

Signs of the End



Flevit super illam (He wept over it) | Enrique Simonet (1892) | Museo del Prado, Madrid | Wikimedia Creative Commons

⁵ While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, he said, ⁶ “All that you see here—the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down.” ⁷ Then they asked him, “Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?” ⁸ He answered, “See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time has come.’ Do not follow them! ⁹ When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end.” ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky. ¹² “Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ It will lead to your giving testimony. ¹⁴ Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, ¹⁵ for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. ¹⁶ You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name, ¹⁸ but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. ¹⁹ By your perseverance you will secure your lives. (Luke 21:5-19)

[The following is not part of the Sunday reading, but is often included when studies. If the above section describes the coming war and tribulation, the following text describes its destruction in 70 AD by the Roman armies]

²⁰ “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is at hand. ²¹ Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. Let those within the city escape from it, and let those in the countryside not enter the city, ²² for these days are the time of punishment when all the scriptures are fulfilled. ²³ Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days, for a terrible calamity will come upon the earth and a wrathful judgment upon this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and

be taken as captives to all the Gentiles; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

A Third Prediction

Jesus' confrontation with the Jerusalem authorities in the Temple (which began in 19:47) now shifts to the future tense. The extended dialogue concerns the:

- coming persecutions and destruction of the Temple (21:5-19),
- destruction of the Jerusalem (21:20-24), and
- coming of the Son of Man (21:25-36)

Luke's third prediction of Jerusalem's fall is by far the most detailed speech (the others come in 13:34-35; 19:41-44). The speech's character emerges when one examines the parallels in Matthew 24:1-35 and Mark 13:1-37. A comparison of these parallels shows how Luke has drawn out some additional teaching and made some distinct points. Some of these points emerge from the additional material Luke includes (vv. 18, 21-22, 24, 28 are certainly additional material; vv. 19-20, 23b-26, 34-36 are probably additional). Other emphases surface because of the way Luke has presented the traditional material. Where Matthew speaks specifically of the "*the desolating abomination*" (Mt 24:15, referring to Daniel 12:11), for example, Luke simply refers to the "*desolation*" (Lk 21:20).

The significance of these differences becomes clear as one carefully compares the accounts. Luke emphasizes the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in a way the other Gospels do not. Mark and Matthew anticipate the fall of Jerusalem in the way they introduce the discourse, but Luke focuses on the short-term event in a way Matthew and Mark do not. His temporal indicators (vv. 9, 12) draw the reader back toward the present before really focusing on the end in verses 25-28. A transition begins to appear in verses 20-24, but until verse 19 the focus is still on events before the judgment of the capital in A.D. 70, which is not yet the end.

This is an important element, else one simply assumes this text is part of a Lucan apocalyptic writing – with a late 20th century understanding of apocalyptic (shaped by popular fiction such as *Left Behind*). On one hand, Luke's text contains only a few of the standard elements of apocalyptic literature, e.g., some cosmic imagery; but omits many others, e.g., hero from the past who seals up the vision until a future date, heavenly interpreter of the visions. In addition, it is not a final word of Jesus, but introduces his suffering and death. On the other hand, it contains several characteristics of apocalyptic thought: a deterministic and pessimistic view of history, anticipation of the end of the world in some great and imminent crisis, visions of cosmic upheaval.

Brian Stofregen provides a brief, simplistic, yet enlightening description of the purposes of prophetic, wisdom, and apocalyptic literature. While they all have a future component, they are primarily concerned about the present.

prophetic literature

Present time is one of suffering
 Why? The people have sinned.
 The future may be a time of blessing if the people repent.
 Purpose: call the people to repent and change their ways in the present time

wisdom literature

Present time may be one of blessing or suffering
 Why? Cause and effect system: Blessed if do right -- suffer if do wrong
 Future depends on continued righteousness or unrighteousness
 Purpose: encourage the people to continue or start living righteously in the present

apocalyptic literature

Present time is one of suffering

Why? The world is under evil powers who afflict the faithful

Future: a reversal of fortunes: the faithful righteous who suffer now, will be rewarded; and the godless unrighteous who bring suffering to others, will suffer (usually in a different or recreated world)

Purpose: encourage the people to continue their faithfulness and patience during the present suffering

At one level, whether this text is prophetic or apocalyptic (or both) is perhaps only a scholarly concern. In any case, *By your perseverance you will secure your lives* (21:19). Perhaps none of these categories is adequate, because one must always remember that Luke is a rhetorical historian. He uses those skills to make it easier to understand how divine history was read by the Jews, as well as by the prophets.

