

AUGUST 3, 2025

SERIES 3: LAST THINGS

PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE

LESSON 3.1

FOCUS VERSES

Luke 21:25–28

²⁵ And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

²⁶ Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

²⁷ And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

²⁸ And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

LESSON TEXT

Luke 21:1–28

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God has big plans for eternity that we do not yet understand.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will live ready for Jesus' return.

Series Overview:

The disciples walked with Jesus for three-and-a-half years, and most of them still did not understand Jesus' teaching about the end time. If you have trouble understanding the end time, you're in good, God-called company. Learn together what Jesus said about last things and how we should live in these last days.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If people from the 1970s could suddenly be transported to 2025, what might impress them most? What do you think the world will look like in 2075?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE WIDOW'S MITES

A. The Disciples Were Impressed by the Temple (I)

B. Jesus Was Impressed by Sacrifice

» *What do you think about Jesus when you realize He was more attracted to a widow's offering than an ornate Temple that took forty-six years to refurbish?*

C. Jesus Prophesied the Temple Would Be Destroyed

D. I Will Seek to Understand

» *What helpful methods do you use when you read passages in the Bible you don't understand?*

II. PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE

- A. Prophecy Often Has Multiple Horizons
- B. Prophecy Is Really God Telling His Story
 - » *What sometimes scares people about someone teaching on prophecy?*
- C. I Will Keep My Focus on Jesus' Promises to Be Faithful (V)

III. SIGNS OF THE END TIME

- A. The Great Tribulation Is Coming
- B. Prophecy Teaches God's Kingdom Wins in the End
 - » *How does knowing that God and His church win affect your ability to keep going?*

Internalizing the Message

- » *What events happening in the world today remind you Jesus could return soon?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see things as He does
- For God to help us live with Heaven in view

LESSON CONNECTION

"I found something!" shouted Ahmad, as his shovel hit a long, solid object. "Kaleem, come and help me." Shortly the two unearthed part of a wall with decorations and figures on it. The whole archaeological team gathered to dig deeper and wider. The wall extended as far as they could dig, but the deeper they dug, they found out this was not just a wall; it was an ancient, beautiful, adorned gate.

German archaeologist Robert Koldewey congratulated his crew. After further digging he announced, "You have done it. You have discovered that all the legends of ancient Babylon are true." Kaleem asked, "How did we do that?" Koldewey answered, "Do you see these glazed, blue bricks that depicted alternating rows of bulls and dragons?" Ahmad answered "yes" with great curiosity. Koldewey pronounced, "You have unearthed the famous Ishtar Gate."

"What's the Ishtar Gate?" asked Ahmad. The archaeologist continued, "This is a gate into the city of ancient Babylon. The historian Herodotus called it the most splendid city in the world." One worker asked, "How old is this gate?" Koldewey replied, "Have you ever heard of the prophet Daniel?" Another worker puzzled, "Should I know him from the Koran?"

"No," replied the archaeologist. "He is not in the Koran. Yet Jews, Christians, and Muslims have all spoken of him. As a youth, Daniel was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers into this very city at the same time this gate was being built."

"Amazing!" said Kaleem, "and we have unearthed this." Koldewey continued, "There were seven gates. The inner city was said to be impregnable. Nebuchadnezzar boasted that his empire would last a thousand years."

"Did it? Did Nebuchadnezzar's people and beliefs live on for a long time?" asked Kaleem. "Nope," said the archaeologist, "less than a century. But remember Daniel, the Jewish exile; well, his people are still prosperous today. And millions worship the God he served."

The Ishtar Gate was excavated between 1902 and 1914 by German archaeologist Robert Koldewey. Ironically, the most powerful kingdom at one time had disappeared in the sands of time, its ancient beauty long gone. This ought to give us pause as to what is important and what will last. Six hundred years after Babylon fell, the one great world power was Rome. At the time Jesus was born, Judaea was ruled by a king named Herod the Great, whose place was established by Rome.

To curry favor with the Jewish people and make a name for himself, he began a project to restore the Temple in Jerusalem to its glory when Solomon built it. Herod died before it was finished, but his son continued the building project. By the time Jesus began His

ministry, thousands of men spent forty-six years building and adorning the Temple (John 2:20).

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE WIDOW'S MITES

A. The Disciples Were Impressed by the Temple

Teacher Option: *A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. (I)*

The beauty of the Temple grounds at the time of Herod rivaled some of the ancient wonders of the world. Though Jesus' disciples were certainly impressed (Matthew 24:1), Jesus had a different perspective. Further, He had little to say about the sometimes lavish display that went along with giving gifts. Luke 21:1 states Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. According to Mark 12:41, these gifts were large. Obviously, the rich enjoyed being seen and commended for their generosity. Indeed, they publicly made a show of giving a large sum into the treasure box that served as the "building fund."

