

“*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)

Luke 21:24

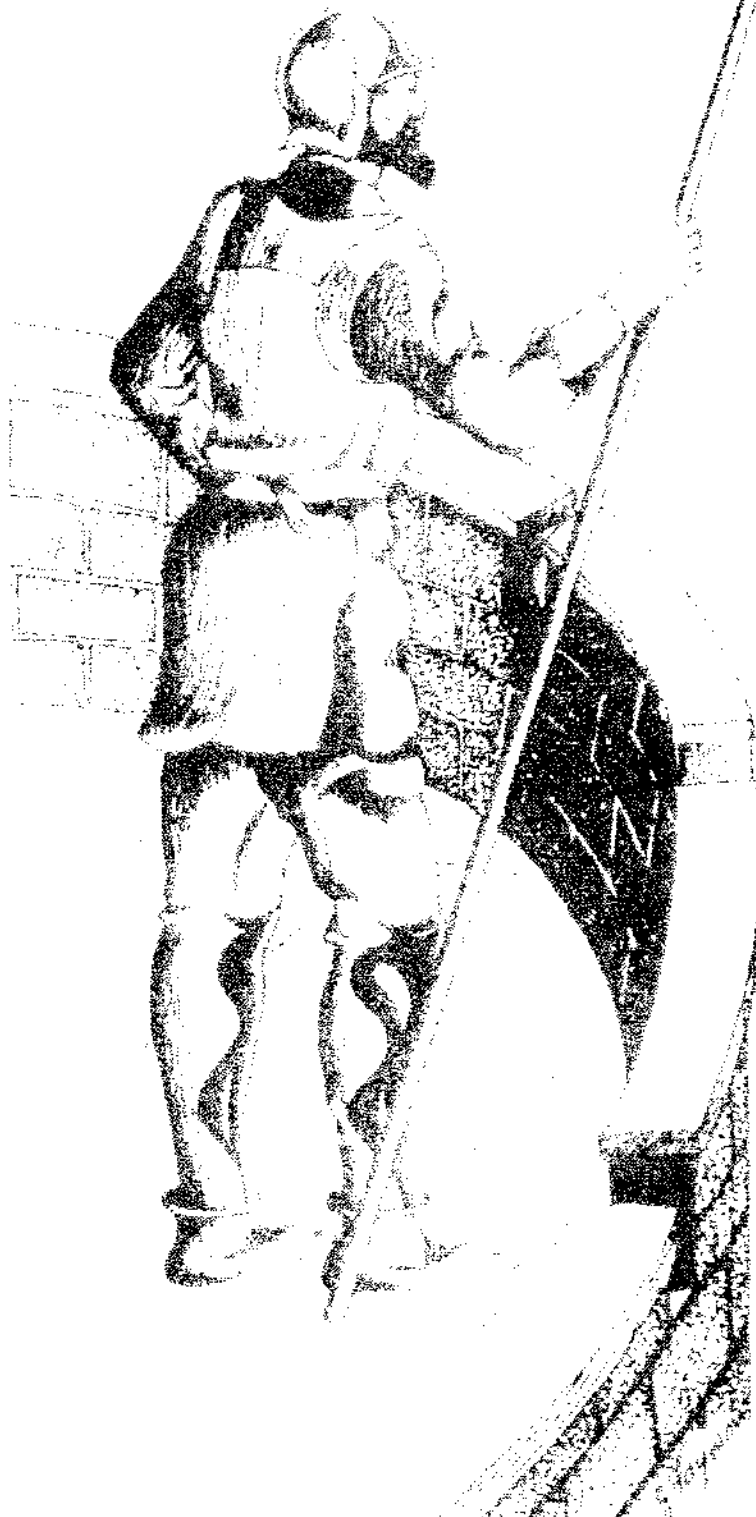
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Editor's Preface

