

“Remember Lot’s Wife” (part 1)

Introduction:

Let us read of God’s judgment upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Recorded here is an historical account of God’s judgment upon a people that became a paradigm for God’s future judgment upon the unconverted world at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.¹

¹⁵When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, “Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.” ¹⁶And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. ¹⁷So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.”

¹⁸Then Lot said to them, “Please, no, my lords! ¹⁹Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. ²⁰See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.”

²¹And he said to him, “See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. ²²Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there.”

Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

²³The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. ²⁴Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

²⁶***But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.***

In Jude verse 7 we read of this event as portending the overthrow and judgment of the wicked at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

⁵But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; ⁷***as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*** (Jude 5-7)

And then let us read the warning that our Lord Jesus gave to His disciples in Luke 17:32. Jesus said, ***“Remember Lot’s wife.”***

The Holy Scriptures contain the Words of God to His people. By His Word He directs His people to live in faith to Jesus Christ unto the salvation of their eternal souls. The Lord’s instruction to His people on how they are to live in His world is often seen in two forms.

(1) The Lord gives blessed ***promises*** to His people to encourage them in their Christian walk of faith. Here are a few: Our Lord told His disciples, “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). He assured them “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on

¹ See Jude 7.

serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you (Luke 10:19). Before He went to His cross, Jesus said unto them, “Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22).

(2) But our Lord has also given many serious *warnings* to His people to prevent them from carelessness and complacency. He told His followers, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). He said on another occasion, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matt. 25:13). And so by these two, the promises and warnings of Scripture, the Lord keeps His people on the narrow road of faithful discipleship that leads them unto life eternal.

On one occasion our Lord gave this warning to His disciples, “*Remember Lot’s wife*” (Luke 17:32). I would like us to consider this teaching session of our Lord Jesus in which He spoke these words to His disciples. After we consider the context (today, Lord willing), then we will consider the importance of this briefly worded warning (next week, Lord willing), for when the Lord Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, He also gave this warning to us and all of His disciples who have followed Him in faith.

The theme that He addressed in this passage arose from a question that was posed to Him about the kingdom of God. In His teaching He warned His disciples of the difficult days ahead of them and their responsibility to be alert and to retain a sense of urgency respecting their salvation from God’s wrath. Let us read Luke 17:20ff.

²⁰Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

²²Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them. ²⁴For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. ²⁵But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; ²⁹but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. ³²Remember Lot’s wife. ³³Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. ³⁶Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left. ³⁷And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?” So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” (Luke 17:20-37)

The Lord Jesus had been ministering among His people for perhaps 3 years. All knew of Him; even King Herod was asking questions about Him. The longer the Lord ministered and the more miracles He performed, the more people asked questions about His identity. “Was He a prophet?” “Was He the promised prophet who was to come spoken of by Moses?” “Was He the Messiah?” Strong opinions were held by everyone. The common people favored Him highly. The Jewish leaders opposed Him fiercely.

When our Lord spoke these words, He had been journeying for some time from Galilee to Jerusalem with His disciples. Everyone seemed to expect a great event to occur once He arrived there. There would be conflict. Perhaps, there would be a move on the part of Jesus to assert the claim He was the Messiah and thereby foment a revolution of the people. Others had done so before Him, perhaps He would also. It is reasonable, therefore, that questions about *the coming of the Kingdom of God* should arise. There were many differing views among the Jews respecting the teaching of the Scriptures on this subject. But what

were His views? “What were the views of this rabbi of Galilee?” “Well,” thought the Pharisees, “Let’s ask him.”

I am glad they did, for in the record of Jesus’ answer we have details which help us greatly. For just as there was much confusion in that day, there is much confusion in this day respecting these matters. There are many errant interpretations and fanciful speculations among evangelicals which only serve to confuse the people of God and divert them from truly important matters. When we enter a discussion of these matters, we must wade through a morass of varied opinions that are held tenaciously by their adherents. These fanciful claims of prophecy pundits sometimes lead unbelievers to be very wary of the claims of Christians. This is the ground where we will encounter the zealot and he will oppose us.

Because of the nature of this material, we need to do some background work. And so, before we look at the text in detail, we should try and understand something of the Jewish expectation of the day. This will be review for some of you; nevertheless, let us take a few minutes and trace some of the history of the Jews’ understanding of this subject, the kingdom of God.

