

## The End is Nearer than Ever!

Luke 21:5-11

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Stephen Davey

We rightly think of Jesus as our Divine Savior, as a perfect Teacher, and as our Lord and Messiah. But do you think of Jesus as a prophet? He was, during His earthly ministry. And Jesus gave some very specific prophecies about the end times and the tribulation. While these prophecies don't directly relate to our world today—before the rapture takes place—we can still find key truths and important applications from Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

Apocalyptic, end-of-the-world movies are more popular than ever.

Since the first end-of-the-world movie was produced in 1916, more than 250 have been produced. Half of them have been produced in the last 25 years. They are doubling in production every decade. It's one of the most popular genres in movie production.

Adapted from Michael Nicholson, "It's the End of the World as We Know It: The Apocalypse in Popular Culture," Mockingbird blog (12-4-15)

And the world can't seem to get enough.

In recent surveys, the majority of Americans believe in the arrival of some kind of catastrophic event, some doomsday scenario, some global meltdown that will change the world as we know it.

I read recently of one company who advertises, "We are on the cusp of an increase in the number and magnitude of events that may change the world, as we know it." Then they list a range of possible cataclysmic disasters. Their solution is this: for \$35,000, you can buy an underground shelter, completely equipped and stocked for a minimum of one year, just enough time to ride out the catastrophic events.

Douglas Rushkoff, [Present Shock](#) (Penguin Group, 2013), p. 245

There happens to be an intuitive sense of coming global disasters—whether it's solar flares from the sun that scorch the earth and destroys technology, or massive flooding and famine. Perhaps the earth will be struck by comets or asteroids, leading to worldwide

chaos; perhaps it's a global pandemic or a global war. Maybe it's a series of earthquakes that lead to massive tsunamis and global destruction.

As of May 2021, an earthquake warning system was made available to cellphone users in California, Oregon, and Washington. The app is an early warning system to let people know about an incoming earthquake so that people can find safety. The trouble is, as sophisticated and advanced as it is, this warning system can only give someone 80 seconds to find safety.

Catherine Garcia, "The entire West Coast is now covered by an earthquake early warning system," The Week (5-6-21); Rong-Gong Lin II, "In major milestone, U.S. earthquake early warning system now covers entire West Coast," The Los Angeles Times (5-4-21)

That's all they can promise: an 80 second warning to get out of harm's way. Or maybe get into your bunker, with enough food to last for one year.

Has it ever occurred to you that the Bible predicts global pandemics, earthquakes, famine, war, and terrifying cosmic disturbances?

And has it occurred to you that God has given mankind a warning that is now 2,000 years old and counting?

In His great patience with a defiant human race, God has given us, not seconds, but years to find safety from this coming global meltdown, not in a bunker, but in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

You're holding a copy of one of God's early warning systems, delivered by the Son of God some 2,000 years ago. More specifically, this one is found in **Luke 21**.

Now, after commending the sacrificial freewill offering of the poor widow, Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus and His disciples leave the temple and head out to the Mount of Olives.

Mark's Gospel records that some of them make comments of admiration to Jesus about the temple buildings. They say, "**Look ... what wonderful stones and what magnificent buildings**" (**Mark 13:1**).

**Luke puts it this way, in chapter 21 and verse 5:**

*And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, ...*

*Luke 21:5*

In other words, the disciples are marveling at how stunning and beautiful the temple was. And rightly so.

The temple was one of the wonders of the Roman Empire.

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 2](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 296

Now keep in mind that this wasn't Solomon's Temple—that had been destroyed by the Babylonians in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. This was the temple rebuilt by Ezra 100 years later, which was desecrated later and then reconsecrated by the Maccabees. This was the temple renovated and expanded by Herod the Great, and the renovation project had been underway for nearly 50 years.

Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible: Luke](#) (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 471

It was one of the largest building sites in the ancient world; the retaining walls towered more than 80 feet above the roadway going around it; the foundation stones, the size of train cars, were some 50 feet below ground level. Herod had assembled 10,000 workers, among them 1,000 priests responsible for the masonry and carpentry work; 1,000 oxen were used to transport stones from the quarry some two miles away. The foundation stones were estimated to weigh more than 400 tons each.

Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 146

Herod was a master builder, and he wanted this temple to outlast the pyramids.

J. Dwight Pentecost, [The Words and Works of Jesus Christ](#) (Zondervan, 1981), p. 397

And you would have every reason to believe it would!

But it was also stunning in beauty.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian wrote in book five of his series, “The doors of the temple were covered with plates of solid gold of great weight, so that at sunrise, it reflected a fiery splendor, forcing you to turn your eyes away, as if it were the sun's own rays. The temple appeared from a distance, to be a mountain covered with snow, for those parts of it that were not covered in gold were exceeding white. The temple pillars were columns of white marble forty feet tall, and each one carved from a single block of stone. The temple's gold ornaments, jewels, and treasures were beyond description.”

Adapted from Ivor Powell, [Luke's Thrilling Gospel](#) (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 433

And it should have been, because it all was supposed to bring someone to worship the true and living God.

And so, the disciples are buzzing with admiration over the marble columns, the gold-plated doors, the encrusted jewels, the grapevine made of solid gold designed to hang over the temple's entrance with precious gems serving as grapes—one grape cluster alone was 6 feet long.

Well, as they're walking away, and up the Mount of Olives, **Jesus says here in verse 6:**

*“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”*

*Luke 21:6*

It's going to be leveled to the ground.

We know from history that seven years after the temple was completed, the Roman army under General Titus arrives and fulfills Jesus' prediction to the letter.

And to this day, the temple has not been rebuilt; the stones that you can see today, commonly referred to as the “wailing wall,” where devout Jews go to pray, that happens to be a part of the foundation. Everything above was razed to the ground; it was completely leveled.

Barton, p. 473

But at the time, this prediction from the Lord was shocking and alarming.

Imagine going to Washington, D.C. and touring the Capitol Building, walking down the mall, admiring the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, and then somebody says, “It won't be long until all of this is destroyed and completely leveled to the ground.”

Adapted from Barton, p. 480

You'd have a hard time imagining it, unless you're watching one of those end-of-the-world movies.

So, the disciples are confused and curious. When they get up the Mount and find a place to sit down, **verse 7 says:**

*And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”*

*Luke 21:7*

Now what Jesus does here—recorded throughout the rest of this chapter—is deliver what is called the Mount Olivet Discourse. It happens to be the Lord's most famous sermon on prophecy.

The parallel passages in Matthew and Mark deal more specifically with the future destruction of Jerusalem in the tribulation period, while Luke will describe the impending destruction of Jerusalem that occurs in A.D. 70. More on that later.

But Matthew, Mark and Luke reveal the conditions of the world *during* the tribulation period, prior to the return of Christ to planet earth to set up His millennial kingdom.

Now keep in mind that this discourse—this sermon—was a message given primarily to the Jewish people, by their Jewish Messiah about the future of the Jewish nation. The Lord isn't discussing here His coming for the church; the rapture of the church isn't discussed here. In fact, no signs are needed to precede the rapture of the church.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Courageous* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 94

That could happen at any moment, and nothing stands in the way of the Lord calling the church to meet Him in the clouds (I Thessalonians 4).

The church isn't looking for signs today, we're looking for the appearing of our Savior, who will take us to meet Him in the clouds and off to the Father's House.

Then some seven years later, following the tribulation period, we will return *with* the Lord as He establishes His kingdom and rules the redeemed nations of the world.

Now we're going to travel through this amazing chapter together as God gives one warning signal after another.

At first, I thought I'd teach this chapter in one sermon, from 30,000 feet, so to speak. Then I realized we needed two sermons to cover it; then I realized we needed four sermons. Now I'm not sure we're going to finish it before the rapture! We'll see.

As we travel through this chapter, there will be this idea of "now, but not yet" in these prophetic statements.

In other words, there are applications for God's redeemed people *now*, but not fulfilled yet, not fully, as these prophecies will be fully experienced and fulfilled when the tribulation occurs and then the Lord returns.

