

TIME OF THE GENTILES

LUKE 21:24

There were many allusions to the end of time or end of the world in Jesus' discourses. Notable was His response to the private query of Peter, James, John and Andrew on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). There Jesus tied together major issues that referenced Daniel 8-12, the fall of literal Jerusalem and signs that would follow patterns outlined in the book of Revelation.

One message that Jesus added to Luke 21, not found in the other records, was this verse:

“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.”
Luke 21:24.

Why did Luke feel inspired to insert this and not the others? When would the “times of the Gentiles” be fulfilled? What follows that time? How does it influence our eschatologic view of Jesus' end-time message?

Background

Luke was a Gentile convert and spent much time with Paul. He was, therefore, involved in the expanding work of evangelizing the Gentile world. This was recorded in fascinating detail in his writing of the book of Acts. A physician, a man interested in detail, a Gentile and one with great compassion for the salvation of all, he recorded this verse, quoting the words of Jesus, that something would terminate – at a fulfillment – for the Gentiles.

Another interesting issue is the word itself interpreted in many translations as “Gentiles.” The Greek root word in this verse is *ethnos*. Originally, it was used for people held together by a common bond. Later, it became a derogatory word for “common” people, and associated with this was the concept of “foreigners.” The form used in verse 24 is *ethne*, which refers to the Gentiles or Gentile nations (Matthew 4:15; 20:25; Acts 4:25, 7:7, 13:19; Romans 5; Galatians 3:8; Revelation 10:11, 14:8, 15:3). In many places it is simply translated “nations.”

From a Jewish perspective, Luke appears to be presenting this, “... the Gentile world had no external existence. The great turning-point will be the messianic age. Then the nations who have made Israel their subjects (especially Rome!) will be destroyed by the Messiah and finish up in hell.”^[1]

In this context and in a still broader misunderstanding of the very Messianic mission by the disciples, came the end-time discourse of Jesus.

“With the overthrow of Jerusalem the disciples associated the events of Christ's personal coming in temporal glory to take the throne of universal empire, to punish the impenitent Jews, and to break from off the nation the Roman yoke. The Lord had told them that he would come the second time. Hence at the mention of judgments upon Jerusalem, their minds revert to that coming, and as they are gathered about the Saviour upon the Mount of Olives, they ask, ‘When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?’ [Matt. 24:3.]”^[2]

There was to be a Messianic age when all would be restored. Jesus carefully wove together the fabric of a dual prophecy. There would be an end to the oppressive Gentile rule. But its greater fulfillment would come at a final time in earth's history.

The Setting and Context

Jesus follows a very tightly defined order of end-time signs. Though beyond the scope of this article to review the details, He divided the end-time issues into three divisions: Before the Time of Trouble, Little Time of Trouble and Signs of the final end. This is how these were developed:

Jesus Answers the Questions			
	<u>Matthew 24</u>	<u>Mark 13</u>	<u>Luke 21</u>
Before Time of Trouble	(beginning of sorrows) Kingdom against kingdom Famines Pestilence Earthquakes	(beginning of sorrows) Kingdom against kingdom Famines Trouble Earthquakes	(--) Kingdom against kingdom Famines Pestilence, signs in heavens Earthquakes Fearful sights
During the Little Time of Trouble	(endure to end – saved) Persecution Hated of all nations Betrayed False prophets Love of many waxes cold	(endure to end – saved) Persecution Testify before kings/rulers Betrayed Hated of all men	(--) Persecution Prison, before kings/rulers Betrayed Martyrdom
Sign of the End	End comes when Gospel goes to all the world	Gospel first published	

Then Jesus introduced special end-time material with Danielic ties. This is how He outlined that:

Special End-Time Information

Evil Power Harm	<u>Matthew 24:15</u> When see abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel	<u>Mark 13:14</u> When see abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel	<u>Luke 21:20</u> When see Jerusalem compassed by armies – know desolation near
Flee	Then Flee to mountains Woe if with child, breast feeding	Then Flee to mountains Woe if with child, breast feeding	Then Flee to mountains Woe – child breastfeeding
Time of Trouble	Then Great tribulation	In These Days Affliction – worst since creation	These Days of Vengeance Fall by sword Dispersed to all nations
Period in Question	Warning False christs	Warning False christs	Jerusalem Trodden down by Gentiles till time of Gentiles fulfilled
Celestial Signs	Immediately After Tribulation Celestial Signs	After Tribulation Celestial Signs	After Time of Gentiles Celestial Signs
Second Coming	Then Christ's Coming	Then Christ's Coming	Then Christ's Coming

