

## LAST CHANCE • GOD'S KINGDOM PLAN



Photograph by Greg Schneider/Worldwide Challenge

### WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

This study looks at Jesus' final call to the nation of Israel to repent, while at the same time it introduces God's new program to advance His kingdom

### WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

#### LUKE 12:35-13:35

##### Overview

This section in Luke's gospel is comprised of several stories and teachings of Jesus that are centered on a common theme. Jesus is inexorably headed for Jerusalem, and the nation is receiving their final opportunity to respond. The window of opportunity is closing fast, and Jesus is pleading and warning them that this is their last chance to accept Him and avert national judgement. At the same time, Jesus unveils Plan B to His disciples: how the kingdom of God will be manifested in light of His rejection.

##### Luke 12:35-48

This is the first time that Jesus addresses the theme of His Second Coming. Had the nation of Israel responded and received Jesus as their Messiah, there would have been no need for a Second Coming; but of course God had always foreknown that this would be the result. In light of Israel's hardness of heart, there will be a different plan. Jesus will be rejected and crucified, and the kingdom of God will progress, but the nation of Israel will not be at the center of the plan. Jesus, Himself, will return again at the end of the age, once believers from every nation are gathered. At this juncture in Jesus' ministry, this would have been very hard for the disciples to understand, and things would only become clearer as the events of Jesus' death and resurrection unfolded.

##### Luke 12:49-53

The Jewish belief was that when the Messiah came, He would restore and gather together the nation of Israel. Instead, due to their rejection of Him, the nation and world, would be divided, with the belief in Christ being the dividing line.

##### Luke 12:54-13:8

In these message, we see the strong call to repentance. While unveiling the new plan for the kingdom of God on earth, Jesus still faithfully holds out the invitation for the nation to repent. He rebukes them for their ability to predict the weather by charting the signs in the skies, but their inability to recognize the many clues and signs that point to His identity as their Messiah. He alludes to the coming judgement of the nation for their disbelief, and urges them to make peace with the Judge before it's too late.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to [cru.comm@uscm.org](mailto:cru.comm@uscm.org).

In the parable of the fig tree, the nation of Israel is represented by the fig tree. God has given ample time for them to produce fruit, and they are receiving their last opportunity before judgement comes, symbolized by the cutting down of the tree.

## **Luke 13:10-17**

This is the last time we see Jesus teaching in a synagogue. This healing takes place on the Sabbath. Far from simply trying to irritate the Pharisees, there is great symbolism in the action. As the Book of Hebrews makes clear, Jesus is truly the fulfillment of the Sabbath, bringing peace and rest from our labor by granting salvation through faith. As Jesus symbolizes the Sabbath, it is quite possible the bound and crippled woman represented the nation itself in need of healing, which Jesus provides. The Pharisees, of course, see none of these actions as symbols of Jesus' true identity, or their own need of healing. Instead, they are only incensed that Jesus did work, a healing, on a day the Mosaic Law forbid work to be done. Once again, Jesus' invitation to come and enjoy the true Sabbath, falls on deaf ears.

## **Luke 13:18-21**

As this section progresses, more information is disclosed about the form God's kingdom will take upon the rejection of Jesus. The disciples, recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, believed He would at this point in history inaugurate His kingdom in great power, for the Jewish belief was that the Messiah would take the throne in a mighty display of power and majesty. The plan as revealed in the parable of the mustard seed, and yeast, was that the kingdom would begin small, unseen, and progressively grow to ultimately fill the whole earth, which of course it has.

## **Luke 13:22-30**

This story pictures a man pounding at the door of the kingdom to gain entry, but sadly is turned away. The man represents Israel. Jesus makes this clear as the man locked out of the kingdom recognizes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all of the prophets inside at the banquet (a common metaphor for the messianic kingdom). Then comes further shocking news, and the last piece of the puzzle, of what God's new kingdom program will look like. Jesus says that people from east, west, north, and south would take their place at this great banquet. These attendees represent the Gentiles who will be gathered into the kingdom ahead, or instead, of the Jews.

## **Luke 13:31-35**

The entire section aptly closes with the picture of Jesus' lament for Jerusalem, and the nations' coming judgment. Here Luke brings us back to the narrative theme, Jesus final trek to Jerusalem. We see that He is drawing near.

## **Summary**

While faithfully holding out the invitation to repent and follow Him, Jesus begins to outline for His disciples what the new plan for God's kingdom on the earth will look like. It will involve a Second Coming of the Messiah. It will not be a peaceful reign, but will divide the nation of Israel and the world; and it will not appear suddenly in great power, but start off imperceptibly small and progressively spread to the entire earth. This new kingdom will also be comprised of believers from all nations (Gentiles), not just the Jews.

**This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it over before the study. Hand it out to the group at the end of the study and have them read it this week.**

## WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

Many people have misunderstood some of these passages and applied them personally or individually, i.e., Jesus giving the fig tree another year before it is cut down, or perhaps seeing themselves pounding on the gate of the kingdom but being denied entry. It is critical to see that these stories are meant to represent the nation of Israel and are not meant to be applied to individuals.

## WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

This study doesn't have a specific application. In following the gospel account, it's simply important for the group to better understand the mission of Jesus, and God's salvation plan. Understanding this plan is one of the reasons Luke wrote his gospel.

## MEMORY VERSE

Luke 12:40 "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

## WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Jesus knows that Israel will reject Him. In light of this, Jesus' glorious reign will await His Second Coming.
2. The picture in the Old Testament is of the Messiah binding and gathering the nation. His rejection will instead lead to division, in Israel, and wherever the gospel is preached.
3. If Israel had repented and received Him as their Messiah, the nation would have been healed, and the reign of the Messiah would have gone forth from Jerusalem to the nations.
4. They all speak of impending judgement and the need to repent before it's too late.
5. While God knows the future, it does not prevent Him from giving us real choices, though He knows they will be refused.
6. As a political leader, a guru, a revolutionary, social reformer.
7. The Sabbath symbolized peace, wholeness, and rest, which would ultimately be brought about through the Messiah.
8. In providing salvation by faith, Jesus offered rest from our work. He also brings peace and wholeness into our lives and His body, the church.
9. The bent over crippled woman, in her deformity, might very well represent the nation of Israel, in bondage and in need of healing.
10. They were too focused on the Laws and that Jesus wasn't following their traditions. Ultimately, they made their laws and traditions more important than heart obedience to God.
11. He would have taken His throne in great majesty and power. The parable of the mustard seed and yeast are meant to emphasize that, instead, the kingdom would begin imperceptibly small and spread to fill the whole world.
12. Israel.
13. That it would be comprised of Gentiles (non-Jews).
14. Luke brings us back to the narrative theme of Jesus' final trek to Jerusalem. We see that He is drawing near.