

68: The Judgment of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24, 32-33)

Preachers can be sneaky, acting like they KNOW more than they really KNOW...especially when it comes to the topic of 'end times'. Many preachers who REALLY love Jesus & the Scriptures attempt to answer difficult questions that they really don't know the answers to. Instead they often lean on what they've been taught by other preachers who were taught the same thing. Rather than doing the hard work of studying Scripture in context, they do what they have seen others do, holding the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, pointing to current events as fulfillments of Biblical prophecy. Sadly, few spend time considering who Jesus was speaking to and what it meant to THEM before moving on to ask, "What does this mean for ME?"

Remember that all 3 of the synoptics focus on this interaction between Jesus and His disciples in answering questions about the destruction of the Temple (Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21). Let me mention a few terms used in these writings & see if you recognize the powerful language that prompts people to immediately think of 'end times':

- **abomination of desolation** standing in the holy place
- **great tribulation** never to be equaled again
- **angels gather the elect** from the four corners of the earth
- **the Son of Man coming in clouds** with great power

It's precisely because of the rich amount of prophetic language & imagery borrowed from the Old Testament that causes this to be one of the most debated passages in all the Scripture. If you don't understand how this language & imagery was used in the Old Testament, you likely won't understand what Jesus intended for His Jewish apostles.

☀ **Kent Hughes** speaking of the Olivet Discourse, writes: *Study of it requires a proper humility and a willingness to admit that we do not have all the answers.*¹

Last week we left off recognizing that Jesus was answering the apostles whom Mark names as **Peter, John, James, & Andrew** (Mark 13:3-4). They were asking about WHEN the temple would be destroyed. Jesus warns THEM about wars, famine, & persecution - and here's the key - that THEY will face. So before we transport this ancient text & its meaning 2000 years to OUR context, how about we consider the Author & Audience in THEIR CONTEXT.

Luke 21:20-21 (ESV) "But when you see **Jerusalem surrounded by armies**, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,

Now consider the difference in Matthew & Mark.

Mark 13:14 (ESV) But when you see **the abomination of desolation** standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Matthew 24:15-16 (ESV) So when you see **the abomination of desolation** spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Why the difference? Some say that Luke pointed to the NEAR fulfillment (fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70) while Matthew and Mark point to the FAR fulfillment which has not yet occurred.² Of course this would mean that a new temple would need to be rebuilt, but the NT Scriptures never teach this.

But there is something very telling in Matthew & Mark. Both writers point the readers to a previous prophecy spoken by Daniel. There Daniel 8:11-14 predicts the coming of a leader who would take over the temple, stop the daily sacrifices, and set up some sort of abomination in God's temple, yet after 3 1/2 years, "the sanctuary [referring to the temple] would be restored to its rightful state" (v.14). And sure enough, **Antiochus IV Epiphanies** takes over the temple in 167 B.C., forces the people to slaughter pigs on its altar, brings in temple prostitutes, & even sets up a statue of Zeus in the Most Holy Place.

Since that occurrence in 167 B.C. the Jews remembered the wicked Syrian - Antiochus IV Epiphanies & celebrated the restoration of the temple by the Jewish leader Yudas Maccabaeus. They still do - it's an annual celebration called **Hanukkah**.

THIS is what the apostles of Jesus thought of when Jesus talked of Daniel. And here's a HUGE point.

- To **Daniel's audience** 'the abomination of desolation' was a **FUTURE prophecy**
- but to the **apostles** - 'the abomination of desolation' was a **FULFILLED prophecy**.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 295.

² Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 520.

And now Jesus points to this PAST EVENT to explain what it will be like in the future. In other words, the apostles on top of the Mount of Olives are expecting *one LIKE Antiochus Epiphanes* to take over the temple...except this time - as Jesus had already said - it will be completely destroyed - not one stone on another. **Daniel 9:26-27** is speaking of the event that Jesus is warning His apostles of which was future for them.

WHY the difference in Luke's language? Why doesn't Luke use 'abomination of desolation' like Matthew & Mark do?

Luke 21:20-21 (ESV) "But when you see **Jerusalem surrounded by armies**, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,

Luke is deciphering this Jewish language for his Gentile audience...like we might do for the Chinese person when someone says, "It's raining cats and dogs". We would clarify what that phrase means: "He means, it's raining REALLY hard."

So Luke helps us understand what Jesus is talking about: The 'abomination of desolation standing in the holy place' is Jewish language for **Jerusalem being surrounded by armies who come to destroy the city & its temple**.

- That was **FUTURE prophecy** for the **apostles & Luke's audience**
- But it is **FULFILLED prophecy** for anyone **after it occurred in A.D. 70** - including US!

The typical response to invasion was for people in the country to get to a fortified city and there was no city better fortified than Jerusalem with its great walls. But Jesus warns his apostles who will later warn their disciples: "When this happens, don't go back into the **city!** As a matter of fact, get out of the state of **Judea!**"

In A.D. 68 Vespasian, Nero's general killed many Jews on his way to besiege Jerusalem, but hearing of Nero's suicide and civil war uprushing, returned to Rome. During that time 3 Roman emperors (Galba, Ortho and Vitrello) took the throne and died in less than 1 year.

☛ The fourth-century historian **Eusebius** records what Christians did before the Romans returned:

*The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city ... to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella.*³

Sadly, many others in the surrounding regions fled TO THE CITY seeking protection within its walls.

