

CHAPTER 21

Overview of Luke 21

Chapter 21 continues Jesus' teaching in the temple. Having just warned His disciples concerning the indiscretions of the scribes, and how some take advantage of widows, He observes a poor widow presenting her offering in the temple. He recognizes her sacrifice and informs His disciples how her gift is so much more sacrificial than those who are rich. While on the subject of money, some of His followers acknowledge how the offerings given to the temple have resulted in lavish adornment. Jesus warns the disciples not to put much stake in the temple, as before long it will be destroyed. That raises the question of what it will be like in the end, when the Messiah comes as conquering king. The entire rest of the chapter is devoted to this subject.

What to look for in Luke 21

1. As you read this chapter, look for the clues of what a truly sacrificial offering might be.
2. Ask whether a magnificent structure for God's people is really that important to God.
3. Look for Jesus' teachings about whether or not Christians will come under persecution.
4. Observe the interplay between prophecy that is near future and that which is far future.
5. Look for one of two key events that must take place before the last days (i.e., the second coming of Christ).
6. Look for examples of false prophets and false teachers, and ask whether or not they exist today.
7. Jesus will give a specific instruction on how to stay "on the alert" regarding the last days. What is that instruction?

1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury.

21:1-4 Chapter 21 continues Jesus' teaching in the temple during the week leading up to Passover, and His eventual crucifixion.

The Feast of Passover is observed the day before the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is observed in the Hebrew month of Nisan, around April our time. Passover was held on Nisan 14; the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on Nisan 15 and ended on Nisan 21, seven full days.

Passover is the first and one of the most important feasts of the Hebrew calendar. Passover commemorates God sparing those who covered the doorposts and lintels of their houses with the blood of an unblemished lamb as the angel of death passed through Egypt, bringing death to firstborns. (Details of its observance can be found in Exodus 12 and 13.) Passover, of course, is a foreshadowing of the cross; the two doorposts and the lintel form the shape of a cross, and the blood of an unblemished lamb represents the blood of Jesus. That the angel of death "passes over" those homes covered with the blood of the lamb is a picture of salvation from judgment for those "covered" by the blood of Christ. Jesus Himself will have His blood shed on the Passover.

2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins.

Immediately following Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread which commemorated the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, were one of the three yearly feasts Jewish males were required to attend and offer sacrifices, the other two being the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles (aka Feast of Booths).

Passover is explained here because of what follows concerning the poor widow. Jesus has just warned His disciples about the unscrupulous acts of the scribes and Pharisees, and how their pretentious attitudes betray their pride and self-importance (20:46-47). As part of characterizing their hypocrisy, Jesus mentions how some scribes, who also served as executors of estates when a family member died, took advantage of vulnerable and grief-stricken widows by convincing them that they should donate their savings and inheritance to the temple and priesthood. The scribes, in this case, were becoming monetary predators of the weak and vulnerable. Who knows what was promised the widows in return for their life savings. While on that subject, Jesus observes worshippers placing their tithes and offerings in the treasury.

The treasury of the temple was located in the Court of Women. Whereas the Courtyard of the Gentiles was a large open area surrounding the temple (it was also the location where animals were slaughtered, as well as the location of the merchants and moneychangers), the Court of Women was located within the temple itself. Men (but not Gentiles) were allowed in the Court of Women for the purpose of presenting offerings, and for men to enter the Holy Place. The treasury consisted of thirteen trumpet-shaped containers used to collect offerings. Seven of the trumpets were designated for tithes and offerings for the temple and priesthood (the temple tax). The other six trumpets were for freewill offerings, including alms for the poor.

Many (but not all) of the worshippers Jesus observes appear to be wealthy, based on their attire and the amount of the gifts they are offering. But in the mix of the crowd is a widow putting in “two small copper coins” (aka “mites” in KJV; “pennies” in NIV). These coins were the smallest coins in Jewish currency, worth less than a penny today. She may have been one of the widows taken advantage of by the scribes. The Greek words Luke chooses to describe her indicate that this “poor widow” was *dirt* poor, down to her last two coins, and therefore destitute. She willingly places her two remaining coins in the temple treasury, most likely the freewill offering. It is clearly a case of the poor contributing to the poor. This striking contrast between the rich worshippers and the poor widow provides an

3 And He said, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all *of them*;
4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.”

opportunity for Jesus to discuss matters of the heart, and fits perfectly with the subject of Passover. The issue here is, “How much is one willing to sacrifice for the kingdom of God? Everything or just enough? Do I give out of my substance, or do I give out of my excess?”

The key phrase in **verse 3** is “put in more.” More what? Certainly not more money. What the poor widow put in was *more trust in God*. Whatever the widow had in the past to sustain her has failed her. With her last two coins going into the treasury, she now must fully trust God for her care and provision. It is possible that her thoughts were, “Maybe these two coins will have a better chance of helping someone else survive.” It is an ultimate act of love. With the destitute widow giving her all to the treasury, one is reminded instantly of the rich young ruler who was unwilling to trust Jesus fully, give all his possessions to the poor, and follow Him (18:18-27).

