



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 21

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

Chapter Outline

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The Widow's Two Mites 21:1-4

- There was a treasury within the Temple complex where people could make donations for the support of the poor
- Perhaps Jesus was standing not far from that *treasury*
- So, Jesus noticed a line of rich people who put in a lot of money, perhaps making some kind of display to call attention to their gifts
- He took particular notice of a widow above all the rest
- The poor, and the widow, are regarded by Him, and are His care
- *poor widow*, A widow miserably poor; her being miserably poor reinforced the value of the action



The Widow's Two Mites 21:1-4

- The mite was the smallest current coin
- Two of these little pieces were the smallest legal offering which could be dropped into the *treasury*
- The widow might have kept one coin for herself, and no one would blame her if she did
- Giving one meant giving half of all her money
- Instead, she gave with astonishing generosity
- Since there was only coinage at this period, when the wealthy threw in their contributions the sound of the coins most probably made an obvious sound while the poor widow's two coins only made two small sounds as they fell into the box



The Widow's Two Mites 21:1-4

- In contrast to the insincere, fruitless and money loving scribes, Jesus points out a poor widow who does not place material wealth before her duty to God
- What a contrast between the poor widow and the scribes who "devour the houses of widows"! Luke 20:47
- "one coin out of a little is better than a treasure out of much, and it is not considered how much is given, but how much remains behind." St. Ambrose
- Jesus did not say that she put in more than *any one* of them
- He said that she put in *more than all* of them – all of them put together



The Widow's Two Mites 21:1-4

- Jesus see us when we give
- He notices how much we give but is far more interested in the faith and motive and heart in giving than simply the amount
- The value of a gift is determined by what it costs the giver
- This is what made the widow's gift so valuable
- David refused to give God *that which cost me nothing* (2 Samuel 24:24)
- The widow challenges the mindset that says, "I'll give when I have more"
- The widow had almost nothing yet was a giver



The Widow's Two Mites 21:1-4

- God does not need our money
- If God needed our money, then how much we give would be more important than our heart in giving
- Instead, it is *our* privilege to give to Him, and we need to give because it is good for us, not because it is good for God
- The number 2 refers to love; for the two coins are nothing other than the gift of love that our Lord Jesus accepts joyfully, love for God and for others

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 21:5-6



- *as some spoke of the temple*, We learn from the other Evangelists that those who spoke were the Apostles, and that the question was asked as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives opposite to the Temple
- This temple was greatly expanded and improved by Herod
- Herod's rebuilding work started in 19 BC, and was only completed in 63 AD, taking more than eighty years
- It was finished only seven years before it was destroyed
- The temple was not just big, it was also beautiful

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 21:5-6



- The Jewish historian Josephus said that the temple was covered on the outside with gold plates, that were so brilliant that when the sun shone on them, it was blinding to look at
- Where there was no gold, there were blocks of marble of such a pure white that from a distance, travelers thought there was snow on the temple mount
- The primary source for the historical event of the destruction of Jerusalem is the Jewish priest/historian, Flavius Josephus, who was an eyewitness to the siege and capture of Jerusalem by the Roman legions in 70 AD

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 21:5-6



- Lord's prediction was fulfilled in the most literal manner
- His words were fulfilled, in spite of the strong wish of Titus to spare the temple
- Josephus, writing upon the complete demolition of the city and temple, says that, with the exception of Herod's three great towers and part of the western wall, the whole circuit of the city was so thoroughly levelled that no one visiting it would believe that it had ever been inhabited

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple 21:5-6



- God gave the Jewish people who resisted Jesus 40 years to come to the New Covenant as a new generation in Christ, just as He gave Israel 40 years in the wilderness to fully embrace the Sinai Covenant
- But judgment finally came in 70 AD when the Roman army completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple by fire
- The Temple was never rebuilt
- It was the house Jesus spoke of when He said: *“See! Your house is left to you desolate;”* (Matthew 23:38)

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- The questioners were according to St. Mark's Gospel Peter and James and John and Andrew, Mark 13:3
- *when...and what sign*, Our Lord does not respond to the question when and leave it unanswered and only deals with the second part of the questions; the signs
- It is the harder to distinguish between the signs Christ gives of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the day of judgment
- Both Matthew and Luke make it clear that Jesus spoke of both the coming destruction of Jerusalem, and of the ultimate end of the age and His glorious return

