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Luke 21



Gospel of Luke - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg delves into Luke chapter 21 and discusses the controversial passage that references the destruction of the Temple. He argues that while Jesus predicted the fall of the Temple, this did not necessarily imply that the second coming had already occurred. Gregg believes that Jesus primarily intended to warn his followers of the impending disaster that would befall Jerusalem and emphasizes the importance of understanding the relevant Hebrew idioms. He interprets some of the commonly used eschatological imagery, such as the promise that "this generation will not pass away," in light of the historical context of the first century AD.

Transcript

When we come to Luke chapter 21, we come to a famous and controversial passage. Not the first four verses. They're not controversial, though they may be famous.

But after verse four, we have what's called the Olivet Discourse, and that is not only famous but controversial because Jesus makes predictions about a coming judgment, and the exact time frame of that judgment even seems to be mentioned, and yet there's controversy as to what he's really talking about. We will discuss that. The first four verses, however, precede it, and it says, Then he looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury.

And he saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites, which would be just really, you know, little tiny things like pennies. They're not worth very much. So he said, Truly I say to you, that this poor widow has put in more than all.

For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings to God, but she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had. Now, this contrast reminds me a little bit of the contrast between the public and the Pharisee in the temple. He's talking about two people very different from each other in the temple, and, you know, those that make a great show of their religiosity, whether it's the Pharisee praying and mentioning all of his virtues, or the rich man ostentatiously putting in large gifts in the treasury, these ones are not commended.

But in the case of the publican who is humble, repentant, and not expected to really elicit much of a positive comment from any religious person because he's a publican, yet Jesus speaks up in his favor. He basically says the roles are reversed with reference to public opinion and God's opinion. God justifies this publican, and the Pharisee, and no doubt those with his mindset justify the Pharisee.

Now, remember Jesus said in an earlier statement in Luke, the things that are highly esteemed among men are an abomination to God, and God's values are just the opposite of man's because God looks on deeper issues. Anyone watching the people putting money in the treasury would have seen rich people putting large bags of silver probably into the temple treasury and thinking, there's a generous person for you. Look at all that money he gave.

And the widow, she comes in, throws in a couple pennies that aren't even going to amount to much, and probably people wouldn't comment negatively about that. They could tell she's poor, but they wouldn't think much about her. They'd be much more drawn to the large gifts and thinking of how much of a sacrifice that is for someone to give such a large gift.

And Jesus basically, of course, turns around and says, well, the guys who give the large gifts, they're not really making that much of a sacrifice. They're very rich, and it's only a small portion of their riches that they're giving. The total amount might be great, but it's not really much of a sacrifice at all.

These people are not showing as much generosity as the widow is because unbeknownst to anyone but Jesus, she's giving everything she has. She's giving all her livelihood. She doesn't have more than that.

I think about that a lot of times when I open the mail that comes into The Narrow Path because we do get tens of thousands of dollars in donations per month, and it all goes out. We have to pay the radio stations that money. And some of the donors send \$1,000 or more.

We had one donor that was sending us \$2,000 a month for a long time. He's reduced it recently to \$1,000, but still a very large gift, large donations. And I certainly appreciate them, and I'm not going to argue that those are not generous gifts.

But when I get a gift for \$5 or \$10, I have to say my initial reaction is, this isn't going to go very far. We have tens of thousands of dollars of expenses. A \$5 or \$10 gift, that's not going to make a very big dent on it.

But then I have to remind myself, the person who's giving \$5 or \$10 probably would be ashamed to give so little if they were wealthy. It's very probable they're giving as much as they can afford. If they weren't generous, they wouldn't be sending at all.

But someone who would send only \$5 or \$10 probably, that pinches them considerably to send it. And God looks on those issues more. We may look on how much the gift can accomplish, how far it will go, how much good it will do.

And God's not even looking at that. He's looking at the sacrificialness of the giver. And it may be that those who send these small gifts are actually more pleasing in God's sight than some who give large gifts.

I'm not disparaging those who give large gifts. It's just we can't know. We can't know how sacrificial someone else's gift is.

But God's looking on the heart, and we look on the outward appearances. Of course, a lot of money, we think, can serve God's kingdom a great deal. But God doesn't have any problems with money.

He doesn't have a financial shortage. And he can provide all he wants. He could cause any of his people to win the lottery if he wanted to.

That is, if his people played the lottery. But the point is, he doesn't have any problem gathering money when he wants it. Our giving to God is more of an expression of our generosity or sacrifice that we're willing to make out of love for him than it is something that he needs from us.

And he's looking on that issue, the spiritual side of things, not the financial side of things. And this makes this obvious. Now, we do come to the Olivet Discourse.

And it's called that because it's a discourse that Jesus presented when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives with some of his disciples. It's precipitated by his departure from the temple. In those first four verses, Jesus was in the temple watching people give.

Then, in fact, he left the temple. Luke doesn't say so, but Matthew makes it very plain that Jesus' last words in the temple that we know of were, your house has left you desolate. You will not see me anymore until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the That's not in Luke, but it's not in this passage here.

But it is found in Matthew 23 just before Jesus leaves the temple and then follows this Olivet Discourse in Matthew. So, Jesus has just abandoned the temple and announced its desolation. And having made such a negative comment about the temple, someone may be trying to say, well, how can that be? Look at this beautiful structure, this piece of architecture that's one of the wonders of the world.

And it was one of the wonders of the world. The temple is very elaborate, very expensive, very beautiful. And its stones were particularly impressive because they're very huge stones.

They were as long as a room. I think there was some, I don't remember the exact length, Josephus describes it. And I mean, as I recall, you know, the stones were like 20 feet long or something like that.

And these are single stones, huge stones. And they were carved so smooth that there was no need for mortar between them. Wind wouldn't get through, no breeze could get through the cracks because there weren't really cracks.