The belief was that God's judgment followed certain patterns. How he judged in one era resembled how he would judge in another. Because God's character was unchanging and because he controlled history, such patterns could be noted. Thus deliverance in any era was compared to the exodus. One event mirrored another. Exilic judgments, whether Assyrian or Babylonian, were described in similar terms. This "mirror" or "pattern" interpretation of history has been called a theological-historical reading of the text, with the "type" reflecting a basic pattern in God's activity. This way of reading history sees events as linked and mirroring one another. Sometimes the events are described in such a way that we modern readers would not readily notice that distinct events are being discussed. Sometimes a text offers clarifying reflection after more events detailing God's program have been revealed.

Jesus' discourse in Ch. 21 links together two such events, the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the events of the end signaling his return to earth. Because the events are patterned after one another and mirror one another, some of Jesus' language applies to both. Mark and Matthew highlight the mirror's long-term image, while Luke emphasizes the short-term event. Either focus is a correct portrayal of Jesus' teaching. Failure to appreciate the typological background to this speech, however, has led to an overemphasis of one image against the other within the Synoptic gospels. Some readers insist that the portrait of one writer must exactly match that of another. Instead, complementary emphases are possible. Appreciation of typology allows each author to speak for himself and allows the accounts of all the Synoptic writers to be viewed not in contradictory or one-sided terms but as complementary.

The historian Josephus recorded his account of the conquest of Jerusalem by the Romans:

The roar of the flames streaming far and wide mingled with the groans of the falling victims; and, owing to the height of the hill and the mass of the burning pile, one would have thought that the whole city was ablaze. . . . With the cries on the hill were blended those of the multitude in the city below; and now many who were emaciated and tongue-tied from starvation, when they beheld the sanctuary on fire, gathered strength once more for lamentations and wailing. . . . Yet more awful than the uproar were the sufferings. (*Jewish War* 6.271-275)

Major historical crises triggered apocalyptic thinking. The destruction of Jerusalem is the historical event that prompted the discourse of Jesus in the text. In other words, in an discourse of this type, history is being set in the larger context of God's purpose, the whole being an extraordinary writing with historical descriptions laced with symbols, signs, and mysterious figures of speech.

In looking at our text, we need to keep in mind at least three references. (1) The time of Jesus when he spoke these words, which was prior to the destruction of the temple. (2) The time of Luke when he

wrote these words (and his hearers heard them), which was after the destruction of the temple. (3) The present time of our hearers, who live centuries after the events recorded in the discourse.

That reference of time will move the emphasis and accent with which the hearer listens. In large part, as Stoffregen point out, the discourse makes several points:

- First, Luke clearly shows how the destruction of A.D. 70 is distinct from but related to the end. The two events should not be confused, but Jerusalem's destruction, when it comes, will guarantee as well as display the end, since one event mirrors the other. Both are a part of God's plan as events move toward the end.
- Second, Jesus' prophetic character is highlighted by this section. God is speaking through Jesus about unfolding events in the plan.
- Third, the Jewish nation's fate was clearly tied to its reaction to Jesus. The reader is not to question that the events Jesus describes will result from the nation's failure to respond to him (19:41-44). In fact, if one were to ask why Jerusalem was being judged, Luke has given many reasons. It is filled with hypocrisy (11:37-54), has oppressed the poor (18:7; 20:47), has rejected Messiah (13:33-34; 20:13-18), has missed the day of visitation (19:44), has rejected the gospel (Acts 13:46-48; 18:5-6; 28:25-28) and has slain God's Son (Luke 9:22; 18:31-33; 19:47; 20:14-19; 22:1-2, 52; 23:1-25).
- Fourth, the passage offers reassurance to disciples that God will enable them to face persecution and deliver them from it, whether by giving them words to say in their own defense or by saving them after martyrdom.
- Fifth, the call is to remain steadfast because God is in control.

