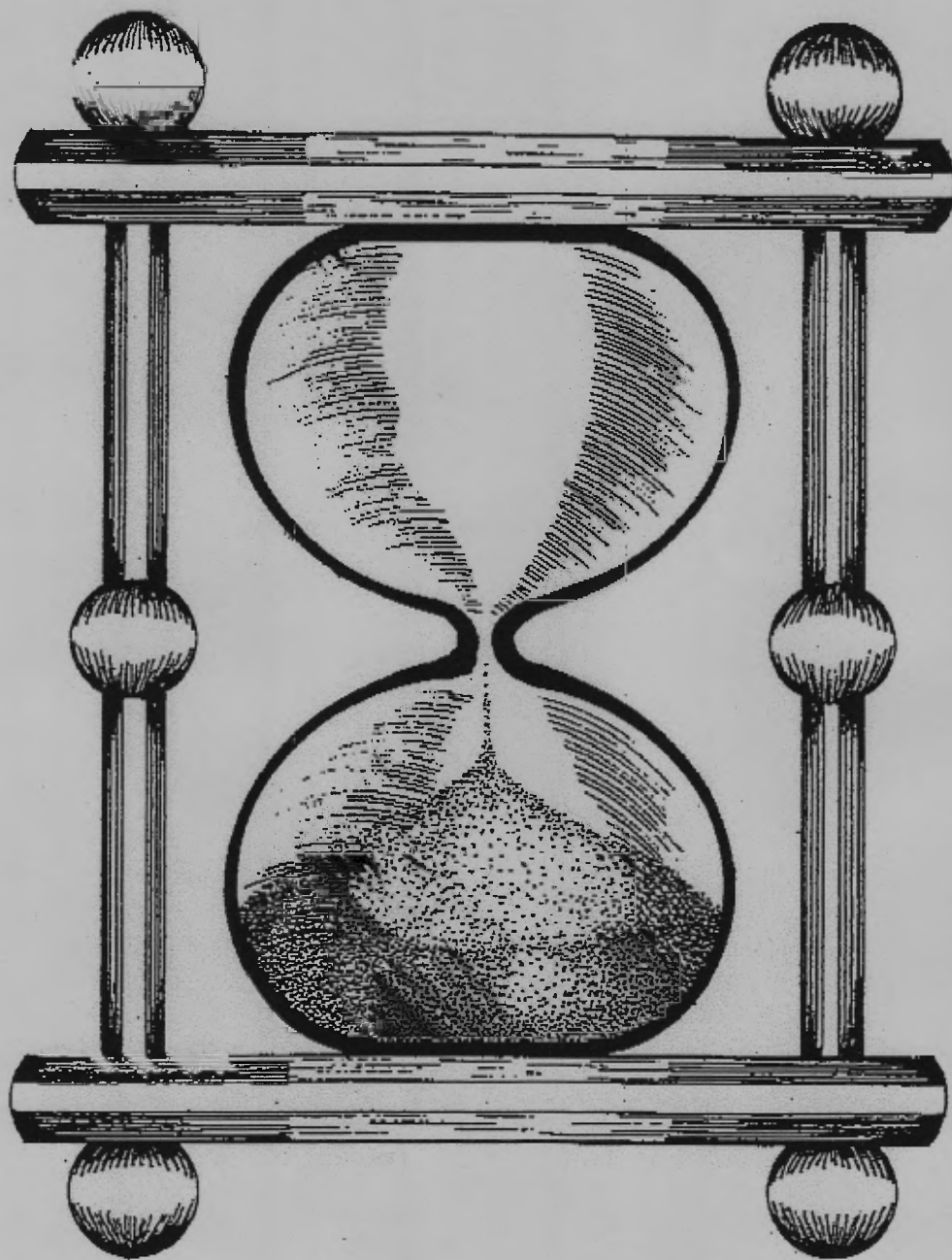


THE HOUR AND THE END



It Is Striking At You!

