

# THE PREDICTED SIGNS OF THE PRESENT AGE

## LUKE 21:05–11

### *Division Overview (Luke 21:05–38)*

This chapter is known as the *Olivet Discourse* (See notes, Mt. 24:1-25:46; *End Time*, Mk. 13:1-37). It deals with *three great subjects* that lay out in the future when they were predicted by Christ.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem (v. 6-7; see Mt. 24:2-3).
2. The Lord's return (v. 7; see Mt. 24:3).
3. The end of the world (v. 7; see Mt. 24:3).

Matthew and Mark's account of what happens in this passage should be read along with Luke for a clearer understanding.

### LUKE 21:05–38 END TIME

Four things will help in understanding what Jesus was doing in the discussion of the end times.

1. It will help to remember that Jesus was preparing His disciples for His death and departure from this world and preparing them to carry on after He was gone. His immediate disciples were to face some terrible times, ranging all the way from personal trials brought on by their witness for Jesus to national trials involving the utter destruction of their nation. In addition, it would be generations stretching into centuries before He returned to earth. No one knew this at that time, but He did. Therefore, He needed to prepare His future disciples as well, for they too were going to face all kinds of trials. There was the danger that His disciples might tire waiting for His return; moreover, they were to see and experience so much trouble in the world, their faith might falter. They, along with many in the world, might begin to ask:

**2 Pet 3:4** *They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

What Jesus did was use this occasion to reveal some of the events that were to take place upon the earth during these "*last days*," the days of the church (Acts 2:16-17; 1 Jn. 2:18). By knowing some of the events, His disciples would be better prepared to endure and to keep their hope for His return alive.

=> They would know that God is never caught off guard. God is still on the throne and still in control of all world events.

- => They would not be caught off guard themselves. They would know what to expect in this corruptible and sinful world. Therefore, when the events happened, they would not be as likely to become discouraged.
- => They would be challenged to *keep themselves* ever so close to God in order to be as strong as possible to face the trials coming upon earth.
- => They would be encouraged to place their hope in God and in the new heavens and earth and not in this corruptible world. They will be “waiting for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

2. Remembering that Jesus was dealing with two questions will also help in understanding what was being said. He was answering the questions: When will the temple be destroyed, and what shall be the sign of His return and of the end of the world?

Note something: Jesus was dealing with *the end of the temple and with the end of the world, the destruction of the temple and the destruction of the world*. He was covering the signs, the events that cause and occur during the judgment of *both the temple and the world*. What is the point? Simply this. Scripture teaches that the same sins and events cause the judgment of anything. That is, the events (sins) that cause judgment upon one thing are the same events that will bring judgment upon everything else. Therefore, the signs that surrounded the destruction of Jerusalem are much the same as the signs that will surround the end of the world. What Jesus was saying has a double meaning and application (Notes, Mt. 24:1-14; 24:15-28. Both notes will help to see the double application.)

The Lord’s words applied both to the disciples of His day and to all disciples who were to follow in succeeding generations. As long as the earth stands, the disciples of “the last days” (or ages) will face many of the same signs faced by those who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem. However, there is to be one difference. At the end of the world, the signs will *increase and intensify*. The day is coming; it will be so terrible that it can be called the *beginning of birth pains* [sorrows] (Mt. 24:8) and the great distress (Mt. 24:21). (Notes, Mt. 24:1-28; 24:15-28.)

3. The present age is considered by God to be “the age of the last days” or “the last time.” According to God’s timetable, the history of the church, its presence on earth takes place in “the last days” or during “the last times.”

*Acts 2:16-17* No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”

*Heb 1:2* But [God] in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

**1 John 2:18** *Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.*

4. A quick overview of the passages in this chapter also in understanding what Jesus was doing.
  - a. The signs of the present age (Lk. 21:5-11).
  - b. The tragic sign prior to the end: persecution (Lk. 21:12-19).
  - c. The destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:20-24).
  - d. The Coming of the Son of Man (Lk. 21:25-28).
  - e. The Parable of the Fig Tree: the signs are clearly seen (Lk. 21:29-33). □

### ***Introduction: End Time (Luke 21:05–11)***

There is a matter of critical importance when looking at the end time. In understanding what Jesus was saying, we have to be very careful not to add to or take away from what He said. Both mistakes were made by religionists concerning Jesus' first coming (Mt. 2:4-6).

A major fact to keep in mind is this. The disciples *did think* that all three events (Jerusalem's destruction, the Lord's return, and the world's end) would happen at about the same time. They did think in terms of the Messianic Kingdom of God. Comparing Acts 1:6 with the Jewish concept of the Messiah shows this. (See *Christ, Messiah*, Mt. 1:18; *Baptism of Jesus and John*, Mt. 3:11; notes, Mt. 11:1-6; Mt. 11:2-3; *Prophecy Fulfilled*, Mt. 11:5; *Messiah, Judgement*, Mt. 11:6; *Jesus, No Publicity*, Mt. 12:16; notes, Mt. 22:42; Lk. 7:23-23.) When Jesus said that the temple would be destroyed, the disciples assumed it would happen at the same time that He returned to end the world, thereby restoring the kingdom to Israel.

