



When Your World Falls Apart Luke 21:20-24

Intro: It is only days before Jesus' death. He's defined true worship, prophesied the destruction of the Temple, instructed us to live faithfully and fearlessly under duress and now prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem.

Little by little, Jesus is removing everything the Jews trusted in so they will turn to him. This is a pattern he often uses in our lives as he teaches us how to live when our worlds fall apart.

First: God's Judgment in our Lives Is Certain (vv. 20–22)

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

Just days before he goes to the cross, Jesus' concern is still for those he loves. Here, he offers practical advice about something he knows is going to happen.

Note: There are things Jesus knew and didn't know. It's another one of those amazing things about Jesus who was fully God and fully man.

a) A word about Jesus.

1. As God, Jesus was omniscient and knew everything.

John 21:17 - *Lord, you know everything.*

John 16:30 - *Now we know that you know all things.*

This means that in His divine mind, nothing was hidden from Him.

2. As man, Jesus had limited human knowledge.

He voluntarily accepted the limits of human learning.

Luke 2:52 – And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature...

In becoming man, the eternal Son willingly limited the expression of His divine knowledge. He didn't lose omniscience; He veiled it. As theologians often say:

He did not cease to be what He was, but He became what He was not.

He learned as other humans do: by experience, observation, and instruction. This wasn't a flaw. It was part of what it meant for Him to become truly human

If He had simply "known everything" at every moment in His human consciousness, He would not have truly shared in our humanity or grown through obedience.

Matthew 24:36 - But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

3. The purpose of this self-limitation was identification and obedience.

By accepting human limitation, Jesus truly entered into our condition.

- He obeyed the Father in perfect trust (John 5:19, Philippians 2:8).
- He experienced dependence on the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14).
- He modeled faith, prayer, and submission as a real man.

He really was, *"...in every respect has been tempted as we are..."* (Hebrews 4:15).

APP:

- When you pray to Jesus, he really does understand the need to pray and the need to depend on God.
- When you wonder where God is in your life, Jesus really does understand. He's been there.

Again, this is just another amazing thing about Jesus and another reason to love him.

b) A Warning Fulfilled

- Jesus' prophecy came true in A.D. 70 when Titus surrounded Jerusalem.
- The "desolation" fulfilled centuries of warnings (cf. Deut. 28:49–57; Dan. 9:26–27).
- God's Word is not idle even when we wonder where he is or what he is doing. God is always active (Hb 1:3b). If he were not, reality would collapse.

c) The Holiness Behind the Judgment

- "Days of vengeance" does not mean cruelty; it means God's justice is complete.
- Judgment flows from his holiness, not hatred.

IMP: Why can't God just change his mind about judgement. Everybody could go to Heaven.

1 – God is (thrice) holy (Isaiah 6:3) and holiness cannot tolerate sin.

2 - Immutability (unchangeableness) is a necessary attribute of divinity. If God changed, i.e., ceased being holy, it would imply an imperfection. He would then cease to be God. All reality would collapse.

3 – God's character and attributes are constant. This guarantees his promises, making him trustworthy. We want and need a trustworthy God.

4 – We don't want God to change his mind about anything.

- The destruction of Jerusalem revealed that sin always brings desolation.

Throughout our lives, Jesus also judges the sin that betrays our love for him and harms us. Listen to this exhortation -

Hebrews 12:5-12 - *...have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? [Proverbs 3:11-12] "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may*

share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

We will talk more about this later, but God regularly dismantles our rival loves so that we are not carried away into worldliness and perhaps, even eternal destruction (1 John 2:17).

The Jews did love the Temple and Jerusalem, didn't they? But instead of serving as conduits of God's grace, sunbeams along which the Jews looked to the sun, the Temple and Jerusalem became ends, in-and-of-themselves.

And yet, judgement is never the end of what God intends. It too, is a means of grace for our sanctification and ultimate glorification. God judges to save.

APP: Jesus' future knowledge gives us confidence in his promises to us. He can make promises like John 5:24, Romans 8:28, 30 because he does know the future. If God fulfilled His Word in judgment, we can trust Him to fulfill His Word in salvation. All of his promises are coming true.

Second: In Times of Loss, We Must Respond Wisely (v. 21)

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it

a) Faith acts when Jesus speaks

- Jesus' instruction to flee was counterintuitive.

In the ancient world, cities built walls surrounding their castles and fortresses, but the majority of the population lived and worked outside of those walls. When invaders arrived, the people usually – and naturally - ran *into* the city for safety. Here, Jesus instructs his followers to do exactly the opposite.

- But believers who trusted Jesus' words escaped destruction by obeying before the siege closed.
- Early church history records that Christians fled to Pella and were spared.