The widow’s donation of *all* her money is contrasted with the rich who only gave *some* of their money. In other words, the rich made sure they kept themselves rich and had all they needed to maintain their comfortable lifestyle. Whereas the amount of money they contributed to the treasure may have been a much greater sum, it was not *more* when it came to trusting God. In fact, Jesus indicates by the word “surplus” that this is leftover money; money that was no part of a real need. The phrase could also be translated “of their abundance” or “of their excess.” This was “extra” money, not an offering that cost them anything in terms of personal sacrifice. And, by giving only their surplus, they did not need to trust God at all. In essence, the rich were giving God their leftovers.

There is another twist to the story of the poor widow’s offering. The rich most likely were giving the majority of their offerings to the temple itself; that is, to the upkeep and maintenance of the lavish ornamentation of the temple, as will be noted in the next few verses. In contrast, the widow probably contributed her “two cent’s worth” to the freewill offering, much of which went to the poor. The irony is that all the money that went toward the temple would become futile in a few years when the temple is torn down stone by stone. However, the money going to the poor was invested in living beings who were worth far more than a mere building.

The lessons that can be learned from these few verses are multiple. First, God does not want our leftovers when it comes to our possessions. He wants us to give to a level that we are forced to choose between needs and wants. Second, God sees and knows about our offerings. He knows the intentions and thoughts behind them, and He knows whether or

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

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.”

not they are contributed out of love or out of duty and obligation. God remembers our offerings. Third, the more one gives out of substance (needs) instead of excess (wants), the greater one demonstrates trust in Him. Trust in God grows through greater sacrifice both for Him and for others. Fourth, investing in people, especially the poor, is far more beneficial than investing in grand edifices or monuments or memorials. The edifices will inevitably fall, stone by stone. The souls of men and women last forever. Lastly, and above all, God wants ourselves. Giving God ourselves is the ultimate show of trust in Him, both concerning our everyday needs as well as our daily circumstances. As has been pointed out numerous times throughout Luke’s gospel, there are few things that hold a person back from following Jesus and trusting completely in God than money and possessions.

21:5-6 Luke notes the connection between the offerings in the temple treasury and the admiration by some of the disciples of the beautiful ornamentation on the temple. It is a logical progression, especially in light of the seven trumpets used to collect the temple taxes. The irony found in **verse 5** should not be lost on the reader, but will require some explanation.

“Some were talking about the...beautiful stones and votive gifts...” Herod’s temple and its surrounding courtyard was almost a mile long, and took over forty years to complete. The temple and walls were made of the purest of white marble, expertly quarried to fit perfectly with adjoining stones. The east side of the temple itself was covered with large plates of pure gold. When the sun rose in the morning on a clear day, the reflection of sunlight on the temple’s gold could be seen from the top of Mt. Nebo on the other side of the Jordan River in the east. Also adorning the temple proper, Herod had donated a “votive gift” of huge grape clusters of pure gold, about six feet in height, that hung above the entrance to the Holy of Holies. The Greek word translated “votive gifts” is the word *anathemasin*. It comes from the classical Greek word *anatitheme*, and generally refers to a “gift of a good kind.” The common form of the word, however (Koine Greek), is *anathema* from which we get the word “anathema.” This word is always used in a bad sense in the New Testament (e.g., Gal. 1:8) and is used to refer to a curse. The temple was adorned with many such “votive gifts,” which were gifts donated by wealthy Gentile kings, rulers and princes friendly to Israel. One cannot help but see the irony of the presence of “votive gifts” in the temple and over the Holy of Holies, denoted by worldly rulers, for the temple that was supposed to be a “house of prayer”

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?”

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.

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.”

for God’s people. Whereas the tabernacle built by Moses was constructed entirely through the freewill offerings from God’s people, Herod’s temple was built entirely by taxing the people and relying upon votive gifts from himself (an Idumean; i.e., Edomite) and Gentile kings and rulers. It is not a great leap to see that the temple which was intended for prayer and worship was turned into an extravagant, if not flamboyant monument showing off the wealth and prosperity of a corrupt priesthood. That which was to be holy was transformed into that which was unholy. History would demonstrate that Herod’s great temple would indeed be cursed, as in AD 70, it was literally torn down stone by stone and all the gold ornamentation was plundered by Rome.

21:7 Astonished at Jesus’ statement “the days will come,” the disciples ask a logical question: “*When*... will these things happen?” The reader needs to keep the context of this question in mind. The disciples are essentially asking when Jesus plans to present Himself as the Messiah and establish His kingdom on the earth, thus conquering the Roman Empire and building His own temple. So the questions “when” and “what will be *the* sign” in verse 7 (*italics mine*) are in reference to what His disciples perceive as the immediate future, possibly before the end of the week. The definite article “the” before “sign” indicates the disciples were looking for one specific act or declaration by Jesus, officially announcing Himself as the Messiah.

Jesus answers neither the “when” nor the “what will be the sign,” but instead gives warnings that apply both to the immediate *and* the distant future. The present-day Christian has the advantage of knowing that most of what Jesus presents in the next few verses are in reference to the end times at the end of the church age when He returns as the conquering king.

(Note: The following interpretations of the prophecies spoken here by Jesus are the writer’s opinion, especially regarding “near” versus “far” future events, and none should be taken as dogmatic. The writer requests grace from his readers, especially those who are well versed in end-times prophecy.)

19:8-11 Jesus clarifies the disciples’ misunderstanding by informing them that there will not be just one sign, but many. The first sign also serves as a warning: “many will come in My name....” The warning? “Do not go after them.”