Jesus, however, gave no timetable. He did not say when the three events would occur. What He did was give signs that would occur before the events, signs that would point toward His return and toward the end of Jerusalem and toward the end of the world.

It is also important to keep in mind that most of the signs happen *all through history*. However, there is this difference: the signs increase and intensify right before the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world. There will be a period known as *the beginning of birth pains* or sorrows (Mt. 24:8) and a period launched by *the abomination that causes desolation* known as the "great distress [tribulation], unequalled from the beginning of the world until now..." (Mt. 24:21).

The signs of the present age are three.

- I. The disciples admired the temple's beauty (vv. 5-8).

- II. Sign 1: false christs (v. 8).
- III. Sign 2: conflict of nations (vv. 9-10).
- IV. Sign 3: natural disasters (v. 11).

### **I. *Luke 21:05–08 End Time***

The disciples admired the temple's beauty. The temple was magnificent. It sat upon the towering summit of Mount Zion. It was built of white marble plated with gold. The temple was a massive structure that could hold thousands of people. (See Acts 4:4 which perhaps took place in the temple. Five thousand men were saved among a crowd which probably numbered many thousands more.) The temple had several porches such as Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch that were supported with huge, towering pillars. The pillars were so large that it took three to four men's reaching arm to arm to encircle each one. The temple was a striking sight, one of the building wonders of the world. The disciples apparently stood some place where the temple in all its magnificent beauty struck them with awe, and they wanted Jesus to see the beautiful sight. When they drew His attention to it, three things happened.

1. Jesus used the occasion to arouse the disciples' interest in coming events. He predicted the temple's utter destruction.
2. The disciples were shocked and aroused to ask two questions of the Lord. To understand the questions, the beliefs of the disciples must be remembered. Their thoughts were filled with the idea of Israel's glory as the greatest nation upon earth. They had finally accepted the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, God's appointed instrument to free Israel and to raise the nation to its destined glory. Therefore, when Jesus began to talk about the temple's being razed to the ground, they were utterly shocked. "Teacher, when will these things happen?" They could hardly believe their ears. The thought that flashed across their minds was *the end time*. "These things will occur in the end time, will they not, Master? Just when will they take place? What signs will there be to show they are about to take place?" (See Mt. 24:1-3, 15-31.) In their minds the temple could not possibly be destroyed until the end of all things came about. They were thinking that the glory of Israel was to be set up when all of a sudden, Jesus began to talk about the utter destruction of the temple, the very centre of their nation. They wanted to know two things.
  - => When was the temple to be destroyed?
  - => What will be the sign "that they are about to take place," that is, the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and the Lord's return (See *End of Time*, Lk. 21:5-38)?
3. Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived. This can mean one or two things.
  - a. A person can be easily deceived when dealing with end time prophecies.

- b. A person can be easily deceived when facing the end time events. He can be deceived into thinking that certain cataclysmic events are infallible signs that the end is at hand. Too often cataclysmic events result in wild guesses about the end time. They result in...
- universal predictions.
  - the deceiving of others.
  - discouragement of one's faith when the end does not come.

## II. *Luke 21:08 False Messiahs*

The first sign will be *false messiahs*. Jesus said three things about this sign.

1. There will be *many*, not just a few but *many*, false messiahs.
2. They will make two claims.
  - a. The claim of deity. Note the words, "I Am" (eimi). This is the name which was used by God to reveal Himself to Moses. It is the most basic name of Deity. "I Am" equals *Being*, the most basic Being of the Universe. It is the claim used by God to tell man that He is the Supreme Being of the universe, the Messiah, the Deliverer of all mankind (Note, Jn. 6:20).
  - b. The claim that the end time — the Messianic Age, the age when Israel and the world are to be delivered — *is at hand*. (How often this claim is made, even by some well-meaning men! But note what Jesus said in the next point.)
3. "Do not follow them." They are false messiahs. The real Messiah has already come, Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself. It is He and He alone who has "the words of eternal life." As Peter exclaimed:

*John 6:68* Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

**Thought 1.** Note to whom Christ was speaking: His disciples. Disciples can be misled by false teachers and prophets.

*Mat 7:15* "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

*Mat 24:5* "For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

*Mat 24:11* "And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."

*Mat 24:24* "For false Christ's and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible." ( see Mk.13:22)

*Acts 20:30* Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

**Rom 16:18** *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*

**2 Cor 11:13** *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.*

**Eph 4:14** *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

**1 Tim 4:1-2** *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*

**2 Tim 3:13** *While evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

**2 Tim 4:3-4** *For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

**Titus 1:10-11** *For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach - and that for the sake of dishonest gain.*

**2 Pet 2:1** *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.*

**1 John 2:18-19** *Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

**1 John 2:22** *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son.*

**2 John 1:7** *Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

### III. *Luke 21:09–10 World Violence, Wars*

The second sign will be *conflict of nations*. Four things were said here.

