

"Watchman, what of the night?"

*"The hour has come, the hour is striking and striking at you,
the hour and the end!" Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)*

The Sign of the End Of Time

(Excerpt from wwn12/00)

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In August of this year a publication of questionable reliability issued its own interpretation on a prophecy of Jesus, ignoring completely what Jesus Himself had said. The defiant dictum read - "The Jews will not have regained control of Jerusalem until they have supreme control over the Temple Mount." This is a devious and deceptive statement. The State of Israel does have control of the temple mount, but Muslims have jurisdiction over their religious rites on the Temple mount. The play is on the word, "supreme." This dictum is a very obvious attempt to blunt the force of the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy as stated in Luke 21:24.

Jesus Himself had stood on the Temple mount a few hours prior to the giving of His eschatological discourse as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. There, in confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, He had declared, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 24:38). Then "He went out, and departed from the temple" (24:1). No longer was the temple, His "Father's house." It was removed from further consideration. But not so the city. He warned the disciples:

When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. (Luke 21:20)

What if the early Christians who dwelt in Jerusalem at the time of its siege in AD 66 had reasoned that it was the "temple mount" that was to be surrounded, not just the city encompassed. Would they have left the city when the Roman armies withdrew? No, they

believed Jesus meant what He said, and at the first opportunity fled the city. Though no longer the city of God, and the people of Israel no longer the people of God, Jerusalem served as a sign in the fulfilment of prophecy. It is still a sign and will continue to be so until "Michael shall stand up." (See Dan. 11:45; 12:1) In the same Biblical paragraph in which Jesus gave the sign by which the Christians of Jerusalem would know to flee the city, He also stated that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Ver. 24).

In this verse (24) and the one following (25), the word, *ta eqnh* is used four times. Twice it is translated "nations" and twice "Gentiles." This word with the article is used for the Hebrew word, *hagoyim*, the pagan nations apart from Israel. (See Thayer, p. 168, #4 under *eqnoV*) Consistency of translation would dictate that in each instance of its use in Luke 21:24, 25, it should be translated, "the nations." In other words, the second designation of Jerusalem as a sign, would involve the probation of the nations as corporate bodies.

This sign is unique and was given by Jesus to answer a specific part of the question asked by the disciples. The disciples were concerned about the destruction of the temple, and had asked, "When shall these things be?" (Matt. 24:3). But they, thinking that such an event would involve the end of the world, asked further - "What shall be the sign (singular) of thy coming and of the end of the world?" They asked not what would be the signs of the time of the end, but the sign of the end of time. Thus the answer of Jesus, in which Jerusalem is given as a sign marking both the hour for the destruction of Jerusalem, "the days of vengeance" (Luke 21:22), and "the (probationary) (*kairoV* not *cronoV* is used) times of the nations" (ver. 24), is of major importance. In its first use, the sign would be the surrounding of the city by alien armies, and its second use as a sign would be the city's restoration once again to the control of the nation of Israel. The first was fulfilled in AD 66, and the second in 1967 and finalized in 1980.

Some History of the Interpretation of Luke 21:24

In 1898, James Edson White published *The Coming King* . It went through several editions. It was printed in the United States by the Review & Herald Publishing Association, and in Australia by the Echo Publishing Company. In the first edition and the 1900 edition, the chapter on the "Destruction of Jerusalem" closed with the following paragraph:

We also read that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke 21:24. Jerusalem has never again come into the possession of

the Jews, and will not until "the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This will be when the work of the gospel is finished. (p. 98)

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When the Australian edition was printed in 1904, this paragraph was enlarged and modified. The last sentence was omitted, and previous sentence was made to read:

Jerusalem has never again come into the possession of the Jews, but when the "times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled, and Christ comes to gather the faithful of all ages, then all who are Israelites indeed, all the household of faith, will have a home in that city of which the old Jerusalem was but a type, - the city for which Abraham looked, whose builder and maker is God. Hebrews 11:10. (p.98)

When an enlarged edition was published by the Review & Herald in 1906, the final paragraph of the chapter was abbreviated to state:

We also read that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke 21:24. This will be when the work of the gospel is finished. (p.109)

Whether the above interpretation of Luke 21:24 is James Edson White's is open to question. Inserted in the 1906 edition following the "Introduction" is this brief sentence:

"The author gratefully acknowledges contributions on special subjects treated in this book, from the pens of J. O. Corliss, M. E. Kellogg, and G. C. Tenny." (p. viii) Does this apply to all previous editions as well as to the 1906 edition?

