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Dispensationalism, Jerusalem and the "Times of the Gentiles"

by David Dunlap

There is a lot of confusion today among Bible prophecy teachers regarding what the Lord Jesus Christ called the "times of the Gentiles." Some prophecy teachers have misconstrued the meaning of the phrase by interpreting it in light of news events surrounding the Israel-Arab conflict. Others have confused the "times of the Gentiles" in Luke 21:24 with "the fulness of the Gentiles" spoken of in Romans 11:25. As always, Scripture must be our guide whenever we seek a true understanding of the Bible. The "fulness of the Gentiles" is spiritual in nature and refers to vast numbers of Gentiles that are saved in this age, thus completing the body of Christ. The "times of the Gentiles" is political in nature and refers to that period which extends from the Babylonian captivity until the end of the Tribulation period, when the Lord returns.

The Lord tells us: "Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people, and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:23-24).

The Jews in Jesus' day were looking for a triumphant Messiah to deliver Israel, and especially Jerusalem, from the tyranny of Rome. Jesus, in Luke 21:24, explains the connection between Jerusalem and the teaching of the prophet Daniel regarding the "times of the Gentiles." It is an important bit of information given to us by Christ because it tells us that ultimate peace will not occur in Jerusalem until a number of events or "times" has been fulfilled.

What Does Scripture Teach About the "Times of the Gentiles"?

In the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, the Jews regained possession of old Jerusalem, the section which Jordan had held up to that time, and also took control of the Temple Mount. Many Christians wondered how this sudden development related to the "times of the Gentiles" prophecy made by the Lord in Luke 21. Did it mean that the "times of the Gentiles" had come to a close? Were we to assume, because Jerusalem was no longer under Gentile dominion, that the return of Jesus must occur within a very brief period of time?

Scripture indicates that the "times of the Gentiles" began when national Israel was sent by God into exile to Babylon because of her

*"...For the
Babylonians
had destroyed
the city in 586
B.C. when 'the
times of the
Gentiles' began.
This significant
period in God's
plan will end
when Jesus
Christ returns to
earth."*

**Dr. Warren
Wiersbe**

*— Radio Bible teacher,
pastor, and author*

idolatry and disobedience. This Gentile dominion was described by the prophet Daniel as a statue composed of various metals in chapter two and as four beasts in chapter seven. C. I. Scofield, editor of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, defines the time limits of the “times of the Gentiles”:

The “times of the Gentiles” is that long period beginning with the Babylonian captivity of Judah, under Nebuchadnezzar, and to be brought to an end by the destruction of Gentile world power by the “stone cut out without hands” (Dan 2:34, 35, 44), i.e. the coming of the Lord in glory (Rev 19:11, 21), until which time Jerusalem is politically subject to Gentile rule (Luke 21:24).¹

When Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the “times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” He did not mean until the Jews would again take control of the ancient city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount from Gentile hands. But instead, He was specifically referring to those successive Gentile, political powers revealed by the prophet Daniel, which would have dominion over national Israel, starting with Babylon and ending with the revived Roman Empire under Antichrist.

These successive Gentile powers are historically seen to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. During the time of ancient Rome, Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed, causing the Jews to be dispersed into the Roman Empire. Today Israel is again back as a nation, and, according to the prophet Daniel, the last phase of Gentile dominion over her will soon develop as well. This last Gentile dominion is described as the ten toes on the statue in chapter two and as the ten horns on the fourth beast in chapter seven. Gentile oppression over Jerusalem culminates with the Antichrist exalting himself as he takes his seat in the Temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Biblical Prophecy, Islam, and the Return of Christ

When Christ returns, He will overthrow and judge the Antichrist along with his followers. Then Christ will rule the nations “with a rod of iron” for one thousand years. The earth will be restored from the destruction of the tribulation and repopulated, while God's saints serve Him. Great prosperity and blessing is in store for Israel, as the head of the nations with its world capital Jerusalem and with Christ reigning on the throne of His father David.

A time of great trial and testing must first occur before this golden age of blessing for Israel takes place. Even if the nation of Israel gains sovereign control over Jerusalem, as we see today, there will still be a future Gentile oppression for Jerusalem. There is the ongoing Islamic control over Israel's most sacred site, the Temple Mount. The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously for the creation of a Palestinian State to be carved out of the land of Israel. For the first time ever, the United States voted in favor of this resolution. The United States has joined with the Arab nations, the European Union, and the United Nations in calling for a division of Israel and Jerusalem to create a Islamic Palestinian nation. At a press conference on May 26th, 2009, President Barack Obama signaled his willingness to sign such a resolution into law.²

Zechariah declared that the day would come when all the nations would come against Jerusalem and Judah: “Behold, I will make Jerusalem

“The expression ‘times of the Gentiles’ refers to the entire period during which the Jews are under Gentile dominion...Just when it will come to an end we dare not attempt to say. Many have tried to work out some kind of time system, but so far all these have failed.”