B. Jesus Was Impressed by Sacrifice

On some level it is hard to blame Jesus' disciples for being impressed with such a display. They had left home and family to follow Jesus, all the while relying on small gifts given by random people to provide for their daily needs. Then unnoticed by all but Jesus, a widow woman unpretentiously dropped a couple coins into the box. The King James Version calls the coins "mites." They were the smallest, least valuable of all Roman coins, worth just a few cents. Yet Jesus said evenly: "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all" (Luke 21:3).

The disciples were confused by Jesus' statement. They scanned the crowd for a wealthy woman but found none. They returned their questioning gaze to Jesus, who simply nodded at a poor widow woman. Then He continued: "For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:4). She did not give out of her abundance; she gave out of her poverty. In Western culture, we do not know much about giving an offering that would affect whether we will eat on a given day. This widow exhibited an unflinching trust that God would take care of her.

Jesus' simple statement offered His perspective, but the disciples did not quite get it. Most people still do not get it. What the woman put in the offering was her hope. The woman freely gave to the Lord her ability to pay for her necessities. The disciples only saw the pitiful amount, but this unnamed widow woman was putting her trust in God. Most others did not even see her, but God Almighty in flesh saw her and inspired His Gospels writers to write her story so we would also see her.

What do you think about Jesus when you realize He was more attracted to a widow's offering than an ornate Temple that took forty-six years to refurbish?

C. Jesus Prophesied the Temple Would Be Destroyed

Jesus was not done. He then soberly announced: "As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Luke 21:6). Jesus said this after the disciples were apparently pointing out the impressive Temple sites (Matthew 24:1). His prophecy arrested their attention and caused them to wonder, *When would this massive, beautiful Temple be destroyed?*

D. I Will Seek to Understand

When we read passages like Matthew 24 or Luke 21, we often shrug because we do not know exactly what they mean. But Jesus prophesied to the disciples and for us so we would know how to live while we wait for His coming. Rather than flip past these passages, let us seek to understand what Jesus was saying for His first-century audience and for us. Pray for God to help you to understand. Read the chapters before and after the one you are trying to understand. Read other passages relating to the current one.

Read books and commentaries for varied views from scholars who have done extensive research. Even reading in different translations can provide answers for the questions we have.

What helpful methods do you use when you read passages in the Bible you don't understand?

II. PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE

Then Jesus taught His greatest lesson on prophecy. It was no different than the lesson He taught about the widow's mites, only they did not understand. The lesson of the widow is that we can trust God, regardless of how bleak things may appear. We can trust Him with our lives and our resources. The lesson of Jesus teaching about the last days is the same: we can trust God with our lives and our resources, regardless of how bleak things may appear.

Because Jesus taught on the Mount of Olives, we often call this teaching about the last days the Olivet Discourse. It was first recorded in Mark 13, but it is recorded primarily in Luke 21 (as well as other chapters in Luke). Yet the fullest account is in Matthew 24–25. Jesus' prophecy was much like Old Testament prophecies. Several of them had multiple horizons: they would be fulfilled in the audiences' day, and they would be fulfilled again in the end of days.

A. Prophecy Often Has Multiple Horizons

We all have been in services where someone said, "That preacher was preaching right to me." The truth is God can speak a single time and it becomes a word to more than one individual in the congregation. Just as a message in tongues and interpretation could speak specifically to more than one individual, so Luke 21 and its parallel passages (Matthew 24–25 and Mark 13) can speak to God's people both near and far.

Jesus' words on the Mount of Olives had much to say to the first generation of believers, those who heard His words. Yet it also had a second and even more profound message to the generation who would see the end of things. Jesus' prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman general Titus leveled Jerusalem. Perhaps this judgment was in answer to the Jews cry, "His [Jesus'] blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). This is the "near" situation. Yet, other prophecies were not fulfilled in the first century, making those fulfillments "far" from the original audience.

For example, the Olivet Discourse culminates with "and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). The return of Jesus did not occur in AD 70 or in our day yet, but we anticipate it in the future. Jesus' Olivet Discourse spoke not only to that generation, but to every generation afterward: God has a plan. He knows the end of the story. Yes, bad things will happen, but you can trust in God. It is the same lesson as the widow's mites.

B. Prophecy Is Really God Telling His Story

A couple important principles about prophecy help us truly appreciate it and take out some of the mystery about it. The first is that prophecy is simply God telling His story. The same God who inspired Moses to write, "In the beginning God . . ." not only knows the beginning of the story, but He knows the end as well. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Revelation 21:4).