They were so smooth that they lay so perfectly against each other. There's no need for mortar, it is said. One report is that when the temple was later burned down by the Romans, the gold dome on top of it melted from the heat and it went, the gold kind of got down in some of the cracks where there was no mortar.

And as a result, the Romans dismantled the temple, taking every stone down to scrape the gold off it. Whether this is true or an apocryphal story, I can't say for sure, but it would certainly give reason for the Romans not only to destroy the temple, but to cause not one stone to be left standing on another. And that's what Jesus predicts here.

It says, then as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, he said, as for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone will be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. Now, Jesus had made exactly the same prediction about the city in general in chapter 19 when he had wept over the city because of this disaster that was coming when the Romans would come and destroy it. He said that in verse 44 of chapter 19, they will 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.

In other words, this is a judgment upon you because you didn't recognize me when I came. So, this statement about the temple being destroyed is just of a piece with this other prediction. The whole city, not only the temple in it, but the city itself was going to be dismantled by its enemies, and it would be a judgment of God.

So, the destruction of the temple that Jesus predicts is recognizably God's judgment upon it. Now, the disciples may well have assumed that this would also be the world. The truth is, it's not clear whether even the gospel writers thought this would be the end of the world.

The gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke, I am convinced, were written before AD 70. And the reason I'm convinced of that is because they record in this passage Jesus' predictions about the destruction of the temple, which occurred in AD 70, and yet the gospel writers don't say, and this happened when the Romans came and did such and such. Very commonly, when the gospels record that there was a prophecy of something, they say, and this happened when this happened.

In fact, Luke especially did that. Remember when Agabus the prophet in Acts 11 said there's going to be a great famine, and Luke says after that, and this occurred in the days of Claudius. Luke is very keen to point out fulfillment of prophecy, so is Matthew.

And both of them record Jesus, and so does Mark, Jesus' prediction about the destruction of the temple, but neither of them suggests that it has already happened, which would be unlike them if it had. This makes me think they wrote all three of these gospels before AD 70. And since they did write before the fact, we don't know how much they knew of how devastating this would be.

They knew Jerusalem was going down. They knew a judgment was coming. They might even have equated that in their own minds with the end of the world.

I'm not saying they did, but we don't know. It's possible that they even, in arranging the material in their gospels, may have joined passages that were about AD 70 with passages about the end of the world, because the gospel writers, they didn't know there were two different events going to be. They learned that after Jerusalem fell.

But Matthew, for example, seems to join more than one discourse of Jesus as the all-of-it discourse. And it seems to me, at least, that one of those discourses he joins with another is about AD 70, and the other is about the second coming of Christ. Matthew may well have known these were two different events.

I don't know what Matthew knew, but the disciples themselves probably thought, wow, the end of the temple, that's the end of the world. In any case, the prediction stunned them and caused them to ask him about it. Not immediately, but when they had left the temple, and he'd made this prediction, they then went eastward to the Mount of Olives and reclined there on the Mount of Olives, and the disciples came to him.

It says they asked him. Now, Mark's gospel, which has the parallel to this in Mark 13, specifically says four of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, and Andrew, came to him privately and asked him this question. So while Matthew and Luke both tell us Jesus gave this discourse in the hearing of his disciples, Mark is more specific.

Well, not all the disciples, four of them heard this discourse. The three who were called the inner circle, Peter, James, and John, and then Peter's brother Andrew was in there too. So these disciples came to him separately.

Now, the other disciples must have been lounging on the hillside at the same time, so they must have been sprawled out a bit, and these four came to him and asked him about that, and they said, teacher, but when will these things be, and what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? Now, this is the question which is answered in the Olivet Discourse, or questions, I should say. There's two questions. When will these things be, and what sign will there be when these things are about to

take place? Now, notice both questions concern what they call these things.

In the context, these things could only mean the destruction of the temple. Nothing else has been mentioned. Jesus didn't predict anything except the destruction of the temple.

Now, in their own minds, they may have associated that with any number of other things, maybe even the end of the world, you never know, but the truth is he had only predicted the destruction of the temple, and they asked when the destruction of the temple would take place, and what sign might be given to alert them that it's soon going to happen. Now, in this discourse, Jesus is going to answer both of those questions. Now, this is likewise worded similarly in Mark 13.

They ask the same two questions. When will these things be, and what sign will there be that these things are about to take place? But Matthew has their question worded a little differently, differently enough to be a little confusing. Matthew has their question like this.

When shall these things be? That's the first part. It's the same as Mark and Luke. They do ask when the temple will be destroyed, but then Matthew's wording goes a little differently after that.

Instead of saying, what sign shall there be that these things are about to happen? They have them saying, what shall be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? Now, clearly, where Mark and Luke have the disciples asking, what shall be the sign that these things are about to happen, namely the destruction of Jerusalem? Matthew words it, what sign shall there be of your coming and the end of the age? Now, what are we to do with this disparity between the passages? There's two things we could do. One thing is to say, Matthew actually has more of this discourse than the others do. And actually, in making it larger, he does so by bringing in material from another discourse, which is Luke 17, actually, which we've already studied.

I told you I believe Luke 17 is about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. I don't believe that Luke 21 is about that. I think Luke 21 is about the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

So, I believe that Jesus on one occasion, or more than one, talked about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, but on other occasions spoke about the second coming of Christ at the end of the world. I believe that Luke 17 and Luke 21 are examples of both subjects being discussed, but Matthew 24 puts them together so that the material from Luke 21, about AD 70, and the material from Luke 17, which I take to be about the second coming of Christ, are joined in one expanded discourse in Matthew 24. Now, this being so, if Matthew realized he was doing this, he may have simply modified the disciple's question to include both subjects.

