

## “Looking Ahead”

May 9, 2021

Luke 21:5-19

### I. Introduction

For the disciples, the past week had been unbelievable. On the way to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus had healed blind Bartimaeus just outside Jericho ([Luke 18:35-43](#)). Then, as Jesus and His disciples were entering Jericho, Jesus had spied Zacchaeus, the tax collector, hanging from a sycamore-fig tree. After getting him to come down, they had gone to Zacchaeus’ house where Jesus and His disciples had spent the day ([Luke 19:1-10](#)). Then came Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sunday. Being part of that procession must have given the disciples goose bumps. That night they all stayed at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus ([Mark 11:1-11](#)). Emotions must have been near the boiling point—I suspect several weren’t able to sleep at all—the Messiah was coming! Monday they all returned to the temple where Jesus, in righteous anger, had driven the merchants and the buyers out of the temple. While there, Jesus had accused the leadership of turning God’s house into “[a den of robbers](#).” But instead of repenting, the religious leaders plotted to kill their own Messiah ([Luke 19:47](#)). Jesus and His disciples spent that night back at Bethany with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Tuesday and Wednesday went quickly as Jesus taught and healed in the temple. And now, it was Wednesday evening of Passion Week. All of the scribes’, Pharisees’, and Sadducees’ attempts to publicly humiliate and destroy Jesus had failed miserably and “[no one dared to ask Him any more questions](#)” ([Luke 20:20](#)). [Matthew 23:1-36](#) records the last sermon Jesus preached to the crowds where He condemned the religious leaders and warned the people of the destructive influence of hypocrisy. To see Jesus final words in the temple, [turn to Matthew 23:37-39](#).

Since the disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah ([Mark 8:29](#)) and the Son of God ([Matthew 14:33](#)) and after all that had just happened, they must have expected Jesus to usher in the messianic kingdom. Although He had repeatedly told them, somehow, they had overlooked Jesus’ death and resurrection that had to occur first. Like the Jews in general, the disciples expected just a single

coming of the Messiah. But God's plan was for the Messiah to come twice—first as the Suffering Servant of [Isaiah 53](#) and, later, as the conquering King of [Revelation 19](#)—with a period of time between the two advents. In today's verses, Jesus prophetically described things that would occur during the time between His 1<sup>st</sup> coming and His return. Looking ahead, Jesus gave five coming certainties beginning with the Destruction of the Temple.

## **II. Five Coming Certainties**

**A. The Destruction of the Temple** After resting in the temple courts, as Jesus and the disciples were leaving the temple for the night, “[some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God.](#)” Built of polished white stones with its eastern wall covered in gold, the temple’s main structure gleamed in the evening light. The temple and the surrounding buildings had taken nearly 50 years to build, and they weren’t finished yet. King Herod had used huge blocks of marble—some weighed 100 tons and measured 37 feet long, 18 feet wide, and 12 feet high. No matter how one looked at it, the temple was an awesome sight.

The size and splendor of the temple was a symbol of strength and permanence—nothing could destroy God’s temple. But Jesus replied, “[As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.](#)” Sadly, Jesus had no hope for the temple. In AD 70, Jesus’ words were fulfilled when the Roman army under Titus Vespasian destroyed the city and the entire temple complex. As God’s instruments of justice, the Romans built massive fires inside and around the temple that caused the stones to crumble in the intense heat. The final bits and pieces were smashed and sifted until all the melted gold was found and then the remaining rubble was thrown into the adjacent valley. All that was left were the massive foundation stones that formed the footing for the retaining wall under the temple mount—stones that make up the Wailing Wall today.

**B. Many Will be Deceived** Having crossed the Kidron Valley and climbed the Mount of Olives, Jesus and His disciples looked back at the temple. [Mark 13:3](#) says that as they looked back, “[Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that](#)

they are all about to be fulfilled?”” Having heard the prophesy of the temple’s destruction, they wanted to hear more about the future—what was ahead. According to [Matthew 24:3](#), their whole question was, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Just like people today, they wanted to know about the end of the present age.

In His response to the disciples’ question, which is also recorded in [Matthew 24-25](#) and [Mark 13](#), we see the longest recorded answer given by Jesus to any question. Since this conversation occurred on the Mount of Olives, this discourse is often called the Olivet Discourse.

In answer to their question, Jesus gave some warning signs—in [Matthew 24:8](#) Jesus called them “birth pains”—that would precede His return. Like birth pains, these signs will come suddenly and increase in intensity. They will lead to a time of terrible sorrow and tribulation for the whole world. Jesus warned that one sign was that the world will experience ever-increasing deception by false Messiahs and false teachers—“Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them.” This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> certainty: many will be deceived. Jesus told His disciples to “Watch out”—for that matter, Christians are warned through Scripture to be on guard.

