

## Reading Guide Week 5

### **St. Luke Part 4: Luke 19:28-21:38**

#### **The Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem**

Jesus's journey to Jerusalem comes to an end as he arrives at the Mount of Olives, immediately east of the city. He has come to the center of Judaism with his message. He will deliver it in the Temple, the heart of Jerusalem.

Jesus realizes that this is a very dangerous undertaking and has warned his disciples of the consequences. It is one thing to preach a prophetic message in a rural area like Galilee and another thing to do so in a city bristling with violent and powerful worldly and religious forces: "Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those sent to you." (Luke 13:34) But Jesus has come to do his Father's will and does not shy away from the danger.

We have seen that the journey to Jerusalem served as a narrative device used by Luke as a vehicle to expand upon the teaching of Jesus. The geographical flow, to and from Jerusalem, is also a key element of Luke's literary structure. The Gospel story, in its movement toward Jerusalem, has shown us Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, accepted by some and rejected by others. In Jerusalem presents himself to the heart of the Jewish people and their leadership. Will he be accepted or rejected? Is he the fulfillment of God's promises to his chosen people?

We know how the story ends and what happens in Jerusalem. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's second volume, the story continues as it moves from Jerusalem to the rest of the world.

We are concerned in this portion of the Gospel in understanding the meaning of what happened in Jerusalem: how God fulfilled his promise of salvation, not only to the Jewish people but also to the Gentiles.

#### **The Entry into Jerusalem**

Jesus enters the Temple area in a way that is both dramatic and full of meaning. He rides in on a donkey and is proclaimed by the crowds as a king who brings peace. Luke's audience is familiar with the meaning of Jesus's action from their knowledge of the Old Testament:

"And the Lord whom you seek, will come suddenly to his temple." (Malachi 3:1)

"Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, humble, and riding on a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

Kings normally entered their cities riding on a horse, a symbol of military power at the time. Israelite prophets had spoken against "warrior" kings of this kind (Deut 17:14-16; 1Sam 8:11-17). In addition, the Romans who controlled Judea would look unfavorably on anyone who claimed to be a military king of the Jews. But Jesus presents himself and is acclaimed by his disciples as a king who brings peace. Luke has already told this to his

readers (Luke 2:14). The bigger question is posed to Jerusalem, “But when the Son of Man (Jesus) comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8)

### **Cleansing the Temple**

Jesus immediately demonstrates his authority by cleansing the Temple of secular activities which were distractions in what was intended to be a house of prayer. This cleansing makes it a proper place for him to teach. At the same time, it was an action more provocative than his entry, because it was perceived as a threat by the Temple authorities.

### **The Authority of Jesus**

St Luke presents the teaching of Jesus in the Temple as a series of arguments about authority in interpreting the Law. The religious leaders try to challenge Jesus by asking him tricky or difficult questions. His answers about paying taxes to the Emperor (Luke 20:20) and about the Resurrection (Luke 20:27) turn them away. For his part, Jesus points out the corruption of the current authorities (Luke 20:45-21:4) and indicates the consequences of their actions in the Parable of the Tenant Farmers (Luke 20:9-19). His message is clear: God will replace those who rebel against him. Jesus also challenges their understanding of the law by pointing out that while the Messiah will be the Son (descendant) of David, he will also be greater than David (Luke 20:41-44).

### **Current Tribulations and the future coming of the Son of Man**

St Luke probably wrote his Gospel between 80 and 90 AD. It was a turbulent time. The Jewish War, which began in 66 AD, had already ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This was a very traumatic event for both Jews and Christians who considered Jerusalem the center of the world. It is not surprising that many would take the destruction of Jerusalem as a sign that the world was coming to an end. Add to that the message already proclaimed orally to Luke’s community: the crucified and risen Christ would come again in glory at the end of time. Many Christians combined these two beliefs with their experience of suffering and persecution and concluded that Jesus would return in glory in the immediate future (within their lifetimes).

In chapter 21 Luke helps his reader to understand that this is not the case. Jerusalem was responsible for its own fate: it did not know what makes for peace; it did not recognize the visitation by the Messiah (Luke 19:41-44).

St Luke also assures his readers of the coming of the Son of Man in glory, with the final redemption of believers at a time *in the future* determined by God. He passes on Jesus’s exhortation to be vigilant and prepared for that time.

We are aided in our understanding of the message of the Gospel of Luke by the examples of early Christian preaching about Jesus that the Evangelist records in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles:

### **A Prophet like Moses**

Both Peter and Stephen compare Jesus to Moses (see Acts 3:12-26 and 7:1-53). Peter points out that in rejecting Jesus, the Jews could be excused for acting in ignorance and not recognizing that Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promises and the prophet that Moses had foretold. But with God’s vindication of Jesus by raising him from the dead,

there was no longer an excuse: they must repent and accept Jesus or bring judgement on themselves.

Stephen makes this comparison explicit by reminding his listeners of the story of Moses: how he was initially rejected when he offered to help the Israelites in Egypt; how he came a second time with signs and wonders, leading them out of slavery and giving them God's law on Mount Sinai; and finally how the Israelites brought judgement on themselves by rejecting God's Law by worshipping a Golden Calf that they had made.

This is an example of how Luke connects the promises of the Jewish Scriptures to the ministry of Jesus to the preaching of the early Church.

### **Questions for reflection**

1. The teaching of Jesus focused on the deeper meaning of the Law rather than details of ritual. How did the destruction of the Temple help people understand his approach?
2. Jesus cleansed the Temple of "distractions." What distractions do we need to eliminate from our worship?
3. In a religious world of competing human voices (Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes) Jesus spoke with the authority of God. In a world where everyone's opinion is held to be valid, do we recognize and obey the authority of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of the Church?
4. When the Son of Man (Jesus) comes, what will he find in your house?

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