

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY: “The Olivet Prophecies” Luke 21

Scripture of Lesson: Luke’s Gospel 21: 5-38

1. *End time prophecies*

Matt 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 all record the Lord’s prophecies about what would happen to the Jews and to the world in different time spans. His prophecies cover the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which was fulfilled; the last tribulation years, which had been prophesied by Daniel already; and His second coming after the tribulation period. The prophecies and the Scriptures of both OT and NT pertaining to them can be summarized as follows:

- a. *The destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem*
[Matt 24: 16-21, Mark 13: 14-17, Luke 21: 20-24]
- b. *The first half of the tribulation*
[Matt 24: 4-14, Mark 13: 5-13, Luke 21: 8-19]
- c. *The middle of the tribulation*
[Matt 24: 15-28, Mark 13: 14-18, Daniel 9: 24-27]
- d. *The last half of the tribulation*
[Matt 24: 29-31, Mark 13: 19-27, Luke 21: 25-27]
- e. *Closing admonitions* [Matt 24: 32 – 25:51; Mark 13: 28-37; Luke 21: 28-36]

2. *Lord’s prophecy #1: the destruction of Jerusalem [AD 7]*

- a. Because the prophecy of Jerusalem’s destruction is inserted in the middle of the entire prophetic discourse, the disciples may have been confused about the times of the prophesied events. They thought perhaps that this event, the end time tribulation and the Lord’s second coming would occur in the same time period. That is why we do not see in NT epistles any warnings by any apostle to the Jews about the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus’ Roman army in AD 70, during which 1.1 million Jews were killed according to the Jewish historian, Josephus.
- b. However, this event was foretold to the disciples by Lord Jesus *three times* prior to this fourth prophecy, according to Luke’s account:
 - i. *Therefore, the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.* [Luke 11: 49-51] – Lord Jesus warned that God would recompense for the blood of God’s prophets and messengers from Abel to Zechariah shed by the Jewish people to “this generation,” specifically referring to the generation of the Jewish people during the Lord’s ministry.
 - ii. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’* [Luke 13: 34-35] – Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem for her intransigence and hardness of heart, and He prophesied a desolate state of the Jewish temple until He returns again “in the name of the Lord.”
 - iii. *For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”* [Luke 19: 43-44] – In this prophecy, Lord Jesus gave a detailed description of how Jerusalem would face besieging and total destruction by the Roman army and how the temple would be so destroyed that not one stone would be left on another. In fact, the Roman soldiers broke every block of stone to find and confiscate

the melt gold of the temple. This detailed prophecy was fulfilled exactly as He had said, giving credibility to the balance of His prophecies about the end times and His second coming.

3. Lord's prophecy #2: the end times of tribulation

In Luke's account [21: 8-19], Lord Jesus spoke about the signs that will precede the end times.

- a. Many false prophets will rise up to deceive people [21: 8].
- b. Wars and troubles will intensify all over the world prior to the end times [21: 9]. During the 20th and 21st centuries, the world has experienced an unprecedented increased number of wars and conflicts, in which hundreds of millions of people were killed. We have seen the rise of communism and the Fascist movement that caused incomprehensible damages to the nations and peoples of the world.
- c. We have also seen a large increase in the frequency of earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes/typhoons, widespread epidemics, celestial signs [21: 11].
- d. Persecution against the Christians occurred during the early centuries and throughout the past centuries, particularly in Buddhist and Moslem nations [21: 16-18]. Christians are encouraged to turn these persecutions into opportunities of witnessing for Christ before the persecutors [21: 13-15].

4. Lord's prophecy #3: the second coming of the Lord

- a. Before the Lord's second coming in heaven's glory and power, there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars. The suffering and confusion of the nations will intensify and the sea and the waves will roar, signifying large earthquakes and tsunamis in the ocean [21: 25]. People will be greatly perplexed and fear greatly when they see the celestial bodies are shaken [21: 26].
- b. Matthew's account of the Lord's coming gives more specifics:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. [Matt 24: 30-31]

The sign of the Son of Man is not clear, but when it does appear, all peoples of the world will recognize it and mourn for their failure of not believing and following Him. He will come in heaven's power and glory, surrounded by His elect, who are already in the heaven, perhaps assigned to various places/ functions in heaven after their rapture event, which is to occur before the tribulation period begins. In other words, the elect will not suffer the tribulation. *"Those who endure to the end"* refer to the Jewish people who are converted during the tribulation period and they must endure the extreme persecution and tribulation of seven years before the Lord's coming. They will not take part in the rapture but will flee to a prepared land until the Lord returns [Rev. 12: 6].

5. Parable of the fig tree: how close are we from the end times?

- a. Lord Jesus gave these signs based on which we must judge the times. It is not right to proclaim that the Lord will return on a specific day because He said, "Only the Father knows the day and the time." The exact timing has not been given to us, but He encourages us to know that the time is near.
- b. "This generation" shall not pass away till all be fulfilled [21: 32]. What did He mean by "this generation." Some scholars interpret "this generation" as the generation that came to see the end of "gentiles' era" in v. 24. The nation of Israel was established in 1948 and Jerusalem was taken back from Jordan as a result of the War of 1967 by Israel, thus ending the Arab control of Jerusalem. According to this prophecy of the Lord, the times of the Gentiles ended then and the end times began. The generation that saw this event is taken to be "this generation," the Lord refers in v. 32. The generation born about the times of these two important events can be considered 'this generation.' If this interpretation is correct, the rapture and the tribulation period can occur in the next one or two decades at most. This is "judging the times" as encouraged by the Lord through the parable of the fig tree.

Discussion topics:

1. *What is your prospect of the end times and how ready are you to welcome the Lord?*