It is indeed a mystery why so many seemingly devout, knowledgeable Christians “go after” false prophets and those who, against the admonition of Scripture, calculate a date for the Lord’s return. From

Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses to radio preachers and TV evangelists, date setters abound. The hope of Jesus' return becomes fertile soil for deceivers and charlatans. Recent newspaper ads proclaim that Christ has already come and is living in the world today waiting to reveal himself (e.g., "Lord Maitreya"). Such deceivers have been around since the early church and will continue to deceive believers until the day the Lord returns.

The second sign involves "wars and disturbances" and, as Matthew states, "rumors of wars." Jesus instructs His disciples to "not be terrified." Why? Because just as in the case of the poor, wars you will always have with you. Some historian has determined that in recorded history, there have only been a handful of years where there wasn't a war going on somewhere in the world. During World War II, Christians were quite convinced that Hitler was the Antichrist, and had very good reasons to believe so. In spite of the Holocaust, it turned out not to be so. What *did* occur prophetically immediately after WWII was the establishment of the independent state of Israel in 1948. Thus, "...for these things (wars and disturbances) must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately."

(It should be noted that some commentators on the end times believe that the events described here are not necessarily worldwide, but involve primarily the nation of Israel, and are therefore local in nature. This writer takes the position that the events are global in nature.)

Jesus continues His teaching concerning His return by broadening the scope of worldwide conflict; this is the third sign. The difference between what Jesus states in **verse 10** and the previous verse is one of a global nature. When the disciples thought of wars, they thought locally: Egypt, Babylonia, Rome, Greece, and so forth. However, in the end times, entire continents will be involved, such as we have today: Russia, China, North America, Europe, and the various alliances formed among the powers, such as NATO, EU, the previous Soviet Union, United Nations, and so on. Verse 10 goes beyond the imaginations of the disciples and is more directed to those living in the end times.

The fourth sign involves "earthquakes...plagues and famines." To be sure, these disasters have been around since the beginning of time. Most scholars believe they will intensify in the end times, and will be more global in nature. The threat of worldwide plague is indeed more possible than ever before due to global travel and the emergence of drug resistant diseases. An increase in the world's population increases the risk of worldwide famine. Some theorists speculate that a reversal of the earth's

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

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

magnetic poles and continental shift could throw the world into complete chaos; secular scientists, however, are quite skeptical about this. Regardless of how exactly these disasters take place, Jesus' instructs His followers to be aware of catastrophic global changes that affect whole nations.

The fifth sign involves terrifying celestial events. Astronomers and physicists speculate on a multitude of celestial-induced catastrophes that could affect the earth: giant asteroids or comets colliding with the earth, solar flares directed toward the earth, gamma ray emissions from a black hole, rogue planets, et cetera). One can only speculate as to what the "great signs from heaven" will be exactly. But one thing is sure: the signs will terrify the earth globally.

The apostle Matthew elaborates on Jesus' teachings about the end times in much more detail than did Luke, probably because he, Matthew, was present when they were given. One observation, however, that stands out in this writer's mind is found in Matthew 24:12 where Jesus explains, "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold." Perhaps the greatest temptation Christians may face in the end times is that things will be so bad economically, even Christians will resort to a survival mode, looking after only themselves, and forfeiting their primary testimony to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Perhaps we will only know exactly what Jesus meant when the last days actually arrive.

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.

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

21:12-19 Jesus now turns His attention from global catastrophic events to His disciples. These prophecies serve as a segue between what *all* disciples of Jesus can expect, both in the immediate future (the apostles) and concerning the worldwide church in the last days. Here, Jesus is describing that persecution of the church will take place *before* the catastrophic events described in verses 8 through 11. In other words, the global events occurring in verses 8-11 are intensified in the last days, but the persecution of Christians will begin *immediately*, and will *continue* throughout the church age. Indeed, the prophecies of verse 12 are recorded in the Book of Acts (e.g., 4:1-3; 5:18, 40; 7:58-60; 24:1-9). Church history is awash with the blood of Christian martyrs, and in over 60 countries today, particularly those in the Middle East ruled by Islamists, Christians are oppressed, imprisoned and killed on a daily basis. One recent study by a mission organization has determined that in the last century, more Christians have been martyred than in the entire history of the church. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be

persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Today, the persecution of the church is a global phenomenon.

However, as Jesus explains, persecution, though terrible, should not be seen a catastrophe, but as an opportunity to bear testimony about Him and His power to save the lost (**verse 13**). Paul did this very thing as he testified before Felix in Acts 24. In other words, God purposefully allows Christians to suffer for the very cause Jesus suffered: to allow the lost an opportunity to hear the gospel, repent of sins, and be saved. By experiencing persecution, Christians are allowed the privilege of entering into Christ’s sufferings. That is why Peter and the apostles “went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

It is out of love for the lost that God allows His children to suffer persecution; the Christian must never lose sight of that. Were it not for the persecution of Christians who stand up for biblical values, how would the non-Christian ever see love and forgiveness offered in return? Were it not for Christians being thrown into prison, how would the lost prisoner ever hear the gospel? Today, Christians who are imprisoned in China, North Korea, Iran and a number of other countries have found extraordinary ways to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, often resulting in underground churches behind prison walls. The response of Christians to persecution should be the incarnation of John’s statement, “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16). When the Father sent His Son into the world, He sent Him to suffer and die for the sake of the lost. So, too, should be the purpose by which the Christian is sent into the world by Jesus: to suffer and die for the sake of the lost. Whether it be physical or economic suffering, the suffering that comes from sacrificial giving and service, the suffering that comes from long periods of intercession, or the dying to self that comes from putting aside one’s personal goals, ambitions and aspirations, the Christian is sent out to suffer and die for the sake of the lost. The love of God for the person who is lost should be imitated by Christians out of their love for the lost. Persecution is just part of the package of what it means to follow Jesus.