You'll notice this sense of "now, but not yet" as the Lord begins His discourse ***here in verse 8:***

*And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them."*

*Luke 21:8*

In other words, don't be deceived by false teachers. John the apostle said in his epistles that many antichrists had already appeared.

So, this is a warning for every generation, in any culture and in every country.

Don't be led astray by people who claim to be prophets, who claim to speak for Christ, who can even quote a little Scripture and use the Lord's name, who claim to be a representative of Christ, who claim to be a Christian.

I'll give you an example of someone who at first sounded more like a preacher than a demonically-inspired dictator. In Munich, on April 12, 1922, Adolf Hitler said this in his speech:

My feelings as a Christian point me to my Lord and Savior ... it points me to the man who recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them.

As a Christian, I read how the Lord rose in His might and seized the courage to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers ... how terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison.

Adolph Hitler – April 12, 1922

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, [Matthew](#) (Crossway, 2013), p. 684

Hitler claimed to be a Christian; he claimed Jesus as his Lord and Savior; he claimed to model himself after Christ; but he was in fact an antichrist, deceiving his nation, deceiving the German people, he used Jesus to defend his own hatred for the Jewish people.

Hitler was an antichrist, but he wasn't *the* antichrist. Now, but not yet.

Hitler foreshadowed the deception of the final antichrist. There was partial fulfillment, but not final fulfillment.

So, there are deceivers now, but not like the tribulation period when *the* deceiver will declare himself Lord.

***Now Jesus goes on here in verse 9:***

*“And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”*

*Luke 21:9*

Again, what's happening now is something like what will happen later on during the antichrist's reign.

War that is taking place *now* will take place *later* to a much greater degree.

Listen, human history is a history of war. So don't panic when another war breaks out and conclude that it's the end of human history as you know it.

And in this context, don't assume the kingdom is just around the corner just because there's another war.

I have read that in the last 3,500 years, planet earth has seen one battle—one war—after another. In fact, out of some 3,500 years of recorded history, only 268 years have not seen war anywhere. And that doesn't take into account wars that were never recorded. Now when we're touched by war, we tend to think, "This is obviously the end of the world."

Hughes, p. 297

Maybe I'd better buy a bunker and store up water and food; this is it!

Beloved, we will only experience a foreshadowing of the ultimate war to come on planet earth, which will take place during the tribulation period.

And I want you to follow something here: in a very real sense, the earthquakes and wars and famines and natural disasters that take place today, *they are* God's early warning system. These are minor, but the big ones are on the way!

Now with that, Jesus begins to describe the fulfillment of these signs, when the big ones arrive in terrifying proportion on planet earth.

What Jesus says next will parallel with the opening of the seven seals of judgment, described in Revelation chapter 6. This is a description of the first half of the tribulation and the opening of the seven seals as the antichrist rises in power.

For those who believe that the rapture of the church takes place at the mid-point of the tribulation—a pre-wrath view of the rapture—well, as Jesus describes the first half of the tribulation, it is nothing less than a terrifying demonstration of the wrath of God on the human-race and across planet earth.

This is the unleashing of horrific conditions, brought on by the judgment and wrath of God, which the church will not experience. We're not looking for the appearing of the antichrist; we're looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

***Now Jesus begins to describe the tribulation, here in verse 10:***

*Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."*

*Luke 21:10-11*

What Jesus predicts here parallels Revelation 6 and following as the tribulation period begins. These events will intensify over time, and you can read the horrific details of God's wrath in the Book of Revelation.

Now let's break this description down by looking **verse 10 again**—the first part:

*“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”*

While our world has known nothing but one war after another, much of what occurs are local battles or continental wars for power and resources.

But as the end draws nearer, and the tribulation begins, Revelation describes the rider on his red horse—bloodthirsty for war and destruction.

Stanley Toussaint, my New Testament seminary professor, writes on this text, “This will be spread over the known world; nations and kingdoms are now in hostility with one another ... this is worldwide conflict.”

