

The Times of the Gentiles

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Recently, I received a very interesting question that deserves serious study. The question was, "What did Jesus mean in Luke 21:24 when He said, 'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled?' " The background for this question is very interesting and for most readers, the outcome will be surprising.

One day, the disciples asked Jesus, ". . . **what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?**" (Matthew 24:3, KJV) Jesus responded by expressing what is identified as a "Day of the Lord" prophecy. Remember, there are five types of prophecy and each type uses unique rules of interpretation. (See page 22, *Jesus' Final Victory*.)

Jesus co-mingled the destruction of Jerusalem (the end of their world) with the destruction of Earth (the end of our world) because there are parallels between these events. To appreciate the phrase, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled," we need to start with verse 20:

Jesus said: "**When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by [Roman] armies, you will know that its desolation [destruction] is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written [in the Scriptures]. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!**"

There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They [the nation of Israel] will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. [The city of] Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Luke 21:20-24, NIV, italics and insertions mine)

I am sure that the disciples were shocked to learn that the nation of Israel was about to perish, Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, and this coming catastrophe would be God's doing, a "fulfillment of all that had been written [in Scripture]." I am sure the disciples were well acquainted with the destruction that King Nebuchadnezzar inflicted on Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but I do not think they were acquainted with the Scriptures that Jesus mentioned pointing to the final destruction of Jerusalem.

God Made a Covenant with Israel

When God gave His covenant to Israel at Mt. Sinai, He promised to bless Israel beyond their imagination *if* they would faithfully serve Him as trustees of His gospel. According to His covenant, God also promised that He would destroy the descendants of Abraham if they became unfaithful to Him and profaned His holy name. (Leviticus 22:31-33; 26:14-43)

God destroys nations that become unfaithful to Him and Israel was no exception. (Ezekiel 14:12-22) Since God chose Israel to be a nation of priests, they were to represent Him to the nations of Earth. Therefore, Israel had a higher calling than other nations and with a higher calling comes a higher level of accountability.

In His covenant, God also promised that if circumstances should require Him to destroy Israel, He would spare a remnant. (Leviticus 26:43-45) About 400 years before Mt. Sinai, God made three promises to Abraham. First, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. (Genesis 13:16, 17:4) Second, God promised Abraham that his descendants would someday inherit the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:7, 15:5, 17:8) Last, God promised Abraham that all mankind would be blessed through him. (Genesis 17:19; Galatians 3:16)

God foreknew the rebellious nature of mankind so He put a provision in His covenant allowing Him to spare the remnant of Abraham's offspring until His promises to Abraham were fulfilled. About two years after God entered into the Mt. Sinai covenant with Israel, the Children of Israel rebelled against God when the twelve spies returned from surveying the land of Canaan. (Numbers 14) According to the terms and conditions stated in His covenant, God destroyed Israel, but He spared a remnant. All of the people who left Egypt died (except Caleb and Joshua) and a remnant (the children born in the wilderness) were spared.

After entering Canaan, Israel went through endless cycles of repentance and apostasy for about 800 years. Finally, when Israel's cup of sin was filled, it reached a point of no return,. Israel had reached a level of decadence and rebellion where extended grace had no redeeming effect. Israel's behavior caused God to carry out the terms and conditions stated in His covenant. He allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy two-thirds of Israel and take the remnant captive for 70 years. (Ezekiel 5:10-15; Jeremiah 25:9-11)

The remnant in Babylon clearly understood why they were captives in Babylon. (Daniel 9:3-19) Even though God was angry with Israel, He did not forsake Abraham's offspring. In fact, God sent encouraging messages to the remnant of Israel through Ezekiel and Jeremiah. God told the exiles that He had not forgotten His covenant, He had spared a remnant, and He would restore them to their homeland. (Ezekiel 36:24) After seventy years of captivity ended, God fulfilled His promise through Cyrus in 536 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:22,23)

Not only did Cyrus set Israel free, but he also returned the city of Jerusalem (its rubble) to the Jews. During the reconstruction of the city and the temple, God reminded Israel through Ezra and Nehemiah that His covenant with Israel still remained. Post-exile Jews perfectly understood that if Israel behaved like their forefathers, God would surely destroy them, as well. (Nehemiah 8, 9)

God's relationship with Israel is but a mirror reflecting God's relationship with all nations of Earth. All nations are subject to God's higher authority (Daniel 4:17,34,35) and when any nation reaches a decadent point where extended mercy has no redeeming effect, a God of love is moved to bring that nation's violence and degeneracy to an end.

