



## THE GOSPEL OF Luke

### **SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 21:5-28**

To understand the three phases of “judgment events” that lead to the end of all things.

## Looking Back on Lament

In Luke 21:5-28, Jesus unfolds the different phases of the “end time,” beginning with the fall of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:20), followed by “the times of the Gentiles” (Lk. 21:24), culminating in “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk. 21:27). Given that Jerusalem is such a special place and knowing that destruction was soon to befall this great city, leaving its people to suffer unspeakable calamity, it makes more sense looking back on why Jesus lamented over Jerusalem after entering the city (Lk. 19:41-44). Jesus said things like “For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Lk. 19:43-44). Because of the impending reality, Jesus says in Luke 21:21-22: “Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.” Things will become so bad in the city of David that it would be better to flee and live in the mountains! And yet, this is only the beginning of the bad things that will follow.

## Phase 1: Jerusalem’s Fall

Often as Christians think through and even teach *eschatology* (the doctrine of the last things), the sequence of events that are to take place are misunderstood and misappropriated. When Jesus speaks of the beginning of the end, He begins with the fall of Jerusalem. Below is a breakdown of key elements in this passage.

**THE TEMPLE DESTROYED**

This portion of Jesus' narrative begins as "some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings" (Lk. 21:5). Jesus tells them that there is coming a day when the Temple will be destroyed, an unthinkable prospect to the ancient Jewish person. Of course, the obvious question is: "When will this happen?" Rather than answering with a straightforward response, Jesus begins to unfold the many "signs" that will occur before the end of all things, and He indicates that it will happen in phases. He even clarifies: "The end will not be at once" (Lk. 21:9).

**FALSE MESSIAHS AND RUMORS OF WAR**

First, Jesus says that "many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'the time is at hand!'" (Lk. 21:8). These are false Messiahs, people who make claims to be the return of Christ. Jesus warns us: "Do not go after them" (Lk. 21:8). They will also "hear of wars and tumults," which likely was fulfilled in the Jewish revolt of A.D. 68-70, during the tumultuous transition between Nero and Vespasian in A.D. 68-69. That is not to say that wars will cease, but that this initial sign likely applied to a more localized and Jewish context.

**A QUICK LOOK AHEAD (VS. 10-11)**

Verses 10 and 11 seem at first to indicate that there will be cosmic signs close to the same time that the wars and tumults take place: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven." However, these verses reflect Jesus looking forward to the final phase. We know this because He brings us back to the first phase in verse 12: "But before all this, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you." Verses 10 and 11 serve as a quick look to the future before coming back to the first phase in Jerusalem.

**A WITNESS**

Jesus indicates that this time of persecution (against Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem) will provide an opportunity for witness (Gk. μαρτύριον, a witness or testimony). This is precisely what the book of Acts describes throughout its entire narrative. Christians living in Jerusalem are intensely persecuted. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, dies in Acts 7, and that spills over into a massive persecution within Jerusalem in Acts 8, which pushes Christians out into Judea, Samaria, and eventually the uttermost parts of the earth, just as Acts 1:8 said would happen. Jesus tells them not to prepare speeches but to instead rely upon Him to give them their words (Lk. 21:14-15).

**JERUSALEM WILL FALL**

The final portion of the first phase is found in verse 20: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near." The idea of people running to the mountains to hide is often applied to the final end times that Christians around the world will face, but this is a misunderstanding of the sequence of events. While this first phase might serve as a type of future judgment, Jesus is speaking literally about the inhabitants of Jerusalem that faced devastating atrocity at the hands of Rome, which took place in A.D. 70 under the direction of then future emperor Titus Caesar Vespasianus. According to a contemporary historian of that time, Josephus, the city was ravaged by murder, famine, and cannibalism.

