

### Third-Last Sunday after Pentecost: Mt. 24:15-28: History's Most Severe Judgment

1. In the early history of the LCMS it was customary to read the account of the destruction of Jerusalem in all the churches on the tenth Sunday after Trinity. The Gospel for that Sunday in the old one-year series of texts was Lk. 19:41-48, Jesus weeping over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The old Kirchengesangbuch hymnbooks, which preceded our several English hymnbooks, contained a very good description of the destruction of Jerusalem on pp. 518-520. The reader of these Notes will perhaps remember that the Gospel text for Advent II in the one-year series was Mk. 13:19-27. In the Notes for that Sunday a summary of the description in the Gesangbuch was given. Perhaps the reader would like to review those Notes before studying this text.
2. Vs. 21 of our text tells us that the severity of the distress of the destruction of Jerusalem is unparalleled in history. We have the same truth stated in Mk. 13:19. Neither the great flood nor the end of the world nor any other judgment in history was, is or shall be as severe and awful as the destruction of Jerusalem. The pastor ought stress this point. The reason for this should be obvious. God made His Gospel Covenant with Abraham 2000 years B.C. God's OT Covenant people were descended from Abraham. God made His Law Covenant with His chosen Israel at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. It was then that the formal worship of Jehovah began. For fifteen centuries God patiently dealt with Israel. But most of that time Israel was stiff-necked and hard hearted. After many warnings the northern ten tribes were taken into captivity in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians. Those ten tribes disappeared. No one knows what became of them. Then, after many futile warnings, the southern two tribes were taken to Babylon in 606 B.C. Many of the people repented and were allowed to return seventy years later. But again the people proved to be impenitent. Finally the Savior came unto His own but His own received Him not. God became a man and tried again and again to call the covenant people to repentance. Most of them refused. Even after Jesus ascended into heaven God granted the covenant people another forty years of grace. But then the time of mercy was gone. During the years 66 to 70 A.D. God sent the Roman legions to Jerusalem. Jerusalem today is nothing like it was before. The covenant people were scattered to the four corners of the earth. Though they can still be saved, their former glory is gone. What a warning for all men, especially for Christians!
3. Vs. 15: The particle οὖν introduces us to the destruction of Jerusalem in particular. Wenzel points out that βδέλυγμα is found again at Rev. 17:4.5; 21.27 where it stands for idolatry and the accompanying pollutions. He says: "This agrees with the sense in which the word is used in Daniel." Note the references to Daniel in the Nestle margin. Note that Matthew says: "When you see." It was something which they really saw. The phrase τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως is variously translated "the abomination of desolation, the desolating sacrifice, the awful horror, the abomination laying waste the land." The genitive is either adjectival or content. Lenski remarks: "Commentators have wrestled with this word of Jesus, and many interpretations have been offered." To a certain extent the words "which stands in the holy place" have a bearing on the interpretation. Some have concluded that this locates the abomination in the Temple. Luther and others thought that it meant a statue of the Emperor Caius Caligula which the governor placed in the Temple for adoration. Lenski says: "The abomination of desolation occurred in the Temple prior to the siege under Titus. It took place when the Zealots, who held the Temple under arms, admitted the Idumeans and as a result the Temple was deluged with the blood of 8500 victims." The interpretation which has widest acceptance in the LCMS is that of Kretzmann: "The abomination of desolation, the blaspheming horde that carried death and destruction with it, that carried out the terrible, but just sentence of God upon the Jewish people, was the army of Rome, with its military ensigns, its eagles and idols. This as Daniel describes it, 11:25.27; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11, would indicate that the Holy Place had fallen into the hands of the heathen, and that sacrifices to the living God would cease. Such a condition of affairs would be so