1. Believers will hear of *wars* and *revolutions* (*akatastasias*), which means tumults, uproars, riots, terrorism, insurrections, treasons, confusions of governments. There will be uprisings within governments, and governments will be overthrown. Believers can become extremely disturbed over the news.
2. Believers are not to be *frightened* (*ptoethete*). They are not to let their hearts “be troubled” (Jn. 14:1). World violence can trouble people; but the believer’s heart and life are to be centred upon God, trusting His presence, care, and security — eternally.

*John 14:1-2* “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”

*John 16:33* “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

*Luke 12:4-5* “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

3. World violence “must happen first.” It does not happen at first because God destines it, but because men’s hearts are gripped by passion, lust, greed and evil.

*Mat 18:7* “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”

*James 4:1-3* What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

4. World violence can so dominate the news that men are led to believe that the end is at hand. However, Jesus warned, “The end will not come right away,” not yet. Remember the words just spoken, “Watch out that you are not deceived.”

*2 Chr 15:6-7* One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress. But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.

*Jer 51:45-46* “Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord. Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumours are heard in the land; one rumour comes this year, another the next, rumours of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler.”

**Luke 21:34** *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

**Phil 4:6** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

**1 Pet 5:7** *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

#### **IV. Luke 21:11 Nature: Earthquakes, Famines, Pestilence**

The fourth sign will be *natural disasters*. Five disasters in nature were mentioned in particular.

1. Earthquakes. Great earthquakes cause enormous damage to buildings, disrupting and destroying the lives of people, cities and communities. Earthquakes are one of the most alarming and frightening disasters among men. Josephus records the fulfilment of Jesus’ prophecy. He even hints that the natural disasters which happened were a sign of coming destruction.

*...there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, and continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and any one would guess that these wonders foreshadow some grand calamities that were coming (Josephus, Wars. 4. 4:5).*

*Earthquakes will occur in many places during the last days of the earth (Rev. 6:12; 11:12-13, 19: 16:17-19).*

2. Famines. Food is one of the most basic necessities of men. Without food men die. Jesus said that in the last days, right before Jerusalem’s fall and right before the end of the world, there shall be terrible famine. Scripture speaks of a “severe famine over the entire Roman world during the reign of Claudius” (Acts 11:28-30). Josephus describes the famine as being so terrible that when flour “was brought into the temple...not one of the priests was so hardy as to eat one crumb of it... while so great a distress was upon the land” (Josephus, *Ant.* 3. 15:3). He says in another place, “A famine did oppress them [Jerusalem]... and many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food” (Josephus, *Ant.* 20:25).

In the very last days before Jerusalem’s fall, Josephus speaks of another terrible famine:

*“It was now a miserable case, and a sight that would justly bring tears into*

*our eyes, how men stood to their food, while the more powerful had more than enough, and the weaker were lamenting (for want of it)” (Josephus, Wars. 5. 10:3).*

*“Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the marketplaces like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead where soever their misery seized them” (Josephus, Wars. 5. 12:3).*

There is evidently to be terrible famine in the last days. The black horse of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse indicates terrible famine (note, Rev. 6:5-6). The unbearable pain and terrible evil that hunger can cause is graphically described by Scripture.

**Lam 4:9-10** *Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from the field. With their own hands compassionate women have cooked [boiled] their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.*

Luke adds a third disaster of nature: pestilence. Earthquakes and famines, of course, cause disease and pestilence (note, Mt. 24:7).

3. Pestilence. Disease is often the result of war and widespread disasters such as earthquakes. Pestilence shows no partiality. The rich may be able to buy food during a famine, but they cannot buy their way out of an epidemic of disease. Death by disease and other natural causes shows no partiality.

Josephus’ record of a great pestilence that struck during the days of Herod is evidence of the fact. *“When he [Herod] was in the way, there arose a pestilential disease, and carried off the greatest part of the multitude, and of his best and most esteemed friends [the wealthy]” (Josephus, Ant. 15. 7:7).*

Pestilence will also be one of the terrible sufferings at the end time. Part of the suffering caused by the pale horse of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse includes pestilences.

**Rev 6:8** *I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword [war], famine [hunger] and plague [pestilence resulting from war and famine], and by the wild beasts of the earth. (see note, Rev.6:8)*

4. Astronomical happenings. There will be “fearful events and great signs” happening in the sky at the end of the world. Very practically, such astronomical happenings occur now. The earth is sometimes darkened by dust from earthly catastrophes such

as volcanic eruptions, wind storms, and smoke from huge fires. Of course, whatever darkens the sun, hides the light of the moon from earth. The stars, that is, meteorites of varying sizes, fall through space often. The point is, the events of the end time are going to trigger astronomical happenings worldwide, universally. (Note, Mk. 13:24; Mk. 13:24-25).

**Mark 13:24-25** *“But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”*

**Luke 17:29-30** *But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”*

**Luke 21:25-26** *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”*

**Acts 2:19-20** *I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.*

**Rev 6:12-17** *I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” ■*