## Phase 2: The Times of the Gentiles

Littler attention is given to the second phase, but what is written is that a kind of diaspora will take place among God's people, sending them in every direction. Christians will "fall by the end of the sword and be led captive among all nations" (Lk. 21:24). All of these things will take place until "the time of the Gentiles are

fulfilled.” It’s hard to know precisely what is meant by this phrase, but there are at least a couple of possibilities.

The first possibility is that this time refers to a Gentile domination over Jerusalem and the people of God as a whole, and this time could be thus seen in a negative light. However, the more likely possibility is that this refers to the church age wherein Gentiles are the focus of God’s redemptive plan given the hardness of hearts in Jewish people (Gal. 1:16, 3:14; 1 Th. 2:16; Rom. 11:25-26, 15:9-12). This means that during this continuing time of persecution and war, the Gentile age will mark God’s covenant being extended to those outside of Israel to be “grafted in” to the tree of Israel (Rom. 11:11-36). The reason this second possibility is more plausible is the usage of the word “fulfilled” (Gk. πληρώω, to fully fill). This is a word often connected with positive fulfillment of the promises of God.

## Phase 3: Cosmic Signs

After “the times of the Gentiles” has been fulfilled, cosmic signs will begin to manifest: “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” This will lead to the glorious second coming of Christ: “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” This is imagery right out of Daniel 7 that Christ fulfills in His return to judge the world and put an end to misery.

It’s important to note that in this account, there is no rapture. In fact, rapture is not really compatible with the biblical narrative. The only “rapture” passage in Scripture is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” This seems like a rapture, but consider the surrounding details that precede this event: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Th. 4:16). The Lord returns at the sound of a trumpet blast, similar to Revelation 11:15, a description of the final return of Christ. In other words, the rapture that takes place in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 takes place after the tribulation and immediately prior to final judgment.

## What About Now?

The main takeaway of this passage is really two-fold. For one, we should be assured that the world will progressively get worse until Christ returns to judge once and for all everyone who opposes Him, including Satan (Rev. 20:10-15). The other takeaway is that in the midst of persecution, Christians beginning in Jerusalem and leading up to the final phase can and should be witnesses to Christ and His gospel (Lk. 21:13). Persecution is never an excuse to be silent for Jesus.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 21:5-6. About what were people speaking? What did Jesus say in response to this?

2. Read Luke 21:7-9. What question did they ask Jesus? In your own words, summarize Jesus' response.
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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 21:10-11. What key sign is given in verse 10? What key signs are given in verse 11? When do these signs occur?
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2. Read Luke 21:12-15. What must first happen before the events of verses 10 and 11? What opportunity does this create for Christians? Why should they not prepare a speech beforehand in anticipation of being taken captive? Who will give them their words?
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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 21:16-19. Who else will deliver Christians to be arrested? What will Christians be hated for? How will God preserve His witnesses according to verse 18? What must Christians possess in order to "gain their lives?"
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2. Read Luke 21:20-22. What does Jesus say will happen to Jerusalem? When does this likely occur? (Hint: See above notes)
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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 21:23-25. In your own words, summarize how things will be for people in "those days." What marks the second phase of the end things?
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2. Read Luke 21:26-28. After "the times of the Gentiles," what signs occur? What do these signs lead to? What Old Testament passage is Jesus alluding to with His "Son of Man" imagery? (Hint: See above notes)
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## Week 76 Discussion: Witness

In Luke 21:5-28, one of the key themes is the importance of being a witness for Christ even in the face of persecution. Talk as a group about how you could be a better witness for Christ. Discuss things that seem to trip you up, and how you might better overcome them.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever shared the Gospel with someone? Talk about that experience with the group.
2. What about being a witness comes most naturally to you?

3. What about being a witness is most difficult for you?
4. Who first shared the Gospel with you? Did you believe? What happened afterwards?
5. What are some easy ways you can begin to share your faith more practically? Share these ideas as a group, and commit to trying one this week.
6. How can the church better equip you to be a witness for Christ?

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus talks about the three phases of the end times.
2. Jesus commends believers who are bold witnesses in the face of persecution.