

15. Luke 20:1 - 21:38



One day, as he was teaching the people in the temple and telling the good news, the chief priests and the scribes came with the elders and said to him, “Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?”

He answered them, “I will also ask you a question, and you tell me: Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”

They discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ all the people will stone us; for they are convinced that John was a prophet.” So they answered that they did not know where it came from.

Then Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

It is clear that those who claim religious authority, identified here as the chief priests, the scribes and the elders [= the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin)], lack authority, for they have no genuine concern for the truth.

The author of the fourth gospel makes much the same point:

‘How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?’ (John 5:44).

He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. And he sent still a third; this one also they wounded and threw out.

Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; **surely they will respect my son.**’ But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Luke 20:15-19

(see Mark 12:9-12)

What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

When they heard this, they said, “Heaven forbid!” But he looked at them and said, “What then does this text mean:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’? (Psalm 118:22)

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces;
and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.” (Daniel 2:34-35?)

When the scribes and chief priests realised that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

Addressing himself to non-Jews, Paul sums up his teaching on the significance for them of Jesus the ‘cornerstone’:

‘You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the **cornerstone**. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God’ (Ephesians 2:19-22).

1 Peter 2:4-8

‘Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: ‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,’ and ‘A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.’

1 Peter 2:8-10

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'

Luke 20:20-22

(Mark 12:13-14)

So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to the emperor, or not?”

Archelaus deposed from his post as ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea 6AD

Roman Imperial Province with its own 'prefect' of equestrian rank: Coponius.

Quirinius, imperial legate to Syria, charged with taking a census for purposes of taxation.

Opposed by Judas the Galilean, but the high priest, Joazar, persuaded the people to submit to the census and the tax.



Luke 20:23-26

(Mark 12:15-17)

But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?”

They said, “The emperor’s.”



(Tiberias Caesar, son of the divine Augustus,
high priest)

He said to them, “Then give back to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent.

Some Sadducees (only time in Luke's Gospel), those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother ('levirate marriage': see Deuteronomy 25:5-6; Genesis 38:8; BUT Lev 18:16). Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?"

Luke 20:33- 36

(Mark 12:24-25)

Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Indeed they cannot die anymore,
because they are like angels and are children of God,
being children of the resurrection.

‘Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High.’
(Luke 6:35).

And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:6).

Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.”

For they no longer dared to ask him another question. (see Mark 12:34)

Luke 20:41-44 (Mark 12:35-37)

Then he said to them, “How can they say
that the **Messiah** is David’s son? (see Romans 1:3)

For David himself says in the book of Psalms,
‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.” (Psalm 110:1 LXX!)

David thus calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?”

Paul, sums up the faith of Jesus’ disciples when he speaks of the:
gospel concerning God’s Son, who was **descended from David**
according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with
power according to the spirit of holiness, by resurrection from
the dead, Jesus Christ **our Lord**’ (Romans 1:3-4).

Luke 20:45-47 (see 11:43)

(Mark 12:38-40)

In the hearing of all the people he said to the disciples,
“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes,
and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,
and to have the best seats in the synagogues
and places of honour at banquets.

They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance
say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

Luke 21:1-4

(Mark 12:41-44)

Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury;
he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.

He said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow
has put in more than all of them;
for all of them have contributed out of their abundance,
but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.'

Luke 21:5-38 : God's judgment of human history

Kingdom of God : God's Action in History

Discipleship : Welcoming and Mediating this action

Luke 19:29 - 21:4

Luke 21

Luke 22-24

Judgment of Religion

Death & Resurrection



The Meaning of History as an
Encounter with the Son of Man

Parousia : Presence in History of the Son of Man

Eschatological : Ultimate Judgment

Apocalyptic : Revelatory Vision

Luke 21:5-38

The Meaning of History as an encounter with the Son of Man

Luke 21:5-6

(Mark 13:1-4)

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you’ (Luke 13:34-35).