In 1974 a North American Division Bible Conference was conducted in three different places across the United States. I attended the conference held at Andrews University. One of the topics presented by a respected Adventist theologian was “The Unique Contribution of Adventist Eschatology.” He noted that the interest at the time of his presentation in the Second Coming of Christ was based on “Three Facts.” On the third fact he commented: “The re-establishment of the state of Israel has generated intense excitement that this historic event is a dramatic fulfillment of prophecy, indicating that the end is near.” Then he commented on what he perceived to be the Adventist perception of the establishment of the Jewish State. He declared: “Seventh-day Adventists do not see theological importance in the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 or the annexation of Old Jerusalem in 1967” (p. 6). This a difficult position to defend in the light of all the evidence that is being presented in this issue of WWN. While it is true that Dr. Zurcher's book on Christ of the Revelation had not been published in 1974, at least not in English. The 20th Century Bible Course was still in vogue. A little research would have discovered Edson White as well as Ellen White's comments on Luke 21. Further “home work” would have brought to light the subject of Christ's Second Coming assigned to Arthur S. Maxwell for the 1952 Bible Conference. Sadly, the failure to see the theological importance of Christ's prophecy has been detrimental to Adventism.



Luke 21:24

“Jerusalem shall be trodden of the Gentiles (nations - εθνων), until the times of the Gentiles (nations - εθνων) be fulfilled.”

James Edson White, second son of James and Ellen White, entered the publishing work at the early age of 15. At the Review & Herald office he learned and mastered the printer's trade. Sensing the need of funds for missionary work and the profit that could be derived from the sale of Bible oriented books, White pushed forward the writing and sale of 12 books in all. Among them was *The Coming King*, which for years was the leading subscription book produced by Seventh-day Adventists for colporteurs (*SDA Encyclopedia* Vol. 11, p. 890). In the chapter on the “Destruction of Jerusalem,” White tells of the terrible carnage inflicted by the Roman soldiers, and cites this as a fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy as given in the first part of Luke 21:24 – “they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations (τα εθνη).” Then he adds a closing paragraph to the chapter:

We also read that “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” This will be when the work of the gospel is finished” (p. 109, 1906 edition).

This is a declarative and definitive statement of how Luke 21:24 was understood. The *book* was published by the Review & Herald Publishing Association, and as noted above “was the leading subscription book produced by Seventh-day Adventists” for years. In other words, it is as official an interpretation as could possibly be given to Luke 21:24 apart from the General Conference in session.

Five years later, Edson's mother directed a letter to Dr. J. H. Kellogg which is

filed as Letter 20, 1901 (*Ms. Rel.*, #14, 1102, pp. 139-149). In this letter, after discussing general matters Ellen White declared Luke 21:24, in full context, to be “present truth,” and “an object lesson.” We discussed this letter in some detail in this year's January issue of WWN (pp. 6-7). She wrote:

Will not the people of God take heed? 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 this world just prior to the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (p. 149).

When Christ comes in the clouds of heaven, “the work of the gospel” will have been “finished.” Ellen White's letter to Kellogg would appear to be an endorsement of her son's position as given in *The Coming King*.

The Coming King was superseded as the leading subscription book for Adventist colporteurs by *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. In the 1915 edition, which was stated to be “New, Revised, and Enlarged,” the following questions and answers can be found in the chapter on “The Gathering of Israel.”

1. Because of disobedience, what experience came to Israel?

“I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.” Jeremiah 34:17.

2. What prophecy spoke of their return from captivity?

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. . . And I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all nations, and from all places whither I have driven you. . . (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

Note – The first dispersion of the Jews occurred BC 606-588, under Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In 457 BC under Artaxerxes, the Persian king, large numbers of Jews returned to Palestine, their home land.

3. How had Moses spoken of another and greater dispersion?

The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, . . . and the Lord shall scatter thee among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other (Deut. 28:49-64).

Note –This calamity and dispersion occurred in 70 A.D., under Titus, the Roman general. . . .

5. How long was Jerusalem to be trodden down of the Gentiles?

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)

6. What will terminate the “times” allotted to the Gentiles?

And 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.

This reflects the same position as stated by Edson White in *The Coming King*. Then another question is asked – “Why was the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles?” The answer is taken from Acts 15 when at the first Church Council James, the moderator, declared – God “did visit the Gentiles *to take out of them a people for His name*” (ver. 14). The 1915 edition goes even further, noting that “many nations” will go to Jerusalem thinking they will arrive at truth citing Micah 4:2, but in reality they will be gathered to the battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:13, 14).

