

Luke 21:5-38 — Signs of the End of the Age

⁵ Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, ⁶ “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.”

⁷ “Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?”

⁸ He replied: “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. ⁹ When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”

¹⁰ Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

¹² “But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ This will result in your being witnesses to them. ¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ All men will hate you because of me. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By standing firm you will gain life.

²⁰ “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. ²² For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. ²³ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

³⁷ Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, ³⁸ and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

Luke 21:5-38

1. What do you think of people who make predictions about the future (seers, clairvoyants, Nostradamus, astrologers, prophets, etc)?
2. How did the disciples respond to Jesus' prediction concerning the temple? (21:7, Matthew 24:3)
3. What signs of the end of the age did Jesus tell us to expect? (21:8-13)
4. Are the events Jesus described in Verses 21:8-18 only sign of the end of the age or are some or all of them characteristic of the present age? Which signs have been fulfilled or do you see being fulfilled today?
5. Can you see why some people have predicted the end of the age would occur in 130 (Rabbi Jose), 400 (Hippolytus), 950 (Adso of Montier-en-Der), 1000 (many), 1533 (Michael Stiefel), 1715 (Isaac Newton), 1836 (John Wesley), 1914 (Jehovah's Witnesses), 1970 (The True Light Church of Christ), 1986 (Moses David), 1988 (Lighthouse Gospel Tract Foundation, others), 2000-2001 (many). For hundreds of additional dates, see <http://www.bible.ca/pre-date-setters.htm>.
6. Why did Jesus tell his followers not to worry about what will happen to them? (21:14) What promises did Jesus give his disciples? (21:18-19)
7. Why will a time of punishment be necessary? (21:22) (Isaiah 63:4, Jeremiah 5:29, Hosea 9:7)
8. What should the response of Christians be to the many signs of the end? (21:28)
9. Why would the wisdom Jesus provides be so necessary during the persecution?
10. Why did Jesus tell the short parable in Verses 29-31?
11. Verse 32 is very difficult to understand unless you understand who Jesus referred to when he said, "this generation." Who does He mean?
12. What final advice did Jesus give? (21:34-36)
13. What can *you* do now to get ready for Christ's return?

Q11. Verse 32 taken at face value, seems to imply fulfillment within the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries. The keyword to understanding the verse is the meaning of the word "generation." It has been the focus of lots of controversy about what Jesus meant. Here are some of the possibilities:

1. Generation = "the people living in Jesus' day," with the fulfillment seen in the fall of Jerusalem, or with the fall of Jerusalem as a type of this end.

2. Generation = "the people living in Jesus' day," so that Jesus was wrong in his prediction that the end would occur within a few years. However, he says he doesn't know the time (Mark 13:32).

3. Generation = "the elect," Christ's followers who would persist right through to the end. This view was held by some of the Church Fathers.

4. Generation = "the Jewish nation."

5. This Generation = doesn't refer to a time period, but to "people who stubbornly turn their backs on God's purpose," following the use of the phrase "this generation" elsewhere in Luke's Gospel. (7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32, 50-51; 16:8; 17:25)

I don't believe Jesus was mistaken; therefore I reject #2 above. #1 doesn't seem compelling to me from the context. Perhaps the truth is closer to #3, #4, and #5 -- that "this generation" refers to the current mix of stubborn unbelievers sprinkled with some believers, that will continue to the very end. Look at the verses in Luke which use the phrase "this generation." I think you'll find them very suggestive of the meaning of the phrase here (see footnote 3 below). Dr. Joel Green comments,

“ ‘This generation’ refers in Luke’s narrative not to a set number of decades or to people living at such-and-such a time, but to people who stubbornly turn their backs on the divine purpose. Jesus’ followers can expect hostility and calamity until the very end.”

I tend to agree. I think Jesus is saying that the End will come not to another type of people (perfected saints in their resurrection bodies or some other group), but for the type or "set" of people living in Jesus' day, who, like their fathers, had persecuted the prophets before them. It is "this generation," this "set" of people whom Jesus had come to give his life to redeem. I believe "this generation" includes you and me. "I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." Perhaps the idea of an epoch or era describes the idea I think Jesus is conveying here.

Jesus is insistent. Verse 32 contains a double negative in the Greek, meaning "certainly" or "surely." Jesus is emphasizing that all these things must take place before the End. God's Word will never pass away!—Dr. Ralph F. Wilson