Several observations come to the fore in these tables and in their Danielic ties. First, the *abomination* that leads to *desolation* in Matthew and Mark parallel the encompassing of Jerusalem with the Roman armies when they set up idols to their gods. The Old Testament ties are found in Daniel 8-9 and 11-12. The Hebrew word for abominations is *shiqquwts* and relates to idolatrous standards. This directly relates to the setting up of a moral code that is contrary to God's laws. When that occurs, it is time to flee. The way Jesus presented this material, a defined order was given in the specific context of the two divisions noted. In the special information area, these were the sequenced points:

- Abomination – idolatrous standards
- Escape
- Time of trouble (includes Little and Great)

- False christs – time of Gentile fulfilled
- Celestial signs
- Second coming

This parallel analysis would suggest that the Gentile issue came to an end just before the celestial signs (noted also under the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-14). Following this is the return of Jesus – also alluded to in Revelation 6:16. It can be assumed that the word “fulfilled” *completes* a prophecy. The time of the Gentile is during a period of trouble and persecution of God’s people, *and* it involves the *trodding down* of Jerusalem. When this prophecy is fulfilled (*pleroo* – to expire), the trodding down of God’s people by the Gentile will have ceased.

Common Threads

What comes to an end or is fulfilled is actually implied in verse 24 – the “trodding down” of Jerusalem. This intimates that if the meaning of Jerusalem can be understood *and* the trodding down grasped, this *insert verse* by Luke could be comprehended.

First, looking at Jerusalem we note that early on it was a Canaanite city called Salem. Then in early Jewish history it was called Zion, Jerusalem and the City of David (II Samuel 5:6; I Kings 8:1; I Chronicles 11:4, 5:7). Approximately 690 B.C., preceding the Babylonian captivity, it began to have a spiritual and religious meaning: Holy City (Isaiah 48:2, 52:1), then a “holy mountain” “for all people” (Isaiah 56:7). Jeremiah noted a prophetic hope it would be a place where Gentiles would come (Jeremiah 3:17) and drew eschatologic expectations from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 31:38). We find even in Isaiah an expectation that Jerusalem would be persecuted (Isaiah 40) and then someday it would repent (Zechariah 8:15), personifying its name.

As time went on, the word Jerusalem became synonymous for God’s people. In the great covenant restoration prayer of Daniel 9, he noted:

“O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people [are become] a reproach to all [that are] about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.” Daniel 9:16-19.

This personification of Jerusalem is carried forward into the New Testament imagery, finally culminating in Jerusalem being the bride of Jesus. The intimation is that the time of the Gentiles will end when God’s people cease being trodden down.

The “trodding down” is *pateo*, suggesting crushing, trampling down, persecuting, even despising God’s laws. There are strong ties to the book of Daniel in these phrases:

1. In Daniel 8:10 the little horn (its second rise) casts down God’s people and stomps (ramac) on them. *Ramac* contextually reveals persecution of God’s people by the papacy.

2. In Daniel 8:13, Gabriel, in a recapitulation of the thought in verse 10, uses a different word –
3. Mirmac – meaning persecution.
 - In Daniel 12:7 the persecution and
 - Scattering of God’s people (naphats) will be ended at the deliverance of God’s people, ending a 3½ year period.

Though a detailed study of Daniel 8-12 cannot be done here, the Hebrew appointed time, *mowed* or *moed* ends at *eth qets* or *es qes* (Daniel 8:19). The trodding under of God’s people, persecution, appointed time, end of time and deliverance of God’s people all finish at the *moed*, *moweds* and half *moed* (12:7).

Our contextual setting can be expanded by noting that exegetic ties tell us that the time of the Gentiles will be finished when the persecution of God’s people is completed – even more specifically, at the end of a 3½ year period.

The Temple Court

In the great interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, this message is given:

“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty [and] two months.” Revelation 11:1-2.

The outer court was for the Gentiles. They are measured later and symbolize those who are wicked. It is intriguing that they will tread (*patco*) under foot (*persecute*) the holy city (God’s people) for – and here it is again – 42 months or 3½ years.

These help develop a link between Luke 21, Daniel 8-12 and Revelation 11. The same contextual language is drawn upon. The time of the Gentiles is a final period of persecution for God’s people and *ends* with the time period *at* the deliverance of God’s people. The persecution ends because something is completed with God’s people.