ILL - After years of Roman occupation and growing unrest, the Jewish people revolted against Rome in AD 66. The general Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian, led a Roman force of approximately 60,000 men to crush the rebellion. An estimate for a maximum

population of Jerusalem at that time was 60,000 people. That's one armed, trained, weaponized soldier for every citizen of Jerusalem.

In AD 70, after a brutal siege, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Temple burned on the 9th of Av, the same day, according to Jewish tradition, that the First Temple (built by Solomon) had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that over a million people died, largely from starvation and internal conflict, and 97,000 were taken captive. The Romans burned the Temple, toppled its stones, and paraded the Temple treasures through Rome (depicted on the Arch of Titus, which you saw several weeks ago). The Temple mount was left in ruins, fulfilling Jesus's prophecy that,

Luke 21:6 - Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.

Early Christian historians like Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.3) and Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* 29.7) record that Christians fled Jerusalem before its destruction.

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, [of Jesus] vouchsafed to approved men [the apostles] there before the war, to leave the city and dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella."

— Eusebius, EH 3.5.3

Why Pella? (which is different from Petra/Isaiah 16:1; 2 Kings 14:7). Pella was a Greek-speaking city still under Roman control but east of the Jordan, across the Jordan River and about 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem. The community these Christians established became known as the Pella Church, one of the earliest Christian settlements outside Judea. (Modern Tabaqat Fahl, a small village in northern Jordan, sits on top of the ancient site and if you go there, you can see the remains of ancient churches, city walls, and homes but there's no active Christian congregation on the site today.

Picture of Church ruins in Pella – Look [here](#) and [here](#) for more pictures.

See Note #1 at the end of the sermon notes. Some people think Pella is Peniel. It is not, but it's an interesting study for the differences and similarities between Pella and Peniel.

PS – Christians fled to Pella in about 68. 960 Jews, who remained in Jerusalem until the siege began, fled to Masada two years later, in 70 AD, when the city was burned. That delay cost them their lives.

b) Faith Walks by Revelation, Not Reason

The point is that early Christians who remembered Jesus' warning obeyed his counter-intuitive instructions and were saved from the destruction of Jerusalem.

- a) Obedience may not make sense to the world, but it proves trust in God's Word.

Take the beatitudes for instance, words that are famously summarized in Jesus' encouragement to "*turn the other cheek*" (Matthew 5:39). This is counter-intuitive to our fallen nature.

Jesus doesn't tell us just to avoid evil, but to actively overcome it with good –

Romans 12:21 – *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- b) God's promises, warnings and judgement are invitations to life.

Proverbs 15:1-2 – *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.*

- c) The cross is the greatest example of this.

APP: Faith listens to God's Word even when it is contrary to the crowd.

ILL – Have you heard the story about the marching band parading down the street, all the musicians are in perfect step with each other, except for one drummer. That drummer is completely out of sync with the rest of the band. His beat is off, he's up when other bandmembers are down, right when everyone else is left. He seems to be marching to a totally different rhythm. When someone finally asks him why he's out of step, they realize he's wearing headphones and listening to his own music. He wasn't just being contrary. He was following a totally different beat that no one else could hear.

Our goal is to be in step with Jesus, even if it looks like we are out-of-step with others.

(For young people especially). As in the case of Jerusalem's destruction, when God says "go," obedience means safety.

Third: Judgement is Historical and Prophetic. 23-24

Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

a) What happened was a historical tragedy.

- Josephus reports famine, siege, and slaughter in which over a million perished.
- This was not random suffering but a sobering sign. Rejecting God's Son brings ruin.
- It did so in Eden, and in every act of rebellion ever since.

APP: How might this move us to pray for those we know in rebellion against God?

b) This judgement became a pattern for the future

- "*Until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" stretches the meaning beyond A.D. 70.
- Judgment on Jerusalem becomes a preview of global judgment and Christ's ultimate return.
- Yet again, this judgement opens the door for Gentiles to be saved.
- And God has not forgotten Israel.

Romans 11:11 - So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Ques: Is anyone interested in going to Israel late next summer before school restarts? If we can get 20 people to go, Teana and I will lead the tour.

As in so many things, God is doing more than one thing in everything he does.

- The past warns us of the future: what God did once, He can and will do again.

APP: The fall of Jerusalem is not just history. It's theology in motion. God's patience is long, but His justice is real. **You are not getting away with sin!**

Fourth: Justice and Mercy Stand Together.

Even in wrath, God remembers mercy.

- a) The door to salvation was opened for years before it was closed in judgement.

Note: God gave the Amorites 400 years to repent. But 400 years of unrepentance led to a greater judgement. (See Note #2 at the end of the sermon notes).

