



THE LAST DAYS

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RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

'Eschatology' is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological 'system' scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular "Left Behind" system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES and the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel

BY KURT SIMMONS

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are 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 countries enter there-into. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. 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. (Lk. 21:21-25)"

The application of the above passage to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 seems plain enough. Indeed, there is no exegetical basis to lift it from its first century context. The personal pronoun "ye" establishes the time for fulfillment in that generation. This is confirmed by verse 32: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all be fulfilled." So far so good; the sound application of exegetical principles guides us in a correct understanding. But what is the meaning of the phrase "times of the Gentiles?" Was this language also fulfilled in that generation, and if so, "How?"

To understand the meaning and significance of the phrase "times of the Gentiles" we need to bear in mind the covenantal nature of the days of vengeance poured out upon that generation. The law of Moses was impressed with both blessings and curses; blessing for obedience, curses for disobedience. If Israel was obedient, God promised thou shalt "lend unto many



"There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets."
Daniel 2:28

Calvin, then, was, on the whole, a Præterist. He saw in the history of the world before the times of the Messiah the fulfillment of the Visions of this Book. They extended from Nebuchadnezzar to Nero.

From **Daniel: Translation Of The Text And Copious Indices** by Thomas Myers, M.A., Vicar Of Sheriff-Hutton, Yorkshire

nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath.” (Deut. 28:12, 13) However, if they were disobedient the opposite would obtain:

“The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcass shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away...Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. And the Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.” (Deut. 28:25, 26; 48-51)

In Leviticus twenty-six, in language evoking the “days of vengeance” mentioned by Luke, in which all things written would be fulfilled, the curse of the law is stated progressively; God punishing the nation more severely as it refused correction:

“And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.” (Lev. 26:23-25; emphasis added; cf. vv. 18, 21, 28)

The progressive nature of God’s wrath began to be poured out as early as the era of the Judges. However, the term “times of the Gentiles” refers specifically to Gentile dominion over Israel beginning with the captivity in Babylon. Beginning with the Babylonian captivity, the throne and tabernacle of David were cast down. The Psalmist refers to this when he says: “Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin.” (Ps. 89:39,40) Jesus

referred to Gentile dominion over the people of God when he said: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matt. 11:12) From the days of Nebuchadnezzar the Gentiles had dominion over Israel; Gentiles sat on throne of David; the feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream trod under foot the land and people of God. But a day was coming when the dominion would be returned to Israel, and the throne to the house of David. Amos speaks of this day:

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this.” (Amos 9:11-12)

The kingdom of God which all Israel was in expectation, and which Jesus himself preached, looked to the time when the yoke of the Gentiles would be taken from the people of God and dominion would be returned to the house of David. This much about the coming Messiah they correctly understood. However, many Jews mistook the nature of God’s fulfillment of this promise, and looked for a national liberator, like John Hyrcanus of the intertestamental period, who would overthrow the Romans and bring in a time of world dominion reminiscent of the glory days of Solomon. Echoes of this basic assumption were behind the question whether it was lawful to pay tribute unto Caesar. (Lk. 20:21, 22) Roman tribute was a constant reminder of the nation’s subjugation to the Gentiles. If the Messiah was to ascend the throne of David and liberate the nation, surely this entailed the abolition of tribute. However, Jesus’ answer, to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s (v. 25), pointed to the fact that the kingdom of the Messiah was not of this world, and did not rest in political or military power. The restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), by setting up anew the throne of David over the people of God and the subjugation of their enemies, would be fulfilled by the victory of the gospel over the hearts and minds of men, encompassing every race and people, revolutionizing every human institution. The beginning of the fulfillment of this promise is indicated by Peter’s sermon on the first Pentecost

after Christ arose from the dead, when he states that Jesus was raised to sit on David’s throne:

“Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:30-36)

Extension of the Davidic throne over the Gentiles began with the Samaritans (Acts 8:5, 12) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-40), and was fulfilled in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10) and the ministry of St. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. (Rom. 11:13; II Tim. 1:12) At the “Jerusalem Counsel,” James indicated the prophetic subjection of the Gentiles to Christ when he quoted the prophecy of Amos, supra. (Acts 15:16,17; cf. Amos 9:11-12) However, the obedience of the Gentiles to Christ did not mean that the “times of the Gentiles” were fulfilled and the dominion of Christ was come. The church came out of and was identified with national Israel until the time of reformation when the temple service was removed and the way into the “holiest” (Messianic age and kingdom) made manifest. (Heb. 9:8-10) Not until the transition period was over, and national Israel taken out of the way, would the kingdom come in its fullness and Christ enter upon his eternal reign. The “times of the Gentiles” was coterminous with national Israel from and after the Babylonian captivity until kingdom and reign of the Messiah; when Jerusalem was trodden under foot at the end of the Mosaic age the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled, and the kingdom and reign of the Messiah would begin. This conclusion is corroborated by Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse where he quotes the Lord:

