming and the end of the age is simply stating explicitly what is implicit in Mark and Luke (Carson, Matthew, EBC, 497).

Therefore, the description of the events that follow include the temple's destruction but also extend beyond it to Christ's second coming at the end of the age. All of these events, including the temple's fall, are part of God's movement toward the consummation of the ages.

21:8 And He said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them.

21:9 "When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately."

21:10 Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom,

21:11 and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

Verses 8-11 list things that we should expect to see between Jesus' first and second coming; they are NOT the signs that immediately precede His return. In Matthew 24:8 Jesus calls them, "the beginning of birth pangs" (cf. Mk. 13:7), and in Luke 21:9 He clearly says, "these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately" (Mk. 13:8). In other words, these events should not be used to validate the claims of the false christs who say, "the time is near" (21:8).

1) There will be messianic pretenders (Rev. 2:20; 12:9; 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:33; Jn. 7:47; 1 Jn. 1:8; 2:26; 3:7).

"One of the temptations in times of difficulty is to follow blindly any self-proclaimed savior who promises help" (Carson, Matthew, EBC, 497). Jesus warns not to go after them for many will come saying, "I am He" (that is, "I am the Christ").

Jesus' remarks indicate that He assumed there would be a long enough interval between His ascension and His return for people to be deceived; nevertheless, false Christs rose almost immediately. Josephus, the great Jewish historian who died in 100 AD, said that during the reign of Felix there were so many who claimed to be Christ "that they were apprehended and killed every day." The trend continues and the names of more and more "messiahs" are recorded in history.

2) Social and civil chaos will also precede the end.

3) Nation will rise against nation. The whole of human history is the history of war. In the Old Testament the prophets commonly spoke of the association of war with the end (2 Chron. 15:6; Isa. 19:2; Jer. 4:20; Joel 3:9–14; Dan. 11:20, 25, 44; and Rev. 6:3–4; 9:9; 12:7).

4) There will also be "natural" disturbances including earthquakes, plagues, and famine (Jer. 4:13-22; 14:12; 21:6–7; Ezek. 14:21).

5) Signs from heaven are also included. These signs are unspecified.

21:12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake.

21:13 "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.

Before the events spoken of in verses 8-11 the disciples would face persecution. This would be the pattern throughout the history of the church. As Bock says, "persecution is the short term destiny of the church" (Bock, 1668).

Christians will be placed in many circumstances that will be hostile. The Book of Acts logs the heavy and consistent persecution that the church faced in its early years (Acts 4:3; 5:18; 12:1; 18:12; 21:27; 24:1-2; 25:8; 26:1).

Jesus said Christians will be persecuted "for My sake." It isn't that Christians are unkind and unlovable; it's that Christians represent the gospel – the gospel that indicts every person as a sinner to be judged unless they repent and believe in Jesus Christ. The world hates that message and the Christ of the gospel. Jesus said in John 15, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. You're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world. Therefore the world hates You. Remember the word that I said to you. A slave is not greater than his master, if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also." In John 16:1-3 Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me."

But these hostile environments also provide an opportunity to testify of Christ. In Philippians 1:12-13 while Paul was imprisoned, he wrote, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." In Acts 26 Paul spoke before King Agrippa, and before his death we assume he spoke to Caesar himself since as a Roman citizen he had appealed his case to Caesar.

In Matthew 24:14, on this same occasion, Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations. Then the end shall come."

**21:14 "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves;
21:15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.**

A single Greek word is translated as "prepare beforehand." It was used of practicing a dance or rehearsing a speech. No such preparation is necessary when the opportunity to testify comes, for God will provide the words to say (21:15).

God knows persecution will come and He will use it as a means to testify about Jesus. If God wants the witness of the gospel to spread, He will empower the one whom He has placed in the position to testify.

**21:16 "But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death,
21:17 and you will be hated by all because of My name.
21:18 "Yet not a hair of your head will perish.**

21:19 "By your endurance you will gain your lives."

Not all persecution will come through institutionalized religion or civil authorities; some will come from family members and friends. Jesus even experienced this when Judas, one of His disciples, betrayed Him.

God-empowered testimony does not mean that the gospel message will be received. In most cases it will not. Many early church leaders were put to death for their faith. Stephen was the first martyr in Acts 7. James, the brother of John, was killed in Acts 12:2. It is assumed that Paul was executed by Rome, and according to church history, Peter was crucified upside down. In fact, church history tells us that all the apostles except John were killed for their faith; John was exiled to the Island of Patmos where he died of old age.