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- Some thinks that God in the destruction of Jerusalem intended to give an example of the ruin of the world at the last day
- So as signs of the same kind with those seen before Jerusalem was destroyed, shall be seen before the great and terrible day of our Lord's coming to judge the world
- Jesus warned the disciples that many would be deceived as they anticipated His return
- In his description of the Jewish rebel against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem, Josephus reports the appearance of many false prophets claiming to be the Messiah who led the people astray

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- What Jesus said here applied both to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the yet to be fulfilled return of Jesus at the end of the age
- Josephus describe the period which immediately followed the Crucifixion as full of wars, crimes, violence, and earthquakes
- In the late 50's and into the 60's AD the Roman Empire, led by an evil and ineffective Emperor Nero, faced a number of risings in the regions
- In some sense, there were *wars* and *Commotions*, unsettled conditions, preceding the destruction of Jerusalem
- The Romans were frequently at war with the Jews, the Samaritans, the Syrians, and others during this period

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- Jesus specifically said that *none* of these things are the specific signs of His immediate coming
- We should expect that *wars, famines, earthquakes*, would become *more frequent* and *more intense* before the return of Jesus – without any one of them being the specific sign of the end
- Matthew 24:8 described these things as *the beginning of sorrows*
- In the broader Roman Empire there were notable *earthquakes* before Jerusalem was destroyed and there were *famines*, such as the one mentioned in Acts 11:28
- *signs from heaven*, Josephus, in his preface to the Jewish war, lists many, one of which is that a star hung over the city like a sword; and a comet continued a whole year

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- Because humanity will be divided against itself, and one nation will rise against another, and one kingdom against the other, thus earth and heaven will declare their wrath on mankind
- The earth will cry out the great earthquakes, just as in the day the Lord of glory was crucified (Matthew 27:51)
- The Lord has informed us of these things ahead of time, so that their impact would be less severe, and so that the believers would not lose their inner peace
- The Lord's declaration of these wars may have been for the believers' sake lest they doubt

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- The special indication that the sufferings from persecution should precede wars, famines, etc., is peculiar to St. Luke
- Between Jesus' Ascension and the Jewish Revolt that began in 66 AD and reached its climax in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the faithful of the New Covenant Church suffered many persecutions
- Examples in Acts 3:11-22, 5:19, 6:8-15, 7:58-60, 8:3, 9:2, 12:1-5, 16:23, 18:12-17, 21:30-33, 22:30, 23:12,24,26,31-35, 24:10-27, 25:1-26:32, 27:1, 28:17-19,30-31
- St. Peter and St. John were arrested, imprisoned, and tried by the Sanhedrin

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- St. Stephen and St. James were martyred and St. Paul and other disciples were beaten
- St. Paul was arrested by the Romans, imprisoned, and spoke the Gospel before two Roman governors (Felix and Festus), a Jewish King (Herod Antipas II) and two Jewish princesses (Drusilla and Bernice), before being taken as a prisoner to Rome
- All spoke eloquently before their enemies, and everything that the early Christians suffered that was recorded in Acts was prophesied by Jesus in Luke 21:12
- Jesus' disciples were persecuted and will be persecuted, but they must not regard any season of such suffering, no matter how severe, as the specific sign of the end

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- *an occasion for testimony*, From the Holy Book of Acts on, there have been countless times when persecution has given Christians the opportunity to preach and give *testimony* to those they could otherwise never reach with the message, such as *kings and rulers*
- This persecution will be a means of strengthening and confirming them in the truths of the Gospel
- It will be a proof and evidence to them of the certainty of the above things Christ had said should be accomplished

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- Jesus is telling them not to try to think of words and what to say in replying to the entrapping questions, that they would be asked by kings and rulers, or any of the judges before whom they should be brought
- Because it is natural for anyone to be fearful if appears before such great officials, and to think about how to respond to questions that may be asked by them
- Jesus *personally* promised special grace, special help to His people in such circumstances
- He promised they will answer in the most prudent manner to any difficult and tricking question

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- They will be provided with such knowledge of the Gospel, and with such gifts and abilities to preach and defend it, that they should be able to give a clear and distinct account of it, and prove every point in it, by the most strong and convincing arguments, and defend it against all objections
- This promise reminds us of that given to Moses when he drew back from the task of speaking God's message to His people (Exodus 4:15-16)
- Instances of the marvelous fulfillment of this promise are supplied in the "Acts" report of St. Stephen's speech (Chapter 7), and St. Paul's defense spoken before the Roman governor Felix (Chapter 25) and before King Agrippa (Chapter 26)