So the discourse offers information and exhortations. It provides a general outline but not a detailed, dated calendar of future events. Such a general portrait without detailed dates is a common form for biblical prophetic and apocalyptic material. Even though the portrait Jesus gives is general, he is saying, in effect, "Rest assured, God's plan is being fulfilled."

The Temple in Jerusalem

The structures of earthly empires are meant to impress and to give the sense that they and what they represent will last forever. Visiting the great ruins of civilizations from Babylon to the Aztecs, one imagines the people must have assumed that their glory would endure forever. Such are the delusions of man-made immortality.

The rebuilt temple of Herod created such an impression. When the disciples praised its grandeur to Jesus (v. 5), the temple was in the midst of an eighty-three-year building program. Started about 20 B.C., it continued until A.D. 63-64, just a few years before Jerusalem's fall in A.D. 70. Assuming an A.D. 30 date for the crucifixion, the program was about fifty years old at the time the disciples marveled at it. The temple clearly made a deep impression on all who visited it. Josephus gives detailed descriptions of its beauty (*Jewish Wars* 1.21.1 401; 5.5.1-6 184-227; *Antiquities* 15.11.1-7 380-425). The Roman historian Tacitus also describes the temple as containing great riches (*History* 5.8.1). Some of its stones were 12 to 60 feet in length, 7.5 feet in height and 9 feet in width. The temple loomed over the city and formed its center: politically, geographically and most importantly, religiously. Surely something so magnificent and God-honoring, something that had taken so long to build, would last a very long time.

Jesus' response must have come as a shock: "*All that you see here—the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down.*" It is hard for us to appreciate the effect on Jewish ears of what Jesus predicts here. When Jesus speaks of time coming, he is predicting in

prophetic terms the arrival of judgment, just like the one Israel had experienced (Jer 7:1-14; 22:5; 27:6; 52:12-13). The magnificent temple, the center of the nation's worship and the sacred locale of God's presence, will be destroyed and turned into a heap of rubble. Centuries of worship and years of reconstruction will be brought to an end.

When and by what Sign?

In v.7 an unnamed interlocutor(s) asked Jesus, "*Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?*" Given the introduction in v.5 where the disciples are mentioned, one assumes the disciples are the audience. But one should note that nowhere else in Luke do the disciples call Jesus "teacher." This is the eleventh time Jesus is so addressed and in none of the previous ten are the disciples the one addressing Jesus. Luke reserves the moniker "Teacher" for the Pharisees, lawyers, the crowd, the rich, Sadducees, and scribes. Given the larger context of Luke, it is more likely that while the disciples are present, Jesus is responding to those present in the Temple complex.

Be assured, Jesus tells them, these things are not permanent. The phrase these things (*tauta*) becomes central to the discourse, since the disciples ask in v.7 when these things will be: "*what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?*"

There are two questions:

1. When? The answer seems to be some unknown time: "*it will not immediately be the end*" (v. 9). By Luke's time (*ca.* mid-80s), the temple had been destroyed. Mt. Vesuvius had erupted, causing all kinds of "signs" in the sky. Luke's audience, living soon after these events, may have thought that the end would happen immediately or at least soon. Luke says, "No."
2. What sign? (Note that "sign" is singular.) It is this question that Jesus seems more interested in answering.

Although "sign" is singular, the plural "these things" (*tauta*), occurs often in this discourse.

- v. 6 seeing these things
- v. 7 when will these things be
- v. 7 what is the sign when these things are about to happen
- v. 9 it is necessary for these things to happen first
- v. 12 before all these things
- v. 28 when these things are beginning to happen
- v. 31 when you would see these things happen
- v. 36 strength to flee all these things that are about to happen

"These things" seems to refer to much more than just the destruction of the temple, but all of the signs/events that will occur to signify that the Kingdom of God is near (v. 31).