Verses 18 and 19 are most likely speaking of eternal destruction since Jesus just said in verse 16 that some would be put to death. Although verse 18 could simply mean that the majority would not be killed, receiving salvation as the reward of endurance was a common thought in Jesus' teaching. In Matthew 10:22 He said, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." In Matthew 24:13 He said, "the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." And in Mark 13:13 Jesus said, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." Endurance in the midst of persecution is a sign of true faith.

According to the Open Doors website, each month 322 Christians are killed for their faith, 214 churches or Christian properties are destroyed, and 722 believers are victims of acts of violence; yet the world turns a blind eye.

21:20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near."

**21:21 "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city;
21:22 because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled."**

Luke 21:20-22 directly answers the disciples' question in 21:7. Everything that Jesus spoke of in Luke 21:8-19 would continue until the end comes; the sign that Jerusalem would fall is now given. Jesus said, "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near."

Luke's emphasis on the end times differs from the other gospel writers. Luke focuses on the events nearer to his day rather than those that occur just prior to Christ's return. Luke wrote his gospel in the early 60s AD; Jerusalem would fall in 70AD. Although the fall of Jerusalem must take place, Luke wants his readers to know that it is not a sign of the end; after it is destroyed, it would then "be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Lk. 21:24). Then the end would come.

Verses 21 and 22 stress that when Jerusalem is under siege people need to flee. Those in Judea are to flee into the mountains for the siege of the city will affect the whole region. Fleeing to the mountains for safety is a common Old Testament and apocalyptic image (Gen. 19:17, 19; Judg. 6:2; 1 Sam. 23:19; 26:1; 1 Kings 22:17; Isa. 15:5; Jer. 16:16; 49:8; Ezek. 7:16; Amos 5:19–20; Zech. 14:5). Jesus also mentions that those in the city should leave and those in the country should not enter it.

Verse 22 makes it clear that the fall of Jerusalem is the judgment of God. Jesus calls it “days of vengeance.” God judged the city for its failure to respond to the day of visitation (see notes on Lk. 19:41–44; 13:34–35).

Unfaithfulness to God leads to national judgment. “All things which are written will be fulfilled.” The city will collapse under siege. See 1 Kings 9:6-9 and Daniel 9:26.

“Desolation” is an accurate way to describe what actually happened to Jerusalem when the Roman armies invaded. Josephus recorded that 1.1 million Jews were killed and 97,000 taken captive when Jerusalem fell. He also said that even children were cooked for food in the midst of the siege that Jesus anticipates here.

The destruction of the temple and the city pictures horrific national judgment but also parallels the circumstances of the end (Bock, 1676). It is as if this near fulfillment is a small picture of what lies ahead.

***21:23 "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people;
21:24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.***

Pregnant women and those with infants would suffer due to the difficulty in fleeing quickly. In Matthew 24:20 Jesus adds, “pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath” for these would also hinder travel.

Jesus said that Jerusalem will be trodden down “by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” These ominous words conclude Luke’s report on the fall of Jerusalem” (Edwards, 604).

One view sees the times of the Gentiles as the time when gentiles are converted by the gospel. However, considering that the word “gentiles” appears three times in verse 24 (it is translated as “nations” once) and the first two references are clearly negative, it is more consistent to see “the times of the Gentiles” as something negative as well, indicating a time of Gentile domination over Israel (Dan. 2:44; 8:13–14; 12:5–13). The times of the Gentiles will end when Christ comes to establish His kingdom.

Luke 21:23-24 implies a number of things.

First, this implies that the city’s fall is limited in duration, or why else mention a time limit? (Bock, 1680)

Secondly, the fact that God's plan involves a time when Gentiles dominate Israel implies that there will be a time in the future when the fortunes of Israel return. Although some deny a future for Israel, why speak of a time of Gentile dominion unless there is a contrast intended between the Gentiles and Israel?

After the resurrection when the disciples asked, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6), Jesus didn't rebuke them for misunderstanding. He didn't say, "Don't you get it! Israel, as a nation, has no place in God's plan anymore!" Instead He simply said, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Again, the implication is that God would restore the kingdom to Israel, but it wasn't for the disciples to know when.

Paul also argues in Romans 11:25–26 that Israel has a future in God's plans. Although God is working through the church, not the nation, it will be grafted back when the fullness of Gentiles is completed (Ro. 11:11–12, 15, 30–32; Bock, 1681). Lastly, the fact that there is a time of Gentile dominion and there is a time that it will end shows that it is part of the plan of God.