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- Christians must expect to suffer not only from enemies outside the church, but also from traitors among believers
- His disciples must be prepared to pay the price of following Him, the sacrifice of all
- How often in the records of the early Christians are these terrible sufferings added to public persecution!
- Literally, His own would have very often to give up mother, father, friends, for His sake
- *some of you to death*, This was literally true in the case of several of those then listening to Him

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- *you will be hated*, The words of the Roman Jews reported in Acts 28:22 well sum this up, *“For concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere”*
- *not a hair of your head shall be lost*, That is, without the will of God, as in Matthew 10:29
- In his 4th century *Church History*, Bishop Eusebius records that the Christians recognized the signs Jesus gave them, and, also warned by a revelation, the faithful left Jerusalem just before the Jewish Revolt and traveled across the Jordan River into Perea, saving all the members of the Christian faith community

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age 21:7-19



- Indeed, there are not any records of Christians perishing during the Jewish Revolt or Rome's suppression of the revolution
- *By your patience possess your souls*, Rather by your perseverance
- The verb involves the idea of “acquiring” rather than “possessing,” and the command so understood answers *to* the promise, “*He who endures to the end, shall be saved*,” in Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13
- By patiently bearing all afflictions, reproaches, indignities, and persecutions, let nothing disturb or distress you; possess that peace and joy in your souls, which the world cannot take away
- We endure, trusting the promise of Jesus



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- This is to be the sign that the end has come for temple, city, and people
- Wars and rumors of wars, physical signs, famine and diseases following each other, all these will, in the forthcoming years, terrify and perplex men's minds, signals of something that seems approaching
- But His people are to bear in mind that these were not the immediate signs of the awful ruin He was foretelling
- But when hostile armies were *surrounding* the holy city - then this would surely come to pass, and some of these eyewitnesses would see it - then, and not till then, His people must be warned



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- Let them at once and at all cost flee from temple and city, for there would be no deliverance, God had left His house
- *by armies*, The siege will not be raised until the city be destroyed
- The Jews, in their stubbornness, when the siege had already reached its height, believed that the siege would be raised
- They totally ignored Jesus' warning in 70 AD when Roman *armies* circled Jerusalem
- Many Jews expected the Messiah to return in glory when hostile Gentile armies surrounded Jerusalem



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- However, Christians in Jerusalem knew what Jesus had said and they obeyed Him, fleeing across the Jordan River mostly to Perea
- Few if any Christians perished in the fall of Jerusalem
- Whoever does not flee, after having been thus warned let him take the consequences
- This is why He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), because He could see the massive devastation to come upon this city He loved – and why He warned all who would listen how they could flee from the coming destruction



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- The 'woe' is only an expression of pity for them because their flight would be almost impossible
- He expressed pity for *pregnant and to those who are nursing babies* from the greater suffering it would involve
- Spiritually they represent those who are weak with no strong faith
- *Wrath*, The wrath of God, as well as of man, which came upon them to the greatest; and their own historian, Josephus, observes, that God, who had condemned the people, turned every way of salvation to their destruction
- The Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 70 AD was complete



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- Josephus says that, when there were no more stolen goods or slay, after “incredible slaughter and miseries,” Titus ordered the city to be destroyed so completely as to look like a spot which had been never inhabited
- History records that 1.1 million Jews were killed and another 97,000 were taken captive in one of the worst calamities ever to strike the Jewish people
- The Jews were sold into slavery and were disbursed throughout the Roman Empire
- When the Romans were done with Jerusalem in 70 AD not a single Jew was left alive in the city



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- Part of what made the death rate so high for the city of Jerusalem was that it was the time of the pilgrim feast of Unleavened Bread just before the arrival of the Roman legions and the city had increased with the addition of the pilgrims
- After the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews predicted by Jesus in the previous verses, there would come a long period when Jerusalem would be dominated *by Gentiles*
- The Romans renamed the city and for many years would not allow a Jew to even enter what was formerly known as Jerusalem, except on one day a year – the anniversary of the fall of the city and the destruction of the temple, when Jews were invited to come and mourn bitterly