God does this for the benefit of innocent children and for future generations. God does not enjoy

destroying anyone, but He will not allow sexual immorality, degenerate behavior, and predatory violence to go unpunished. When God uses His wrath to destroy a nation, He often saves a remnant, *if* their testimony will have a redeeming effect on other survivors.

For example, when God destroyed the world in Noah's day, He spared a remnant of eight people. When He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He spared Lot and his family. When He destroyed Jericho, He spared Rahab and her family. However, on other occasions, God spared no one. (Deuteronomy 2:31-34;3:4-6, 1 Samuel 15:3)

The Creation of Plan B

During the Babylonian captivity, God spoke frankly, but tenderly, to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. God promised the remnant of Israel that they would have a bright and wonderful future *if* they would cooperate with Him. God wanted the remnant to forsake the rebellious ways of their forefathers and "get with His program."

If they cooperated with Him, everything God promised in His original plan for Israel would occur. However, God wanted this remnant to know that *if* they should return to Jerusalem and over time behave as their forefathers did, God would surely destroy them. To make this point clear, God did something during the Babylonian captivity that many people do not understand.

He created a contingency plan. The contingency plan was rather simple. If the remnant of Israel behaved as their forefathers did, God announced that He would create *a new Israel* and move forward to fulfill His promises to Abraham. I call God's contingency plan for *a new Israel*, "Plan B." (Because of space limitations, I cannot address the dimensions and ramifications of Plan A / Plan B in this article. Please review Appendices B and D in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory*.)

Many people ask, "Why was Plan B necessary if God already knows the outcome of everything?" Even though God is omniscient and knows everything, He does not predestine the behavior of people. God responds to human beings according to our will. He never removes our power of choice! Israel had the power of choice and could cooperate with Him or rebel against Him. If Israel chose rebellion, God made it clear in the prophecies of Daniel that Plan B would be implemented.

Consider God's foreknowledge: When God made three promises to Abraham, God foreknew that He would not be able to fulfill two of His promises through the biological offspring of Abraham. In spite of this, God still attempted to fulfill the promises! When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He foreknew that all of the adults (except Caleb and Joshua) would die in the wilderness, but this did not keep Him from delivering Israel from Pharaoh's grip. God foreknew that when He made promises to Abraham, He would eventually have to fulfill those promises through the *adoption* of Gentile believers.

Notice the difference between selection and adoption. When God chose the biological offspring of Abraham to be the trustees of His gospel (Genesis 17:7-14), Abraham's descendants became "God's elect" on the basis of selection. God *selected* them. (Exodus 19:3-8; Romans

9-11) After 1,500 years of apostasy in Israel, when it became clear God's elect would continue down the path of rebellion, God implemented Plan B. God abandoned the biological descendants of Abraham and He let the world know His displeasure by destroying that nation and their city in A.D. 70.

To fulfill His promise to Abraham, God implemented the adoption process. God displaced the biological offspring of Abraham with self-selecting offspring who wanted to be trustees of His gospel. After the cross, anyone who chooses to serve Jesus Christ as Lord and Master is *adopted* into the family of Abraham! (John 3:16; 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29) By adopting people who were eager and willing to do His will, the tables were turned 180 degrees. By adopting Gentiles as heirs of Abraham, God terminated His need for Abraham's biological offspring.