When shall these things, that is, the destruction of the temple be, and what sign shall there be of your coming in the end of the age, meaning the second coming, and that is going to be included in Matthew's expanded discourse. He's going to address both subjects, so he rephrases the disciple's question to include both subjects. That's one way to understand this.

That's not the way I choose, but it would, in some ways, answer the question, why is the question different in Matthew's gospel, Matthew 24:3, than it is in Luke's and Mark's. Another explanation, which I think is more likely, is based on the fact that Matthew is often seen to use the very words of Jesus, including the Hebraisms that Jesus used and the disciples used, because Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience that would be familiar with the idioms. Mark and Luke, however, because they are not writing to Jewish audiences, but Roman audiences or Greek audiences, in the case of Luke, that being so, they don't use the idioms of the Hebrews.

They often paraphrase them. You'll find that Luke certainly does that in this discourse at a certain point, where Matthew and Mark both say, when you see the abomination of desolation, well, that certainly is a Hebraism if there ever was one. Abomination of desolation, very much a Hebraism, comes from Daniel the prophet.

Luke's quite sure that his reader will not know what abomination of desolation means, so he just paraphrases it. In Luke 21:20, he says, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies. This is the same statement, only paraphrased.

In other words, we know for a fact that Jesus spoke with Hebrew idioms to a Hebrew audience, but that Mark, and especially Luke, at times paraphrased into idioms or just plain speech, which their non-Jewish readers would more likely understand. For example, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven. That was a Hebraism for the kingdom of God.

Whenever Mark or Luke quote a statement of Jesus, which contained the expression kingdom of heaven, Mark and Luke changed it to kingdom of God. They're paraphrasing in order to make it clearer to a non-Jewish audience. Now, that makes me think that the question of the disciples employs Hebrew idioms, and that Mark and Luke have clarified what those idioms mean for their audience.

The disciples said to Jesus, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? Now, the coming here, we naturally associate with the second coming of Christ at the end of the world, but the end of the age is not necessarily the end of the world. There are more than one age. There is a Jewish age, the age of the law.

There is a kingdom age of the Messiah. There are many ages. Paul speaks about the ages to come.

An age is just a period of time that is characterized by some characteristic that changes when there's another age. Certainly, the destruction of the temple was the end of an age. The end of the age of the law, the end of the age of the temple, the end of the priesthood, the end of the whole Jewish commonwealth that God had set up through Moses.

That was the end of an age when Jerusalem fell. So, the end of the age doesn't have to mean at all the end of the world. It could just be referring to the destruction of the temple.

Likewise, the expression your coming, while we are inclined from our vantage point to say, oh, that's the second coming of Christ. Remember, the disciples didn't have any clear grasp of the fact that Jesus was going. They didn't understand he was even going to die and rise again, though he had told them.

He had also given them parables that allude to his going away and coming back, but they did not expect him to go. They had missed these hints. They thought he was here to stay, even after his resurrection.

In Acts 1.6, they said, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Is it time now to drive the Romans out and give Israel their independence again? They didn't know he was leaving, but that same day they asked the question, he ascended into heaven? And they were shocked. And the angels told him, well, he's going to come back. When they were hearing Jesus on this occasion, it's unlikely that they had a clear picture of the fact that he was going to go away and come back.

So, when they say, what's the sign of your coming? There's not any reason to think they would think of his coming like we think of it, because we take it for granted that he went away and will come back. They didn't have that concept. So, what did they mean by his coming? In my opinion, they were using a typical Jewish idiom found in many of the prophets about God coming.

And when God would judge a nation, though it would be through the agency usually of an army of some enemies or something, this judgment of God would be called God coming. God is coming against them. God is coming at the head of these pagan armies.

God wasn't literally or visibly coming, but he was coming through the agency of some force that was going to bring judgment that was a judgment from God. And therefore, the prophets were comfortable talking all the time about God coming in that sense, and they were not talking at all about what we call the second coming of Christ or any visible coming of God at all. It was an idiom that simply meant God judging.

And when Jesus predicted the judgment of the temple, the disciples said what I think they actually said, what Matthew said, they said, what is the sign of your coming and the

end of the age? That is, what is the sign of this judgment you've just described of the temple and the end of the Jewish age, the end of the temple age? In other words, their question in the Jewish idiom would not suggest at all what we think of by those words, because we're Gentiles. And likewise, since Mark and Luke are writing to Gentiles, instead of rendering their question exactly as they said it, they do what they often do. They paraphrase Jesus to make him understandable.

That's the disciples in this case, they paraphrase. The statement, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age really means what is the sign that these things are going to happen, the judgment of Jerusalem. So whether you're reading Matthew or Luke or Mark, I believe we've got the disciples asking the same question, and it's simply about Jerusalem being destroyed.

This happened in AD 70, but they didn't know it was going to happen then. Jesus just said it was going to happen. So they have two points of questioning.

When will it be, and will there be a sign given to let us know that it's coming soon? What sign will there be that it's imminent? There are two answers to these two questions. The answer to the first question is found in verse 32. The question, when will these things be, is answered in verse 32.

Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled. Actually, in Matthew it says all these things are fulfilled, which is the question they asked about. When will these things be? He said, well, this generation won't pass before these things be.

And so that's the answer to their question. It's going to happen in what time frame? This generation is the time frame. But what sign will there be that these things are about to happen? Well, that's answered in verse 20.

Jesus says, but when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. You know, it's about to happen. This is the sign.

In Mark and Matthew, this parallels Jesus saying, when you see the abomination of desolation standing in where it ought not to be. In both cases, or in all three cases, Jesus then tells them to flee from Jerusalem. That would do no good if it was the end of the world, but it would do good if Jerusalem is under attack and going to be destroyed.

In other words, they need a sign that it's about to take place because they have to get out and dodge. They got to escape before this comes crashing down. So they want to know two things.

