

Growth Group Study

The End of an Era

Luke 21:5-32



Luke 21 is often seen as a confusing passage full of scary sounding stuff. Sometimes, it's taken to be all about the end of the world as we know it. But these words Jesus spoke to his disciples were more likely about the end of **their** world as **they** knew it. We've already heard Jesus foreshadowed the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the 'promised land' of Israel. He's said it with tears in his eyes - the city that rejects God's visitation to them is going to be rejected by God. And it's all going to happen in a terrible way within the space of a generation. When you read Luke 21 in that context, it seems to make good sense - but the descriptions are louder and more vivid.

Something to share...

Has anyone in your group been to Jerusalem? Ask them to describe "The Wailing Wall." If nobody has been there, do a little bit of internet research, and see if you can find a picture.

Getting Oriented...

1. What does Jesus think of the beautiful temple?
2. What specific two questions do the disciples ask in verse 7?

FIRST QUESTION:

SECOND QUESTION:

THE ANSWER TO QUESTION 1 (VERSE 32):

Here's how we're going to approach the chapter. It's a radical idea! We're going to try to understand how Jesus answers exactly those questions. The answer to the first question is clear... within their lifetime. (The temple was actually destroyed by the Romans in AD70, and only the 'wailing wall,' which was part of the foundations, remained.) With that in mind, we need to read the way Jesus describes the 'signs of the end of Israel' in a way that makes sense. Sometimes, he uses vivid "apocalyptic language." (That's what we're doing when we talk about EARTH SHATTERING EVENTS. The earth doesn't necessarily shatter, but our personal world is shaken!) But most of the descriptions are a straightforward account of exactly what happens to his disciples over the next 40 years. You can read about it in the Book of Acts.

The Signs of the End

List some of the 'signs' that will tell the disciples that Jerusalem is about to be destroyed...

- a) verse 8
- b) verse 9
- c) verse 10
- d) verse 11
- e) verse 12-16
- f) verse 20

3. Peter and John were among the disciples listening to Jesus. What happens to them in Acts 4:1-12 and Acts 12:1-2.

4. What opportunity does Jesus promise that opposition will create?

Rejoicing in Rejection

5. Too often, we're afraid of the slightest hint of rejection of ourselves or our message. Jesus says, count opposition as opportunity! Can you think of circumstances where this would be useful advice in your own experience?

6. What does Jesus promise his original disciples? How are these words encouraging today?

Jerusalem Surrounded

7. The fall of Jerusalem will be terrible indeed. Summarise how Jesus describes it in verse 21-24...

Background Briefing - thanks Wikipedia!

Let's step forward in time to AD70, and catch a glimpse of how things worked out in reality. The Roman historian Josephus had acted as a mediator for the Romans and, when negotiations failed, witnessed the siege and aftermath. He wrote:

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), Titus Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple... it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make a visitor believe Jerusalem had ever been inhabited...

And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judaea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, do anything but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor had anyone who had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again...

Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege, of which a majority were Jewish. 97,000 were captured and enslaved. Many fled to areas around the Mediterranean. Titus reportedly refused to accept a wreath of victory, as there is "no merit in vanquishing people forsaken by their own God".



The Son of Man Coming in a Cloud...

From verse 25 to 28, the language becomes cosmic and catastrophic. There will be 'signs in the sun, moon and stars - the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

8. Draw and label what will the disciples will see according to verse 27...

Think about it...

Signs in the sky... a man who travels on a cloud... ring any bells? Maybe it should!

If you're looking for some signs that are going to tell you that it's all over for Jerusalem and not one stone will be left on another, you just need to keep reading the rest of Luke's book... and the sequel. Because that's EXACTLY what's about to unfold.

Read Luke 23:44-45. What happens here?

Read Acts 1:9. What's happening here?

Daniel 7:13-14. The 'son of man coming on the clouds' is not coming to earth at this point. He's coming to the throne! What do you think Jesus is claiming for himself when he quotes these words, and when he literally, physically 'ascends' on the clouds?

Daniel long ago promised that 'one like a Son of Man' would 'come on the clouds to the throne room of God' and share his rule forever... a rule over not just Israel, but all the nations. Jesus says, that's me. And that's going to happen - just up ahead. Keep watching. Keep trusting. The implications are bad for the Israel that rejects him, but in the end the kingdom is much bigger than just Israel. It's a kingdom for all the world!

So stick with it and stay tuned...

The prescription is simple. The crisis is coming, but here's what the disciples will have to do...

- Don't be frightened (v9)
- be witnesses to Christ in front of rulers and kings (v13)
- head for the hills when the Romans come (v21)
- Be careful not to be weighed down with drunkenness and cares (v34)
- Be alert for when it happens. (v36)

Because of these warnings from Jesus, while many in Jerusalem stayed to fight the Romans - thinking their city was invincible - the Christians fled, and were largely kept safe. Jerusalem was gone - but the message of Jesus was spreading like wildfire around the world.

The temple is gone. But according to the apostle Paul, now there's a more important temple... and he's building it!

Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17.

- a. What are some implications of the fact that 'we are God's building', and 'you yourselves are God's temple'? (v9,17)
- b. What's the foundation of our building?
- c. What do you think Paul has in mind when he says 'we should be careful of how we build'?
- d. If the building is "us, built together," how is it that some are seeking to 'destroy God's temple'.

Paul uses the same metaphor in Ephesians 2, where he reminds us that we Gentiles are also part of God's great building project... "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as

the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."

○ **Spend some time in prayer**, asking that God would help us build one another up in faith, that we would always seek to build on the foundation of Jesus, and that we would be careful not to do anything that 'damages' God's new and final temple!

This is our final study in the Luke Series for 2009. We'll resume in the lead up to Easter 2010. Your growth group should plan to wind up the year with a celebration next week.

Growth Groups 2010

In the past, we've tried to mix up group members each year by asking everyone to sign up for a fresh new group. Due to our shorter six week cycles this year, though, many feel there has not been enough time to really get to know each other. That's why we're recommending that you consider staying in the same group for another year. AT THE SAME TIME, we'll be working hard (as always) to encourage other people to join. Your leader will contact you during the break to see if you're able to continue in the group next year, and your names will be written up on the sign up sheets, with spaces to encourage new members to sign up. Why not see who you can recruit for your group?

○ Groups next year will run for full school term cycles. Each group will be encouraged to arrange their own social and service activities.