‘The days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognise the time of your visitation from God’ (Luke 19:43-44).

‘Because you have done all these things, says the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh’ (Jeremiah 7:13-14).

Luke 21:7-9

(Mark 13:5-7)

They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”

And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.

“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.”

In the Acts, Luke gives two examples of false messiahs, Theudas (Acts 5:36), and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37). The terrible experiences of the Jewish war (66-73AD) would have provided many opportunities for alarmists to announce the coming end of the world.

Luke 21:10-11

(Mark 13:8)

Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

Jesus’ disciples believed that he had inaugurated the new creation promised by God. One can readily sense how terrified they were (see 21:9) when, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the old patterns of war, earthquake, famine and plague continued as though nothing had changed. Luke is encouraging his community not to lose heart.

‘Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt, and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labour. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. See, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light ... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger’ (Isaiah 13:6-10,13).

Luke 21:12-19

(Mark 13:9-13)

“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.

This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends (see Luke 12:52-53); and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name.

But not a hair of your head will perish (see Luke 12:7; Acts 27:34).

By your endurance you will gain your souls (Luke 8:15; Acts 14:22).

Jesus' final words express the basic theme of all eschatological writings' (see Revelation 13:10; 14:12).

This is not the first time that Jesus has warned his disciples to expect to be persecuted. Simeon warned that Jesus himself would be rejected (Luke 2:34). His ministry in Galilee began with a rejection scene in Nazareth (Luke 4:24), and his journey to Jerusalem opened with a rejection by the Samaritans (Luke 9:53). We have seen Jesus being rejected by the religious leaders (Luke 6:11; 11:15), and by the fickle crowd (Luke 7:34).

On earlier occasions Jesus has warned his disciples not to be surprised when they are treated in the same way. We recall the following promise and exhortation: ‘**Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets**’ (Luke 6:22-23).

Luke 21:20

(Mark 13:14)

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies (see Luke 19:43-44), then know that its desolation has come near.

‘Desolation’ echoes an expression found in the Book of Daniel, the classical reference book for writings concerned with the last things (eschata). There it refers to the sacrilege of placing a statue of Zeus on the altar of holocausts in the sanctuary of the Jewish temple (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; see also 1Maccabees 1:54; 2Maccabees 6:2).

Luke sees the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies as another example of this proud defiance of God.

Luke 21:21-24

(Mark 13:14-17)

Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for *these are days of vengeance, as a fulfilment of all that is written.*

Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth *and wrath against this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.* (when they will have embraced the good news)

Luke's final remark recalls the hope expressed by Paul:
'A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in' (Romans 11:25).

Luke 21:25-28

(Mark 13:24-26)

“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.
People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming
upon the world, for the powers of the heavens (Isaiah 34:4)
will be shaken. (see Joel 3:3-4; see Hebrews 12:26-27)

Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ (Daniel 7:13)
with power and great glory (see Luke 9:26).

*Now when these things begin to take place,
stand up and raise your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near.”*

your redemption is drawing near

The word 'redemption' occurs nowhere else in any of the gospels, but is a favourite word in Paul's theology. We have no idea of the timing of the final judgment, but we do know how to live in the meantime. If we live in this way, we have nothing to fear, but can hold our head high in expectation of liberation. Luke would agree with the following advice given by his mentor, Paul.

your redemption is drawing near

1 Thessalonians 5:2-10

‘You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober ... Let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.’

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

Truly I tell you, this generation (this ‘age’) will not pass away until all things have taken place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The destruction of the temple (21:6-7) will happen within their generation. The deception, the violence, the persecution and the sacrilege (‘**these things**’, 21:28, 31) are about to take place in the passion and crucifixion of Jesus. They will be able to see it all for themselves.

Two passages from Luke's second work, Acts, are relevant here.

‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority’ (Acts 1:7).

‘Turn to God ... so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration’ (Acts 3:20-21).

Luke 21:34-38

“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, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

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.”

Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.