**21:25 "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves,
21:26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
21:27 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory.
21:28 "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."**

The end of human history has already been written; it is not headed toward a humanly engineered utopia or an age of peace and tranquility. The world is headed for judgment and re-creation.

Verses 25-28 move from the fall of Jerusalem to the coming of Christ and the end. The imagery is clearly apocalyptic (Isa.13:9–10; 24:18–20; 34:4; Eze.32:7–8; Joel 2:10; 2:30–31; 3:15; Hag. 2:6, 21). The events are comprehensive, including the entire creation, sky, land, and sea.

Matthew 24:29 says, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Revelation 16:13-14 describes it as "the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up." In a similar way Joel 2:10 says, "The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining." These foreboding events foreshadow the time in Revelation 21:1 when the heavens will be completely destroyed (cf. II Pet. 3:11, 12).

Revelation 6:12 -17 says,

There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up,

and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

In that day, humans will be overcome with fear because the heavenly powers will be shaken and it is completely beyond their control (Isa. 34:4; 2 Ki. 17:16; Dan. 8:10). Heavenly bodies will crash into the earth, the skies will go dark, earthquakes will shake the world.

The image of the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory is from Daniel 7 and is crucial to Luke's meaning. When Jesus comes, He comes to receive the kingdom and full rule and authority.

Clouds accompany heavenly beings. Psalm 104:3 says of God, "He makes the clouds His chariot." Isaiah 19:1 says, "The Lord rides on a swift cloud." Jesus was taken up into a cloud at His ascension (Acts 1:9), and the Bible says He will return in the same way as he went (Acts 1:11). Power and glory emphasize the majesty of the one coming. The skies will be darkened but there will be one light in the heavens – the glorious radiance of the Son of Man! Revelation 1:7 says, "behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him." Jesus had said, "For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day" (Lk. 17:24; Matt. 24:27). No one will miss Jesus' return. Jesus' appearance will cause His followers to lift up their heads, in contrast to the nations to cover their faces. When Jesus comes, the saints' redemption is drawing near.

21:29 Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees;

21:30 as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near.

21:31 "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.

21:32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.

21:33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Verses 29–33 reinforce the necessity of reading the signs in the world around us. The consummation of the kingdom is a future reality and its nearness can be discerned. The difference between the "birth pains" in verses 8-11 and the signs of the end in verses 25-28 is now obvious.

Fig trees were common in Palestine and there were many around the Mount of Olives. The tree has seasonal foliage. It loses all its leaves in the winter. When it begins to sprout again it is a sure sign that summer is around the corner. Simple observation helps one determine the seasons. In the same way, the signs of the end signal that the Kingdom of God is just around the corner.

Verses 32 and 33 have generated a lot of controversy. Some say that “this generation” referred to those who were there as Jesus spoke. In other words, Jesus was saying that He would return before they died. The obvious objection to this would be that Jesus would have been wrong and the church would have continued to perpetuate these remarks after the disciples died. If that was what Jesus meant, wouldn’t the church have abandoned hope of the second coming? It would also be ironic that in verse 33 Jesus declared, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” if verse 32 was proof that His words never came to pass. Lastly, to claim that the end was near would contradict His claim in the parallel passage in Mark that “of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mk. 13:32).

Although not without problems, I believe that the easiest way to view this is to see the events of 70 AD as linked to the events of the end. The destruction of the temple is both part of the end time events and a picture of what was to come on a world-wide scale. Those present would see the fall of Jerusalem and know that what Jesus had predicted would come to pass. The one testified of the other.

The weakness of this view is that it reverts back to the destruction of the temple that was left behind in verse 24. Also to say, “this generation will not pass away until *all things* take place” sounds bigger than just the fall of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it does take into consideration the context and the events that Jesus addressed. Whatever this means, it is impossible to believe that the church saw this as “Jesus’ big mistake” and in spite of it were still motivated to look for His return anyway.

21:34 "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; 21:35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.

Jesus warns against three evils that could put the believer’s watchfulness at risk: dissipation, drunkenness, and the worries of life. Dissipation is the hangover after intoxication; it is the evidence of the sin committed the night before. Intoxication and the worries of life are self-explanatory. All focus on the fact that the believer should not give up hope that Jesus will return and live carelessly as if it made no difference as to how one lives.

21:36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Verse 36 is an exhortation to stand firm in the face of persecution and to have stability in mind, focused on the Lord’s return.

21:37 Now during the day He was teaching in the temple, but at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet. 21:38 And all the people would get up early in the morning to come to Him in the temple to listen to Him.