H. A. Ironside
(1876-1951)

former pastor at Moody Memorial church, author, and radio pastor.

a goblet of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples. Then they will lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And in that day, I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who try to lift it will be severely injured. All nations of the earth will gather for war because of it" (Zechariah 12:2-3).

Prophetic Viewpoints Concerning the "Times of the Gentiles"

Some Bible teachers have made the mistake in thinking that since Israel is back as a Jewish nation and that she now sovereignly controls Jerusalem, "the times of the Gentiles" must be in the process of completion. Some say this period began at the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 and was fulfilled upon Israel's retaking of the Old City in 1967. This view is wide of the mark, since it does not satisfy the Biblical definition of "the times of the Gentiles" found in the book of Daniel. Possession of Jerusalem by Israel may be significant prophetically, but it has nothing to do with the beginning of the end of the "times of the Gentiles." Representative of this misguided view is Bible prophecy researcher Hal Lindsey:

Jerusalem, the Bible says, will be a stumbling block for the entire world... In Luke 21:24, the Bible tells us that 'Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.' We are literally witnessing the end of the times of the Gentiles. ³

Then on another occasion, in his book *The Final Battle* (1995), Hal Lindsey writes:

We are literally witnessing the last hours of the times of the Gentiles. God's focus is shifting back to His people Israel. ⁴

A number of prophecy teachers contend that these "times" already ended in 1967 when Israel drove its tanks into east Jerusalem and took control of the old city, which was formerly controlled by the nation of Jordan. But the idea that the "times of the Gentiles" began its culmination after June of 1967 does not seem to fit what the "times of the Gentiles" is according to Scripture.

Other Bible teachers believe that these Gentile "times" will end when Israel once again takes total control of Jerusalem, especially the Temple Mount. Representative of this view is respected author and Bible teacher Dave Hunt, the editor of *The Berean Call*. He writes:

Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" this is what Christ said. ...I remember the great prophecy teachers and authors in about 1967, when Israel took Jerusalem, and I remember them saying, "Well, Jerusalem is no longer trodden down; this is the climax of the Gentile empire", you know. But (Moshe Dayan) the General with the patch over his eye, almost immediately, acting on his own without any permission from the Knesset or anyone, turned the Temple Mount over to King Hussein of Jordan. In 1994, he gave it to the PLO, the PLO are in charge. Now, of course, Israel could move in there and wipe them out and take over, but it would arouse such anger from the UN, from the world, ...So, Jerusalem, in that sense, was still trodden down of the Gentiles; it had not been delivered completely. This is the most important—that 35 acres on the Temple Mount is the most important part; this is the very heart of Jerusalem. ⁵

"God was going to allow Jerusalem not so much to be destroyed as to be overrun and trodden down by the Gentiles...we should notice that divine mercy had limited divine judgement—until the 'times of the gentiles 'be fulfilled'."

Dr. David Gooding

from "According to Luke", IVP p. 328



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Conclusion

All serious Christians must be careful and serious students of biblical prophecy. Sadly, the prophetic Scriptures have often been twisted, misinterpreted, and wrenched out of their proper context. We must not, in our zeal for the Lord's return, rush God's prophetic timetable. Although Israel is a sovereign nation today, in a coming day she will yield government control to the Antichrist according to Revelation thirteen. So we see that in respect to the "Times of the Gentiles," it is of little consequence if the Jews have control over all Jerusalem again, or even build their temple on the Temple Mount; Jerusalem will still be trampled underfoot until Daniel's prophecies are completely fulfilled. Down through biblical history Jerusalem was trampled underfoot by Babylon, Persia, Greece, and ancient Rome; she will again be trampled underfoot by the future Antichrist when he comes to power in the revived Roman Empire. May Christians turn from looking at the latest news out of the Middle East for end time clues and begin "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Endnotes

1. C. I. Scofield, *Reference Bible*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 1345
2. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/palestinianauthor/5403326/Barack-Obama-pledges-support-for-Palestinian-statehood.html>
3. Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth-2000 A.D.*, (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1994), p. 164.
4. Hal Lindsey, *The Final Battle*, (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995), p. 95.
5. Dave Hunt, *The Berean Call*, Bend, OR website archives - www.thebereancall.org/node/1843

Further Reading

1. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998)
2. John Whitcomb, *Daniel*, (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1993)
3. Renald Showers, *Daniel*, (Bryn Mawr, PA: FOI, 2003)