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- After thousands of years of exile, a Jewish state was miraculously established in Israel again in 1948
- It was not until 1968 that Israel controlled Jerusalem, but still today they yield the rule and the administration of the most central piece of Jerusalem – the Temple Mount – the Palestinian Authority
- Jesus warned them to avoid it
- Some from this text think, that there shall be a time when the Jews shall repossess the city of Jerusalem
- Some by the *times of the Gentiles* understand all that time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world



The Destruction of Jerusalem

21:20-24

- Others, the time when the gospel should be carried over all the world
- And some think it is till the different nations of the earth, to whom God shall have given the dominion over this land, have accomplished all that which the Lord has appointed them to do; and till the time of their conversion to God take place
- But when shall this be?
- We do not know
- The nations are still treading down Jerusalem, and the end is known only to the Lord



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- The Lord continues his earnest prophecy respecting things to come
- His disciples asked Him in verse 7, *“Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?”*
- He answers generally their question as to the temple, describing to them the very signs they are to look for as indicating the temple's fall
- He now proceeds to reply to their real query respecting the glorious epiphany



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- The city and temple will be destroyed; this catastrophe some of you will live to see
- Ages will pass before these 'times of the Gentiles' shall be fulfilled, but the end will come, and then, and not till then, will the Son of man come in glory
- These words of verse 25 are to express figuratively the downfall of kingdoms and signifying the decaying of all the glory, superiority, and prosperity of the nations
- Some believe that the whole solar system shall then undergo unusual commotions and these signs will literally happen before the coming of Christ



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- By the signs that will be manifested before Christ's coming, the Lord may have meant the manifestation of the anti-Christ; it is he who will play a serious role in the world at the end of times
- If the sun represents the Lord Jesus, then there will be a sign to show the lack of faith in Christ, as if the sun is hidden in people's lives
- The Lord has declared this in bitterness; that if anti-Christ could, he would mislead even the elect
- The moon refers to the church that takes its light from the Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness
- It will also carry a sign that specifically pertains to it



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- It will go through severe hardship and will become a fugitive in the wilderness, chased by the anti-Christ wherever it is found
- The stars refer to the believers with all their spiritual gifts and positions
- It is unfortunate that many will fall, even those who possess gifts and positions
- The earth refers to the corruption of the body
- Corruption will prevail and conquer, and defilement will be common, and people will change
- The sea and its waves refer to the nations and the kingdoms



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- Hardships will prevail not on an individual level only, but also on the scale of nations
- This kind of total chaos and calamity is described in horrific detail in Revelation 6, 8-9, and 15-18
- *men's hearts failing*, This is an expression implying the highest terror
- The word "failing" here it means that the terror would be so great that people would faint and be ready to die in view of the approaching adversities



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- This is certainly to be understood of the day of judgment
- Jesus assured believers on the earth at that time to be ready, because the time of great tribulation they experience will not last forever, but Jesus will return in glory soon
- In all times the earnest Christian is on the watch for the signs of the return of his Lord, and the restless watch serves to keep hope alive, for the watcher knows that that advent will be the sure sign of his redemption from all the weariness and distress of this life, *The kingdom of God is nigh at hand*
- *look up and lift up your heads*, Be cheerful and pleasant
- Look upwards, from where your help comes



The Coming of the Son of Man

21:25-28

- St. Cyril of Alexandria comments on this verse saying, “Christ will not come secretly or obscurely but as God and Lord in glory suitable for deity. He will transform all things for the better. He will renew the creation and refashion the nature of people to what it was at the beginning. The dead will rise. This earthly and infirm body will put off corruption and will clothe itself with incorruption by Christ’s gift. He grants those that believe in Him to be conformed to the likeness of His glorious body.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

21:29-33



- Christ tells His disciples to observe the signs of the times, which they might judge by
- The fig tree is an example of a tree that buds before summer
- The Lord assured us by a wise comparison that we have to walk over the love of the world
- It is as if He is saying “When a fig tree buds, there is an inevitable result – summer is near, and fruit is coming
- In the same way, when these signs are seen, the coming of Jesus in glory to this world will inevitably follow

The Parable of the Fig Tree

21:29-33



- Some believe that Jesus did not refer to His *own* generation and that of the disciples, but of the *generation* that sees those signs; *they* will also see the very end
- Others believe strongly that Jesus meant *the Jewish people* by the term *this generation*, meaning that they would not perish (despite terrible persecution and attempted genocide) until these things were fulfilled
- *My words will by no means pass away*, No mere man could truthfully say this
- Jesus claimed that His words were the very words of God – and they are