What's the time frame of this? And is there some indicator we'll have to know that it's imminent and we need to get out of town? He says, yes, to both. It will happen in this generation. There will be a sign.

You'll see Jerusalem surrounded by armies. Then you'll flee. Okay.

So this is what this discourse is about. Now I said it's a controversial discourse. And the reason is simply because most people in modern times have seen this discourse as being about something very different.

Ever since dispensation became a reigning paradigm of evangelical thinking, many teachers have taught that this is talking about the last days, the end of the world, and especially a time they call the tribulation period. They believe that Jesus is now going to describe the seven years just immediately prior to the second coming. And he's giving a prophecy essentially about the second coming of Christ at the end of the world and telling them what will be happening in the tribulation period just before Jesus comes back.

Now, most of the people who interpret it this way believe the church will be raptured before any of this happens, that the church will be raptured before the tribulation. The church will be gone. Then God will bring seven years of judgment on the world and especially on Israel.

And then Jesus will come back and set up a millennial kingdom. This is the dispensational view. So their assumption going in is that this is not talking about anything that's already happened.

It's not talking about 70 AD. It's talking about a future tribulation period. And you will find as we read through it that many of the images and predictions are used commonly in modern popular eschatological teachings and popular novels and movies about eschatology about the end times.

The things that Jesus said are happening here are just taken for granted. He's talking about the tribulation period. He's talking about the end of the world.

Now, in other words, this is either talking about something that has not yet happened and not much will happen after it, but it'll happen at the very end, or it's talking about something that has happened in that generation, as Jesus said. Now, you might say, well, why would anyone think it was about the end of the world when Jesus said this generation will not pass till all these things have taken place? How could that be in reference to the end of the world, unless maybe Jesus missed his prediction and was wrong? Well, the dispensational answer is, well, there's two dispensational answers. They're not the same, but they both work for them.

One is, they say that the word generation means a race of people, a race or a family of people. Genea, the Greek word, can mean a race or tribe or group of people. And they say it's talking about the Jews, but Jesus, when he says this generation will not pass, means the Jewish race will not pass from existence.

Well, while it is technically possible for the word genea to mean a race of people, the question is, does it make sense for him to say that here? There's been no reference, actually, to the Jewish race in the entire passage. Why would he expect his disciples, when he says this race will not pass away, to associate that with the Jewish race or any other particular race when there's been no mention of race? Besides, if that's what he's saying, if he's not talking about a time period, then he has given them no answer to their question, when will these things be? That's their first question. If he says it's going to happen in this generation, that's a direct answer to their question.

If he's saying this race won't pass away till then, that's irrelevant to their question and irrelevant to anything. Whoever suggested that that race would pass away before then, whoever thought it, who would have dreamed it? Why do you have to tell us that? What's the point? That race has not been a subject of the topic in the discussion at all. There's no discussion here of the Jewish race in this passage.

Now, the other dispensational way to look at it is to say, when Jesus says this generation will not pass, that he means the generation that actually sees these signs take place will not pass until it's all done. In which case he's saying, when you begin to see these earthquakes and famines in diverse places and false messiahs and false prophets and wars and rumors of wars, then the generation that sees these will not pass until it's all done. But that would seem to be an overstatement if it's all going to happen in seven years.

Why not say this decade won't pass? Why this generation? That sets it way out much farther. Besides, Jesus should have said then, that generation will not pass rather than this generation. Because when a man says this generation, he's usually speaking about the generation that's listening to him and himself.

In fact, Jesus Gospel of Matthew uses the word this generation, the phrase, six times, I believe. And in all the other cases, he's talking about the people living at that time, this generation. It never means some generation that's later on.

And it would be very unnatural to take it that way. It's much more natural just to have him say what he says, this generation won't pass. It's very much like what he said in different words.

In Matthew chapter 16 and verse 28, he said, some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the son of man coming in his kingdom. Now coming is not the second coming, but this judgment on Jerusalem. In Matthew 16, 28, Jesus said, surely I say to you, there are some standing here who should not taste of death until they see the man coming in his kingdom.

The same comment is recorded both in Mark and Luke. I give it to you in Matthew because I've got Matthew much more memorized than Mark and Luke. And so I can find

those passages easier in Matthew, but the parallel is in Luke and in Mark.

So there you can't finagle the word generation because he actually uses different words. He says, some of you standing here won't die. That means some of the people of this generation will still be surviving, which means this generation will not pass entirely until this is done.

There's no way to get around that wording. And it's the same prediction, just in other wording. Clearly, Jesus is saying that the things he predicted would happen while some of those listening to him had not yet died.

In other words, that generation would not have all died off, would not pass. Okay, so it seems there seems absolutely no justification whatsoever to make this prophecy be about something other than the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. After all, that's what Jesus predicted.

It did happen in AD 70. They asked him when it would happen. His answer certainly must be in accordance with reality.

And it was. The interesting thing is most people don't know this because they don't know much about the history. They don't know that there was an abundance of earthquakes and famines and false messiahs and so forth in the years before AD 70.

But there were. Some of these are actually testified to in the Bible. The Bible speaks of certain great earthquakes in the gospels and in the book of Acts.

The Bible in the book of Acts talks about certain false prophets. And John, in 1 John says many false prophets have gone out into the world. And there were false Christs.

There were wars, plenty of them, and rumors of wars. Everything Jesus said was going to happen did happen before AD 70. Let's see what he actually says here.

They asked him the question, so he begins to answer it in verse 8. He said, take heed that you do not be deceived. For many will come in my name saying, I am he. And the time is drawn near.

Therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified. For these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.

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

But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogue and prisons. And you will be brought before kings and rulers for

my name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.

Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by your parents and brothers, relatives and friends.

And they will send some of you to your death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost.

In your patience possess you your souls. Now this statement, in your patience you possess your souls. Patience should be translated endurance.