The Full Cup Principle

During the Babylonian captivity, God announced that His patience with Abraham's biological descendants was limited. He had dealt with Israel's failures for about 900 years and in an effort to bring Plan A to fruition, He granted Israel one last chance. God gave Israel seventy weeks (490 years) of probationary time to accomplish some divine objectives. (Daniel 9:24)

God told Israel that Messiah would appear during the seventieth week to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. This was a test for Israel to determine if it would receive and embrace the ministry and teachings of God in the flesh or despise God's presence in their midst. Israel's response to Jesus would reveal whether the nation had walked away from God during the seventy weeks or whether the nation had walked with God, and you know the rest of the story.

Near the end of His ministry, a frustrated Jesus said to the leaders of Israel: "**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the [dead] prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'** [You think you are wiser and more enlightened than your forefathers, but you are no different than your forefathers.]

Your corrupt religion is your God. You worship a religion that invokes the name of God, but you do not know God or His ways. If you knew the Father you would love Me because the Father and I are one. You have rejected the Word of God with the same malice and rebellion exhibited by your forefathers.]

So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. [You are murderers, just like your forefathers.] **Fill up, then, the [cup, the] *measure of the sin* [committed by] *of your forefathers!* You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? . . . Look, your house [your temple] is left to you desolate [the glory and presence of God will never return to it]."** (Matthew 23:29-33, 38 italics and insertions mine)

Israel's seventieth week report card can be summarized in one sentence: "**He came to that**

which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:11) When it became a fact that Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the Father terminated Plan A and initiated Plan B which God had created and revealed to Daniel while he was a Babylonian captive. Plan A and Plan B cannot co-exist. Plan B is based on a different (new) covenant. For example, the High Priest appointed for Plan B is from the tribe of Judah and He ministers in the true temple that God established. (Hebrews 7:12, 8:6)

This is contrary to Plan A which required the high priest to be a Levite; a descendant of Aaron. The promises and prophecies made in Plan A do not carry over into Plan B. Plan B has different promises and prophecies. In fact, the promises and prophecies belonging to Plan A are incompatible with the promises and prophecies made in Plan B! Unfortunately, most Christians do not realize that it is impossible to assemble a valid prophetic schematic when elements from Plan A and Plan B are mixed or merged together.

The transition from Plan A to Plan B required three steps:

First, a new covenant was necessary. This covenant is summarized in John 3:16, stated in Hebrews 8:10, and Jesus initiated it in Luke 22:20.

Second, God took a self-selecting remnant from old Israel (those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah) and He created a *new Israel* that would soon include millions of Gentile believers from every nation.

Think about this: If a Gentile obeys Christ's call to follow Him, he is no different than Abraham who obeyed Christ's demand to follow Him. From God's point of view, those who love God with all their hearts, minds and souls, and their neighbors as themselves, live as Abraham lived. In God's sight, such people are Abraham's children. (John 8:39)

Ironically, the Jehovah who called Abraham out of his homeland was the Messiah Himself. (Exodus 6:3; John 8:58; Isaiah 44:6) The God that calls Gentiles to leave their families and homes to become part of the new Israel is Christ Himself! (Galatians 3:26) Since Plan A was terminated, Gentiles in Christ are counted as the seed (Greek: *sperma*) of Abraham and heirs of the promises which God gave to him. (Galatians 3:28,29)

Faith in God is a matter of choice. Surrender to God's will is a matter of choice. Plan A and Israel's history prove that biological descent means nothing without faith in Christ and surrender to God's Spirit. Since biological Israel consistently rejected the voice of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had to abandon biological Israel to fulfill two of His promises to Abraham. The one promise God made to Abraham that was fulfilled through Plan A was the promise that Messiah would biologically come through Abraham's lineage. (Genesis 17:19; Galatians 3:16; Matthew 1; Luke 3)

The third step in the transition from Plan A to Plan B was the destruction of old Israel and old Jerusalem. (Luke 21:22) Since Plan B involved a new High Priest, a new covenant, a new Israel, and a New Jerusalem, there was no place for Plan A to be a part of Plan B. We have already noted that in God's original covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, He promised to destroy the

nation of Israel if it went into apostasy.

This covenant that Moses wrote in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 is the authority behind the phrase, "**For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written** [in Scripture]." (Luke 21:22, insertion mine) During the seventieth week, Israel confirmed its rejection of God (the ministry of Jesus).