Concerning the sign: the same word (*symeion*) is used of Jesus lying in the manger (2:12); crowds want a sign from heaven (11:16), but Jesus will give them no sign except the sign of Jonah (11:29-30) – although in vv. 21 and 25 Jesus enumerates others. Could it be that the sign is Jesus himself? His birth, death, and resurrection? Or, perhaps his expression of the graciousness of God towards the outsiders that led them to repent and not be destroyed contrary to Jonah's wishes? Could Jesus' presence on earth be the sign that all these things will happen?

If it had been assumed that the destruction of the temple (and the events related to Mt. Vesuvius) were signs of the end, it would have been easy for pretenders to convince people that "I am he" and "the time has come." Josephus reports that many signs preceded the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, but the people chose to believe the ones who reassured them "Thus it was that the wretched people were

deluded at that time by charlatans and pretended messengers of the deity; while they neither heeded or believed in the manifest portents that foretold the coming destruction..." (*The Jewish War*, 6.288)

V. 8 is the only occurrence of *planao* (or any of its related terms) in Luke. The original meaning of this word is "to cause to wander off the path." Thus to "lead astray," "to mislead," "to deceive," "to cause to wander from the truth." The word is used in Matthew (8x) and Mark (4x). There and in the epistles the context concerns false teaching and being deceived regarding apocalyptic events (John 7:12; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 6:7).

The deception in verse 8 has two parts: false messiahs and false calculations of time.

In order to be led off the path, one needs to have a path, a clear direction. What is it that keeps us from being deceived by logical, but misguided interpreters of current events? We need to be clear about the path we are on and where it is going. Or, to counter the specific deceptions in this verse: to really know the true messiah and what he says about the time. Within a different context, the same can be said about congregations (or individuals) who have a clear mission for their lives. They are better able to fend off temptations to vary from that path.

The word for "time" is *kairos*. It is used three times in this discourse in ch. 21: vv. 8 and 24 concerning "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled; and v. 36 with the final command: "Be vigilant at all times!" The two instances prior to our text are times of comings. In 19:44 Jesus wept over Jerusalem and talked about its destruction, "because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God." A similar image is presented in its next use. In the parable of the wicked tenants (20:9-19), in contrast to Jerusalem, the tenants know the proper time, but they respond improperly. There seems to be two issues related to *kairos* -- (a) knowing when it occurs and (b) knowing what to do when it has come. In other words, it is not simply being at the right place at the right time -- it is realizing you are at the right place and time and knowing what is the right thing to do.

It may be that the deception in our text is not (a) that the time has come near. Jesus uses the same word and form (perfect) in 10:9, 11; 21:20 to indicate that the Kingdom has come near and that the desolation of Jerusalem has come near. Both instances also seem to indicate that the Kingdom and the desolation have already arrived. So the deception may be more related to (b): Now that the time has come near (and arrived), what is the proper thing for us to do?

Paul addresses a wrong understanding of the time in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 (dealing with (a) above):

We ask you, brothers, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a "spirit," or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no one deceive you in any way. For unless the apostasy comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one doomed to perdition,

Yet, later he indicates that their misguided understanding about the time led them to be misguided about their actions (dealing with (b) above). Apparently there were some in the Thessalonian church who felt that the end had come and that they no longer had to work (for the common good?) It is in this letter where Paul gives this command: "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (3:10). Could this be the deception of the false messiahs about the time in Luke?

The time has come near (v.8). What is the right path to follow? One that is mentioned in this part of our text is "do not be terrified." This word *ptoeomai* only occurs twice in the NT; both in Luke. It implies being frightened or terrified or startled by something. In its other use, the disciples are startled and terrified (*emphobos*) by the sudden appearance of the risen Jesus in their midst (24:37). Classically, the active form was used to refer to "frightening or scaring away." It also took on a metaphorical sense of

“to be in a flutter, be agitated; to be wild, distracted.” Such ideas could be part of the meaning in our text.

What should not be scaring us? The wars and insurrections? The deceivers? The arrival of the kingdom? Natural disasters? Persecutions? It would be natural to be terrified at the prospect of such things. At the end of our text, Jesus gives the promise, *“but not a hair on your head will be destroyed”* (21:18; found only in Luke).