21:14-19 The entire discussion by Jesus concerning the persecution of His followers must have been a mystery to the disciples. How could they possibly visualize the last days when, at the same time, they are expecting Jesus to establish His kingdom on earth at any moment? It is quite possible that none of what Jesus was teaching was understood by the disciples, much less believed. Just as the disciples had difficulty accepting that Jesus would suffer at the hands of the Romans and be killed (as He had

14 “So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves;

15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.

16 “But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death,

17 and you will be hated by all because of My name.

18 “Yet not a hair of your head will perish.
19 “By your endurance you will gain your
lives.

informed them in 18:32-33), they probably doubted that they themselves would ever suffer persecution. None of what Jesus said about the end times was believed until after the resurrection when Jesus met with His disciples over a forty-day period and helped them recall His teachings (see Luke 24:44-45). Regardless of whether the disciples believed Jesus’ words or not, Luke, witnessing persecution of Christians and having the benefit of hindsight, took the opportunity to teach future disciples of Jesus what lay in store. At the same time, he is laying the ground work for what he will record in the Book of Acts.

Jesus’ instruction to His disciples begins by elaborating on “an opportunity for your testimony.” The word translated “prepare beforehand” is a classical Greek word referring to preparation of a formal speech, that is, an apologetic; they are not to attempt to “defend” themselves with a formal apologetic. Such preparation beforehand would suggest contrivance and conspiracy. They are to speak from the heart in the context of the circumstances in which they find themselves. The disciples are to gain confidence in their testimony by relying upon Jesus Himself to give them utterance. How exactly this happens has already been taught by Jesus in Luke 12:12—it will be the Holy Spirit who gives them utterance. This utterance will be accompanied by spiritual wisdom, wisdom so great that those who oppose the disciples will be unable to argue against them without falsifying the evidence. The very scenario Jesus predicts is written about by Luke in Acts 5:27-39.

The second part of Jesus’ instruction about the last days is that family and friends will turn against them. Some will even betray them to the point of death. There is no record, however, that any of the disciples ever suffered this fate. This suggests that Jesus’ warning here pertains to His followers throughout the church age, and in particular, the last days. Indeed, this very scenario is being seen today in Muslim and Jewish families where one of the members becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. They are not only cast out of the household, they are threatened with, and often experience, death at the hands of family members or local authorities, all because they have called upon the name of Jesus.

Verse 18 seems puzzling if one believes it pertains to one’s earthly life. But this cannot be, as Jesus has just stated in verse 16 that “they will put some of you to death.” Church history indicates that all the apostles but one, John, were martyred. The key to understanding this verse is the word “perish.” The Greek word is *apollumi* and is the word used most often to describe spiritual death (e.g., John 3:16; 10:28). Thus the promise of verse 18 is that even if one suffers physical death, spiritual life awaits them.

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

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;

22 because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.

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;

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.

The phrase “not a hair of your head” is a Hebrew idiom referring to one’s entire being.

Verse 19 is Luke’s version of Matthew’s record, “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matt. 24:13).

In comparing these versions, one must remember that Jesus never taught anything only once. He may have made this statement dozens of times, even during the week that He was teaching in the temple compound before Passover. The reason is simple: people who wanted to hear Jesus came and went. He probably had groups passing through, and to each group He would teach the same things, not always saying it the same way. Therefore, one must not fret that the gospel writers record Jesus’ statement differently. In Luke’s case, he is simply writing what others told him about Jesus’ last days of teaching.

That these teachings are relevant to church history has been borne out many times. During the persecution of Christians in the reign of Diocletian in the 3rd and 4th centuries, many Christians, especially clergy, renounced their faith under threat of death if they didn’t align themselves with the Roman Imperial cult and burn their Christian books. When Constantine ended Christian persecution in AD 313, many of the clergy who had renounced the faith wanted back into church leadership. This caused quite a bit of controversy, as some in the church believed that the lapsed clergy should not be allowed to resume their ministry because they had renounced their faith, and others felt they should be forgiven and allowed to resume offering the sacraments. This controversy caused a severe schism in the church (particularly North Africa) resulting in what is known today as the Donatist Controversy.

21:20-24 Jesus now turns His attention *primarily* to the immediate future; that is, not the “last days” but the events that are to take place between AD 68 and 70 when Jerusalem is destroyed by the Roman general Titus. “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies...” refers specifically to these events, as indicated by the pronoun “you.” However, that is not to say that His statement here refers *only* to the immediate future. It refers to future events as well. Therefore, it is important for the reader to understand this, as similar events will also occur in the last days. Jesus did not know exactly when these events would take place, either the near or the far future, for the time table belongs to God the Father.

Almost all prophecy, therefore, contains both near and far future events. Examples include Isaiah 1:21 – 2:4, Isaiah 61:1-2, and Joel 2:28-32 just to name a few. The same was true in Jesus’ teachings about future prophetic events. One must remember that even though Jesus was God, and therefore

omniscient (all-knowing), He willingly limited His omniscience when He was incarnated into human flesh. Although it had been revealed to Jesus *what* would take place in the future, so as to prepare the church, He did not always know exactly *when* they would take place. For example, in Matthew 24:36, Jesus informs His disciples, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” Again, in Acts 1:7 He states, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority....”