In 1949, *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* was revised. Attention was directed to one major change by Leroy E. Froom in his questionable apology, *Movement of Destiny* (See pp. 427-428). Interestingly, the chapter on “The Gathering of Israel” in the 1915 edition of *Bible Readings* was reproduced without change in the 1949 revision for the first seven questions and answers except for the omission of the note under question 5 (p. 258).

The 1949 edition (p. 315) did add a new section – “True Israel in God’s sight.” This has led to the “spiritualizing” away of the literal city of Jerusalem and substituting the concept of a “spiritual Israel,” as is suggested in the revised edition’s new section to the chapter. But such does not reflect the context. It was the literal, historical Jerusalem that was “compassed with armies” (Luke 21:20); likewise it is the same Jerusalem that would be “trodden down of the nations (εθνων) until the times of the nations (εθνων) be fulfilled” (21:24).

This was not the only problem that Adventist prophetic interpretation faced during the decade leading up to the establishment of the present State of Israel. For the colporteur were published paperback books on various Biblical topics. These sold for 25 cents, and were known as “bread and butter books.” If the colporteur could not place *Bible Readings* in the home he could sell a paperback or two and thus have money to live on. These same books were used as the “gift of the month” by the Voice of Prophecy. One such book was *Palestine in Prophecy* by J. C. Stevens copyrighted in 1944. The last paragraph of the book reads:

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 A.D. 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 the hope of national restoration for the Jews are following a theological will-o-the-wisp (p. 95).

In 1947, the Pacific Press published a paperback written by Roy F. Cottrell, *The Jews and Palestine*. He wrote:

The father of modern Zionism was Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian journalist. In 1896 he published a book entitled, *The Jewish State*. The following year the first Zionist Congress convened in Basel, Switzerland, and presented to the world its program for "a publicly assured and legally secured home for the Jewish people in Palestine" (p. 57).

Near the close of this chapter, the conclusion is drawn:

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).

In 1947, the published position of the Church was that it was impossible for a Jewish State to ever be restored in Palestine. One year later, in 1948, the Jewish State became a reality.

In 1948, I became pastor of the First Church in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The Sabbath following the establishment of the Jewish State, I prepared a sermon to shore up confidence in the Church's position. I told the congregation - "Don't get too disturbed. Do not become overly alarmed. There are still more Jews in New York City that can possibly get settled in the small area of Palestine." I had no other answer, which was no answer. What was I to say? In other words, as a result of current events, it became obvious that we as a Church were fallible in our prophetic interpretations, and that there needed to be some re-thinking.

In 1952, a Bible Conference was held in the Sligo Church. At this conference, Arthur S. Maxwell, editor of the *Signs of the Times*, was assigned the topic, "Imminence of Christ's Second Coming." In his presentation he discussed three areas of unfulfilled prophecy, one of which was "developments in Palestine." What he said needs to be carefully considered in its entirety:

The recent dramatic restoration of the nation of Israel has focused the attention of mankind once more upon Palestine. Many Christians have mistakenly permitted themselves to believe that the return of thousands of unconverted Jews to their native land is in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not realizing that, since the death of the Son of God on Calvary, there is no salvation, nor eternal homeland, except for those who believe in Him and accept His sacrifice.

However, 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" Luke 21:24.

For nineteen centuries Jerusalem has been trodden down of the Gentiles. It is still trodden down of the Gentiles. Despite the amazing prowess of the Israeli troops, the ancient city of Jerusalem is still in Arab hands. A Mohammedan mosque still stands upon the site of Solomon's Temple. Victorious as were the forces of Israel in every other part of Palestine, they failed to take the most dazzling objective of all. Mysteriously they were held back from achieving this most cherished goal, this culminating triumph, as by an unseen hand.

What could be the reason? Only that the times of the Gentiles are not fulfilled (*said in 1952*).

Centuries ago Israel was not permitted to enter Palestine for a certain time because "the iniquities of the Amorites" was "not yet full" (Gen. 15:16); that is, not until the probationary time allotted to the Amorites had run out.