What sometimes scares people about someone teaching on prophecy?

C. I Will Keep My Focus on Jesus' Promises to Be Faithful

Scholars tell us that up to a fourth of the Bible is made up of the prophetic. Further, not only are many prophecies in the Bible, but there are many fulfillments to prophecy as well, especially related to Jesus. The Messiah was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem, born of a virgin, from the seed of Abraham, and a descendant of David. All these prophecies have been fulfilled.

Jesus came, lived, ministered, and even died in fulfillment of words spoken by prophets. God's promises did prove to be true. And if

God could miraculously fulfill dozens of prophecies in minute detail when Jesus first came, we can likewise believe God will fulfill future promises as we anticipate Jesus' return.

Teacher Option: *A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. (V)*

III. SIGNS OF THE END TIME

One of the most important prophetic passages of Scripture is found in today's text: Luke 21. So we would be prepared for Jesus' return, He offered word pictures, signs, and promises about events that would signal the last days. These signs do not seem to be pleasant at all, and that was purposeful.

When Jesus spoke of wars and rumors of war, it was a warning not to be fearful (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). For this same reason, He warned of earthquakes, famines, and pestilence (Luke 21:11); "distress of nations" (Luke 21:25); and "men's hearts failing them for fear" (Luke 21:26). Of course, none of these things are good—at all. Yet Jesus offered an important hope. "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). In other words, the worse things get, the more reason we have for hope. Even in difficult times, the people of God can have faith that God's promises are true and He has a plan for His people.

A. The Great Tribulation Is Coming

Jesus warned His hearers about what is really important, not just to that generation but to every generation. Yet He reserved His greatest caution for those living in the generation at the final turn of the age. Daniel spoke of a time of tribulation that would come when an evil man would try to destroy the Jewish religion. But Jesus quoted from that same prophecy to talk about a future time of tribulation that would yet occur. Jesus spoke about the "abomination of desolation," and the way Mark framed it (in Greek), this could only be a man who would defile the Temple (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14).

While this prophecy was in part fulfilled in the first century, certainly not all of it was. Matthew recorded Jesus' words after this: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). This is no minor judgment. Jesus continued: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

B. Prophecy Teaches God's Kingdom Wins in the End

While prophecy is meant as a warning, it is also meant to build hope for the future. In the end, the earth will be cleansed from evil, the kingdom of God will triumph, and God's purposes will be accomplished. In this fact Daniel did not tell a different story from Jesus. Peter's epistles are not telling a different story from the Book of Jude. Paul did not have a different understanding from the Book of Revelation. In the end, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

How does knowing that God and His church win affect your ability to keep going?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

There is a ditch on either side of the road when it comes to teaching on biblical prophecy. On one hand, some people are so afraid of being wrong, they will not venture to interpret prophetic Scripture or even to say anything about it. They see prophetic passages like a creepy closet they dare not open, lest a horned beast jump out and scare them. On the other hand, some people are so sure a certain prophecy means this or that in the headlines, they do not consider a varying view. They are judgmental of other people's interpretations.

We in the church are appointed, like Ezekiel, as watchmen on the wall. We are to look to see if the enemy is attacking and warn those in the city when there is danger. If enemies are marshaling to fight against us, we may not have it exactly right—it could be three thousand or five thousand—but even if we are not sure on every point, we ought to sound out a warning.

All the innovations and wealth around us, and the comfort and luxury in which many people live, contribute to our generation losing touch with the value of eternity. The widow woman was not wealthy financially, but she had a better sense of the value of what was really important than others around her. And she was able to surrender what she had for God's glory and eternal purpose.

It is hard to imagine everything around us could readily pass away, but Babylon thought the same about their city and their day. Like a broom passing through an old cobweb and sweeping it up, so the events of the last days could be upon us. But the Bible has a prescription for these things: Love Him appearing (II Timothy 4:8); consciously live a life with Heaven in view, knowing the Lord will appear to those who look for Him (Hebrews 9:28); live a life full of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–25); and “covet earnestly the best gifts [of the Spirit]” (I Corinthians 12:31) so we “come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 1:7).

Finally, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church about the return of Jesus, he not only encouraged them to live in a godly way, but he also let them know they did not have to be fearful of Christ's return. They would see their loved ones again. The brokenness and pain they felt would vanish. The same grace that saved them would be present upon Christ's return. Rather than striving to be perfect, he taught them to rest on the grace of God in all aspects of their past, present, and future. That is why he could say with respect to Jesus' return, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (I Thessalonians 4:18).

What events happening in the world today remind you Jesus could return soon?

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see things as He does
- For God to help us live with Heaven in view