Jesus’ instructions to His disciples and His crowd of followers are dire warnings about what lay in Jerusalem’s future, both near and far. Notice that Jesus didn’t specify “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by the *Roman* armies....” It had been revealed to Jesus that Jerusalem would suffer a terrible fate for rejecting Him, but apparently He didn’t know exactly when or by whom. He knows the target of the armies—Judea and Jerusalem. He also refers to these days as “day of vengeance” which most likely refers to God’s vengeance on the Jewish leadership for their corruption and for their rejection of the Messiah. However, these prophecies of Jerusalem’s fate pertain also to the far future during the last days, and all the warnings associated with the near future can be equally applied to the last days.

“...So that all things which are written will be fulfilled” most likely refers to the many Old Testament prophecies concerning God’s judgment on wickedness (e.g., Zeph. 1:14-18; Zech. 14:1-5).

Verse 23 is undoubtedly a message that no mercy will be given by the armies who attack Jerusalem. Pregnant women, as well as nursing mothers and their children, “will fall by the edge of the sword.” The Jewish historian Josephus indeed wrote that these terrible things happened when the Roman army invaded Jerusalem. Other historians indicate that many Christians did indeed flee Jerusalem before the Roman invasion, including the apostle John, taking with him Mary the mother of Jesus, establishing a new home in Ephesus.

Verse 24 is perhaps one of the most important verses in this section of Scripture in regard to the last days. Jesus clearly states, “...and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” This reference to “the times of the Gentiles” is found only here in Luke. The phrase “trampled under foot” is a metaphor for conquest and occupation. (Paul uses this same metaphor in Ephesians 1:22 when he writes, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet....”) This metaphor refers to subjection of a kingdom or domain by a conquering kingdom. What Jesus is stating here is that Jerusalem will be conquered by a Gentile nation (the Romans, in AD 70) and remain in

Gentile hands until “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” There are two possible interpretations to the fulfillment of the “times of the Gentiles,” however. First, and most likely, the fact that the word “times” is plural could indicate that there will be a revolving door of Gentile occupation. This indeed has occurred over the centuries, as the Holy Lands have been occupied by the Romans, the Muslims, the Crusaders, the Palestinians, the British, and only since 1948 has been back in the hands of Jews. The other possible interpretation of the fulfillment of the times of the Gentiles could refer to the church itself which is now predominantly Gentile. This second interpretation is less likely due to the fact that “times” is plural; if it were referring to the church, it would most likely be singular.

What is even more noteworthy by the phrase “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” is that it is one of only two specific events that *must* happen before the approach of the last days. The other is found in Revelation 6:11 which states, “...rest a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” In other words, the end times will not occur until these two things are complete: the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and those Christians destined for death has been completed. As one will notice, there are no dates associated with either of these events, and they are impossible to measure. The completion of these two events, however, will be the trigger for the final days.

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,

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.

27 “Then they will see **THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD** with power and great glory.

28 “But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

21:25-28 Jesus now closes in on the global events that will occur just prior to His second coming. These events will be so terrifying that people will be “fainting from fear.” What signs are in the sun and moon and stars are not specified by Luke, but Matthew indicates that “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky” (Matt. 24:29). Again, this description has caused some theorists to hypothesize that the only way these events could occur is if there were to be a reversal of the earth’s magnetic poles, for what will be witnessed will be seen globally. It is theorized that a reversal of the earth’s magnetic poles could result in continental shift, the triggering of unprecedented volcanic activity, earthquakes without measure in intensity and frequency, and, of course, complete disruption of the economy. Other theorists see the same results from a giant asteroid or comet impacting the earth. Still others predict the eruption of super volcanoes. No one really knows, and no one will know for certain until the events actually occur. That is why the Christian must not listen to every voice of doom that comes along. In most of what Jesus describes regarding the end times, many occur

on a daily basis and have occurred throughout history. It's when all the events come together at the same time on a global level that the end times are near.

Verse 27 describes what will happen *after* all the future events have taken place: the abomination of desolations (as recorded in Matthew), the tribulation, and the events described above. *After* all these events, or more likely, at the height of them, the Son of Man will return "with power and great glory." Jesus therefore doesn't end His teaching about the last days on a gloomy note. In **verse 28**, He provides His followers with hope: "...straighten up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near."

There are a number of lessons in all these teachings about the end times. First, be vigilant, for only the Father knows when exactly these events will occur. Second, no matter how bad things get, don't lose faith and don't give up hope. Jesus is always there for you. Third, be careful who you listen to and follow. Many, many well-intentioned Christians and pastors have predicted the beginning of the end times, and so far, not a single one has been correct. Fourth, when everyone else's love grows cold, don't let *your* love grow cold. Keeping faith until the end means loving one another and loving your neighbor as yourself until the end. Love is the true mark of the disciple of Jesus Christ; not Bible knowledge nor the elaboration of doctrine, not eloquence of preaching nor the ability to build a megachurch, and certainly not lofty theological credentials nor grand ministry accomplishments. What defines a Christian is his or her ability to demonstrate love for others and love toward others, whether that involves everyday relationships, a ministry outreach to the poor, or a passion for lost souls. It is when everyone else's love grows cold that the Christian is called to shine with love that penetrates the darkest of times and the gloomiest of circumstances.