THE HOUR AND THE END!

An In-Depth Study of Luke 21:24

"Evil on evil! says the Lord Eternal -- it is coming,
the hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the HOUR and the END!"

Ezekiel 7:5-6, Moffatt

by

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EXHIBITS

- #1 - Our Firm Foundation, Vol. II, pp. 230-231
- #2 - 20th Century Bible Course, Lesson 5, p. 1
- #3 - Christ of the Revelation by Dr. J. R. Zurcher (SDA), pp. 71-72
- #4a & b - Economic Data - Various Sources
- #5 - The Coming King by James Edson White, p. 98
- #6 - Carter and the Pope - Handclasp on North Lawn of White House
- #7 - Document, UN Security Council: Papal Policy on Jerusalem
- #8 - Basic Law of Israel Regarding Jerusalem
- #9 - Apostolic Letter of John Paul II - Papal Vision for Jerusalem

PREFACE

My mother was a devoted and active Baptist. She was a leader in the Children's Division of the Sunday School of the local church where we lived in Iowa. She was also an active member and regular attendant of the Woman's Missionary Auxiliary. I recall one summer afternoon upon her return from one such meeting, she told me about the devotional study that day. It had made a deep impression upon her mind. The guest speaker related to the group the events of the Dark Day of May 19, 1780, and the Falling of the Stars on the night of November 13, 1833. Mother said to me, "William, just think in less than two years, it'll be 100 years since the last great sign Jesus gave." The year was 1931, and the guest speaker was Bertha E. Jorgensen, a retired Seventh-day Adventist Bible Worker.

I did think. I wondered if I would grow up to be a man. The end seemed so near. Would it be five years yet? That Fall, the same retired Bible Worker would give my mother and me a series of 22 Bible studies. We would be her last converts to the Truth before she would go to her rest. But time has continued, and those five years have lengthened into plus ten times five.

Little did I dream, or for that matter anyone else in that small Seventh-day Adventist company, that some of us would live to see a prophecy of Jesus fulfilled in our day as verily as those living in 1833. But we have! That is what this manuscript is all about - THE HOUR AND THE END! It is written for, and dedicated to, all who desire truth and who with an open mind will search for it. As you read, it is my hope and prayer that your mind will be guided by the Spirit of truth, and that the realization that we have reached the end of all things earthly will stir your hearts as mine was stirred that day long ago in 1931.

Wm. H. Grotheer

Chapter I

Recent Adventist Literature on Luke 21:24

The 1952 Bible Conference

In 1952, a Bible Conference was held in the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church from September 1-13. Various theological and prophetic studies were presented at the Conference. One topic, which was assigned to Arthur S. Maxwell, then editor of The Signs of the Times, was "The Imminence of Christ's Second Coming." In the presentation of his study, Maxwell listed three areas of unfulfilled prophecy - developments in the United States, developments in Palestine, and the Seven Last Plagues.

The "developments in Palestine" concerned the fulfillment of Luke 21:24. Keep in perspective the time of this Bible Conference - 1952. Just four years prior in 1948, the Jewish state of Israel had been re-established. In the light of this background, observe carefully Maxwell's penetrating observations. He said:

The recent dramatic restoration of the nation of Israel has focused the attention of mankind once more on Palestine. Many Christians have mistakenly permitted themselves to believe that the return of thousands of unconverted Jews to their native land is a fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, not realizing that, since the death of the Son of God on Calvary, there is no salvation, nor any 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 yet fulfilled.

