

## **Bible Study Notes 12-17-2014—Luke 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24—Destruction of the Temple and the End Times**

*<sup>5</sup> And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, He said,<sup>6</sup> As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. <sup>7</sup> And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? <sup>10</sup> Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: <sup>11</sup> And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. <sup>20</sup> And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. <sup>21</sup> Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. <sup>22</sup> For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. <sup>23</sup> But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. <sup>24</sup> And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

St. Theophylact says that Jesus is first speaking about the capture of Jerusalem. Then he says that the disciples thought that Jesus was talking about the end of the world (they thought that the buildings of the Temple would be destroyed at the end of the world) so Jesus condescends to their misunderstanding and begins to weave together into a single account the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, forewarning them not to be led astray by the false prophets that will appear before His second coming.

This brings up an important point: why should Orthodox Christians be concerned about the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. and the end of the world? Isn't that a rather gloomy and negative thing to be avoided? At first glance, it would seem that the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple were simply historical events that happened. After all, the Jews had tried to rebel against the Romans and the Romans responded by slaughtering over 1 million of the Jews, destroying their Temple and sacking the city.

Yet, it is significant that Christ foretold all this. From a Christian standpoint, the term "Sacred History" is appropriate when we look at world events. In our modern secular humanist society that tries to separate God from man, everything is seen as earthly, materialistic phenomena, as though man alone is the measure of all things, the cause of all things. But this is not true. As Christ said in the Gospel, 'not a sparrow falls from the sky without God knowing about it.' God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Everything that happens, happens by God's permission. This is quite clear in the Old Testament. When the Israelites disobeyed God's Laws and Commandments, they suffered terrible consequences. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone and only Lot's family was spared. The whole earth was flooded and only Noah's family and all the animal species were spared. One of the great historical writings of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, *The History of the Franks*, was written by St. Gregory of Tours. Just as in the Old Testament, St. Gregory writes about the events of that time revealing miraculous and divine intervention. For example, during this time of barbarian invasions, there were occasions when the barbarians were marching on a city and the bishop called everyone together, made them put on sackcloth and ashes and fast and pray in order to repent of their sins; and the invaders suddenly left them alone. However other cities in their pride decided that they could fight off the invaders, and their cities were burned to the ground, everyone was killed or taken captive and all their goods were lost.

We see evil all around us in the world today and it's tempting to think that man can solve all problems and conquer all evil by his own efforts. We see this played out every day through foreign policy, economics, environmental issues, moral and social issues and so on. Actually, this is the spirit of "*chiliasm*" which was an ancient heresy taught by Apollinarius that was condemned by the Second Ecumenical Council. In essence, this heresy said that Christ would return in His Second Coming and establish an earthly kingdom that would last for 1,000 years—really the idea of trying to make 'heaven on earth.' So the idea that man can eradicate all evil and bring about some kind of earthly paradise therefore, we could say is a 'chilastic' idea. However, from a Christian point of view, we know that we need God's help and that we of ourselves can do virtually nothing. As Christ said, 'with men this is impossible, but with God everything is possible.'

St. Ambrose of Milan also points out that besides the actual physical events like wars of nations rising against nations, earthquakes, famines, pestilence and the like; that we have the spiritual battle to war against the passions and acquire the virtues. As he says, '*but there are other wars which a Christian man endures, battles, too, of different desires, and conflicts of interests, and domestic enemies far more hostile than foreigners. Now avarice goads, now lust kindles, now fear terrifies, now anger upsets, now ambition disturbs, now the spirits of wickedness (Eph. 6:12) which are among the Heavenly Powers try to instill terror. Thus the fickle goodwill of a hesitant spirit is distressed by the battles and shaken by the movements of the earth. But a braver man says "though an army should set itself in array against me, mine heart shall not be afraid; though war should rise up against me, in this am I confident" (Psalm 26:3)*

St. Ambrose also goes on to talk about the abomination of desolation and while historically, the Romans threw the head of a pig into the Jewish Temple during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.; he says this desolation also refers to the coming of the accursed Antichrist, "*insofar as he pollutes the inner mind with unpropitious sacrilege, sitting according to history in the Temple, so as to claim for himself the seat of Divine power (2 Thess.2:4) According the spiritual interpretation, he is fittingly thought to stand, so that he desires to set the footprint of his treachery in the goodwill of individuals, arguing from the Scriptures that he is the Christ (Matt 24:24) Then, the desolation will be at hand, since many will fall into error and depart from the True Faith. Then will be the Day of the Lord (II Thess. 2:2-4)...*"

Each time we say the Nicene Creed, we affirm that we believe that "*He is coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead; and His Kingdom will have no end...I look for the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the age to come. Amen*"

Concerning the signs of His Second Coming, the Lord Himself tells us "*Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is...And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*" (Mark 13:33, 37)

There are numerous other references in the New Testament where we are instructed as to what the signs of His Coming shall be and cautioning us that we not be deceived. Having an Orthodox Christian Worldview is essential for us to build and strengthen as we work out our salvation with God's help. There is a lot of wild speculation today as various people try to figure out who the Antichrist is and when the end of the world will be. Some have predicted a specific date and deceived many people. One thing is certain though, these signs are happening all around us and the Antichrist is going to appear at some point—possibly even in our lifetime. He is going to deceive a lot of people into thinking he is really Christ.

We are not to fear evil, but rather cultivate the fear of God. It is extremely important therefore that we draw close to Christ and pray for His help that we will not be deceived should the Antichrist appear in our times. Just as God sent His Holy Prophets to prepare for Christ's coming at the time of His

Incarnation, so too, we can see that there are many un-holy forerunners of Antichrist who have his worldly spirit, both historically and even in our times now. There is a movement away from the Christian beliefs and values and many are falling away and losing faith in God. We can see this in the spirit of worldliness being brought into churches that once were more traditional. We can see that there are so many foolish opinions out there from all kinds of people claiming to be the bearers of Christian teaching and truth. Yet, this is why the One, Holy, Ecumenical and Apostolic Church was established by Christ, which the gates of hell will not prevail against. And this is why we have been given the whole of Sacred Tradition, the Holy Fathers, the Sacraments, the hierarchy of our Church, the Great Feasts and Fasts, the Holy Scriptures; so that we can grow strong in our Orthodox belief and practice. It is up to each of us to take advantage of all that the Holy Church has given us so that we will not be led astray and fall into delusion. May God help us in this struggle! Amen.