I. What kind of kingdom did the Jews expect to come?

A. The Old Testament teaching

There are various ideas which are taught in the Old Testament that contributed to the Jews’ understanding of the kingdom of God. The Old Testament teaches about the kingdom of God throughout its pages. Let us consider some terms and themes often employed by the Old Testament writers.

1. The coming of God

The Old Testament portrays God coming to the rescue of His people in order to deliver them from slavery and oppression and bring them to a place of safety where they may dwell with Him. (1) It was so in the days of Israel’s beginning, the **Exodus**. God came from Sinai to Egypt and led them out with His mighty hand to Sinai. (2) It was so later when His people were in exile in **Babylon**. God promised that He would come to them and bring them out and lead them back to their land. Isaiah 40:10-11 describes God coming to save His people from Babylon where they had been held in captivity for 70 years. This event speaks of the deliverance that He brought to them through Cyrus the Persian.

Behold, the Lord GOD *shall come* with a strong hand,
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His work before Him.
He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young. (Isa. 40:10f)

(3) Even **David** described his rescue from King Saul as a “coming of God” in Psalm 18.

He bowed the heavens also, and *came down*
With darkness under His feet.
And He rode upon a cherub, and flew;
He flew upon the wings of the wind. (Psa. 18:9f)

2. The coming of God as a visitation of God

In many places of the Old Testament God is described as coming “to visit” a people in order to scrutinize them, assess them, and then render justice to the situation which He finds. (1) When **Sodom** and

Gomorra were destroyed, it was after a divine visitation in which God, through two angels, inspected the city and its inhabitants. (Genesis 19:1ff). (2) Again, when God would come to **Egypt** to bring out His people in the great **Exodus**, it was described as a visitation (Genesis 50:24 – but not in the NIV). (3) Isaiah declared that God would visit **Tyre** with His judgment (Isaiah 23:17). I would encourage you to examine the many references of the words “visit” and “visitation” as well as the words “come” or “coming” respecting the manifestation of God to His people in Old Testament times. The Jews anticipated a future visitation of God to come among them to bring them salvation from their sin. This was realized in the coming of Jesus Christ. Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, spoke of this prophetically upon the birth of his son, the forerunner of the Promised King.

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For **He has visited** and redeemed His people,
⁶⁹And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,
⁷⁰As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,
⁷¹That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
⁷²To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
⁷³The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
⁷⁴To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
⁷⁵In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.
“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;
For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,
⁷⁷To give knowledge of salvation to His people
By the remission of their sins,
⁷⁸Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which **the Dayspring from on high has visited us**;
⁷⁹To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:68-79)

3. “The day of the Lord”

This expression should *not* be viewed as a specific date; rather, it is a description of an **event** that transpires. The phrase occurs to describe God intervening in the affairs of nations in order to punish sin and deliver His people. Perhaps it could be explained in this way, “Man has had his way (day), now the Lord will have His way (day).” It is as though God says “Enough! No more!” and He executes justice in punishing evil doers and relieving the oppression of His people. He intervenes, He acts, and He does so in such a way all know that it was He Who brought it to pass. He alone is exalted in that day. Perhaps a good description of this is in **Isaiah 2:11-13, 20-21**.

¹¹The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down,
And the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.
¹²For **the day of the LORD** of hosts
Shall come upon everything proud and lofty,
Upon everything lifted up—
And it shall be brought low—

²⁰In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver
And his idols of gold,
Which they made, each for himself to worship,
To the moles and bats,
²¹To go into the clefts of the rocks,
And into the crags of the rugged rocks,
From the terror of the LORD
And the glory of His majesty,
When He arises to shake the earth mightily.