And it's parallel to what Matthew renders as those who endure to the end shall be saved. That's the reference, the parallel statement in Matthew 24, a little clearer in terms of its actual meaning, of course. But he says in Matthew 24, 13, after he said all these things, he says, but he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Luke 21, 19 could be rendered, in your endurance you'll possess or retain your souls. You'll be saved rather than lose your souls. If you don't endure to the end, you will lose them.

You will not be saved. Now these things I just read over rather quickly, they're very famously used as signs of the times by modern teachers. There's earthquakes, famines, wars, false messiahs, certainly there's been plenty of those that have come along, false prophets.

And I know that when I was young, I used to repeat what my teachers told me about this. I even said things like, you know, there's been more earthquakes in the past hundred years than there were in all of recorded history before. And therefore, this must be the time Jesus spoke about earthquakes and so forth.

Now a couple of things I'd say about that. One is, how in the world would you know how many earthquakes there were before we had seismic measuring devices and the ability to count them up and know when they're happening? We can count earthquakes up from all over the world because we have sensors around that didn't exist more than 100 years ago. We can count earthquakes since then, but we can't count all the earthquakes that happened before then.

So this claim is rather claims to know too much. But more than that, even if it is true, Jesus did not say there'd be an increasing frequency of earthquakes. He just said there would be earthquake.

He did not say there'd be a lot compared to at other times. He just said there's gonna be earthquakes and famines and wars, but he says, don't let that bother you. That's not

really a sign of anything.

It's just that when there are big wars and earthquakes and famines, people begin to speculate, is this the end of the world? He says, no, there's gonna be earthquakes and stuff, but that's not the end of the world. I mean, you're always gonna have earthquakes. I don't really know whether there's more earthquakes now than there used to be, but if there are, it's irrelevant to what Jesus said.

He didn't say there will be an increased number of earthquakes. He just said there will be earthquakes and famines, all those kinds of things, such as there are at all times. But whenever these happen, at any time, people begin to speculate, is it the end of the world? And he's saying, no, no, it's not.

He says there at the end of verse nine, but the end will not come immediately. It's not upon you when these kinds of things are happening. Now, he does talk about, in verse 11, there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

Likewise, in verses 25 and following, he talks about there'll be signs in the sun and the moon and in the stars and on the earth, distress of nations, perplexity, et cetera, et cetera. Now, these signs in the heavens, what do we make of those? Well, there's various ways we can go on it. They can certainly be seen as symbolic or figurative in some cases, because such things are spoken of in figurative ways in the Old Testament by the prophets.

For example, the idea that the heavens would be rolled up like a scroll and the stars would fall from the sky like ripe figs from a fig tree is found in Isaiah 34 in a passage describing the fall of Edom, which happened like 500 years before Christ. You know, this heavens didn't roll up as a scroll. This is hyperbole.

These are judgment images that are not intended to be taken literally. And so one could say this is not literal. On the other hand, it's rather interesting that Josephus tells us that in the war of the Jews, which was about three and some years long, which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, there were a number of interesting signs, some of them in the heaven.

Josephus, who is not a Christian and did not see the significance in this that the Bible does, nonetheless was present to witness these things and recorded them. The survival of his record is almost providential because without the records of Josephus, we wouldn't know how many of these things actually happened. It seems that God has made sure that we would by preserving this ancient historian's work.

That's my interpretation of the survival of Josephus. I think it's divinely sanctioned. But here's the thing Josephus said.

He said there were many signs. He has a whole paragraph in there saying these things,

you wouldn't believe it. They're so weird.

You wouldn't believe they really happened if they weren't testified to by so many people who saw them. He said, for example, there's a star, the shape of a sword that hung over the city of Jerusalem for a whole year. That would be a sign in the sky.

He said on another occasion, people looked up and they saw in the clouds soldiers in armor running about in the clouds. Well, that'd be a sign of something. Remember, Jesus talked about how they'd see the sign of the Son of Man in the clouds coming with his angels.

I mean these things, Josephus, totally in ignorance of anything Jesus said about this, records these things happening. He said there were other things that happened on the earthly level. I won't go into catalog those, but there were supernatural signs being given and this prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

So there's really no reason to suggest that Jesus' words at the end of were anything other than literal there. He does say before Jerusalem fell, the disciples experienced great persecution and they did. He said some of them will be killed.

Well, some of them were. Interestingly, he says not one hair of your head will be lost. Well, if you're killed, what good is it that your hairs aren't lost? I mean, you don't want to be buried bald or something.

I mean, the truth is he's saying that though you die, you have really lost nothing in the long run. God is still preserving you beyond death. And it's a hyperbole, not a hair of your head will be ultimately lost.

There is a resurrection after all. And apparently all those hairs you have lost will be restored in the resurrection. I don't really know if we should apply it that way, but some of those who are bald may be glad to consider this a possibility.

All right. Now, interestingly, he says they're going to put you on trial. All the disciples were in fact put on trial.

Most of them were put to death. What Jesus predicted would happen in that generation did happen in that generation. He said, when you're before the synagogues, don't worry about what you'll say.

I'll give you the words. Remember, Jesus said that earlier when he sent out the 70 in chapter 10 of Luke, he said, when they put you before the synagogues, don't premeditate what you're going to say. But he said the spirit of your father will speak through you there.

Here he says, I will give you a mouth and wisdom. Certainly what is done through the

Holy Spirit is Jesus doing it. It's the same prediction.

He just in one place says, the spirit of God will give you the answer. He says, I'll give you the answer. It's the spirit of Christ clearly who does so.

Now, verse 20 says, but when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Now, I mentioned that this parallels, for example, Matthew 24, 15. If you follow, if you put Matthew 24 and Mark 13 and Luke 21 side by side, say open three different Bibles to these three passages and follow verse by verse this discourse, it becomes very clear what things are parallel to what things, although the gospel writers sometimes state things in slightly different words.