terrible, so far exceeding all imagination, that they must force their mind to understand what that really means." This interpretation is based on the fact that Luke's equivalent for these words is: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then knew that its desolation is near." (NKJV) Furthermore, this interpretation assumes that the words "standing in the holy place", means Jerusalem and Judea. The words "let the reader take note" are found not only here but also in Mk. 13. This little parenthesis is obviously from the mouth of Jesus who warned that it had been prophesied in the Book of Daniel and that it would prove to be a horrible happening. The interpretation of Kretzmann (and also of Wenzel) is preferable also because of what the next vs. says. The presence of the formidable Roman legions would be their cue to flee to the mountains. A statue in the holy place would hardly be seen by all. We know from Josephus that the legions of Vespasian and his son Titus laid siege to the city from 66 to 70 A.D. and that Jerusalem finally fell on August 10 in the year 70 A.D. Rome was the most powerful nation at that time. Its legions were invincible. Because the Jews were so very recalcitrant Rome sent all the might that could be spared to Palestine. It was an army of Gentiles, rough, cursing men. The presence of this army was surely "the abomination of desolation". Jerusalem lay desolate after this abominable power carried out the furious anger of the Lord.

4. Vs. 16: τότε, very pointedly "on that occasion". The phrase ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ is adjectival. He does not say "those in Jerusalem" but "those in Judea". The legions were camped around Jerusalem. "Let them flee" means that they should get away as quickly as possible. Hendriksen remarks: "We know that the Jews in general rushed into Jerusalem, resulting in a horrible blood bath. Josephus referred to the city's overcrowded condition (Jewish War VI.420)." Wenzel points out that Roman legions often traveled fast, especially their cavalry, and that, therefore, flight must not be delayed. Lenski comments: "These mountains lay outside of Judea, beyond the Jordan, in Perea. The Christians followed Jesus' bidding. Eusebius, 3, 5, reports that the congregation migrated to Pella in Perea." Were any of the apostles among them? We know not. Paul was already dead. Obviously the apostles passed this word on to the Christians in Judea.
5. Vs. 17: Houses in Judea and Jerusalem had flat tops and people often sat up there on the roof. So dire and terrible was the onslaught of the Roman legions that, at first notice of their coming, the man who was relaxing on the roof should not even try to pack a few things for the flight. Both prepositional phrases (ἐπι and ἐκ) are adjectival. Wenzel comments: "Some would be inclined to think that a fortified city would be a safer place of refuge than the open country. Not so in this instance. The only place of safety is outside Jerusalem." Kretzmann says: "Any one that happens to be on the flat housetop when the news comes should not even endeavor to make his way out through the house, but should use the stairway leading down into the street immediately in order to lose no time. . . . Precipitate flight is the one way to be saved."
6. Vs. 18: The ἐν phrase is adjectival. Note that both the prohibition and the infinitive, denoting purpose, are aorist, denoting decisive action. The ἑξωτερικόν was the outer garment as opposed to χιτῶν, the inner garment. To tell a person "Don't even stop to get a coat" certainly denotes utterly dire circumstances. Lenski remarks: "Life is worth more than many robes." By the way, the destruction of Jerusalem is a type of the end of the world. It will come suddenly and demands constant preparation. And it will be utterly final. With the destruction of Jerusalem came the end of all claims by the Jews to Palestine. In His fury the Lord scattered them far and wide. And to this day, even though they try to hang on to the land of Israel, there is constant strife which reminds all of us that the Jews do not have Israel by divine right. Their "rights" ended in 70 A.D.
7. Vs. 19: Three of our versions translate οὐαὶ with "Alas!" TEV and NIV have "How terrible (dreadful) it will be" etc. The first ἐν phrase is adjectival in an idiom. The second is temporal. The

two feminine participles are substantival. It is difficult for pregnant women to move quickly. Likewise with women who are nursing their babies. Pregnancy and care for infants would prove to be a hindrance for rapid movement and also for living out in the wilds, away from civilization. Wenzel calls οὐαὶ an expression of sorrow. Lenski says: "Jesus' heart melts at the thought of the hardships that such flight from the doomed city and country will bring." He is compassionate even amidst words of judgment.