Finally, **Vespasian became Emperor** and his son, **Titus**, marched to Jerusalem, in April of A.D. 70 the Romans began to besiege the city. **Josephus** describes the people as leaving the city "as swimmers deserting a sinking ship."⁴

Jesus had warned about the devastation when He said...

Luke 21:22-23 (ESV) for these are **days of vengeance**, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the *earth and **wrath against this people**.

Why would this be a problem for pregnant women and nursing infants?

While we could put a pregnant woman or a nursing baby with his mother in a vehicle and speed away, this wasn't an option in the 1st century Jew. **Pregnant woman & women with nursing babies** might have the option of a donkey OR more likely would have to walk. They would have to stop frequently to feed the babies or rest their backs from the watermelons they carried in their bellies. When you're running from an invading army, this would mean probable capture or death. And this would be the result of those who stuck around in state of Judea and specifically in the city of Jerusalem.

*There would be great distress on the 'ge' - **earth**, probably better translated **LAND** as the NAS, NLT, and NIV do, as this word has to do with the SOIL and not the name of the planet.

We talked about the coming destruction of Jerusalem in a teaching entitled **The King Who Cries** in Luke 19 (back in March). As Jesus approached Jerusalem, knowing that many would reject Him, Jesus wept out loud and said,

Luke 19:43-44 (ESV)

⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Remember, Luke 20:15-16 where Jesus told the parable of the **vineyard owner** destroying the tenant farmers who had killed his messengers & then killed His Son! Now in A.D. 70, the vineyard owner makes good on His promise and destroys the tenants who beat his messengers and killed His son!

³ R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 301.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 301.

The Judgment of Jerusalem was more than just the result of defying the Romans; it was the result of rejecting the KING of Kings and GOD HIMSELF was using the Romans as His punishing hammer...just as He had used the Babylonians 600 years earlier to destroy Jerusalem and the 1st temple (586 B.C.)!

And those who don't get away...

Luke 21:24 (ESV)

²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and **Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles**, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

After a 5 month besiegement, **Titus** and his Roman forces destroyed the city and the Temple, slaughtering priests and peasants alike.

Some say the Jewish historian often exaggerated his numbers when he writes that **1.1 million were killed and 97,000 were taken prisoner** (Wars of the Jews, 6.9.3). Whether or not those numbers are exaggerated doesn't take away from the horrific destruction & desolation of Jerusalem and the people in it.

- Many died from fighting the Romans beyond Jerusalem's walls. But many more died from plague, famine, infighting, and suicide before the Romans entered - even throwing dead bodies over the walls as there was no where to bury them. Others tried to escape the city.

- Josephus records that many who attempted to flee were caught whipped, tortured, and then crucified before the wall of the city - about 500 Jews each day!⁵

²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and **Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles**, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

THIS is the answer that Jesus gave to His apostles who asked when the temple would be destroyed.

You know what's SAD for US? I doubt many of you KNEW THAT... I didn't! Instead, people pointed to this passage as a FUTURE event for us - that a new temple would be rebuilt and a contemporary anti-Christ would take it over...but that is NOT what Jesus was talking about - CONTEXT!

Finally, as we will deal with in much more depth next week, we skip ahead to confirm that what Jesus was talking about was indeed a FUTURE event for them, but a FULFILLED event for us. At the end of this chat on the Mount of Olives with the apostles, answering the question about the destruction of the temple Jesus told THEM...

Luke 21:32 (ESV)

³² Truly, I say to you, **this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.**

Remember, it was **THIS GENERATION** that rejected Jesus and it would be **this generation** that would face God's wrath.

Those who claim this is FUTURE for us...have some heavy lifting to remove the intention of this phrase. Next week we will deal with the term **this generation** in more depth, but until then you need to chew on what this would have meant to the original audience - the apostles on the Mount of Olives and the audience Luke was writing to. What if WE were on that mountain and Jesus said those words to US?

³² Truly, I say to you, **this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.**

When would WE expect those things to be fulfilled? **Within OUR GENERATION.**

And lastly, we find significant application and our BIG TRUTH for the day in verse 33.

Luke 21:33 (ESV)

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but **my words will not pass away.**

You see, the words of Jesus didn't fall to the ground.

BIG TRUTH: What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true

Jesus warned His apostles about what was coming - wars, earthquakes, famine, plagues, and signs in the heavens. They were to be persecuted and many would be killed...and ALL this was to occur...within ONE GENERATION...THEIR GENERATION. And it DID!

We should celebrate that...

BIG TRUTH: What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true

There ARE future events that we await.

- Jesus talked about His return one day. How can we trust that will REALLY happen?
- When Jesus returns, the dead will be raised and be judged by Him.
- Followers of Jesus will receive a transformed body - no more sickness, death...or SIN!
- This is a time that faithful believers should LONG for and a day that disobedient people should BEWARE.

But How can we trust that will REALLY happen?

Here's why

⁵ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).

BIG TRUTH: What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true

Jesus WILL return. Jesus WILL judge. Jesus WILL reward His faithful & punish the unfaithful.

BIG TRUTH: What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true

So what if that were to happen THIS WEEK? What if we KNEW - and we don't - that Jesus was returning NEXT SUNDAY?

How would you LIVE differently?

- Would you bow your knee and ask Jesus to forgive you? Would you turn from your sin and seek the King?
- Would you open the Scriptures to READ and HEED what they say?
- Would you warn of God's wrath and offer God's peace to your friends and family who don't follow Jesus?

How would you LIVE differently...if you knew

BIG TRUTH: What Jesus said HAS & WILL come true?

PRAY