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

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

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

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

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

21:29-33 Jesus wraps up His teaching on future events by providing His disciples with a parable. It is a lesson on vigilance followed by action and has both near and far future events in mind. The key words in this parable are "you see it" (v. 30); that is, "when you see it." From the fig tree, and all other trees for that matter, when you see leaves appearing on bare branches, you know that it is spring and summer is approaching. So, regarding the near future, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies..." (v. 20), flee! Regarding the far future, "when you see these things happening..." (v. 31), recognize! Regarding the near future, they are to flee Jerusalem and Judea. Regarding the far future, they are to recognize that the kingdom of God "is near," meaning that what has existed in the hearts of the church will come to

material fruition on earth when the Messiah returns as the conquering king. While the near future involves survival, the far future involves hope and perseverance. Unlike “men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world” (v. 26), followers of Jesus are to rejoice, for “your redemption is drawing near” (v. 28). The reader should note, too, that the word “near” appears five times in this chapter alone. Therefore, the overriding instruction is to be ready *at all times*, for the events predicted could happen at any time and are indeed “near.”

Verse 32 has been subject to much interpretation. Most conservative scholars take the position that “this generation” is the generation living when the far future events take place; those events that immediately precede the second coming of Christ. Indeed, when these verses are read in Matthew, where he goes into much greater detail, that is probably a correct interpretation. This interpretation begs a question, however: why did Luke omit mention of the abomination of desolations, such an important part of the teaching concerning the last days, and an integral part of “all these things”? Being a traveling companion of the apostle Paul, and certainly familiar with Paul’s writings to the church in Thessalonica, it would seem quite odd that Luke would omit this important event. This writer believes that Luke purposefully omitted the abomination events that clearly pointed to a *far* future event in favor of focusing on the *near* future event; that is, the pending destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Luke was a student of history and accompanied Paul to Jerusalem prior to Paul’s being transferred to house arrest in Rome upon his appeal to Caesar. It is possible that Luke could see the handwriting on the wall regarding the Jews rebellious relationship with the Romans. Even though his visit to Jerusalem was 20 to 25 years before the actual destruction of Jerusalem, events may have been unfolding at the time of his writing of the gospel. This would explain why Luke inserts verses 20-25, as his gospel would have been written sometime after his visit, perhaps as much as a decade later. And why would Luke want to focus on the near future events regarding the fall of Jerusalem by the Roman armies? The answer is simple: Luke is attempting to convince his Gentile readers that Jesus is the Son of God, and that if what He predicted about Jerusalem came true, then everything else He said and taught must be true, especially regarding the last days.

All of the above is this writer’s opinion, of course, and should be taken only as food for thought.

The point is this for today’s reader: everything Jesus predicted came true regarding the near future, and therefore, everything Jesus taught about the far

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;

35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.

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.”

future will come true as well. Indeed, His “words will not pass away” regardless of what happens in the near or far future.

21:34-36 Jesus ends His teaching on the last days with a warning: don’t be lulled into thinking these events could not possibly happen in your lifetime. His examples of a lack of preparedness are those that often accompany a lifestyle of leisure, pleasure, and obsession with personal needs and wants. The words “weighted down” come from an old Greek word meaning “to press down,” as if in carrying a heavy load on one’s back. The word “dissipation” is a medical term that refers to a hangover after one has had too much to drink. “Drunkenness” is from a common Greek word referring to intoxication. Lastly, “the worries of life” refers to cares, anxieties, preoccupation or even obsession with the things of the temporal world to the degree that anything of eternal value is neglected. The warning is as clear as the responsibility: it is the responsibility of the disciple of Jesus Christ to stay alert and to stay on top of things when it comes the matters of the heart and matters of the kingdom of God. Therefore, disciples are to maintain loving relationships and deeply involve themselves in the matters of the kingdom of God.

Verse 35 clearly indicates that these instructions are relevant to all believers everywhere at all times, not just to those who were listening to Him on the Portico of Solomon. The far future events Jesus has described here will be global in nature, and no believer anywhere will not be affected at the time of their appearing.

Verse 36 is Jesus’ instruction on how to “Be on guard” and how to “keep on the alert”—prayer. Prayer is the practice that keeps the believer in a vital, living relationship with the Father. One cannot be hung over and still be effective in prayer. One cannot be drunk and expect prayers to be heard and answered. One cannot be so concerned about his or her own needs, wants, ambitions, aspiration and daily concerns that time and effort isn’t carved out of the daily agenda to spend time praying earnestly, fervently and effectively. Prayer keeps the believer alert because praying for believers everywhere keeps the believer informed of what is happening in the world. Today, all true followers of Jesus Christ should be praying for those brothers and sisters who are experiencing oppression, persecution, imprisonment and even death at the hands of the enemies of Christ. Not to do so is a terrible failure to love one another.

And believers need to pray for themselves as well. No one is beyond the temptation to renounce Christ, especially when suffering is involved.

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.