8. Vs. 20: The impv. προσεύχεσθε is present tense, denoting constant prayer. The ἵνα introduces a noun clause and means "that". χειμῶνος, is genitive of time within which and means "during the winter", when the weather would be cold, wet and disagreeable. σαββάτῳ is dative of time when. Does it mean "the Sabbath Day" or "a Sabbath Year?" AAT and NEB seem to allow for the latter. All others plainly make it "Sabbath Day". Kretzmann says that if it were to occur during a Sabbath Year, when the land was lying fallow, they might have trouble in obtaining the necessary food on the way. But, very likely, it means "Sabbath Day". How could that cause difficulty? It implies that strict Jews would not allow travel on a Sabbath Day. Or, Christians who knew that the Sabbath was no longer in force, under such dire circumstances might have scruples of conscience for making such a long journey (east of the Jordan). In any case, it would be a drawback. But why then must they pray over this? Could not the Lord make provision so that Rome would not strike in the winter or on the Sabbath? He could, of course. But God wants His children to exercise their faith in asking Him to avert all evil. Wenzel thinks it implies that, while Jesus was in the state of humiliation, He did not know the exact time when the Romans would strike. And Lenski says: "In 'keep praying' there lies the veiled promise that God will hear." Often Jesus' commands contain promises.
9. Vs. 21: Another τότε. (Cf. vss. 16 and 23). γὰρ is explanatory. Lenski says here: "No nation had ever piled up a guilt such as that of the Jews who were chosen of God, infinitely blessed, and yet crucified God's Son and trampled upon all his further grace. . . .In the history of the world no judgment can be compared with this that wiped out the Jews as a nation." Wenzel observes: "This then means that even the tribulations at the end of the world shall not be as great as those at the destruction of Jerusalem. To be sure, they too shall be great, for Daniel says so, (Dan. 12:1), but they shall not reach the height of the latter, for the crime of the world is not so great as the crime of Jerusalem when it killed Christ. . . . The world before this time has seen great calamities, as the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the drowning of Pharaoh's men, even a former destruction of Jerusalem, but none of these can be compared with the terrific tribulation which Jerusalem underwent in 70 A.D."
10. Vs. 22: The first half of this vs. is a past contrary to fact conditional sentence. The second half of the vs. gives us God's reason for shortening those days, the days of the great affliction, from 66 to 70 A.D. Lenski understands ἐσώθη as physical annihilation. And he understands ἐκλεκτοῦς as the believers in all generations since that time. In other words, if God had not cut short that great θλίψις the Jewish nation would have been destroyed. But as a sign to all believers since that time God cut those days short and thus preserved enough of the Jewish nation to keep them as a sign through all generations. Kretzmann and Wenzel, however, understand ἐσώθη as ultimate salvation. They understand ἐκλεκτοῦς of Jewish believers in the city of Jerusalem, or the elect in Jerusalem who became believers later. In any case we note Wenzel: "This is a very comforting lesson for the Christian, to know that God keeps them in mind even when He is punishing the world for its disobedience." Perhaps Kretzmann's idea is a combination of Lenski and Wenzel: "God would be pouring out the vials of His wrath in full measure upon their city and nation. If God would not temper justice with mercy and pity, all the people would be consumed in the general destruction. But even in the midst of His anger He has compassion; for the sake of His people, the believers in Him, He will

shorten the time of punishment, lest all perish."