“So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is now nigh at hand.” (Lk. 21:31)

But the kingdom of God was more than merely the removal of Gentile's dominion over the Israel of God and the restoration of the kingdom to the house of David; more importantly, it was the time of the regeneration and restitution of all things. (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21) Sin and death had reigned from the fall of the race. (Rom. 5:14, 17, 21) Death was the "prince of this world." It came for Jesus but had no power over him, because he was spotless and without sin. (Jn. 14:30) The principality of sin and death was spoiled in Christ's cross (Col. 2:15); Jesus "took captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8),

and freed the prisoners of the pit wherein was no water. (Zech. 9:11, 12) The "creature" that had groaned and travailed in pain from the fall of the race (Rom. 8:19-23) would find rest and refreshment in redemption and adoption of the sons of God at the consummation of the age.

Conclusion

The "times of the Gentiles" spoke to the dominion of unbelievers over the Israel of God. Gentile dominion began with the captivity in Babylon and continued for more than 500 years until the destruction of the Jewish state at the close of the

Mosaic economy in A.D. 70. The times of the Gentiles expired where the kingdom of Christ began. In Christ the kingdom is restored to Israel and the throne to the house of David. Because the kingdom of God is spiritual and is not nationally constituted, none can conquer or have dominion over it, but Christ alone. "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." (Dan. 7:27)

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

PART TWO BY JAMES B. JORDAN



"All these things shall be finished."

Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and **when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.** Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. "Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days." Daniel 12:5-12

An Overview of the Pattern

What I intend to do in this series of studies is this: First, in the present essay we shall survey the occurrences of the Abomination of Desolation in the Bible in a cursory way, in order to get the fundamental pattern before us. Next time, we shall look at the Hebrew words underlying the English word "abomination," and we shall find that the "abomination of desolation" is a technical phrase indicating a sin that only God's peculiar people can commit. Then we shall go back and look at the particular historical occurrences in more detail.

The Abomination of Desolation pattern is an extension of the basic Fall pattern seen repeatedly in the Bible. The Fall pattern is this: God gives His people a kingdom, and then immediately they fall into sin and lose the kingdom, but God is gracious and restores them. At certain

climactic times, though, when their sin is extremely great, prolonged, high-handed, and performed right in front of His face, God brings His wrath upon them. God withdraws His presence from them, leaving them desolate, because their sins have become abominable. Once God departs, He brings in an enemy army to destroy His ruined house and His ruined city. The result is that His people are driven into exile, just as they drove Him into exile: eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

There are four occurrences of the Abomination of Desolation pattern in the Old Testament, and two preliminary occurrences. They are:

1. The Flood of Noah.
2. The Apostasy of Eli's Sons.
3. The Apostasy of the priesthood in Ezekiel's day.
4. The Apostasy of the priesthood in the days of the Maccabees.

The final and climactic occurrence of the pattern comes in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The pattern stands as a warning to every Church in every time. If we commit pronounced and prolonged sins of apostasy, God will do to us as He did to them (Rev. 2-3).

Let us now survey the occurrences of the pattern. First, let us consider the Fall of Man. Because the Fall of the first man was a unique event, we cannot expect to see the pattern in all its details, but we can see it in its essence. When Adam sinned in the Garden, he did so on the sabbath, in the sanctuary, right at the center where the two trees were located. Adam was a priest, and his sin performed right before God's face was a desolating sacrilege. Instead of leaving the Garden, God drove Adam out of it. Essentially the pattern is present, however, because Adam's expulsion separated him from God's blessing and protection, God

brought in an enemy to throw Adam out: the cherubim.

Yet, in the Fall we do not see the climax of sacrilege that leads to God's destroying His house. That comes at the Flood, when wickedness has matured. At the Flood, God does depart from the Garden of Eden, and brings in an enemy (the Flood, which becomes a symbol for the enemy later in the Bible) to destroy it and to destroy all the people. A remnant joins Him in exile, in the Ark, and then is returned to start a new covenant.

Second, the Golden Calf. Notice that the people committed a religious crime (idolatry) accompanied by gross sexual sin (sat down to eat, rose up to "play") right in front of God's face, for they were in the sacred area at the foot of Sinai. They got the High Priest, Aaron, to lead them in this. God's response was to withdraw from the camp and pitch His tent far outside of it. This exposed the camp to destruction. Moses was able to persuade God to return, however, and so the full pattern of destruction was averted (Exodus 32-34).