Centuries ago Israel was not permitted to enter Palestine for a certain time because "the iniquity 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, pp. 230-231 (See Exhibit #1)

In 1952, the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was alerted in regard to the prophecy of Jesus concerning Jerusalem. While the studies given at the Bible Conference did not carry the "imprimatur" of the General Conference, the theologians of the Church, and the Administrative leaders of the world field were all present at this conference. It is of interest to note what Dr. Denton E. Rebok, secretary of the Bible Conference, had to say in his "introductory" remarks as found in Volume I of the Conference report. He wrote:

The General Conference as a body is in no way responsible for the studies presented. They are not an official pronouncement of the church. They do, however, represent the best thinking on the part of sincere, honest, earnest, devoted, loyal men - Seventh-day Adventists, first, last, and always - who have tried to give expression to our conception of the great truths believed, held, and taught by Seventh-day Adventists generally in all parts of the earth. (Ibid., Vol. I, p. 13)

Elder W. H. Branson, president of the General Conference at the time, in a report that appeared earlier in the Ministry (July, 1952), enumerated who were to be in attendance at the Bible Conference. He wrote:

According to the action of the Autumn Council, the personnel of the conference will consist of the following individuals:

The members of the General Conference Committee who will be in attendance at the 1952 Biennial Council, and others who may be invited to the council:

From North America:

- a. Two Bible teachers from each senior college, to be chosen by their respective boards.
- b. One Bible teacher from each junior college, to be chosen by their respective boards.
- c. One to as many evangelists from each union conference as there are local conferences in the union, to be appointed by the respective union committees.
- d. The editors of our leading periodicals.
- e. The book editors of our leading publishing houses.
- f. Representatives from the Theological Seminary.
- g. From the overseas divisions: a minimum of three in addition to the president of the field. (Ibid. p. 14)

It was before such a gathering of the leadership of the Church that Elder Arthur S. Maxwell called attention to the significance of Luke 21:24. This writer was there as a delegate under section "c" and can tell you what happened in his case, and I do not believe that my response was much different from the others present. I heard but perceived not, because of the conditioning received over the years in regard to the Jews returning to Palestine.

The Twentieth Century Bible Course

It is well known that The Twentieth Century Bible Course is a means used by the Church as an evangelistic tool. It represents the teachings of the Church in regard to interpretation of Bible prophecy and points of theology. In Lesson 5, captioned - "Time Running Out" - the prophecy of Luke 21:24 is declared to be fulfilled in our day. The #2 question is - **"What sign did Jesus give that would indicate when the destruction of the city [of Jerusalem] was at hand?"** Luke 21:20 is given as the Bible answer. Then this note follows:

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 (Matthew 24:15-20) 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 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. (Emphasis theirs)

The third question reads: **"How long did Christ say that Jerusalem would be trodden down?"** Luke 21:24 is given as the place in the Bible to find the answer. Then this note follows:

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! (See Exhibit #2)

Sabbath School Lesson Helps

"The Witness of Jesus" was the subject of the second quarter's lessons (1980) for the Adult Division of the Sabbath School. Dr. Jean Zurcher not only authored these lessons, but his book, Christ of the Revelation, was translated into English as a "Helps"

for the quarter's lessons. In this book was noted the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of Luke 21:24. Dr. Zurcher wrote:

We shall not linger over the numerous signs given by Jesus in this discourse. [Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21] 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 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 setting of the tragic history of Jerusalem. The latter is a 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 to 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 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"?

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

As I understand 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 for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 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 shall cease to "be trodden down 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 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; See Exhibit #3)

In 1952, the ministry of the Church was alerted to the coming fulfillment of Luke 21:24. In 1980, the whole Sabbath School was given an opportunity to know that the prophecy had been fulfilled. During this same period, those studying the doctrines and teachings of the Church were told - "This portion of Christ's prophecy was fulfilled in our day!" With this background, as found in Adventist literature on prophecy,¹ it should be irrelevant to spend time proving the validity of the fulfillment of Luke 21:24 to Seventh-day Adventists. We should rather be seeking to discover the significance of this already fulfilled prophecy to our own work and

mission. We should know and appreciate what Jesus was giving in prophetic legacy to His followers. We should also become aware of the large amount of historical data which adds significance to the dates which mark the fulfillment of Luke 21:24.