You can tell they're talking about the same discourse, the same order of comments. And at this point in the discourse, both Mark and Luke have Jesus say, when you see the abomination of desolation. Now, what is that? The expression, the abomination of desolation, which Luke does not use, but paraphrases, it comes from Daniel and it's used three different times in Daniel.

And it's not even always the same thing. Like for example, it says in Daniel 11 that Antiochus Epiphanes would set up the abomination that makes desolate. And it's referring to him sacrificing a pig on an altar to Zeus in the temple in 168 BC.

But then in another passage in Daniel chapter nine, it talks about when the Messiah has been cut off, then the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed and there will be an abomination of desolation. It actually says on the wing of abomination shall be one that makes desolate. There'll be an abomination that makes desolate.

That's abomination of desolation. He's referring to the Romans destroying Jerusalem after Jesus was crucified. Then there's a third reference in Daniel 12, and it's not clear which of the two he has in mind there, but he does use the term again.

It's a very typically Hebraic expression. Abomination is a Hebraism that means an idol, usually. In the Old Testament, the abominations that the prophets decried were idols, statues.

Desolation refers to God abandoning the city. There's going to be an abomination that marks or causes the abandonment of the city by God. It'll be desolate.

When Jesus walked out of the temple, he said, your house has left you desolate. And although Luke does not use the term abomination of desolation, he does say when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. So this connects with the word abomination of desolation.

There's an abomination that's going to cause desolation, and that desolation is near when the Romans are near. When you see the Romans coming against the city, it's near.

The presence of the Romans, especially as they eventually came into the temple itself, into the holy place, and even brought, as many people believe, their banners that had images of Caesar or carved images on their banner poles, these would be viewed by the Jews as an intrusion of paganism into the temple, an abomination.

The coming of the Romans against Jerusalem is what Luke understands to be meant by Jesus' words, abomination of desolation. And why not? Daniel used it that way in chapter 9. The Messiah would be cut off. The city would be destroyed.

There would be an abomination that makes it desolate. So certainly Daniel in chapter 9 speaks of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem as an abomination of desolation. And even if he didn't, Luke does, and Luke's a biblical writer.

Luke certainly reflected the understanding of this that the apostles had. He didn't make it up himself. He was a companion of the apostles and understood what they understood and held their views.

So it's clear the abomination of desolation is not some future antichrist putting an image of himself in a future rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This is the dispensational view, that the Jews will rebuild their temple in Jerusalem in the last days and the antichrist will come and put an image of himself in it. They say that is the abomination of desolation in the middle of the tribulation.

Interestingly enough, there's not one line in scripture that ever speaks about an antichrist putting an image of himself in a Jewish temple. Where does that idea come from? It comes from conflating two verses that aren't talking about the same thing. At least they're not saying the same thing.

One is that in Revelation 13 it says that the second beast will make an image of the first beast and he will require all people to worship that image. That's what we're told. We're not told it'll be in Jerusalem.

We're not told that it'll be in a temple. It's just an image that is made and people are required to make the image. It could be in New York City, it could be in Paris, it could be anywhere.

There's no geography and certainly no temple mentioned in Revelation 13, but the beast's image will be an object of worship and it is usually assumed that this beast is the antichrist. So, here you have the source of this idea of an image of the beast being worshipped, but nothing suggests it's going to be in a temple or in Jerusalem. Now, on the other hand, we have another passage in 2 Thessalonians 2. This passage does not mention the beast or the antichrist, but it does use a term, the man of lawlessness, and many people believe the man of lawlessness that Paul speaks of here is the same as John calls the antichrist in 1 John, or that Revelation refers to as the beast.

This identification is questionable to my mind. I can't rule it out, but I certainly don't see anything that necessitates this identification. And this man of lawlessness, it says about him in 2 Thessalonians 2, it says in verse 4 that this man of lawlessness opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped.

Now, by the way, if a future antichrist that did this would not at all be the first person to ever have done so. Many rulers and even popes have exalted themselves above God and everything that's worshipped. So that he, the man of sin, sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Now, it does not say here that he puts an image of himself in a temple. There's no suggestion ever made that an image of the man of sin is ever made at all, unless he's the same person as the beast, and that's disputable. One thing we do know that if both of them are the antichrist, one thing we can say is the antichrist then would himself sit in the temple because that's what's said.

He sits in the temple. And if the beast is the same person, then there's also an image of this man made somewhere and people are made to worship it, but not necessarily in the temple. If the beast, after all, rules the whole world, he might set up his image in Rome or anywhere he wants to.

The point here is there's no passage that itself says the antichrist will make an image of himself and put it in the temple. This is the whole assumption of dispensationalism that makes them identify that act with the abomination of desolation. Well, Luke tells us the abomination of desolation is the Roman armies coming, and this happened in AD 70, not some future time.

But what's more, even the thing that they identify as the abomination of desolation is a fabrication. It's not found in any scripture. So anyway, enough of that.

Verse 21, when they see the Roman armies coming, and this is that sign they ask for, what sign shall there be that these things are about to take place? Well, this is it, when you see the Romans coming, then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let those who are in the country not enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days, for there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people, and they will fall by the edge of the sword.

They'll be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Now, I could spend a very long time on these verses. There's so many parallels to other passages in scripture that would be helpful to make, but our time will not allow.

I did a lot of this, of course, when we were in Matthew 24, and those lectures can be accessed if you want more detail on this Olivet Discourse than I can give here. But suffice it to say that Jesus said when they see the armies coming, they should flee out of Jerusalem. The early Christian church did flee from Jerusalem.

According to Eusebius, the church in Jerusalem fled before the Romans got there, and the church escaped this horrible judgment that came on the city by doing so. Jesus told them to. They did.