Stanley D. Toussaint, [Behold the King: A Study of Matthew](#) (Kregel, 1980), p. 271

Perhaps inspired by the rising power of the antichrist, what is now set off is nothing less than worldwide conflict.

This is a race for global domination. And the antichrist is leading the pack of wolves.

***Jesus adds to this in verse 11:***

*“There will be great earthquakes ...”*

Again, what we might experience today is a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of God's outpouring of wrath.

Since the invention of the Richter scale, which measures earthquakes, there have been thirty-five earthquakes measuring at least 8.5 or greater.

In 2011, an earthquake in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Japan measured 9.0 and the resulting tsunami killed 16,000 people, with thousands more missing. It also triggered a nuclear meltdown in a nearby nuclear plant, displacing 100,000 people. The effects of that one single earthquake are still being studied.

Luke refers here to a plurality of earthquakes, he calls them **“great earthquakes.”** The word great comes from the Greek word *meegas* which gives us our word mega. These are mega earthquakes, which have never before been experienced.

***Jesus adds here in verse 11:***

*“And in various places famines and pestilences.”*



Famines have been recorded in history, going back as far as 500 years before the birth of Christ. Every continent has experienced them.

But they will pale in significance and impact to what is coming during the tribulation.

***Jesus mentions pestilences here in verse 11.***

You could translate the word, ***plagues***. Again, what the human race has experienced over the centuries is a wake-up call, a warning sign; diseases today are a warning of the plagues to come.

The notorious pandemic outbreak of bubonic plague known as the Black Death, which took place in the middle of the fourteenth century, was devastating.

Most of us know the little poem that originated from the plague:

"Ring around the rosies,  
a pocket full of posies,  
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!  
We all fall down!"

The rhyme originated with the bubonic plague in 1665.

"Ring around the rosies" was a reference to the red rashes that developed on the infected.

"A pocket full of posies" was a reference to their superstitious belief that demons were behind the plague and sweet-smelling flowers would drive the demons away, so they filled their pockets with flowers.

"A-tishoo! A-tishoo!" was a reference to sneezing by the afflicted.

"We all fall down" simply meant, everybody with these symptoms died.

This plague killed 25 million people.

The Book of Revelation records that famine and plagues will account for the death of one fourth of the world's population (Revelation 6:5-6).

That means, if the tribulation were to begin tomorrow, it wouldn't be 25 million people who would die. 2 billion people would die.

Now Jesus ends this severe warning here in verse 11 by adding these words:

*"And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."*

This phrase, ***"terrors and great signs from heaven"*** is apocalyptic language.

***The prophet Isaiah describes some of it in chapter 13:***

*For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, ...*

*Isaiah 13:10-11*

The book of Revelation describes these cosmic events, from meteor showers, hurricanes, hailstorms with hail—giant pellets of ice four times larger than bowling balls—falling from the sky.

Mankind has long worshipped nature, giving it divine attributes and creative power; they named it “Mother Nature.”

During the tribulation, it’s as if God unleashes “Mother Nature” upon the human race. She was their false idol; humanity had stolen from Creator God the worship that was due Him. They had given their praise to her, and it’s as if God uses her to punish them without mercy.

Let me tell you, there’s not an end-of-the-world movie that begins to capture the horror of this outpouring of wrath upon planet earth.

There’s not a bunker you can hide in. 80 seconds of warning won’t matter.

Here’s your warning, this is your safety alert. It’s been ringing for 2,000 years which means the end is nearer than ever. The fulfillment of Christ’s predictions is closer now than ever.

This is not an end-of-the-world scenario; this is not a movie. This is for real.

***Now Jesus says here in Luke 21:12:***

*“But before all this ...”*

Note that time stamp. Jesus has just described some of the horrors of the tribulation period, but now He says, “But before any of these things take place, something else is going to happen.”

“Before the tribulation, this is going to happen ...”

And what Jesus now does is describe what happens to the believer before the rapture—before the tribulation takes place on planet earth.

Jesus is about to give us the answer to what we should expect on planet earth while living in these last days.

And what do we discover in His answer? We'll find out next Sunday, Lord willing.