In the coming chapters, we shall discuss and give that data, then we shall devote the last part of the study to the meaning of Luke 21:24 for the work and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

¹In 1974, a series of three Bible Conferences were held in the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At each of these conferences, Dr. Herbert C. Douglass presented a topic on "The Unique Contribution of Adventist Eschatology." In these presentations, he stated - **"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) Then in his book, The End, published by the Pacific Press in 1979, he makes the same assertion, however, changing the emphasis to a prophetic significance. In the book, Douglass wrote - **"Although Seventh-day Adventists are premillennialists, they do not see prophetic importance in the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, or the annexation of Old Jerusalem in 1967."** (p. 48)

It should be noted that in Chapter I above, none of the sources cited refer to the date, 1948, as being a fulfillment of any prophecy. However, both Dr. Zurcher and the author of the 20th Century Bible lessons saw definite significance in the retaking of Old Jerusalem by the Israelis in 1967. In fact, Zurcher emphasizes the point that if one cannot see "that Jerusalem is an exceptional sign of the times," he could be placing himself in the same category with the "religious leaders who knew how to 'discern the face of the sky' but could not discern the obvious 'signs of the times.'"

Douglass is not listed among the delegates to the 1952 Bible Conference, and so was perhaps totally unaware of Maxwell's presentation. The English translation of Zurcher's book came one year after the Pacific Press had published his book - The End. However, Douglass' assertions are given without support or documentation. They do indicate an awareness of the prophecy and what could be its fulfillment. One is left with the impression that Douglass is most reluctant to come to grips with this prophecy because of what the significance of its fulfillment would be to the thesis of his book.

The same Pacific Press that published Douglass' book - The End - in 1979, also published some years earlier in 1898 a book by James Edson White - The Coming King. In that book, Edson White had written:

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 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; See Exhibit #5)

Chapter II

Luke 21:24 in Context

Part of Jesus' Prophetic Legacy to His Church

The prophecy of Luke 21:24 is a part of a prophetic outline which Jesus gave to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, Tuesday prior to His great sacrifice on Calvary. What Jesus said is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels - Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

The day following His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Monday, He cleansed the temple the second time. He charged the Jewish leadership with making His house "a den of thieves." (Matt. 21:13) On Tuesday, upon His return to the Temple, He was met and challenged by the chief priests and elders of the people as to His authority to do what He had done the day before. (Matt. 21:23) After putting them to silence, Jesus spoke in the hearing of the multitude, the most scathing denunciations of the religious leaders of Israel they had ever heard. (Matt. 23:1-36) Then He declared - "Behold, **your** house is left unto you desolate. ... and Jesus went out." (Matt. 23:38; 24:1)

This pronouncement and act of Jesus shocked the disciples. Hurriedly following Him from the Temple precincts, they sought to bring Him to reality as they perceived reality to be. One of the disciples - speaking the sentiments of all - said to Jesus: "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" (Mark 13:1) What were they saying? "Jesus, you spoke too hastily. Look here. See these great buildings. Look at the massive rocks which have been used in the building of the Temple. How can You say, that this Temple, the center of all our religious worship is now desolate? Is it going to be set aside? Jesus, not backing down one inch said in response - "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Mark 13:2) This stunned them. Silence reigned during the entire walk from the Temple to the Mount of Olives where they would spend the night.

While sitting together on the Mount, four of the disciples ventured to ask Jesus - "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3) To the disciples, if the Temple was going to be destroyed, that had to be the end of the world. So to them, it was just one question. In answering their question, Jesus mingled the signs marking the two events. But in giving general signs which would apply to both events, He outlined three specific signs which would mark major epochs from the time of the Apostles to His second coming. Note these events as given in Luke 21:

1) **And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter thereinto.** (Luke 21:20-21)

2) **And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.** (Luke 21:25) ["The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven." - Matt. 24:29]

3) **Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.** (Luke 21:24)

It is important to understand that these three prophetic signs were not given in