The language which is often used to describe this day is filled with **graphic imagery** and **poetic symbolism**. Men hide in caves. The earth shakes. Great hailstones fall. Stars fall from heaven. The splendor (glory) of God is revealed

Because the day of the Lord is an event, we should realize that the Bible indicates that *there have been a number of days of the Lord in history*. God has intervened in overthrowing kingdoms, punishing the wicked, and bringing relief to the oppressed. Great harm comes when this expression is associated solely with a single date, or a single event in the future, as in the Second Coming of Christ. *Many Christians do err greatly because they see this expression as always, in every instance, referring to the second coming of Christ.*

“The day of the Lord” is used to describe a number of historical events in the Biblical record. A “day of the Lord” occurred when God judged *Egypt* in 605 BC (Jer. 46:1-13). A “day of the Lord” occurred when God judged *Edom* in about 600 BC (Isa. 34:1-15). A “day of the Lord” occurred when God judged *Babylon* in the late 6th century BC (Isa. 13:9-22). A “day of the Lord” occurred when God judged *Israel* and *Judah* (Amos 5:18-24). A “day of the Lord” occurred when God judged *Jerusalem* in the early 6th century BC (Ezek. 12:26-13:14; Zeph. 1:4-18; cf. Lam. 2:22).

3. “The Messiah”

a. The word “messiah”, in Greek, “Christ”, means “anointed.” In the Old Testament when a person (or thing) was anointed with oil, it indicated that person belonged to God and would be an instrument in God’s hand to work on His behalf. Priests were anointed because they ministered before the Lord. Prophets were anointed because they spoke on behalf of God. Judges and Kings were anointed because they administered justice on behalf of God. In the OT we see frequently the expressions “the Lord’s anointed” and “mine anointed” to refer to God’s servants.

b. “The Messiah” as a specific title of the coming Saviour did not emerge until rather late in Israel’s history. Through most of Israel’s history there was little anticipation of a coming Saviour. Now, you and I see the need of a Saviour throughout the Old Testament, but the people living in that time did not. Early in their history, before the period of the kings, when they saw their need for specific instances of divine intervention against their enemies, they would cry out to God and He would send them a deliverer in the form of a judge. Later, Israel demanded and was given kings, each descendant was viewed as the “anointed of the Lord.”

The periods of rule by King David and his son, Solomon, were the glory years of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament. After Solomon, there were years of decline, defeat, oppression by enemies. With the birth of each succeeding heir of the throne, who was a descendant of David, the people’s hopes were raised that God through him would bring Israel to her former glory. This did not occur.

The prophets, as well as other writers of the Old Testament declared why this was so. Because of their own sin, because they had violated their covenant, because they had repeatedly broken God’s laws, it was not merely a problem of their enemies being against them, God Himself was against them. Although He had dealt with them graciously, mercifully, warning them repeatedly as to the consequences, they persisted in

their actions. They broke their covenant and the curse of God had come upon them. They were utterly destroyed, taken into captivity to Babylon (586 BC).

What finally began to emerge in their thinking was that they were not merely a need for a deliverer to deliver them from their enemies, but for a deliverer/Saviour who would save them from themselves--from sin and its domination, and a deliverer/Saviour who would save them from God's great wrath that was upon them. Until God sent the Messiah, there would not be, could not be, peace, joy, and righteousness. God Himself would have to save them from their sins. He would have to send a Savior, who would have to effect this deliverance on their behalf, hence, the arise of the Messianic hope.

But questions arose: (1) Would he be a descendant of David who would lead God's people to victory, thereby transforming the world? Or, because things have become so bad, the world so far gone, (2) would He be a divine figure Who comes out of heaven destroying all his enemies and creating a new heaven and earth on which He will establish God's kingdom? (cf. Daniel 7:13, 14)

4. The kingdom of God

The Bible speaks of the kingdom of God in several ways. First, there is a sense in which the kingdom of God describes *the sovereign rule of God over all peoples in all times*. Because He is the Creator, He is King over all through all of history. This truth was revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, as recorded in Daniel 4, in which he was made to confess of our God:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
³⁵All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Dan. 4:34-37).

Second, *the kingdom of God describes a realm in which its citizens willingly subject themselves to God's rule*. This idea of the kingdom of God arose with the ancient kingdom of Israel. Israel was the kingdom in which God Himself ruled through His judges and kings. David, of course, was the King by which all kings were judged, for he was a man after God's own heart; that is, he ruled Israel as God would have him rule Israel. The theocratic nation of Israel was a manifestation of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament.

Third, *God gave many promises of a future kingdom that He would inaugurate, setting up a promised Son of David as its eternal King*. God gave many promises to David, namely, that forever, his descendant would rule over the kingdom of Israel. Within this kingdom there is freedom from pain and oppression, there is peace, joy, righteousness. People in the kingdom live before God in a manner that pleases Him, and they experience His blessing with an abundant life that only He may bestow.