**Turn to 1 John 4:1-3.** There have been false messiahs, false prophets, and their misled disciples throughout history, but their numbers will increase towards the end of the age—leading up to the ultimate false teacher—the Antichrist of [Daniel 8:23](#) and [Revelation 13:1-10](#).

**C. Disasters in the World** Jesus continued by warning about the 3<sup>rd</sup> certainty: disasters in the world. He began by warning about political conflict--disasters among nations. “Wars and uprisings” have been a reality throughout history, including today, but, following Jesus’ analogy of increased pains, these calamities will increase in magnitude and intensity as the end of this age approaches. Jesus said “do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”

In addition to “nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven”—physical disasters. The Book of Revelation records several great earthquakes that are part of

God's wrath during the Tribulation itself (Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). As well as wars and earthquakes, famines, pestilences (like the pandemic we're living in right now), fearful events (like the massive wildfires we've seen in the west), and great signs from heaven (like the severe storms we've seen recently)—all these things have been active throughout the history of the world. Jesus warned, “Don’t expect things to get better.” Conditions in the world will deteriorate as ours is a mutilated, cursed planet, suffering the consequences of the fall and groaning for its redemption—Romans 8:19 says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” Just as when the moment of childbirth grows closer, the pains intensify both in frequency and severity, the disasters that are found throughout history will increase in frequency and severity as the end of this age approaches, culminating with wars, famines, and plagues in the Tribulation itself that kill large numbers of people (Revelation 6:1-17).

**D. Increased Persecution** Jesus said, “But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.” This is the 4<sup>th</sup> certainty: increased persecution. As Jesus had warned several times, persecution will come to those who follow Him—not just to the 12 Apostles but to all Christians. The Apostle Paul wrote later in 2 Timothy 3:12, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

It's not easy to face courts, governors, and kings, but Jesus said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.” This isn't an excuse for poorly prepared preachers or teachers, it is an encouragement for all believers who sincerely want to witness for Christ and honor Him. In John 14:26 Jesus said, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Every Christian has the Holy Spirit inside them as a Counselor, Teacher, and Guide.

Jesus added that this persecution would also come from members of one's own family, “You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to

**death.”** Those who follow Christ must expect to endure persecution even from their most intimate friends and family members. However, there is a ray of hope in this darkness, persecution may result in death, but not even death can stop the spread of the Gospel.

**E. Deliverance of Believers** The reason the world hates believers is because it hates the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus said, “**Everyone will hate you because of me.**” Jesus expanded this thought later in the Upper Room—**turn to John 15:18-20.**

Jesus finished by saying that those who endure suffering for His sake demonstrate by that very endurance that they are genuine believers: “**Stand firm, and you will win life.**” This is the final certainty: Deliverance of Believers. Conversely, those who fall away when persecution comes reveal that they never truly possessed saving faith in the first place—**1 John 2:19** says, “**They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.**”

### **III. Conclusion**

The things Jesus described in today’s Scripture are not signs of His soon return, because they have been going on for centuries. However, as the coming of the Lord draws near, these things will multiply and intensify. Because God is in control and because we know “*the rest of the story,*” Jesus cautioned, “**Watch out that you are not deceived,**” “**Do not be frightened,**” “**Make up your mind not to worry.**”

There’s a saying that goes “*Forewarned is Forearmed.*” Jesus has warned us over and over about what would happen in the future—we have been forewarned. We shouldn’t be surprised, worried, frightened, or deceived at what is happening in the world around us: The temple has been destroyed. There are obviously many false teachers around—some claiming to preach this Book, but the liberal “Jesus” is really an antichrist. There seems to be an increasing number of disasters—wars and uprisings are on the rise—there’s Islamic terrorism throughout the world, there’s North Korea and Iran both threatening to take on the world, Russia and China rattling sabers. Famines, earthquakes, plagues, and other natural phenomena are increasing in number and severity. Persecution is on the rise throughout the

world—including here in the United States—for example, we could talk about LGBTQ agenda. But in the midst of all the warnings, Jesus reminds those who trust in Him that they will be saved spiritually—“Not a hair of your head will perish.”

Jesus and the Scriptures don’t tell us these things to scare us but to encourage us. As the frequency of the birth pains increase, we can look ahead to a time when sin and all its consequences will be done away with; a time when “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). In John 14:3 Jesus said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” 1 Thessalonians 4:17 reminds us that “We will be with the Lord forever.” For the Christian, the time ahead is a time of peace, joy, and love.

But as we look ahead, we must not forget the here and now. We still have the Prime Directive, the Great Commission from Matthew 28:19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Romans 10:13-14 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Time is short; we must share the Gospel with others before it is too late—before God says, “Enough is enough!” How about you? Are you sharing the Gospel with others or is your Christianity a well-kept secret? In Matthew 10:32 Jesus said, “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” What do your words, your actions say about you? What will Jesus say?