It may well be that the same principle applies today, on a wider scale. If so, then Jerusalem is to remain trodden down by 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).

During this mid-century period various Bible correspondence courses were prepared by and for the Voice of Prophecy. Others for personal lay evangelism also appeared. Among these was the 20th Century Bible Course. Lesson 5 of this course was captioned, "Time Running Out." It was based upon a discussion of Jesus' eschatological discourse recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. A

paragraph prefaced the lesson telling of the reaction of both the Jews and His own disciples to Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the temple. The second question asked – What sign did Jesus give that would indicate when the destruction of the city was at hand? The student was directed to Luke 21:20 for the answer. This note followed:

The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman armies in A.D. 66. After a period of time the army withdrew and the Christians, recognizing the sign given by Christ ... fled the city and did not return. In A.D. 69 the Romans returned, and destroyed the city in A.D. 70. Nearly a million people died or were sold into slavery at that time, but not a single Christian died. *They watched for the sign that Christ had given and obeyed His instructions.* The temple was burned to the ground as Christ had foretold (even though the soldiers had orders not to destroy it). Christ foresaw the future and outlined it to his followers so that they could be saved.

Question #3 asked – How long did Christ say that Jerusalem would be trodden down? The student was directed to Luke 21:24 for the answer. This note then followed:

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 "lightning victory." This portion of Christ's prophecy was fulfilled in our day!

In 1980, the second quarter's Sabbath school lessons for the Adult Division was "Christ of the Revelation" authored by Dr. Jean Zurcher. He not only authored the lessons, but also prepared a special "Helps" book by the same title which was translated into the English from the French. In this book, he noted the fulfilment of Luke 21:24 and its significance. He wrote:

We shall not linger over the numerous signs given by Jesus in this discourse. One only will occupy our attention, the one that especially deals with time. Even in our days it constitutes a critical point in the political world: Jerusalem. In fact, Jerusalem is both the beginning and the

culmination of Jesus' prophecy. For Him as for Daniel the prophet, the history of nations as that of the people of Israel, is written in the tragic setting of the history of Jerusalem. The latter is the sign by which the fate of the former is determined. 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 (Luke 21:24).*"

Few today would deny the precision of this prophecy. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in AD 70 is a historical fact commemorated on the triumphal arch of Titus in Rome. The dispersion of the Jews among all nations is still a reality. As for Jerusalem, nineteen centuries of history should provide adequate proof that it has been "trodden down of the Gentiles" – first by the Romans, then by the Arabs, next by different Christian nations during the Crusades, fourth by the Turks up to the end of the first world war, then by the British, and finally by the Jordanians until the Six-Day War in June, 1967.

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 our seeing in the return of the Jews to Palestine and in 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 "sign of the times"?

In order to understand Jesus' statement, three questions need answering. First, exactly what does the expression "the times of the Gentiles" mean? Then, what should be understood by the fulfilment of the times of the Gentiles? Finally, what connection is there between the retaking of Jerusalem by the Jews and the fulfilment of the times of the Gentiles?

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. The baptism of the first "heathen" – the Ethiopian eunuch and the centurion Cornelius – as well as the conversion of Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles mark the beginning of these new times. And if I have understood the prediction of Jesus properly, this time will be "fulfilled" when Jerusalem will cease to "be trodden of the Gentiles." The fact that since 1967 Gentiles no longer have occupied Jerusalem means, therefore, that we are now living at the end of "the times of the Gentiles."

Jerusalem here constitutes the last sign 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. And should God tarry once more in the fulfilment of His promise, we should understand that He "is longsuffering, ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) (*Christ of the Revelation*, pp. 71-72).

"Dual Covenant" Theology

There is and has been a close working relationship between the Religious Right and representatives of Judaism. Now a new theology regarding Israel has emerged, which is embraced by the leading lights of the "Religious Right" – Falwell and Pat Robertson. This relationship and theology were reported in *The International Jerusalem Post* for March 3-9, 2006. The report was captioned – "Falwell: Jews need not convert to get to heaven." It read:

An evangelical pastor and an Orthodox rabbi, both from Texas, have apparently persuaded leading Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell that Jews can get to heaven without being converted to Christianity.