11. Vs. 23: It is not clear to the author of these Notes why the XXVth ed. of Nestle has a major paragraph at vs. 20 where the XXVth ed. had no subparagraph and likewise with the section beginning at vs. 23. On this vs. cf. Lk. 17:21,23. Evidently the same kind of false teaching lies behind that reference. Perhaps Nestle XXVI makes vss. 23-28 a separate paragraph because the words apply both to the days of the destruction of Jerusalem and also have a general application. The word  $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$  clearly indicates that we are still talking about Jerusalem. The condition here is future more vivid which means that it is very likely to happen. The word  $\text{Ἴδοϋ}$  means that someone is attempting to draw attention.  $\mu\eta$  with the aorist subjunctive prohibits beginning to do something. As vs. 24 indicates, vs. 23 is speaking about false Christs. In times of stress false Saviors arise. In desperation people follow them to their own destruction. This happened just before 70 A.D. and still happens today. Think of Jim Jones and the Peoples' Temple in 1978. Think of the Moonies and their leader in Korea. Think of the many and various cults and sects.
12. Vs. 24:  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  is explanatory. Here cf. I Jn. 2:18. The closer the end, the more false Christs. The destruction of Jerusalem began ushering in the end. The curtain of history was beginning to fall. Theologians debate the question whether or not Satan and false teachers can actually perform great signs and wonders.  $\acute{\omega}\sigma\tau\epsilon$  with the inf. denotes purpose. We won't try to answer the above question. But one thing is certain. So terrible is their deception that all except those who are firmly grounded in the faith are subject to be deceived. This vs., on the one hand, is Law, warning us of the terrible deception. On the other hand it would seem that the thought of Jn. 10:28 hovers in the background.
13. Vs. 25: Jesus uses the very word,  $\text{ἵδοϋ}$ , used by the false teachers. Jesus is saying: "Forewarned is forearmed." No one will ever be able to plead ignorance. Christians cannot foretell the future but they do know enough about it to be forewarned about false teaching and false teachers.
14. Vs. 26: The inferential  $\acute{o}\upsilon\nu$  points back to the reason given in vs. 25. We have another future more vivid condition which repeats vs. 23 in greater detail. Note that we again have two instances of  $\mu\eta$  with the aorist subjunctive, prohibitions not to start something. The two adverbial locative  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$  phrases evidently point to bizarre types of false teaching, or maybe they point to the false teaching of monks and nuns who feel that living apart from society makes one more righteous. Or perhaps the text is speaking of gurus who want to establish an ideal type of culture away from all contact with ordinary society. In any case vss. 23-26 make us conscious of the many possibilities of false Christs and false prophets.
15. Vs. 27:  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  is again explanatory.  $\acute{\omega}\sigma\pi\epsilon\rho$  and  $\acute{o}\upsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$  are correlative particles of comparison. Here finally Jesus answers the question which the disciples had asked in vs. 3. The word  $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha$  clearly means that Jesus is speaking about His second coming. The point that Jesus is making is that His second coming will be sudden, universal, a happening which no one will question. And the implication is that we should constantly have one eye on His  $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha$ . Over and over Scripture tells us that we should be prepared.
16. Vs. 28: Like vs. 15, this vs. has received a number of explanations. Lenski explains thus: "With  $\pi\tau\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha$  Jesus indicates the hopeless state of the Jewish nation; carrion is death gone into putrefaction. It is fit only for vultures. When the Jewish nation is so far gone, it is fit for nothing but false Christs and false prophets who are to finish the horrible job of removing that nation from existence." Wenzel explains thus: "We find the governing thought in vs. 26, a warning not to listen to false messianic claims. The adage then would mean that wherever a carrion is found, vultures are sure to gather. The

carcass thus would be the pseudo-messiahs and prophets and their doctrines, and the vultures eagerly devouring the carrion, the fools and dupes who readily, yea, greedily, fall for false doctrines. This also takes into consideration the general trend of vv. 23-26. . . . Be ye not like vultures that gather about carrion." But Kretzmann: "Where Christ is, there shall His elect be." Wenzel remarks: "Before the meaning of the adage can be determined, the question must be answered: Is it to be connected with vs. 27 or vs. 26?" Lenski and Wenzel answer this question according to vs. 26. Kretzmann answers the question according to vs. 27. The text of the Majority adds a γάρ here. But even at that it is difficult to decide between the two explanations. Is it a warning or a promise? It seems to be a warning rather than a promise. Just as carrion draws the vultures, so sin attracts the judgment of God.