

The Lord of History

Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. What is one major world event you can distinctly remember watching unfold on television or social media?
2. What's the most impressive building or manmade structure you have seen in person?

Read the following passage: Read Luke 21:5-36.

Jesus' disciples, like many people in the first century, were impressed with the Jewish Temple's size and grandeur. In fact, scholars believe it was the largest temple in the ancient world. The disciples were surely stunned to hear that it would be destroyed. There is some debate as to whether Jesus was also alluding to the end of the age in this passage. Jesus' use of apocalyptic imagery (e.g. "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.") and reference to "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" (see Daniel 7:13) do not necessarily imply that he was looking beyond the destruction of the Temple, though it is certainly possible.

Why was God bringing such a judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple? Jesus' teaching emphasized that the people of Israel — particularly the religious leadership — had failed to embrace the identity and mission God. Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43).

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Jesus invested countless hours teaching and healing people in Israel, often among those who were outside of the Jewish power structures. He also warned people of the dire consequences of ignoring God's call to repent. (See, for example, Luke 13:1-9.) Jesus' ministry cannot be reduced to *only* compassion or *only* prophetic warning. Do you find it difficult to embrace one of these aspects of Jesus' ministry? Are you prone to gravitate to one of these emphases over the other? Explain.
2. Jesus' foreknowledge of the Temple's destruction is a powerful indication that God is in control of human history. In the Scriptures, this important truth is held in tension with human accountability for our own actions. (As an example, see Acts 4:22-23.) How should God's sovereignty over human history impact how we pray and how we navigate difficult circumstances? Consider the example of Paul's experience in Corinth described in Acts 18:5-11.
3. The Jewish Temple was a massive structure in the ancient world. Some of the stones used in its construction weighed in excess of one million pounds! Some Jews, considering the Temple's size and God's covenant with the people of Israel, felt that the Temple was virtually indestructible. This, of course, was not the case. What are some things in our culture that we may look to for safety because they feel

almost indestructible?

4. How did Jesus prepare his disciples for what they would experience after his death and resurrection, up to and including the siege of Jerusalem? What are some ways God prepares us for the challenges we face?
5. The ancient Israelites made very clear distinctions between what was “holy” and what was “common.” In contrast, holiness is not a concept that has much traction in our cultural context. What does it mean to be God’s holy people today?
6. Read Matthew 5:13-16. God called the ancient Israelites to display God’s glory to all the nations. What does it look like to be “salt” and “light” in our setting?
7. Consider the following features of what we might call a “modern Gnosticism.” How might some of these paradigms or beliefs pull us away from the worldview, identity, and mission that God has for us?
 - My life is inferior to the lives I see projected around me.
 - I would be much happier if I had a perfect body.
 - I need to discover and express my authentic self.
 - Truth is found by looking inward, not in traditional religions or religious texts.
 - There is no more important commitment than the commitment to myself.
8. What is one way you can embrace God’s identity and mission this week?

Pray