In the meantime, here's what we can take away with us today:

**First, don't be deceived by false teachers.**

They're alive and well in every generation. They are slick and they're smooth, but they aren't worth listening to, so turn them off and stick close to the Scriptures.

**Secondly, don't be dismayed by current events.**

It's not the end of the world. We're not waiting for a sign of the rapture of the church. There's nothing in the way of the Lord coming for us today.

These events will fully arrive during the tribulation when you are already safely home in the Father's House with Jesus.

But don't miss this here: the Lord is predicting what we might experience during our lifetime, and He has just given His predictions of what the world will experience during the coming tribulation.

Listen, the only way Jesus can predict these events with perfection is:

- If He is in control of these events.
- If He is in control of nature.
- If He is in control of the storm.
- If He is in control of kings and kingdoms.
- If He is in control of the timeline of history.

He can't predict the future unless He is in control of the future.

And He is! He is.

# Study Guide

## Summary

Jesus told His followers that the Temple would be destroyed. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Roman army decimated the temple only seven years after its completion.

Jesus' teaching is not merely a historical account but a prophetic unveiling of events that will transpire in the future. Jesus is addressing the Jewish people about the fate of their nation and the world during the tribulation period before His return to establish His millennial kingdom.

We are reminded that we are not to be deceived by false teachers, for many will come claiming to be Christ or His representatives. Deception is not confined to the future tribulation but is a present reality we must guard against.

Jesus also warns of wars, tumults, and natural disasters, which are not to be interpreted as the end of the world. These events are but a foreshadowing of the greater calamities that will occur during the tribulation. The world has witnessed wars and natural disasters throughout history, but what is to come will be of a greater magnitude.

The Bible foretells of pandemics, earthquakes, famines, and cosmic disturbances, and these serve as a merciful warning from God to turn to Christ for salvation.

As we live in these last days, we are not to be dismayed by current events or to seek signs of the rapture. The church is to await the Savior. The tribulation will be a time of God's wrath upon the earth, a period of judgment that the church will not endure. We look forward to the blessed hope of Christ's return.

## Key Takeaways:

- False teachers have been, are, and will continue to be a threat to the faithful. We must be vigilant, discerning, and rooted in Scripture to recognize and resist their deceptions. Our defense against falsehood is a deep and abiding knowledge of the truth found in God's Word.
- The apocalyptic events described by Jesus are not meant to paralyze us with fear but to motivate us to share the gospel with urgency. Knowing that time is short and that the end is nearer than ever, we are called to be ambassadors of hope, pointing others to the safety found in Christ.
- Jesus' sovereignty over the future assures us of His faithfulness in the present. As we face uncertainties and trials, we can trust that the One who holds tomorrow is the same One who walks with us today, guiding, providing, and securing us in His perfect plan.

## **Discussion Guide:**

### Bible Reading:

Luke 21:5-6 / Luke 21:8-11 Titus 2:13

### Observation Questions:

1. What did Jesus predict about the physical temple that His disciples were admiring?
2. What warnings did Jesus give about being deceived and the events that would precede the end times?
3. What are the specific signs Jesus mentioned that would occur before His return?

### Interpretation Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus warned His disciples about the destruction of the temple and the coming false prophets?
2. How do the signs Jesus mentioned in Luke 21 relate to the concept of an "early warning system" as described in the sermon?
3. In what way does Titus 2:13 shape our understanding of Christian hope in the context of end-time events?

### Application Questions:

1. Reflect on a time when you were impressed by something grand or beautiful. How does Jesus' prediction about the temple challenge the way you view earthly splendor?
2. Have you ever encountered a teaching or philosophy that seemed to distort the truth of the gospel? What steps can you take to ensure you are not deceived by such teachings?
3. Considering the signs of the times mentioned by Jesus, how can you actively share the gospel with urgency in your community this week?
4. Identify a current event that causes fear or anxiety in your life. How can you apply the hope of Christ's return to your perspective on this event?
5. Think of a practical way you can encourage a fellow believer this week who may be struggling with fear or uncertainty about the future.