Now, he said in verse 22, again speaking about this invasion of Jerusalem in AD 70, these are the days of vengeance. What vengeance? God is avenging the blood of the prophets and most especially of his son, because they didn't recognize the day of their visitation. This is coming upon them.

God's vengeance upon the enemies of his prophets and of his son. Remember, Jesus said all the blood of the righteous prophets that were sent, it's going to come on this generation. That's what he's talking about.

All things that are written, he said, will be fulfilled. Now, this is interesting because unless it's a complete hyperbole, it suggests that in the Old Testament, all things that were written were fulfilled by the time Jerusalem was destroyed. Of course, some things were fulfilled before that.

There were promises about the first coming of Christ that were already fulfilled. There were even promises about the fall of Babylon and Tyre and Edom that were already fulfilled. But the last things to be fulfilled, apparently, would have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem.

And Jesus said, this is going to happen so that all things that are written may be fulfilled. This strongly suggests that when we read Old Testament prophecies, we're not reading about anything that extends beyond AD 70 and its fulfillment. Now, there may be some.

I'm not going to be an absolutist about this because all things can certainly be a hyperbole. He might mean most things, the vast majority of things, with a few exceptions. All sometimes is used that way in the Bible.

And he might be using that. Maybe there are a few prophecies in the Old Testament that look beyond AD 70. But his statement certainly implies that a great mass of the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by this destruction.

And that means when we read Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, these prophecies, that we should expect to find considerable material that points to this event. And once we look for it, it's clearly there, which we cannot get into right now. He says, woe to those who are pregnant with babies, not because they're, you know, not because God's mad at them, but because they're in trouble.

They're trying to travel. They're pregnant. They're carrying babies.

They're trying to get out of Dodge and they can't get out easily. Jesus even said in Matthew 24, pray that your flight be not in the winter or on the Sabbath day. Why? It's so hard to travel.

The gates are shut on the Sabbath day. You can't buy provisions on the Sabbath day. Wintertime is a real bad time to try to travel without a car.

He said, this is going to be very inconvenient. Woe to those who have to make this trip at this time in these conditions. He said in verse 23, for there will be great distress in the land.

That is a phrase that refers to Israel and wrath upon this people, clearly a reference to the Jews. This is not a worldwide tribulation being described here. Actually, this is the very verse that parallels Matthew 24, 21.

Matthew 24, 21 says, then there should be great tribulation, such as none has been since the world began or ever shall be afterwards. That verse is paralleled here. There'll be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.

The great tribulation of which Jesus spoke is interpreted by Luke's paraphrase, apparently, as a tribulation upon the land of Israel and the people of Israel, not a worldwide situation. They'll fall by the edge of the sword. Verse 24 says, well, that certainly happened.

The Romans slaughtered probably at least 700,000 of them and be led away captive into all nations. That's what happened to the rest of them that weren't slaughtered. And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles.

That did happen and has been happening until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, apparently, a long period of time. The times of the Gentiles is not a self-explanatory phrase, but it's not found anywhere else in scripture either. We have to guess at what it means.

My guess is it means the time during which God is dealing with the Gentiles instead of the Jews. Until the temple is destroyed, the Jews were the focal point of God's dealings. After that, the Gentile evangelistic mission has certainly replaced what anything he's doing in Israel in terms of significance.

Another way to see it would be that the times that the Gentiles are allowed to overrun Israel would be the times of the Gentiles. There are other possible interpretations. Some people say the whole period of time of the four beasts of Daniel chapter 7 is the period of the times of the Gentiles.

So there's more than one way of looking at that. To me, I take the simplest view without any agendas to try to prove anything by it. The times of the Gentiles strikes me as the times when the Gentiles are ascendant.

And since they always are ascendant, because Jews are a small number, it must mean in the sight of God, that God is focusing on the Gentiles during that time, which would mean the church age. Okay? Verse 25, And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars. And on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth.

For the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.

Now those last two verses, 27 and 28, certainly sound like the second coming of Christ. And, of course, verses 25 and 26, if taken literally, sound like maybe it's referring to something future too. What I would suggest about verses 25 and 26 is they do use images which are paralleled in Matthew by similar images.

The sun being dark and the moon turned to blood is parallel to that in Matthew's version. These images are, as I said about some other things, common images in the Old Testament prophets when they're not talking about literal things like the heavens being dissolved and things like that. But they're really references in the prophets to the downfall of great empires, Babylon, Edom, Tyre, Assyria, and so forth, Egypt.

And so this kind of language is used when an empire falls. Although it sounds like it's the universe or the solar system, it's not really talking about that in most cases. Now these words are a little different than the way they're rendered in Matthew, but they seem they're the same passage, the same prediction.

And I tend to see these as probably symbolic. But let's take for a moment the possibility that they're not. Let's suggest that verses 25 through 28 are, in fact, a literal description of a literal second coming which is still future.

Does that mean we've been wrong in identifying the earlier material as being about AD 70? No. You can easily see the times of the Gentiles, last mentioned at the end of verse 24, as a long period of time. Jerusalem is destroyed in 70 AD.

The Gentiles trampled Jerusalem for how long? Well, until the end of the times of the Gentiles. And after that is the second coming. In other words, the age of the church intervenes between AD 70 and the second coming.

And that age could be covered simply by reference until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Paul talked about the fullness of the Gentiles coming in as sort of what's

happening in the church age, so it might be the same idea. So it is possible that the last line of verse 24 covers the entire age of the church and that we do have, in verses 25 through 28, the second coming of Christ.

It's not impossible, but it's not necessary. His statement about the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled does not necessarily mean now we're going to look at the end of that time. He could still be talking about, okay, he's mentioned how long that's going to last, but it's back to our main subject, the destruction of Jerusalem, all these things are going to happen.