Time and The Divine Plan – A Theology of History

“Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?” The broad scope of the question in v.7 is significant, since a judgment of Jerusalem that wipes out the temple suggests a time of great catastrophe and a turning point in the nation’s history and identity. Such an event can only signal that God’s plan for the nation is underway. Though Luke’s form of this question is more focused on the temple than the questions in Matthew 24:3 and Mark 13:4, its implications clearly cover the same span.

Two features of this discourse should not be overlooked. First, in verses 8-12 Jesus works from the end backwards and then in verse 25 leaps forward again in time, beyond Jerusalem’s destruction to the end. Such a rewinding backwards in time is clear in light of the statement in verse 9 that the end will not come right away and the note in verse 12 that before all this--that is, the events of verses 8-11--other things will occur. With verse 12 and following, Jesus moves forward again, toward the description of Jerusalem’s fall and the persecution that will accompany it. The issues of the end and the return of the Son of Man are deferred mostly until verse 25, with the reference to the times of the Gentiles in verse 24 serving as a transition into Jesus’ statements about the end times. After Jerusalem falls, the period of Gentile rule will continue until the Son of Man returns.

Second, the events of the end and those of Jerusalem’s fall are presented side by side in the entire discourse, as is typical in prophetic presentation, even though we can now look back and know that the events are separated by a large period of time. Such prophetic foreshortening is designed to indicate that one event mirrors and is linked to the other. When the initial event occurs, Jesus’ followers can be assured that the rest is coming. But--and this is the key point--for the initial listeners it would be next to impossible to distinguish the times of these mirrored events. More important than these events’ time relationship to each other is their linkage in meaning. Both the end and Jerusalem’s fall are part of the divine movement toward fulfillment of promise. Anyone originally hearing Jesus’ discourse might have assumed the end would come with Jerusalem’s fall, but the real indication of the end is not Jerusalem’s fall but the return of the Son of Man.

So Jesus warns first about events that are not yet the end. Messianic pretenders will abound, so the disciples must not be deceived. *“Do not follow them.”* (v.8) Josephus describes such claims in Jewish Wars 6.5.2-3 285-88, 300-309. In addition, social chaos, civil turmoil, wars and other tumultuous events will precede the end. The disciples should not be surprised when the world is in chaos. There is no need for alarm. These things must take place. Paul expresses a parallel concept when he speaks of creation groaning until redemption is complete (Rom 8:18-25). Sin will be with us until Christ returns. Pain and persecution in the world should never surprise us.

Despite the chaos, God’s plan is moving on. The end will not come right away. Jesus prepares the disciples for the era to come by reassuring them that worldwide chaos does not mean the cosmos is spinning out of divine control. Such chaos should not cause shock or emotional distress.

Still more chaos will come before the end. Nation will rise against nation, and earthquakes, famines and pestilences will come. All the typology of Jesus’ descriptions has roots in judgment scenes of the Old Testament (2 Chron 15:6; Is 14:30; 19:2; 29:6; 51:19; Ezek 36:29-30; 38:19; Amos 8:11; Zech 14:5).

Fearful events and great signs from heaven are signs of God's activity. (Mark 13:8 mentions the beginning of birth pangs here, but Luke lacks such explicit apocalyptic language.) In sum, chaos of all sorts will precede the end.

Discipleship and Persecution

But before all these things will come persecution. Disciples will need to stand prepared for its coming. *"Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name."* (v.12) The bevy of verbs [seize (*lit. lay hands on*), persecute, hand you over, led before kings, etc.] are ones that are used again, not only of Jesus during his Passion, but also of the early disciples early in Acts and of St. Paul in the latter parts of Acts. Especially in Acts, these are all settings in which the disciples give witness and testimony. Luke strengthens the connection between Jesus and the following persecutions of the disciples.

The mention of synagogues shows that the period of the early church is in view. In fact, the initial fulfillment of this prediction comes in Acts, starting after the proclamation of Jesus in chapter 3 leads to arrest and persecution in Acts 4. Virtually every chapter after that describes the persecution of the earliest church.

