

Luke 21:24 (Paul Wilson) 147024

Prophetic Terms, Prophetic Terms: Times of the Gentiles

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Let us read a verse from the gospel of Luke wherein we find the above term used.

"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.

The word Gentile is used in Scripture to describe any and all nations who are not Jews. Before the days of Christianity, there were only Jews and Gentiles on earth, but now there is another body known in Scripture as the "church of God," which is composed of those who are saved from among both Jews and Gentiles. All three are mentioned in one verse,

"Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God." 1 Cor. 10:32.

Before marking out what is meant by the term, the "times of the Gentiles," we shall have to look at the history of the Jews.

God chose the seed of Abraham for His special people on earth. They were further marked out in Isaac and Jacob; and when God gave to the nations their inheritance on earth, He marked out their bounds "according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8). They were His special possession on earth among mankind. He gave them His promises, and then His covenants. After redemption, He came down and dwelt in their midst.

God also gave them the land of Canaan for a possession and drove out the inhabitants of that land. He did not, however, drive them out without just and sufficient reason. The seven nations who inhabited that land were only tenants on it, as it all belonged to God. Through their great wickedness, these nations polluted the land wherein they dwelt; and God said to Abraham that He would give his seed the land of Canaan, but not yet, because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). This is a principle with God. He never acts in judgment until there is no other alternative. He waits long in patience, but when iniquity reaches its peak, He must act in judgment.

So when the iniquity of the heathen who occupied the land of Canaan, reached the limit, God gave the land to the children of Israel. He brought them out of Egypt and planted them in the land whereon His eyes were "from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deut. 11:12).

We have not space here to recount the multitude of blessings that were bestowed on the Israelites in their land, but we all know the sad history of failure which followed. While the heathen had polluted the land before, Israel did it afterward. In Psalm 106:38 we read that they polluted the land with blood. They learned the works of the heathen, and worshiped their false gods. In fact, the condition in that land became as bad, or even worse, than it was when inhabited by the heathen whom God displaced because of their wickedness. Note this verse:

"So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken." 2 Chron. 33:9, 10.

Yes, they would not hearken. We read that God sent many messengers to them, but they despised the messengers, and misused His prophets "till there was no remedy." 2 Chron. 36:14, 16.

If God had not acted then, it would have shown Him to be as careless of His glory as they were. He must act! Their very nearness to God, and place of special favor, did not make them exempt from punishment—No! It increased it. God's special favors increase our responsibility, as we read of Israel,

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Amos 3:2.

Finally, after every possible effort on God's part to recall His earthly people, He sent Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to chastise that guilty nation. Note these words:

"And the LORD gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god." Dan. 1:2.

Yes, the Lord gave the children of Judah into the hands of this Gentile monarch. In fact, God gave this king a universal dominion, and withdrew His throne from the earth. Earlier (Josh. 3:11) God was called the "Lord of all the earth"; but in the book of Daniel, He is called the "God of heaven." Israel who had been called "His people," are then called "not My people" (Hos. 1:9). This great change that took place when God withdrew His throne from this earth, and turned His earthly people over to Gentile control, marked the beginning of the "times of the Gentiles." This change took place about the year 606 B.C.

And while a remnant of Judah returned from captivity seventy years later, they only did so under the power and control of the Gentiles, so the "times of the Gentiles" went on, and today still continues.

When our Lord spoke in Luke 21, He said that after His speaking, Jerusalem was to be "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This also came to pass about the year 70 A.D. That word "until" does tell us that there will be definite termination of this period. In fact we are getting along down toward the end of this period—how close we do not know. But it will end when Christ the Lord comes out of heaven with His saints to execute judgment on this Christ-rejecting earth.

"The times of the Gentiles" are pictured in Daniel, second chapter, in the image of a man. The last part of this figure of the "man of the earth," is the feet and toes, which describe the last part and state of Gentile power before the end of this period of time. Then, as we see in Daniel 2, the Lord shall come out of heaven to execute judgment as the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands"; and He will strike the then-existent part of Gentile dominion (the feet and toes of the image—the revived Roman Empire) in His wrath, and break all things to pieces. After executing judgment, His kingdom will fill the whole earth, and Israel will again be brought into a place of blessing and prominence; but it will be a new Israel—they will have a new heart in that day.

May the Lord give us all to see in what close proximity we are to the very end of this age. May we be looking for our Lord from heaven, and holding the things of earth more lightly.

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