The Jewish people anticipated this kingdom of God, which they saw only in physical terms as the restored, glorious Davidic kingdom of ancient Israel. They perceived it as a kingdom ushered in by the Messiah, which would come about when God intervened in history, when the glory of God would come again to Israel--God would visit them; they longed for this great Day of the Lord. In this way all of these terms and concepts come together.

B. The intertestament period

Between the time of the close of the Old Testament and 400 years later with the opening of the New Testament there were increased expectation and raised hopes for the coming of the Messiah and His inauguration of the kingdom of God. But these were also days of great deception and disillusionment. The Jewish Essenes, who lived by the Dead Sea, were waiting for a heavenly figure, like a son of man to come and destroy the world in one last battle of Armageddon. There were those in Jerusalem who saw the Messiah

in every charismatic leader that stood in defiance to Rome. By the time the Lord Jesus arrived on the scene there was an anticipation by everyone of the soon coming Messiah and His kingdom, but there was understanding by no one as to the true nature of the kingdom; that is, except for the Lord Jesus Himself.

Thankfully there will be a day when all oppression will cease. All defiance against God's law will end. There will be compliance, submission, delight in God's rule. There will be peace, joy, and righteousness in the Holy Spirit. But we who are in the kingdom of God now enjoy these things now. Yes, we will more fully see the kingdom when Jesus returns at the Second Coming, but we enjoy kingdom privileges and blessings now as well. May God be praised for having sent us the Lord Jesus in turning each of us from our iniquities.

And so, when Jesus taught these people, there was anticipation by everyone of the coming kingdom, but there was confusion everywhere with respect to the nature of that kingdom. There is confusion today as well respecting these matters. We now come to our passage, **Luke 17:20-37**.

II. Jesus' response to the Pharisees (17:20, 21)

²⁰Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you (rather, "in your midst")."

Our Lord's entire ministry focused on the theme that through Him the promised kingdom of God was present and manifest. The gospels do not present the kingdom as something that would have taken place if the Jews would have embraced it, but that God withdrew His offer of the kingdom when the Jews rejected Jesus. This is the teaching of classical dispensationalism. No, rather, the gospels announce the arrival of the kingdom through Jesus Christ. If the Jews rejected the kingdom, that is, if they failed or refused to acknowledge and submit to Jesus as the promised King, God would reject them and bring His judgment upon them.

We know, of course, that the Jewish people by and large rejected Jesus as their Messiah, their promised King. Rather than submitting to Him as their Lord, they crucified Him. They thought that their rejection of Him put an end to His claims as their King. He was dead and buried.² But in actuality, the Jews rejection and crucifixion of Jesus was the every means by which God would bring about His Son's exaltation. The Father raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned Him in heaven as Lord. The promise of the coming kingdom of God was thereby inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

What then, did our Lord teach on this occasion respecting the kingdom of God?

A. One cannot calculate the arrival of the kingdom (17:20b-21a)

The Pharisees wanted to know what kinds of signs would take place before the kingdom would come. The Lord told them that the kingdom would not come in that fashion. To think in those terms was to misunderstand the nature of the kingdom completely. The kingdom is not something that is to be seen as arriving suddenly, being manifested outwardly. It is not a physical kingdom which one can identify as being here or there. In other words, *the kingdom is essentially spiritual in nature*.

This is important. It would seem that some people can only see the kingdom through carnal eyes. But the kingdom has to do with forgiveness of sin, righteousness, peace with God and having the peace of God, accompanied with joy in these things. These things are not visible to the eye, nor can they be confined to physical boundaries.

B. The kingdom had already arrived (17:21b)

² Amazingly, classical dispensationalists also believe that the Jews rejection of Jesus and His subsequent death put an end to the hope of the Kingdom until the end of this church age.

Jesus said that the kingdom is “within you” (or, “in your midst”); that is, it is spiritual in nature, and experienced by individuals who come to encounter the rule and power of God in their lives. Even while Jesus was ministering, the kingdom was being manifest to all who came in contact with Him and experienced His working in their lives.

III. Jesus’ further response to His disciples (17:22-37)

Now we come to the hard part. There are a number of interpretations which are given respecting our Lord’s teaching. I am going to present them under two broad headings. First, there is the common understanding that Jesus was teaching about His Second Coming. But there is a second view, which I will explain later.