- For decades, Jesus had wept over Jerusalem and offered peace

Luke 19:41-44 - And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

APP: This is not only true of cities but people. Don't miss the day of your visitation –

Quoting Isaiah 49:8, Paul says, 2 Corinthians 6:2 - *Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

- The city rejected Him, but He still went to the cross for its people.

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of bliss
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.*

- b) The Cross Is the Only Safe Place in the Coming Storm

- Those who took refuge in Jesus's words found life even when their Jerusalem world fell apart.
- Eventually, however, even those died who made it safely to Pella. But they were forever safe in Jesus.
- Every generation faces the same choice: flee to Him or fall apart without Him.

APP: God's judgment is never the end of His story. It is love forevermore in Jesus.

Conclusion: Our God is the God who keeps his word.

- The destruction of Jerusalem proves that Jesus' words never fail.
- God's promises of judgment came true and so will His promises of salvation.
- What happened to a city can happen to a soul that resists Him.
- But whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13).

When judgment comes, where will you run? The same Lord who spoke of wrath on that day in Jerusalem, also stretches out His arms in mercy today.

Note #1

Some people think Pella is the same place as Peniel. I don't think so but there are interesting similarities.

First: Location and Context

- Peniel (also spelled Penuel or Peniel)
 - First appears in Genesis 32:30, where Jacob wrestles with God and says, *"I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."*
 - Meaning: "Face of God."
 - It's located east of the Jordan River, near the Jabbok River, in the territory later given to Gad (Judges 8:8–9).
- Pella
 - A city of the Decapolis, north of the Jordan Valley, in what is now modern-day Jordan.
 - Early Christian historians (notably Eusebius and Epiphanius) record that Christians fled from Jerusalem to Pella around A.D. 68–70 when they saw the Roman armies surrounding the city.
 - Meaning: possibly from the Greek *pella*, meaning "stone" or "city."
 - But this is not Petra either, even though Petra means "rock." Pella is in Northern Jordan. Petra is 150 miles south, in Southern Jordan. Some interpreters associate Petra, a fortress city, with a future place of refuge for Israel during end-time persecution (see interpretations of Revelation 12:6, 14 and Matthew 24:15–16).

Second: The Connection in Theme, Not Place

While Pella and Peniel are distinct in geography and era, they share a spiritual theme:

- Peniel is a place where Jacob met God and was spared.
- Pella is a place where the early Church found refuge through obedience to Jesus' words.

In both, God preserves His people through revelation and response:

- At Peniel, Jacob sees God's face and lives.
- At Pella, disciples heed Christ's warning and live.

Third: Symbolic Parallel

You could say:

- Peniel was the place where one man was spared by seeing God's face.
- Pella was the place where a people were spared by hearing God's word.

Both reveal that God's mercy always provides a way of escape for those who trust Him, whether through wrestling faith or obedient flight.

Note #2

God's 400-Year Patience and Perfect Judgment

First: The Promise and Delay - When God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15:13–16, He promised that Abraham's descendants would one day inherit the land, but not yet. The Lord said, *"The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."* That statement reveals His remarkable patience. For four hundred years, God withheld judgment, allowing time for the Amorites to repent. His justice never hurries. Like with the Egyptians and Ninevites, his mercy always gives space for repentance.

Second: The Judgment Arrives - Centuries later, when Israel entered Canaan, God's long patience reached its limit. The Amalekites and Amorites had continued in cruelty and idolatry, and the time for reckoning came. The same God who had waited for generations now acted in righteousness. His timing was neither impulsive nor delayed. It was perfect. See Deut 25:17–19; Ex 17:8–16; 1 Sam 15:1–3.

Together, these passages show the full arc:

- Genesis 15: God's promise/delay of judgment.
- Exodus 17: Amalek's cruelty.
- Deuteronomy 25: God's memory and moral rationale.
- 1 Samuel 15: The final execution of judgment.

Third: The Principle - Throughout Scripture, we see this pattern: God's patience is real, but not endless. He delays judgment to give space for repentance, yet when sin matures, justice falls with precision. As Peter later wrote, *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, but is patient toward you"* (2 Peter 3:9). Every warning, every delay, is an act of mercy designed to bring people back before the day of reckoning.

Fourth: The Connection to Luke 21:20–24 - When Jesus foretold Jerusalem's fall, He was not announcing a sudden punishment but the end of a long story of rejected

grace. God had sent prophets, messengers, and finally His Son. Like the Amorites, the city's sin had reached its fullness. Yet even this judgment served redemption. The gospel would now go out to all nations, beginning with the Gentiles.



CG Questions: Luke 21:20-24

Observation

What does the text say?