Luke uses a key term to characterize disciples: witnesses for Jesus (*It will lead to your giving testimony*, v. 13; compare Acts 1:6-8). Between now and the end, they are called to witness about Him. Part of that witness is how they face persecution. From Stephen's martyrdom to the suffering of many in the formerly communist Eastern Europe and in Muslim countries, testimony to Jesus in the face of persecution has had a compelling impact throughout history.

Again Jesus tells his people not to worry. They need not be overly concerned with how they might defend themselves. They don't need a defense attorney, for Jesus himself will be their defense: *Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute* (v.15; compare Acts 4:8-12; 7:54; 26:24-32). Though Jesus does not explain here how this works, Luke 12:11-12 and John 14-16 make clear that the gift alluded to here is the Holy Spirit.

The persecution will be painful, because it will involve parents, brothers, relatives and friends. This is why discipleship requires putting God ahead of family (14:26). Some of God's people will even meet death. Put bluntly, *"You will be hated by all because of my name."* (v.17) Part of the chaos before the capital's fall and before the end is the persecution of those allied to Jesus.

But the disciples will receive comfort. *"Not a hair on your head will be destroyed."* (v.18) In light of verse 16, this cannot mean that none of them will die. Rather, it must mean that even if they die, they will live (12:4-7). There is no way real harm will come, since Luke uses the emphatic Greek negative here (*ou me*). In short, by standing firm with Jesus, one gains life – or to use Luke's language, *"you will secure your life."* (v.19) Thus Luke again emphasizes perseverance. Those who cling to the Word with patience bear fruit (8:15). Luke has made it clear that standing firm requires resolve and counting the cost (14:25-33), properly assessing the cares of life (8:14; 14:15-24) and not overvaluing material possessions or the pleasures of life (8:14; 12:19).

The Fall of Jerusalem

In verse 20 Jesus describes Jerusalem's destruction in detail. The sign of its destruction will come when armies surround it. Jesus had already predicted this in 19:41-44. Because of his focus on the near event of Jerusalem's fall, Luke's version of this discourse does not include certain details from the other Synoptic gospels. He does not include Jesus' words about this being a time of unprecedented tribulation. He does not mention the Lord's decision to cut short these days so humanity will survive.

He lacks any comment about events not coming in winter. Most important, he does not discuss “the abomination that causes desolation”; he mentions only its desolation. The focus throughout is the city’s destruction, a destruction that encompasses, but is not limited to, the temple. This will be a time of tension, but it is not yet the end. A phrase unique to Luke shows the distinction. Jerusalem will be trampled on until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The judgment on Jerusalem remains until that time is completed.

When the time of destruction comes, it will be time to flee and hide. Those who are in Judea should head for the mountains, where they can hide in safety, while those in the city should get out. Those in the country should avoid the city. The destruction will be total; the nation will suffer. These events will fulfill all that has been written. The allusion is to prophetic warnings of the price of the nation’s covenant unfaithfulness (Deut 28:32; Jer 7:14-26, 30-34; 16:1-9; 17:27; 19:10-15; Mic 3:12; Zeph 1:4-13). The reference to God’s pattern of judgment suggests a typological connection here: this judgment is like others before it and like ones that will follow it.

The destruction will be a dreadful time for the most vulnerable people, especially pregnant mothers. Distress and wrath will overwhelm the people and the land (19:44; 23:29). Death and imprisonment will be the fate of many citizens. “*Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*” (v.24) Be assured, Jesus warns, the nation will be judged and the temple abandoned. Israel’s fall is not the end of God’s plan, however, for one more decisive stage remains. The coming of the Son of Man (Luke 21:25-38)

Notes

Luke 21:5 *votive offerings*: The Greek word *anathema* is an odd one. In this context it means “what is set up,” and it refers to the memorials made by the wealthy devout for the adornment of the Temple (cf. Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1:401; 5:184-227; *Antiquities* 15:380-425). Elsewhere the word means “cursed by God.”