A. Jesus’ Second Coming

It is clear in the Scriptures that Christ is returning one day, literally and physically (cf. Acts 1:9-11). When He returns, He will resurrect all who are in the graves and judge each and every one according to his works (cf. John 5:28f; Matt. 16:27). Most people see this passage as our Lord’s clear teaching respecting His Second Coming.

1. The Lord said there would be a day when his disciples long for “the days of the Son of man”, but they would not see it. Our Lord was telling His disciples that in the future, after His departure, they will not have it “as good” as the days they were now enjoying. They would long for the days when Jesus was among them, and they were experiencing every blessing.

2. The Lord said there would be deceivers who would teach that Christ has already come and that He is over here or over there. The Lord warns, “Do not be deceived by them.” (17:23)

It is hard to imagine that Christians could be deceived in this respect in thinking that Christ could have returned and we have to find Him, but these disciples did not have the advantage of what the Scriptures say about these matters. There were many false christs in that day.

3. The Lord said that His Second Coming will come suddenly and in a fashion that there will be no mistake, but first He must suffer and be rejected of “this generation” (17:24f).

4. The Lord said that His Second Coming would come suddenly and unexpectedly (17:26-36).

a. It would be as in the days of Noah (17:26-27). The days of the Son of Man (Jesus), will arrive in the same way. Nobody expected the flood in Noah’s day even though Noah had warned them. In the same way, nobody will expect the Second Coming; it will happen suddenly. All will be caught by surprise. *Life will be going on as normal.* No signs of immediate judgment exist, but then Christ will come. (Note that the “days of the Son of Man” is a reference to Christ judging the wicked and the rescue of the godly.)

All those prophecy buffs who make all kinds of predictions about “signs before the Lord’s coming should listen to the Lord Jesus. It will be like in the days of Noah. There was no warning other than the words of warning of Noah himself. The Day of Judgment came suddenly, and only Noah and his family escaped.

b. It would be as in the days of Lot (17:28-36). Life was going on as usual in Sodom and Gomorrah (17:28). There is no mention here of the sins of Sodom; that is not what is under consideration here. Rather, the point is that they were unaware until that very moment they saw “fire and sulphur” raining down upon them (17:29). It will be the same in the “day the Son of Man is revealed”; that is, that He will judge the wicked on that day(17:30).

Then the Lord gives instruction to His disciples beginning in **17:31-36**. When that day comes, flee. Get away “now.” Do not stop to pack. Do not go home if you happen to be away. Flee. As Lot and his family left Sodom, you leave. Remember how Lot’s wife tarried? She looked back, longing for her life in Sodom. God judged here, turning her into a pillar of salt. **“Remember Lot’s wife.”** On that day God would cause a separation to occur, the righteous from the unrighteous.

Now it is in these verses that *a real problem* arises if you interpret these verses to be speaking of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. *Where are you going to flee or how are you going to have time to flee when Christ returns the second time? But is not the Lord instructing His disciples to do so in this context?* Some explain this by saying that He is speaking metaphorically, that He is stressing the need for His disciples to be fully ready and hoping and waiting for the Second Coming, and not to love the world as did Lot’s wife. Do not allow yourself to fall back into worldliness and sin and therefore be an object of judgment as well. That is plausible.

Here is another point of confusion by many respecting this passage. Our Lord declared, “One will be taken, the other left.” Most evangelicals assume that He was speaking about the rapture when He will snatch away His people before a future tribulation period. But in the context, the ones who are taken are not raptured, but rather they are “taken away” in that they died due to the judgment of God. But look at the question the disciples asked, *“Where are they taken, Lord?”* The Lord answers in verse 37: *“Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”* What he was saying is that their being “taken away” is being killed due to the judgment of God. They are removed from among the living (cf. Matt. 24:36-41).

Now thus far we have described the passage assuming that our Lord was teaching about His Second Coming. However, there is another plausible interpretation of this passage of which you should be aware. It is possible that the Lord was not speaking here of His Second Coming at all; rather, He was prophesying of...

