

## **A Storytelling Commentary on Luke 21:25-36**

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This section of Jesus' speech is generally referred to as the little apocalypse. It's the last major speech by Jesus prior to the passion narrative in the Gospel of Luke. It follows the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple, which in turn, Jesus states in response to a disciple's admiration and delight at the wonders of the Temple. It also follows the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. In the time of the telling of Luke's Gospel, that destruction happened only 10-20 years before the composition and proclamation of the Gospel. That is, major elements of the prophecies in Jesus' speech have already taken place for Luke's audience. They know that many of the things that Jesus prophesied in this little apocalypse have been fulfilled. Luke's version of this speech is much more specific than that in Mark and Matthew. Jesus' apocalyptic speech foretells both what has already happened in the lives of Luke's listeners and what will happen in the future.

Jesus' words are addressed to us as his disciples. This is Jesus talking calmly, objectively, and compassionately with his disciples, sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple. It is an opportunity for us as storytellers to present Jesus as one who both knows what is coming in the future, and who is utterly confident. The tone of Jesus' voice is a voice of calm, setting all things in perspective. It's quiet, confident, and strong. What he foresees is chaos and ultimate victory. That is precisely what happened for Luke and his audience.

The Jewish War of 66-70 A.D. was a time of unprecedented chaos in Palestine and among the peoples of the diaspora communities of Judaism all over the Greco-Roman world. It was a time of enormous stress and it was also a time in which the victory of the Roman Empire was virtually unqualified. The end of the Jewish war was an enormous defeat—the greatest disaster in the entire history of Israel. Thus, the promise of signs of the coming Kingdom of God were heard by Luke's audience in the midst of what they experienced as impending chaos, as powers beyond their control. All these things that Jesus refers to—war, famine, mass enslavement, persecution—all of these things happened both during and following the Jewish War. The issue that Jesus is addressing is whether one can persevere in hard times and remain faithful to God.

The times of the Gentiles that Jesus refers to in this speech are the times of the victory of the forces of Rome. His prophesy is that the power of Rome will come to an end and the time of the Son of Man will come. The time of the Son of Man will be a time of justice and peace, of the establishment of love as the law of the land. Jesus' way of nonviolence, of love and action, will be victorious over the powers of this world. That is the message of Jesus' speech here.

The question that underlies this story for us is: "Did it happen? Did the Son of Man come on the clouds of heaven? Was the earth transformed into a place of peace?" The answer

is fairly obvious: "No, that didn't happen." On the other hand, the seeds of that possibility were established. A new community was formed that was organized around nonviolence and love. A new possibility was introduced into the world. We live in a time when the same dynamics are present as to what we will believe and whether or not we will persevere in the establishment of a new government in the world. Jesus' speech is addressed to us as his disciples. The issue for us is basically the same issue that was present for Jesus' disciples as they heard this address in the first century: How are we to understand the signs of the times, and how will we respond?