1. What physical event does Jesus describe in verse 20?
2. What specific instructions does He give to those in Judea, Jerusalem, and the countryside (v. 21)?
3. How does Jesus describe these days in verse 22?
4. What emotions or tone do you sense in verse 23 when Jesus says, "*Alas for women who are pregnant*"?
5. What final outcome does verse 24 predict for the people and for Jerusalem itself?

Interpretation

What does it mean?

6. Why might Jesus call this destruction the "*days of vengeance*"? Whose vengeance is it?
7. How does this prophecy show both the justice and the faithfulness of God?
8. Why do you think Jesus commanded His followers to flee rather than fight or resist?
9. What do these verses reveal about Jesus' compassion, even when speaking of judgment?
10. What might "*the times of the Gentiles*" mean in God's larger redemptive plan?

Correlation
Where else does the Bible say this?

11. How does this passage echo Old Testament warnings about Jerusalem's destruction (e.g., Jeremiah 6:6–8 or Micah 3:12)?
12. In what ways does Jesus' lament in Luke 19:41–44 connect emotionally and theologically with this prophecy?
13. How does Paul's teaching in Romans 11 about Israel and the Gentiles shed light on verse 24?
14. Where else in Scripture do we see God using tragedy or exile to bring people back to Himself?

Application
How should we respond?

15. When have you experienced God's loving discipline or warning in your own life? How did you respond?
16. What might obedience look like for you when God calls you to "flee" something destructive rather than resist it?
17. How can we maintain compassion and sorrow for those under judgment rather than self-righteousness?
18. In what ways does this passage challenge our understanding of God's justice and mercy working together?
19. How might "*the times of the Gentiles*" motivate us toward prayer or evangelism?
20. What does this text teach you about trusting God when events seem dark or chaotic?



Mon, Oct 13th. Read Luke 21:20. Jesus warned His followers that Jerusalem's destruction would not be random but a fulfillment of God's purpose. He wasn't predicting chaos but revealing that God's justice would unfold in history. God is patient, but His patience is not permission for rebellion. He gives warnings so we might turn before destruction comes. Where do you see God's mercy giving you, or others time to repent before consequences arrive? Form a prayer of gratefulness and repentance to God and let your prayer lead you to praise...

*O worship the King all-glorious above,
O gratefully sing his power and his love:
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.*

Tues, Oct 14th. Read Luke 21:21. Jesus told his followers to flee when the time came, not to fight or resist, but to escape. Obedience may look like retreat to the world, yet it is often the truest act of faith. God sometimes calls us to stand, and other times to flee. The key is not courage for its own sake but trust in His voice. Are you willing to obey God even when his call is unexpected or countercultural? Ask the Lord to give you a sensitive and obedient heart. Then sing,

*O tell of his might and sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.*

Wed, Oct 15th. Read Luke 21:22. Judgment is not rageful vengeance, but justice carried out by a righteous King. God keeps His word; both as promises and warnings. Jerusalem's destruction reminds us that God's holiness cannot be mocked, yet also that

His faithfulness never fails. How can you reconcile God's mercy and justice without denying either? Whom can you help understand this concept? Ask the Lord to help you trust his justice and mercy, even when you don't understand either. Then, remind yourself of his love by singing,

*Your bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.*

Thurs, Oct 16th. Read Luke 21:23. Jesus did not speak coldly of judgment. His "woe" shows deep compassion for those who would endure the horror of war and exile. Even in warning, His heart breaks. True prophecy always carries tears. We must never delight in judgment but grieve for those far from grace. Do you share Christ's sorrow for those who face suffering and judgment without hope? Ask the Lord to give you a heart of mercy, not judgement, for those who reject God's mercy. This verse will help you remember we are all,

*Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail.
Your mercies, how tender, how firm to the end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!*

Fri, Oct 17th. Read Luke 21:24. Though Jerusalem fell, God's purpose did not fail. Its fall opened a door for the gospel to reach the nations. His justice cleared the stage for His global mercy. What seems like the end in human eyes often becomes the beginning of His redemptive work. Can you see God's redemptive hand even in seasons of personal loss or confusion? Ask the Lord to help you trust that His redemptive purposes, when you don't see him working and when his work causes sorrow to you or others.

*O measureless Might, unchangeable Love,
whom angels delight to worship above!
Your ransomed creation, with glory ablaze,
in true adoration shall sing to your praise!*

Weekend Thought

As you reflect on or prepare to teach this passage, remember that Jesus' words are both historical and prophetic. They are a merciful warning, a picture of judgment. Yet, in every

act of judgment, mercy still calls. The cross stands as proof that God's justice and grace meet perfectly in His Son.

Remember that, when you or people you love don't understand God's work in the world. Worship the Lord this weekend with reverent awe and deep gratitude. The One who warns and the one who judges is also the One who saves, now and forevermore.