B. The judgment of God upon Jerusalem that took place in A.D. 70

Here in Luke 17, *it may be that the Lord was predicting the fall of Jerusalem exclusively*. He may not have been speaking of His Second Coming at all. But how can one get that out of these verses? Quite easily actually. The “days of the Son of Man” would be seen as the equivalent of the “Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament when God judged Babylon, Egypt, Edom, and Israel and Judah. Jesus declared that judgment would fall on this generation after they first rejected him (cf. 17:25). The judgment would fall on them suddenly, as lightning comes suddenly. They will be living as in the days of Noah and the days of Lot, as though there were no danger to them at all, but then the judgment of God would fall on them suddenly. If this is the proper way to understand this passage, then verses 31ff makes perfect sense. He was warning His disciples that they should get away as far as possible and as fast as possible, otherwise they will be destroyed as well.

In A.D. 70 God sent the Roman armies which utterly destroyed the city of Jerusalem. At that time the inhabitants of the city suffered terribly under a long siege. The people starved. There was treachery and murderous bands among the Jews themselves within the city during the siege. There were Jewish zealots who refused to allow any to surrender to the Romans and they killed anyone who tried. By the final destruction, **1,100,000** had died. The Romans enslaved the **97,000** remaining survivors. The Romans destroyed and dismantled the temple, so much so that there was not a stone standing upon another.

The Lord Jesus prophesied of this event, and it came to pass. This was an event of immense significance in the first century to the early church, the Scriptures speak of the event repeatedly. However, this makes our job of interpreting prophetic passages of Scripture very difficult. For several reasons:

(1) In these days, most people are not even aware of what occurred, yet alone of its importance. Consequently many Christians do not recognize those passages as telling of that event, and so, when they come to such passages, they project them all onto a yet future event just prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

(2) Many assume those passages which prophesy of the fall of Jerusalem are speaking of Christ's second coming because the passage may be filled with apocalyptic language of symbols, obscure images, and cosmic upheavals, in language just like we considered in the Old Testament which described historical events like the fall of Egypt, Edom, Babylon, and Jerusalem. But because this language is so unfamiliar to us in our 20th century thinking, we tend to see this language hyper-literally, and so this leads us to project these passages into the future, "*after all*" we say, "*We have not seen the sun darkened or the moon turned to blood, or stars fall from heaven; obviously, these are references to future events.*"

(3) The Lord in several instances seems to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem of AD 70 and of His Second Coming in the same conversation (cf. Matt. 24:1-3), which is an enormously difficult passage to sort out. For these reasons, prophetic portions of Scripture that speak of these things should be approached with caution, and people's interpretations should be viewed with a great deal of scepticism. Moreover, I would encourage you in this: whenever you come to a portion of Scripture in the New Testament like this, you need to ask yourself, "is this speaking of the events of AD 70, or the Second Coming of Christ, or both?"³

Let us quickly look at these verses from this perspective.

(17:22-23) -- The "*days of the Son of Man*" would be seen as the equivalent of the "*day of the Lord*" in the Old Testament when God judged **Babylon, Egypt, Edom, and Israel and Judah**, and the city of **Jerusalem**. Just as we saw there were many "days of the Lord" when God broke into history to overthrow wicked people through the means of Gentile armies, so the Lord Jesus says that one day, at a time unexpected, He will break into history and judge "this generation" that rejected Him. The disciples with whom He was speaking would one day long for a manifestation of Christ's kingdom, that He would come to their deliverance and put down oppression and deliver them from their enemies, but their expectation would have to wait on God's timing, "*but you will not see it.*"

There will be deceivers, but do not listen to them as if the Lord were manifesting Himself here or there to His people. There is great emphasis in this passage on endurance/perseverance, not becoming *discouraged* or *deceived*, but to persevere in faith and obedience, and to be watchful for the day when the destruction would come upon Jerusalem, so that they might escape.

(17:24) For when one of the days of the Son of Man (Jesus) will be manifested, *that Day will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like lightning*. Here in this expression is one of the greatest difficulties of applying these verses to AD 70. What the interpretation hinges on is the significance of "lightening." By this expression, was the Lord attempting to show the fact that all would see Him because it will be as visible to all as lightening flashing across the sky? If so, it would be difficult to see this as referring to anything but the Second Coming. However, if the emphasis is on the *suddenness and unexpectedness* of lightening, then it can be seen to apply to the events of AD 70. They were not aware of what was coming, and then when it did come, it was too late to escape.