38 And all the people would get up early in the morning *to come* to Him in the temple to listen to Him.

Believers can dis-believe just as quickly and easily as they can believe, given the right circumstances. The apostle Peter thought he would never deny Jesus, but he did...three times. Believers should never assume that they are beyond denying Christ. What will anchor the soul in Christ? Fervent, frequent, persevering prayer. It's prayer that builds the relationship with the Father, and it's prayer that keeps that relationship vital. It's prayer, too, that keeps the hope alive that one day we will hear from the Son of Man, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

21:37-38 It is appropriate that Luke ends Jesus' teaching on the last days by His call to prayer. And it is appropriate that Luke then informs his readers that prayer is exactly what Jesus did when He knew His death was drawing near. When Luke states that Jesus "would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet," he implies that Jesus went out to pray. It is quite probable that Jesus went alone, although this is not certain. And so there is a pattern: ministry by day, prayer by night. Would that every follower of Jesus Christ abide by such a pattern.

And in the morning, with the sun rising in the east and reflecting brilliantly off the gold doors of the temple, the people streamed to Jesus to hear Him teach on the kingdom of God. Where else could one find such irony? The brilliant light of the rising sun was being overshadowed by the soon to be risen Son of God. The magnificent temple raised up by a debauched royalty and corrupt priesthood, surpassed by a holy temple soon to be raised up from the grave. The temple itself, symbolizing a lost world, grudgingly hosting the only One who could save it from perishing. And the people themselves, hanging on Jesus' every word, unable to comprehend the gravity of His teachings about the near and far future, listening but not understanding, hearing but not comprehending, sensing something wonderful was about to happen, but totally ignorant about what that wonderful thing might be.

Little did they understand that the greatest Passover of all was just days away.

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. This chapter begins where the previous chapter left off: Jesus is teaching in the temple just prior to the Passover. At the end of the previous chapter, He warns His listeners about the unscrupulous behavior of some scribes regarding their interaction with widows. At the start of this chapter, Jesus observes a widow donating “two pennies” to the temple treasury. Explain why Jesus made the statement, “This poor widow put in more than all of them.”
2. Regarding the poor widow’s donation, how does Jesus’ statement affect you in terms of your giving to God’s work? Can you honestly say that you are giving out of your substance rather than out of your abundance? How does this teaching of Jesus mesh with Jesus’ teachings about possession?
3. At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus’ disciples point out that the temple itself is a very magnificent structure. They admire its expensive ornamentation. Take time to compare their awe of the building with church structures you are familiar with. Do not compare only liturgical churches and cathedrals, but evangelical structures with expensive lighting, sound systems, in-house television, family centers, and multimedia. Is there a comparison here?
4. Jesus warns His disciples that they will indeed be persecuted in His name. Do you know of those who is being persecuted as a Christian? If so, are you currently praying for them?
5. Reread Jesus’ warnings about false prophets. Do you know of any, or have you heard of any? What kind of a following do they have? What is wrong about attempting to predict the time of Jesus’ return? What two things must happen before the end times begin?
6. At the end of the chapter, Jesus instructs His disciples how to “be on guard.” What is that instruction? How does your lifestyle fit into His instruction, and how does your lifestyle compare to the negative examples He gave regarding those who are *not* ready for His return.
7. Can you honestly say that you are ready for Christ’s return? If yes, why? If not, why?

The Discippler's Commentary

Fill-in Outline for the Disciple

Luke 21

In Luke 21, Jesus continues His teaching in the temple during the week before Passover. He has just warned His listeners concerning the evil practices of the scribes. Scribes were experts in Jewish law, and therefore helped with legal situations. One of their tasks was to serve as executors of estates when someone passed away. Thus, chapter 20 ends with verse 47 where Jesus states, "Beware the scribes...who devour widow's houses...."

21:1-4 – Jesus observes the "poor widow" putting in _____
Application: What is the difference between giving out of "surplus" and giving out of "poverty"?

21:5-6 – Jesus instructs His disciples on their observation of the temple's _____.

21:7-19 – Jesus' first teaching on _____
8 – The warning against false teachers, false prophets, false _____
9 – The warning against wars and _____
10 – The sign of _____
11 – The sign of _____
12-13 – The sign of persecution and the opportunity to _____
14-15 – The instruction on how to prepare for _____
16-19 – The promise of _____

21:20-24 – Jesus' first teaching on _____
20-24 – Teaching on the utter destruction of Jerusalem and its _____
20-24 – The event came true in _____
24 – The significance of verse 24: "The times of the Gentiles are _____"

21:25-28 – Jesus' second teaching on _____
25-26 – The global observation concerning _____
27-28 – The appearance of the Son of Man: an event to be _____

21:29-33 – The parable of the _____
29-31 – The signs of the appearance of the Son of Man will be obvious to those _____
32-33 – The key teaching: Jesus' words _____

21:34-36 – Jesus' instructions on how to prepare for the coming of the _____
34-35 – First, _____
36 – Second, _____

21:37-38 – Jesus' instruction on how to be on guard and how to be alert: _____

The Discipler's Commentary

Answer Outline for the Discipler

Luke 21

In Luke 21, Jesus continues His teaching in the temple during the week before Passover. He has just warned His listeners concerning the evil practices of the scribes. Scribes were experts in Jewish law, and therefore helped with legal situations. One of their tasks was to serve as executors of estates when someone passed away. Thus, chapter 20 ends with verse 47 where Jesus states, "Beware the scribes...who devour widow's houses...."

21:1-4 – Jesus observes the "poor widow" putting in all she had to give

Application: What is the difference between giving out of "surplus" and giving out of "poverty"?