Luke 21:6 *will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down*: This passage recalls Jesus entry into Jerusalem when he pronounces: ⁴¹ *As he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it,* ⁴² *saying, “If this day you only knew what makes for peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.* ⁴³ *For the days are coming upon you when your enemies will raise a palisade against you; they will encircle you and hem you in on all sides.* ⁴⁴ *They will smash you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another within you because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”* (Luke 19:41-44). These verses are immediately followed by a reference to Jeremiah’s temple sermon, in which the prophet announces the destruction of the temple (Jer. 7:1-14; cf. 22:5). With an echo to this earlier reference, the announcement in 21:6 seems to allude to these oracles of the prophet that were fulfilled in the first destruction of Jerusalem in July 587 BC (cf. the description in Jer. 52:12-13; 2 Kings 25:1-21). It has been suggested that first-century Jews believed that the exile had not yet ended and that they prayed and hoped for divine liberation from oppression and for the restoration of the land. Whether Jews believed that the exile had ended yet or not, Jesus’ prediction of total annihilation certainly must have been stunning, both with regard to the monumental architecture of the Herodian temple and with regard to religious, social, and political significance of the temple as the center of the Jewish universe (Green. *The Gospel of Luke*, 733).

Luke 21:7 *when will this happen*: In Luke Jesus continues to speak in the Temple area rather than withdraw to the Mount of Olives (Mk 13:3 and Matt 24:2), ***what sign will there be*:** In Luke the “sign” is limited to the destruction of the Temple and city. This is contrasted to Mark 13:4 – “*what sign will there be when all these things are about to come to an end?*” and Matthew 24:3 – “*what sign will there be of your coming, and of the end of the age?*”

Luke 21:9 *such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end:*

Luke 21:10 *Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom:* The description of apocalyptic wars in 21:9–10 alludes to 2 Chron. 15:6; Isa. 19:2. The prophet states in his oracle against Egypt (Isa. 19:1–17) that God “will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, one against the other, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom” (19:2). The war of “kingdom against kingdom” echoes Isaiah’s prediction of the fight of “kingdom against kingdom.”

Luke 21:11 *earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky:* The description of cosmic cataclysms, which include earthquakes, plagues, famines, and terrifying portents in the sky is an echo of and possibly an allusion to Ezek. 38:19–22. In Ezekiel’s oracle against Gog of the land of Magog (38:17–39:6), God declares, “*On that day there shall be a great shaking upon the land of Israel. Before me shall tremble the fish of the sea and the birds of the air; the beasts of the field and all the reptiles that crawl upon the ground, and all men who are on the land. Mountains shall be overturned, and cliffs shall tumble, and every wall shall fall to the ground. Against him I will summon every terror, says the Lord GOD, every man’s sword against his brother. I will hold judgment with him in pestilence and bloodshed*” (Ezekiel 38:19–21). Similar apocalyptic announcements are found in Isa. 5:13–14 (hunger); 8:21 (hunger); 13:13 (earthquake); 14:30 (famine); Hag. 2:6 (earthquake) (cf. 2 Bar. 2:3; Jub. 23:13).

Luke 21:12 *Before all this happens:* to Luke and his community, some of the signs of the end just described (Luke 21:10–11) still lie in the future. Now in dealing with the persecution of the disciples (Luke 21:12–19) and the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20–24) Luke is pointing to eschatological signs that have already been fulfilled.

Luke 21:16 *handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends:* The reference to close relatives becoming persecutors echo several OT passages and early Jewish and rabbinic traditions that speak of the breakdown of family solidarity in the last days, particularly Mic. 7:2, 6; Zech. 13:3 (cf. Jub. 23:19; 1 En. 100:1–2; 4 Ezra 5:9; 6:24; 2 Bar. 70:3; m. Soṭah 9:5; b. Sanh. 97a).

Luke 21:18 *but not a hair on your head will be destroyed:* echoes 1 Sam. 14:45; 2 Sam. 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52 and occurred in Jesus’ exhortation to fearless confession in Luke 12:7. Read in the light of 21:16, which announces the execution of some of Jesus’ followers, this proverbial expression does not promise complete physical safety, but rather asserts that nothing will happen to the disciples apart from God’s sovereign will. And, read in the context of 21:17, the proverbial expression implies a promise that “persecution, even death, does not spell the end of life for the faithful” (Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 738).

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