(17:25) **But Christ's death must proceed this day.** First, this generation would reject Him, and then and as a result of their rejection, they would encounter their destruction.

- * cf. **19:42-44** -- A clear reference to Jerusalem's siege
- * cf. **20:9-16** -- The Jews would be judged for having rejected Christ
- * cf. **20:17-19** -- The "stone" which is Christ, will crush them who have rejected Him
- * cf. **21:5-28** -- Jerusalem would be destroyed.

³ By the way, this is my purpose in dealing with this passage in the way I am. I am not trying to convince you one way or the other about this passage, whether or not it is speaking of the Second Coming or AD 70. My intention is to show you that there are differing, but plausible interpretations offered by sincere, honest interpreters. My hope is that it will help give you a sense of caution about yourself and others to keep you from running to extremes of dogmatism or embrace fanciful, bizarre interpretations of Christian leaders (or cults).

(17:26-29) That day will come suddenly, as in the days of Noah and Lot. Jesus declared that judgment would fall on this generation after they first rejected him (cf. 17:25). The judgment will fall on them *suddenly*, as *lightening comes suddenly*. They will be living as in the days of Noah and the days of Lot, as though there were no danger to them at all, but then the judgment of God will fall on them suddenly. Then **vs.31ff** makes perfect sense: He was warning His disciples that they should get away as far as possible and as fast as possible, otherwise they will be destroyed as well.

(17:30-33) On that day His disciples were to flee Jerusalem. In order to escape the siege and destruction that God would bring upon them by the Roman armies they were warned ahead of time to escape.

(17:34-37) On that day the righteous will be separated from the wicked⁴. Interestingly, no Christians perished in that fall. They all fled. For when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they took off for the hills. They saw God's hand in it all. Now you might not see the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 in these words, but apparently the Jewish Christians of that generation did, for they got out and were spared destruction for having done so.

Furthermore, later, early Christian writers understood the details of our passage as applying to AD 70. **Eusebius**, the early church historian of the fourth century believed this was so. He quoted **Josephus** to prove that Jesus was speaking of AD 70.⁵ And then he gave his own assessment.⁶ In addition many noted commentators have understood this passage speaking of AD 70. In particular we could cite **Matthew Henry**.⁷ Here are his comments on verse 30, "*Thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.*"

When Christ comes to destroy the Jewish nation, by the Roman armies, the generality of that nation will be found under such a reigning security and stupidity as this. They have warning given by Christ now, and will have it repeated to them by the apostles after him, as they had by Noah and Lot; but it will be all in vain. They will continue secure, will go on in their neglect and opposition of Christ and his gospel, till all the Christians are withdrawn from among them and gone to the place of refuge. God will provide for them on the other side Jordan, and then a deluge of judgments shall flow in upon them, which will destroy all the unbelieving Jews.

But it may be that the Holy Spirit intended that both the fall of Jerusalem in Ad 70 and the final return of our Lord Jesus to be conveyed through these words. The point is this, the prophetic portions of Scripture are difficult to interpret and one must be very cautious about either uncritically accepting one view, or in a cavalier fashion rejecting another view. When reading interpretations of much of New Testament prophecy, if the interpretation does not address with the AD 70 event, disregard them. If they deal with the AD 70 event, read them carefully and critically.

Avoid extremes. Avoid dogmatism. Read all opinions and weigh their arguments in the light of the evidence. Avoid reading the Bible as though it fell out of heaven last week and that the best commentary available is today's newspaper.

Do not allow yourselves to be drawn into error being deceived by men with "charisma" who seem to always come up with novel interpretations of prophecy which serve principally in gaining for themselves a loyal following. Be ready always to stand before the Lord to whom you will render an account of your life.

⁴Note: in v.37 the word "vultures" is literally "eagles", which happened to be the symbol on the Roman banners of the armies which destroyed Jerusalem.

⁵ See *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Series Two, pp. 142ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 138ff.

⁷ *Commentary on Luke*, vol. 5, p. 771.

Now it was in this setting of our Lord warning His disciples, He said to them, “Remember Lot’s wife.” And although the Lord gave these words to His disciples in that first century setting, they have abiding authority and relevance for us. We will address this more directly next week, Lord willing.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise?
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever.
Amen. (Jude 24f)