- *Help the disciple discover the relationship between the last verse of the previous chapter and the first part of this chapter, regarding widows.*
- *This observation by Jesus is capable of providing quite a bit of discussion on giving. Does this verse teach that every person should give all one has? Make sure the discussion stays focused on trusting God for all of one's needs.*

21:5-6 – Jesus instructs His disciples on their observation of the temple's ornate grandeur.

- *There may need to be a discussion on what "votive" gifts are. Help the disciple understand the context in which Jesus' audience point out the grandeur of the temple, and how it was laden with gold.*
- *Show the disciple how their observation about the temple leads into Jesus' discussion concerning the "end times."*

21:7-19 – Jesus' first teaching on far future events

- *Inform the disciple that there are many different interpretations regarding prophecy about the end times immediately preceding the second coming of Christ; that not everyone would agree with the interpretation of "far future" and "near future" events, and that oftentimes the prophecies overlap, so that the differentiation is difficult. Clearly state that this outline is just one person's opinion...the writer's.*
- *Inform the disciple that even Jesus did not know exact dates regarding future events. This is a good place to warn the disciple not to pay attention to anyone who announces they know when Jesus is returning, and that great harm has been done to Christians who listen and pay attention to these deceivers.*
- *Help the disciple find the most important lessons on these end-times prophecies, such as can be found at the end of the outline, and verses 13-19*
- *Let the disciple know that liberal scholars believe that all of these words were composed by the Early Church fathers after the fact; that Jesus couldn't possibly have actually predicted the events of AD 70.*
- *Inform the disciple that many of the events presented here are always happening throughout history, and that almost every generation of Christians have believed that they were living in the end times.*

8 – The warning against false teachers, false prophets, and false messiahs

9 – The warning against wars and rumors of wars

10 – The sign of nation against nation

11 – The sign of worldwide natural disasters

12-13 – The sign of persecution and the opportunity to give testimony about Jesus

14-15 – The instruction on how to prepare for the coming persecution

16-19 – The promise of eternal preservation

- *In this section, emphasize verses 13-19, and that is what he or she should be focusing on.*

21:20-24 – Jesus' first teaching on near future events

20-24 – Teaching on the utter destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants

20-24 – The event came true in AD 70 by the Roman General Titus

24 – The significance of verse 24: "The times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"

- *Inform the disciple that although the writer has labeled these events as "near future," the lessons taught here by Jesus are also applicable to "far future" events.*

21:25-28 – Jesus’ second teaching on far future events

25-26 – The global observation concerning heavenly disturbances

27-28 – The appearance of the Son of Man: an event to be hoped for

- *Emphasize to the disciple that the events described here will be global in nature, so that the whole world will be aware of what is happening.*
- *Even though these global events will cause panic and fear for those who do not have the hope of the second coming, these events should bring great joy and comfort to Christians. Therefore, these events will help determine who is a true believer and who is a nominal Christian.*
- *It is important that the disciple understands how the true Christian is to act if these events were to take place during his or her lifetime...their love for others will be tested. Whereas the rest of the world will descend into chaos and trying to save oneself, the Christian must stand firm by faith and maintain the command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Living out love for others will be as great a testimony to the world as standing up and giving a defense during persecution.*

21:29-33 – The parable of the fig tree

29-31 – The signs of the appearance of the Son of Man will be obvious to those who are looking

32-33 – The key teaching: Jesus’ words will not pass away (will come true)

- *There may need to be an explanation about verse 32, regarding the words “this generation.” One interpretation is that the word “this” refers to Jesus’ audience as He is giving the prophecy. Therefore, the prophecy applies only to the events that happened in AD 70. Another interpretation is that “this” refers to the generation who will be experiencing the global events immediately prior to His second coming that are described in verse 25. A third interpretation is that “this” can refer to both.*
- *Inform the disciple that everyone believes their interpretation is the correct one! Therefore, the writer’s opinion is that one should not be too dogmatic in their opinion. While the discipler may have an opinion of his or her own, it is best—and most loving—to recognize that there are other interpretations, and those who support other opinions should be respected.*

21:34-36 – Jesus’ instructions on how to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man

34-35 – First, be on your guard

36 – Second, be on the alert by staying in prayer!

- *Emphasize to the disciple that these verses are the key to Jesus’ teaching on the above events. The disciple is to be on guard and stay alert.*
- *Have the disciple read again verse 36. Ask the disciple how he or she plans on being “on guard” and keeping “on the alert.”*
- *If the disciple does not have an effective prayer life at this point, that should be something the discipler should be teaching!*

21:37-38 – Jesus’ instruction on how to be on guard and how to be alert: pray!

- *See if the disciple can fill in the blank without the discipler giving the answer first.*
- *Do not let the disciple get carried away by focusing on future prophecies and raising endless questions that probably have no certain answer. Do not let the disciple dismiss the important lessons at the beginning of the chapter in regard to the widow’s sacrificial giving.*
- *When this chapter is completed, the disciple should walk away with these important principles:*
 1. *Sacrificial giving is an important indicator of one’s trust in God and love for Jesus’ kingdom.*
 2. *Jesus is coming back, and that is a great hope for all true Christians.*
 3. *The true disciple should not fear the future...it is a glorious hope.*
 4. *The disciple needs to be on the alert and be on guard at all times.*
 5. *Prayer is the key to giving, trusting, hoping, having courage and staying alert.*