During the time of the publication of the various editions of Edson White's book, his mother wrote in a letter to Dr. J. H. Kellogg the following insight:

In the twenty-first chapter of Luke, Christ foretold what was to come upon Jerusalem; with it He connected the scenes which were to take place in the history of the world just prior to the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Letter 20,1901)

Two factors need to be carefully considered from this statement: 1) Luke 21 is singled out from the other two parallel chapters of Matthew 24 and Mark 13 in the Synoptic

Gospels. It is Luke alone who recorded Jesus' prophecy - "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations until the times of the nations be fulfilled." 2) It was what "was to come upon Jerusalem," not the Temple Mount, which was connected to the final scenes "just prior to the coming of the Son of man." While this statement was written in 1901, it was not until 1946 that this particular section of the letter to Dr. Kellogg became available to the Church in the compilation, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp.23-25. By this time the publications coming from the Church's presses were negating any possibility of a State of Israel which would thus preclude the possibility of Jerusalem coming under Israeli control.

In 1944, the Voice of Prophecy published for their Book of the Month offer, *Palestine in Prophecy* by J. C. Stevens. He concluded his treatise with this paragraph:

The apostle Paul speaks of old Jerusalem as being "in bondage with her children." Galatians 4:25. Had the Jews been faithful, Jerusalem would have been enlarged and beautified to become the center of the whole earth, beautiful for situation. But throughout the generations [since] the fall of that city in AD 70, Jerusalem has been "a burdensome stone" and "a cup of trembling unto all the people" (Zechariah 12:2, 3); and it will be so to the end of time. Palestine and Jerusalem do not have a bright future in this present world, and those who are holding out the hope of national restoration for the Jews are following a theological will-o'-the-wisp. (p.95)

In 1947, another book appeared, *The Jews and Palestine*. It was published by the Pacific Press and authored by Roy F. Cottrell. In a chapter on "Modern Zionism," the author after quoting Jeremiah 19:10,11 - "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that it cannot be made whole again" - wrote:

The God of heaven who overthrew the city and nation and who because of their apostasy dispersed the inhabitants to the ends of the earth forever settles the question of a complete return and restitution in old Canaan by asserting that it "cannot be." (p.61).

Yet within a year, the State of Israel became a fact. This should teach the Church and its writers on prophecy to be very cautious, recognizing that some positions held may be faulty, and need to be carefully restudied. "God and heaven alone are infallible."

The Church at the first opportunity rectified its position and returned in principle to the understanding suggested by Edson White in 1898. In 1952 a Bible Conference was held

in the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. Elder Arthur S. Maxwell, Editor of the *Signs of the Times*, was assigned the topic, "The Imminence of Christ's

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Second Coming." One section of his presentation was devoted to "Areas of Unfulfilled Prophecy." He cited three, one of which was "Developments in Palestine." He noted that the "recent dramatic restoration of the nation of Israel" in 1948 has once more focused the attention of the world on Palestine. Then he stated:

There is one prophecy concerning Palestine that we should all be watching with special care. Said Jesus, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Citing "the amazing prowess of the Israeli troops" in every other part of Palestine, he noted that they "failed to take the most dazzling objective of all." Jerusalem remained in Arab hands. Then he asked the question - "What could be the reason?" His answer - "Only that the times of the Gentiles are not yet fulfilled." Noting God's dealings in times past that Israel was not permitted to enter Palestine because "the iniquity of the Amorites" was "not yet full," he stated:

It may well be that the same principle applies today, on a wider scale. If so, then Jerusalem is to remain trodden down by the Gentiles till the probationary time of all Gentiles has run out. If this be correct, how much hinges upon the fate of this ancient city and the power that occupies it! (*Our Firm Foundation*, Vol.2, pp.230-231)

One means used in Adventist evangelistic outreach has been Bible Correspondence courses. Among them was one called the "20th Century Bible Course." Lesson 5 of this course - "Time Running Out" - cited the prophecy of Luke 21. Question #2 asked - "What sign did Jesus give that would indicate when the destruction of the city was at hand?" The text given for the answer was Luke 21:20. Question #3 continued - "How long did Christ say that Jerusalem would be trodden down?" The answer, "verse 24" was followed by this note:

Old Jerusalem and the temple site has been occupied largely by the Gentile nations until 1967 when the Jews took possession of it in a "lightening victory." This portion of Christ's prophecy was fulfilled in our day!

In reflection it would seem that providentially, the Adult Sabbath School Lessons for the

second quarter of 1980 were devoted to "The Witness of Jesus." The month following the conclusion of these lessons, the Knesset of Israel on July 30, voted that "Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capitol of Israel," thus culminating the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jesus. The author of these lessons, Dr. Jean Zurcher, wrote as a guide to accompany them the book, *Christ of the Revelation*. In it he stated, noting Christ's prophetic discourse:

We shall not linger long over the numerous signs given by Jesus in this discourse. Only one will occupy our attention, the one that deals especially with time. Even in our day it constitutes a critical point in the political world: Jerusalem. In fact, Jerusalem is both the beginning and the culmination of Jesus' prophecy. ... So having predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews "into all nations," Jesus declared, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, *until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*" (Emphasis his)...