The Importance of Watching

21:34-38



- The Master ended His teaching with an earnest practical reminder to His disciples to live always with the sure expectation of His return to judgment
- For many surely no passions or cares of earth would hinder them from living the brave pure life worthy of being His servants upon hearing Him talking about the approaching ruin of the city, temple, and people, with the sever sequence of signs indicating the coming ruin ever before their eyes
- The warning voice of Jesus here is equally addressed to *for coming generations*

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- We must *take heed* because there are certain things that will make one unprepared – *carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life*
- Each of these things can make us unprepared for the day of Jesus' return
- They make the heart *weighed down*
- The attitude of His people in every age must be that of the "watcher" till He come
- The purpose of showing the signs for His coming not for us to know the times, and be busy counting them; rather, to be watchful with our hearts, expecting His coming to reign eternally

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- *As a snare* - In Matthew and Mark Jesus compares the suddenness and speed with which these disasters would come, to the flood of the days of Noah
- Here He compares it to *a snare*
- Birds are caught by a snare or net quickly and when they are not expecting it and cannot get out of again
- So, He says, these troubles shall come *as a snare*
- The figure is often used to denote the suddenness of calamities, Psalm 69:22, 124:7; Romans 11:9; Isaiah 24:17
- Anyone who watches will never be caught in a *snare*; a failure to watch prevents us from being ready

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- Jesus told His followers to *pray always*, that they may be found worthy to *escape all these things that will come to pass*
- In a lesser and more immediate sense regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, those who listened to and obeyed Jesus escaped the horrible destruction that came upon the city
- Regarding the far greater destruction that is coming upon the whole earth, those who listen to and obey Jesus can escape the horrible destruction that will come

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- Watch against every sin, snare, and temptation; particularly, against the *carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life* and worldly cares; pray continually, for continuous and renewed provisions of grace
- This watchfulness changes the 'day of the Lord' from a surprise attack in which fall all those sitting on the face of the earth, to a day of salvation and standing before the Son of Man
- *Watch and pray*, No man is safe, at any time, who does not attend to this advice as literally as possible

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- The talk and teaching that begun at Luke 20:1, with its varied scenes, is now closed
- This brief picture of the last days of public work is probably retrospective
- This was how our Lord spent "Palm Sunday" and the Monday and Tuesday before His passion
- After Tuesday evening He never entered the temple as a public Teacher again
- In these two verses our evangelist let us knew how Christ spent those few days which He had yet to live

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- In the day-time He was in the temple preaching; in the evening He was on the mount of Olives praying
- St. Luke emphasizes the public teaching of Jesus
- He did not hide in these few days before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion
- Like many Galileans who came to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus essentially camped out on Mount Olivet in the days leading up to Passover
- *Then early in the morning,* The whole example of Jesus goes to show the importance of beginning the day with God

The Importance of Watching 21:34-38



- And to lift up the heart to Him for direction, for provision, and for protection from temptation, before the mind gets occupied by the cares, and distracted by the uncertainties of the world, and led away by the temptations of this life
- Let the day begin with God
- If we allow the world to have the control in the morning, it will be likely to have it also all day



Discussion

- How were the motives of the rich different from those of the poor widow?
- How did Jesus use this situation as an opportunity to teach His followers?
- Why does Jesus respond with a warning instead of direct answer in verse 8?
- What did Jesus say could deceive Christians in the last days?



Discussion

- What are the two purposes for Jesus telling His disciples about the end times? Two temptations that people fall into when talking about the end times is to set out to predict when it is going to happen or to be worried that it is going to happen at all. How does Jesus address this and do you fall into either of these categories?
- Betrayal by friends, relatives, or anyone is hard, if not devastating. What example does Jesus present for us about how to handle betrayal? Do you look to Christ when you feel betrayed? Are Jesus' words encouraging? Why?



Discussion

- For what purpose did Jesus tell the parable of the fig tree?
- Jesus tells us to protect our heart and pray. What is your prayer life like?
- Jesus spent this large section warning and depicting the end and He ends with a call to watch our hearts and to pray. How easy is it for you to allow your heart (passions, emotions, desires) to become caught up in sports, television, money, food, worry, etc.? What is it that steals your heart and distracts you?