This was "the last straw," Israel's cup of iniquity overflowed. Forty years later, Jesus Himself sent Rome's armies into Judea (A.D. 70) to destroy Israel and Jerusalem. Just as Jesus promised, He spared a remnant. A self-selecting group of *adopted* believers escaped Jerusalem by taking the words of Jesus to heart and leaving the city early. Thus, Jesus spared twelve *new tribes* who believed in Him! (Compare James 1:1 with James 2:1 for the identity of the new twelve tribes.)

The Years Allotted to the Gentiles

Jesus said, "**Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**" (Luke 21:22-24, italics mine)

Now that we have explored God's covenant with Israel, the rebellious history of Israel, the seventieth week test, the differences between election and adoption, God's contingency plan to fulfill His promises to Abraham, and some of the differences between Plan A and Plan B, four conclusions can be made about the phrase, "**Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**"

First, when Jesus spoke these words on the Mount of Olives, His followers were not called Christians. (This label would be created in Antioch a few years later. See Acts 11:26.) Believers in Christ were generally called "disciples," "followers of the Way" (Acts 24:14), or Gentile believers. (Acts 15:23) After Paul was converted in A.D. 34, the quantity of Gentiles believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the Savior of the world, soon exceeded the number of Jewish believers.

Furthermore, after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there was an enormous amount of anti-Jewish sentiment throughout the Roman Empire. This led the Gentile believers to separate themselves from Jewish heritage as quickly as possible. Of course, throughout their history, the Jews saw no difference between ungodly Gentiles and believing Gentiles. To them, the world consisted of only two groups of people, the Jews and the Gentiles.

Second, Jesus used a double entendre in Luke 21:24. The word Gentile goes in two opposite directions. In today's vernacular, the words of Jesus could be stated as follows: ". . . The city of Jerusalem will be trampled on by *godless Gentiles* until the years allotted for the ingathering of *Gentile believers* are fulfilled." (Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:10)

Third, when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, Jesus terminated the biological lineage of Abraham by having all of Israel's genealogical records destroyed. History records how the

Romans took Israel's survivors to Rome to work as slaves. (It is said that Jewish slaves helped build the Amphitheater in Rome.) Thus, the temple fire and the slavery that followed produces an interesting dilemma for Jews today. There are approximately 35 million Jews on Earth today and no one knows for sure whether he/she is a biological descendant (heir) of Abraham and there is no way to tell! No records exist to identify who is who.

Since A.D. 70, it is important to understand that one cannot become an heir of Abraham through conversion to Judaism. Even though a Gentile could become an heir of Abraham through conversion prior to the cross. (Matthew 23;15), but this is no longer possible under the new covenant (Plan B).

Ever since the cross, the *only way* to become an heir of Abraham is through adoption. *Paul says this is true for Jews and Gentile alike.* (Ephesians 2; Romans 9 - 11; Galatians 4) Unfortunately Plan B is not properly understood and many end time expositors use Plan A prophecies to make the modern nation of Israel the centerpiece of their schematic.

Let me be clear! The Israel of God is no longer centered in or around Jerusalem. Believers in Christ, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, are found all over the world and their High Priest, King, and Holy Temple are currently in Heaven.

Last, God declared that if Plan B was implemented, the city of Jerusalem would be cursed with wars and desolations until the end of the world. (Daniel 9:26) Indeed, 2,000 years of history reveals a sorrowful story for the ancient city that King David founded about 1000 B.C. Jerusalem has experienced many wars and desolations since A.D. 70.

Even though Jerusalem seems to be prospering currently, its prosperity is temporary. The years allotted to the ingathering of *godly Gentile believers* will soon end and God will destroy the entire world, including ancient Jerusalem. Daniel 9:26 says, " **The end will come** [upon Jerusalem] **like a flood** [as a tsunami destroys everything in its path]: **War will continue until the end** [of the world], **and desolations** [upon the city] **have been decreed.**" (Insertions mine)

I hope this helps!

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