And he's using, in that case, apocalyptic imagery, which is not to be taken overly literally. Now the statement, they'll see the Son of Man coming in verse 27 with cloud and great glory, that sounds probably more than any other passage, like it's talking about the second coming of Christ. But that very language is used, like I said, in the Old Testament of things that aren't the second coming of Christ.

The most close verbal parallel we have in the Old Testament is in Isaiah 19.1. In Isaiah 19.1, it's a prophecy about the Assyrians invading and conquering Egypt. You can read the whole chapter and see that that's what's discussed there. The chapter begins with this summary statement, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt.

Well, what does Isaiah say? God's coming on a cloud to Egypt. But really, it's the Assyrian armies that are coming to Egypt to conquer them. It's just a figure of speech.

God is sending the Assyrian armies. They are His hand, His agent of judgment, His saw, His axe, as He referred to them in chapter 10 of Isaiah. So they are God's tool.

God is coming through the agency of these invading armies against Egypt. But figuratively, it said God is coming on a cloud. Jesus says they'll see the Son of Man coming on a cloud.

This could be, if we allow ourselves to adopt the language the Jews were most familiar with, could be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem still, not a literal second coming at this point in the narrative. I'm not at all denying a future second coming. I'm saying, the question is, is this really talking about that or something else? That can go either way, as I've said.

You can make it the second coming if you want to, because that times the Gentiles would span the whole period from the destruction of Jerusalem until the second coming. Or, he could just be back on the subject again and using the same apocalyptic imagery that is familiar elsewhere in scripture. Verse 29, And he spoke to them a parable.

Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they're already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you, likewise, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. The only thing I'd say about this is the fig tree thing.

In Matthew, the parallel, it says, learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches are tender and it sends forth its shoots, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these begin to come to pass, know that it is near, even at the doors.

Distant satanists often say the fig tree is an image for Israel. And when Jesus says in Matthew 24 that you'll see Israel budding again, or the fig tree budding again, it's referring to the last days, the return of the Jews to their land, the restoration of the nation of Israel from its long slumber and exile, and that they believe in the last days the Jews will come back to Israel, the nation will be restored, and that is the budding of the fig tree. And then when Jesus said this generation will not pass, they sometimes say the generation he means is the generation that sees the fig tree budding.

This was the approach Hal Lindsey and many others like him took, and so he said, well, hey, Israel became a nation again in 1948. That was the budding of the fig tree Jesus spoke about. That generation that saw that would not pass.

So back in the 70s, Hal Lindsey and many like him said the second coming of Christ has to be within 40 years of 1948, no later than 1988. By the way, some of you wouldn't have been born yet if that prediction had come true, wouldn't have been born at all, wouldn't exist because you were born after that time. But fortunately for you, I suppose, that prediction was a misinterpretation, or at least fortunately for your parents.

I don't know if it's a blessing to have been born, but you're a blessing to your parents. So that's a good thing that Jesus tarried that long at least. But the point here is they're making a fundamental mistake.

They're saying the fig tree represents Israel, and the generation that sees the fig tree bud will see this all happen. That's where they're going with this. First of all, the fig tree does not represent Israel.

Luke makes that clear. Unlike Matthew, he says, look at the fig tree and all the trees. He's not using the fig tree as an image of Israel.

It's just one of the trees. When you see the trees begin to come back to life after winter, they've had a long winter slumber, and you see branches, fresh wood growing, leaves, eventually fruit. You know that summer is coming.

In the same way, he didn't say this generation will not pass. He said, in the same way, when you see all these things happen, know that it is near. The statement this generation should not pass is a standalone statement that's not necessarily related to the fig tree.

And the statement of the fig tree and all the trees is not really any different in significance than Luke 12, verses 54 and 55, where it says, then he also said to the multitudes, when you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say a shower is coming, and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say there will be hot weather, and there it is. Hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky, and you do not, he says, you do not discern this time.

The point is, you can look at nature and make certain predictions as to what the current natural importance are portending. You can tell what the weather's going to be from certain things going on right now. When you see this, you know this is coming.

He says also, when you see the fig trees and the other trees begin to bud, you know summer is near. He's just making references to the fact that we, on a regular basis, can make predictions of things that are impending by signs that they're about to happen. So he says, when these things begin to happen, that is when the Romans begin to surround Jerusalem, then know that it is near.

That's what he said in verse 20, then know that its desolation is near. So also, when you see the Romans coming, you know that this is happening. It's going to happen in this generation.

Okay, now finally, verse 34. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly, for it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole land. I know it says whole earth in our translation, but the word earth and land are the same Greek word, and he's already said it'll be distress in the land and wrath upon this people.

It's not on the whole earth, it's on the whole land of the Jews, Israel. Watch therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man. That is, you won't fall under his judgment, you'll continue to stand before him as you do now.

You'll survive this if you pray that you will be. Be careful, don't fall back into sinful patterns, don't melt back into the pagan society of the Jews, that is the unbelieving Jews. Don't be overcharged with gluttony and things like that, but stay alert, stay on your game, stay at the, you know, at the peak of your spiritual alertness and discipline, and he says pray that you can escape these things I've just described and you'll survive this.

And they did, the ones who had not died earlier than this, the Christians in Jerusalem did escape it, they did flee. He says in the daytime, it says he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and stayed on the Mount of Olives, either out under the stars because it was springtime, or possibly in Bethany at his friend's house, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They were on the Mount of Olives too.

Then early in the morning all the people came to him and in the temple to hear him. So this was the pattern of his final week. He'd stay each night on the Mount of Olives and he'd go into Jerusalem in the daytime and sit in the temple and teach.

This sermon was given not in the temple, but on the disciples. But much of his teaching in the final week was public, but these were not the things he was saying. All right, well we've used up more than the time allotted for this, and so we'll give you your break and we'll come back to chapter 22.