

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-22-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Luke 21:25-36

<sup>25</sup>[Jesus said to the disciples] “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup>People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup>Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

<sup>29</sup>Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup>as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. <sup>34</sup>“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup>like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

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The themes of Luke 21 are parallel to the reading from Mark 13 we had two weeks ago as our gospel lesson. In contrast to Mark, however, in which the signs of “the beginning of the birth pangs” were general in nature—wars, rumors of wars, conflicts between nations, earthquakes, and famines—Luke’s signs are more specific in nature and point not toward “the beginning of the end,” but rather toward “the redemption” of the disciples. In my commentary on Mark I mentioned that one could easily find parallels with Mark’s “signs” at virtually any time in history. We have always known wars, rumors of wars, national conflicts, earthquakes, and famines throughout human history. Here in Luke, Jesus gives us much more specific signs that have no obvious parallel in our world today or up to this point in history: “signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars...distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves...people [fainting] from fear and foreboding...the powers of the heavens [being] shaken...‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.” It is not immediately clear what these signs even mean. They are far less ordinary than those described by Mark. The only clear reference is in v. 27—the Son of Man coming in cloud clearly refers to Daniel 7:13. Otherwise, it is unclear what sort of signs in the heavens Jesus has in mind. Would these be eclipses? Meteors? Or something entirely supernatural, even to our “advanced” scientific minds? Further, it is not clear what he means by confusion over the roaring of the sea and the waves. Perhaps, taken in tandem with the idea of signs in the moon, we may surmise that a problem with the moon would also mean irregular tides. The idea seems to be that the ordinary way of things will break down. In the creation story in Genesis, remember, God set the heavenly bodies in their courses and separated land from water. This apocalyptic vision seems to indicate the undoing of that good order which God set into place at creation.

The key here, however, is that the reaction of the disciples to these things is to be distinct. While the people (generally) will faint—that is, lose morale and become despondent—the disciples are, by contrast, to “stand up and raise their heads” since these signs are to be signs that their redemption is drawing near. As terrible as these signs seem to be, they are, in fact, good news to those whom God has called and chosen.

**<sup>29</sup>Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup>as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.**

This very short parable has a double meaning. On one level the blooming of the fig tree and all other trees which shows forth the coming of the summer season symbolizes the signs Jesus has referenced which show forth the coming of the kingdom of God. On the other level, the fig tree is used throughout scripture to refer to the nation of Israel. In this same fashion, “all the trees” may refer to the nations other than Israel. Also, the reference to summer brings to mind Amos 8:1-2 in which God contrasts “a basket of summer fruit” (Hebrew *quayets*) with “the end” (Hebrew *quets*). Jesus is playing off of these multiple meanings to point toward the coming of the end of the age and the kingdom of God.

**<sup>32</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**

Jesus gives the disciples reassurance here that his words will endure even if all else is destroyed. Therefore, the disciples can trust in his words no matter what happens. The most natural reading of v. 32 is that Jesus fully expected the end of the age to come soon and that most of those alive and listening to him at that time would themselves witness this end event. Because it seems that didn't happen literally, many interpreters have suggested alternative options. Perhaps Jesus used “this generation” to refer to Israel, to those who are evil or depraved, or humankind in general. The main point is that no matter what happens, Christ promises to be faithful and that his words will endure no matter what.

**<sup>34</sup>“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup>like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

Again, Jesus gives words of assurance amidst frightening events. He urges the disciples to “be on guard,” to not become “weighed down with overindulgence and intoxication and anxieties” in order to avoid being snared by the coming end day. Further, he urges them to “be alert at all times” and to pray for strength to escape the things Jesus has mentioned before in order to stand before the Son of Man. Christians are to live with an awareness of God and of the end to come. These signs and warnings are not intended to frighten us or cause us to waste time speculating about the end times, but rather they are meant to be an encouragement and an assurance that Christ's word will endure and we will indeed be redeemed.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. What events do you think Jesus is referring to when he talks about these signs to come?**
- 2. What do you think Jesus means when he tells the disciples to “stand up and raise your heads?”**
- 3. How can we be on guard and be alert as Jesus urges us to do here?**