Yet, in the Golden Calf we do not see the climax of sacrilege that leads to God's destroying His house. That comes after many years of maturing evil, described in Judges, climaxing in the apostasy of Eli's Sons. Again we are in the sanctuary, and again it is the priests who, reflecting the sins of the people, take a lead in committing sacrilegious abominations. They stole God's sacrifices and committed ritual fornication (1 Sam. 3:12-17; 22). Eli refused to stop them. As a result, God desolated the sanctuary and went into exile. The priests were killed and a permanent curse put on Eli's house (1 Sam. 3-4). God brought in the Philistines to conquer and punish Israel. But God was gracious. While in Philistine exile, God defeated the gods of the Philistines and returned to Israel with much spoil (1 Sam. 5-6). Then the covenant was renewed (1 Sam. 7).

Third, the apostasy of the priesthood in Ezekiel's day. The kingdom had been given to David, and 1 Chronicles describes how David as a new Moses set up the priesthood. David fell into sin right away, but God restored him through much trauma (2 Sam. 7; 11-19). The full climax and maturation of evil comes in the years immediately pre-

ceding the exile. Ezekiel 8-11 describes in fullest detail the detestable acts that cause God to desolate His Temple. The people committed every kind of idolatry right before God's face in the Temple, and the priests were the leaders in it. Ezekiel sees God pack up and move out of the Temple, leaving it desolate. Soon God sent in Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Temple and the city—and remember that Daniel was Nebuchadnezzar's right-hand man at this time. The people joined God in exile, receiving a punishment equal to what they had done to Him. Again, however, God was gracious, for in Babylon God went to war with the false gods (Dan. 4-5). Eventually the people returned to Israel, with God, and the covenant was renewed.

Fourth, the apostasy in the days of the Maccabees. The kingdom of God had been restored in the days of Ezra, and then the people had immediately fallen into sin (Ezr. 9-10; Neh. 13; Malachi). God had restored them, however. Their sinfulness continued, though, and climaxed in the days of the Maccabees. This is prophesied in Daniel 11, and recorded in Josephus and in 1 & 2 Maccabees. The people rejected the Lord, and the High Priests self-consciously adopted Greek religion. They did this in the Temple, right in God's face. For political reasons, they asked Antiochus Epiphanes to come to the city and set them up in power. As a result, God desolated the Temple and city, and caused the people to anger Antiochus, who returned to the city and instituted a reign of terror. Antiochus defiled the Temple, but this is only the aftermath of what the Jews had already done. Antiochus could not really defile the Temple, because he was not one of God's peculiar people and he had no legal access to it. His defiling the temple is not the abomination of desolation, therefore.

Finally, the fulfillment of this pattern is seen in the events leading down to A.D. 70, as predicted in Daniel 9, Matthew 24 and parallel passages, many places in the epistles, and the book of Revelation. The Jews continued to do sacrifices in the Temple, right in front of God's face, after the final sacrifice had been made. They then compounded their sin by persecuting the Christians. They were eventually joined in this by apostate Christians, the Judaizers. The apostasy of the Judaizers

is the "fall" of the new kingdom, but as before, God did not destroy them when they fell. He gave them opportunities to repent, but they only got worse and worse. We see in the book of Acts that it was the Jews and Judaizers who kept asking the Romans to persecute the Christians, as the High Priests in the days of the Maccabees asked Antiochus to do. The persecution of Paul by the Judaizers encapsulates the events leading to A.D. 70. In A.D. 62, they slew the Apostle James. As A.D. 70 approached, they massacred many Christian Jews. The final abominating event was the invitation by the Zealot Jews to the Idumeans (Edomites) to invade the Temple and kill anyone not favorable to the Zealot cause. This massacre of righteous people in the holy place, I believe, was the event to which Jesus pointed in Matthew 24:15-25. (See Josephus, Jewish War 4:3-6.)

At this point, God stopped giving the Jews a second chance, which He had been doing ever since Pentecost. They had committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, by rejecting this second chance. They had committed a desolating sacrilege by attacking His bride. So, He finally abandoned them. Then He brought in an army, the Romans, to destroy the Temple and the city.

But God was gracious. He went with His new people, the Church, into the Roman world, and made war on the gods of Rome, defeating them. He offers His Church to anyone, including those who think of themselves as Jews, who wants to enter her.

This is the Abomination of Desolation pattern. In our next study, we shall look at the laws of Leviticus, and we shall find two different Hebrew words, indicating that an "abomination" is any gross moral sin committed in the land, while a "detestable act" is immorality mixed with idolatry committed in God's sanctuary. We shall see that a better translation of the phrase Abomination of Desolation would be "detestable act causing desolation," for it is the Hebrew word for "detestable" that is used in the phrase we render in English "abomination of desolation." It is God's people and not gentiles (Antiochus; Titus) who commit the sin known as the "Abomination of Desolation".

Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." Romans 9:27-28