The Modern Jerusalem Issue

Jesus personified Jerusalem as His holy people:

“The voice that speaks to the impenitent today is the voice of Him who in heart anguish exclaimed as He beheld the city of His love: ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.’ Luke 13:34, 35, R.V. In Jerusalem, Jesus beheld a symbol of the world that had rejected and despised His grace. He was weeping, O stubborn heart, for you! Even when Jesus’ tears were shed upon the mount, Jerusalem might yet have repented, and escaped her doom.”^[3] [Jerusalem = His people]

“As Christ on the mount overlooked the doomed city, his tender sympathetic tears flowed, and

he uttered the yearning cry of a broken heart because of rejected love. He looked upon Jerusalem with suffering tenderness,...”[4]

Many people aren't aware that there is a difference between the Old and New Jerusalem. The new section was built on the outside of the small old section. It was established as a city in 1860. In the Six-day War in 1967, Israel gained control of Jerusalem. An Israeli flag was hoisted atop the Dome of the Rock where the ancient Jewish temple stood in Jesus' day. General Moshe Dayan, Defense Minister at that time, who was the architect of Israel's victory, ordered the flag removed. He returned the Dome of the Rock and parts of Old Jerusalem to the Muslims to appease one billion Muslims.

Old Jerusalem is 1/2 x 1/2 mile in size. The Vatican wants control of that part of Jerusalem. Currently, though under Jewish authority, it is occupied by Jews, Muslims, Armenians and Christians. The Dome of the Rock considered holy to both Jews and Muslims, has a mosque on it. Millions of Christians believe that a new temple will be built on that rock, which is, they feel, where the antichrist will appear at the end.

The challenge to Christians is how the Biblical prophetic messages are interpreted. *Literalism* taints apocalyptic views, directing its proponents in a never-ending search for events to fit the passage. Good hermeneutic research is set aside with contextual exegesis of words and phrases. E. G. White looked forward to this issue when she said:

“I also saw that Old Jerusalem never would be built up; and that Satan was doing his utmost to lead the minds of the children of the Lord into these things now, in the gathering time, to keep them from throwing their whole interest into the present work of the Lord, and to cause them to neglect the necessary preparation for the day of the Lord.”[5]

Iniquity being full is a pivotal understanding.

In Genesis 15:13-16, Abraham was told he wouldn't settle in the promised land until the fourth generation. Why? The iniquity of the Amorites would then be complete. Amazing mercy and longsuffering is displayed by God in this simple illustration to maintain the freedom of will until all hope is past. The *time of the Amorites* did finally come (Deuteronomy 9:3-4).

We can draw a distinct parallel from the Amorites to the Gentiles – all non-Jews or those not having a relationship with Jesus.

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” Romans 11:25-27.

Fullness here is *pleroma* and means the *vessel* is full, the number is complete eschatologically. When the time of the Gentiles is complete, it will be time to see the salvation of God's people, spiritual Israel.

“With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps an account with all nations. While His mercy is tendered with calls to repentance, this account will remain open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath commences. The

account is closed. Divine patience ceases. There is no more pleading of mercy in their behalf....

“The crisis is fast approaching. The rapidly swelling figures show that the time for God’s visitation has about come. Although loath to punish, nevertheless He will punish, and that speedily. Those who walk in the light will see signs of the approaching peril; but they are not to sit in quiet, unconcerned expectancy of the ruin, comforting themselves with the belief that God will shelter His people in the day of visitation. Far from it. They should realize that it is their duty to labor diligently to save others, looking with strong faith to God for help. ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.’”^[6]

The time of the Gentiles is the end of probation for the world. It brings to an end persecution of God’s people, judgment on those rejecting His grace, and ushers in the kingdom of glory for His people. It is final end time, which finishes a climaxing 3½ year period of covenant probation. There is nothing contextually to encourage a literal Jerusalem motif. It must be noted that when this “time is fulfilled” there are celestial signs that immediately precede the coming of Jesus.

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References:

- [1] Brown, Colin, editor, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, p. 60 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI), 1986 pp. 792-793.
- [2] *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, pp. 25-26.
- [3] *Mount of Blessings*, p. 151.
- [4] *The Signs of the Times*, 2/21/1878.
- [5] *Early Writings*, p. 75.
- [6] *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 208-209.