This prophecy of Jesus was a sign for the Christians of the Apostolic Church, who lived at the beginning of the times of the Gentiles, and it remains a sign for us who live at the end of the times of the Gentiles. Again we must know how to discern its meaning.

It is not a matter of seeing in the return of the Jews to Palestine and in the Israeli conquest of Jerusalem a sign of the approaching conversion of the Jews, as so many Christians think. Nothing in Jesus' prophecy allows such an interpretation. However, if we cannot see that Jerusalem is an exceptional sign of the times, then might we not be placing ourselves in the same position as the religious leaders who knew how to "discern the face of the sky" but could not discern the obvious "signs of the times"?

As I understand the Biblical language, the times of the Gentiles is the period set aside by God for the evangelization of the heathen nations. It is not the time needed for them to be converted to Christianity, as some think but for them to hear the gospel. It is in this sense that Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

I believe that the times of the Gentiles began in AD 34, when the prophetic seventy weeks that God set aside for the people of Israel ended. ... And if I have understood the prediction of Jesus properly, this time will be "fulfilled" when Jerusalem will cease to "be trodden down of the Gentiles." The fact that since 1967 Gentiles no longer have occupied

[controlled] Jerusalem means, therefore, that we are now living at the end of "the times of the Gentiles."

Jerusalem here constitutes the last sign of the times by which the Lord shows us that the history of this world is coming to its climax and that the restoration of all things is at hand. (pp.71-72).

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What is the Fulfilled Prophecy of Jesus Saying?

The very least that this fulfilled prophecy of Jesus is saying is that God is no longer restraining the power of Satan in his control of the nations of earth. Even though Satan declared that he possessed such power and could delegate it to whomever he chose (Luke 4:6), the book of Daniel draws the curtain aside and reveals that God "ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Dan. 4:17). When kings and rulers resisted His purposes, Michael, to whom all earthly authority is given (I Cor. 15:27), comes Himself to influence the outcome of human events (Dan. 10:13). That time is now past, and God has stepped aside and Satan is working his will in the nations of earth.

We have not been left in doubt as to what Satan is seeking to accomplish. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the picture is drawn. "The spirits of devils go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). But you respond, that is the sixth plague after the close of probation. No, it is the cause for the sixth plague, not the plague. Consider the first plague: a "grievous sore" on those who had received the mark of the beast (16:2). Was not the mark of the beast received prior to the close of probation? Just so, the sixth plague. Verse 12 describes the plague - the drying up of the great river Euphrates, and verses 13-14 give the cause in probationary time.

Note the use of this text in *The Great Controversy*, pp.561-62. Observe the context - "the last remnant of time."

The location of this gathering is given as a place in the Hebrew tongue, called "Har-Magedon" (16:16 ARV). This transliterates back into the Hebrew as Har-Mo'ed - Mount of the Congregation. Here Satan will seek to realize his objective - "I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north," or Jerusalem (Isa. 14:13; Ps.

48:2).

Even as the sanctuary "was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment" in 1844 (See, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 268), so also it gives a further understanding as to the significance of Jesus' prophecy as recorded in Luke 21:24. During the daily ministrations, confession of sin, both individual and corporate was made in the court of the sanctuary. The distinct difference between these two ceremonies was where the blood of confession was placed. For the individual, the blood of his sacrifice was placed upon the horns of the Brazen Altar of the Court, while for a corporate sin, the blood of the sacrifice was placed on the horns of the Golden Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. (See Leviticus 4). In the yearly service on the Day of Atonement, the ministrations of the High Priest involved all three sections of the sanctuary. He moved from the Most Holy to the Holy, and then to the Court to complete the atonement at the Brazen Altar where the individual confessions were recorded. (See Leviticus 16). Thus the prophecy of Jesus would indicate in its fulfillment that the corporate bodies of earth have been weighed in the balances of the sanctuary and found wanting. The time of judgment has passed to the very last act of the Final Atonement - the cleansing of the living.

What Warning Has God Given? -- When God told Moses, the nature of the Coming One, that He would be a Prophet raised up in the midst of the Children of Israel like unto himself, and that He would put words into His mouth, He also sounded a warning:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. (Deut. 18:19)

It was that Prophet who declared that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations until the times of the nations be fulfilled."

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21:34-36)