Televangelist John Hagee and Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg whose Cornerstone Church and

Rodfei Sholom congregations are based in San Antonio told *The Jerusalem Post* that Falwell had adopted Hagee's innovative belief in what Christians refer to as "dual covenant" theology.

This creed, which runs counter to mainstream evangelism, maintains that the Jewish people have a special relationship to God through the revelation at Sinai and therefore do not need "to go through Christ or the Cross" to get to heaven.

Scheinberg said that this has been Hagee's position for the 25 years the two have worked together on behalf of Israel, and that Falwell had also come to accept it. Falwell had sent a representative to the San Antonio launch of Christians United for Israel in early February, as did popular televangelist Pat Robertson.

Hagee, who will serve as CUFI national chairman, says the new organization aims to be a kind of "Christian AIPAC" (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) through which every pro-Israel Christian organization and ministry in America can speak and act with one voice in support of Israel on biblical issues.

The main issue, following disengagement from the Gaza Strip, is not to give up any more of the land of Israel, he said.

Many Christian denominational leaders who represent some 30 million evangelical Christians in the United States – have expressed support for CUFI in writing.

Scheinberg said he had worked with Hagee since 1981, when the pastor first broached the idea of organizing a night to honor Israel, which has become an annual event.

"He came to the Jewish community and of course they were sceptical, they were a bit suspicious, anxious about whatever agenda he might have," the rabbi recalled. "He took public positions against proselytizing the Jews, which some of his own colleagues at that time criticized him roundly for, for

example Falwell was at that time very critical of his nonconversionary statements regarding the Jews. But that is not the case though. Falwell has changed his position," he said.

Hagee has been consistent in this theological position, Scheinberg said, and this was reflected in both the declared policy of CUFI and at the public launch of the organization last month.

"It seemed there was a great deal of unity - not unanimity - on conversion, a non-proselytizing agenda, that the Jews have a special covenant, and this was stated over and over," the rabbi said (p. 7).

Parallels?

Jesus' prophetic discourse covered the end of two "times" - the "times of Israel" as a chosen people of God, and the "times of the Gentiles" (nations). There would be a "new" Israel of God (Gal. 6:15-16). The Jerusalem of this "new" Israel would not be in the time of secular history, but be the climax of sacred history. "The nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it" (Rev. 21:24). The question is: Are there any parallels between the closing of the two "times"?

Through the prophet Daniel, Israel was given notice that a period of time was allotted to them - "Seventy weeks" (prophetic) time were determined for them (9:24). In that time the Messiah would come. The way they would relate to that "Prince" would determine their fate. The eschatological discourse of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 24 is prefaced by the first step in the closing of the "times of Israel." Jesus declared, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (23:38). Then the text reads - "Jesus went out, and departed from the temple" (24:1). The temple veil was soon to be rent, and a new and living way opened (Heb. 10:20). In the discourse, He directed their attention to

"Daniel the prophet" and the desolation to come (24:15). Between that hour in AD 70, and the time when He then spoke would come AD 34, the stoning of Stephen and the end of the "seventy weeks." In that period of time would be the ministry of Paul, who would tell the Jews of the Diaspora, that their religious leaders had the Messiah killed by the Romans, and that they had to join the "new" Israel of God with the Gentiles whom God was calling out to be a "people for His name" (Acts 15:14).

From the same discourse of Jesus, Luke focuses on the closing of the other "times" - the times of the nations. This brings questions to the fore. What was to be the final call to the nations? To whom was the final message entrusted? What have they done to it, and with it? Luke 21:24 cannot be shunted aside as of no consequence. The fact that Christ is the truth, the crucifixion of truth is the same as crucifying Him. The parallel between AD 27-31, 1950, and our day should be painfully evident.

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Texts to consider with Luke 21:24:

Daniel 11:45 - "He shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas (Dead, Galilee, and the Great) in the glorious holy mountain."

Revelation 16:16 - "They gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Har-Mo'ed (Mount of the Congregation).

Isaiah 14:13 - "For thou hast said in thine heart, ... I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation (Har-Mo'ed), in the sides of the north" (See also Ps. 48:2).