

What On Earth Is Going On **Luke 21:1-24 and Daniel 2** **“The Times of The Gentiles”**

Introduction

Everywhere I go these days, it seems that people are obsessed with current events. Violence, racism, war, riots, and endless stories of division and hatred fill the daily news cycle. A phrase that I hear quite often is, “I’ve never seen it this bad before”. And believe me, I know exactly what they are talking about. We are living in perilous times. I cannot remember the last time that I heard a positive or encouraging story in the news. I’m not quite sure if it is because nothing good is happening in the world, or if today’s news media are actually encouraging the violence to further some hidden agenda, but what ever the cause, it sure is depressing to live in these dark days. As Christians we have been called to be a light in the world, but it sure seems like people are longing for the darkness. How did we get here? And more importantly, what are we supposed to do about it? Well, believe it or not, The Bible has a lot to say about the times that we are living in today. Some of you might be skeptical about that, seeing as the last book of The Bible was written over nineteen centuries ago, but, believe it or not, Jesus saw ALL of this coming. He hasn’t been caught off guard by all of this in the least. In fact, He told us that this was all going to happen!

In the days prior to His death, Jesus went to the Temple in Jerusalem to teach. On Wednesday of that week, he saw an elderly woman give all the money that she had in the offering at the Temple. How sad He must have felt knowing that poor people, such as this woman, were giving their offerings to such a corrupt religious system. He turned to His disciples and told them that one day there would not be anything left of this beautiful Temple in Jerusalem. The whole system of corruption would soon come crashing down. As they walked outside the city, they came to the Mount of Olives, where the disciples could hold back their curiosity no longer. They asked The Lord point blank when these end times would come. His response is known today as The Olivet Discourse (**Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21**). Jesus told his disciples of the things that would come to pass before the end of time and prior to the coming of His eternal kingdom. He warned them that before things could get better they would, in fact, get MUCH worse. He told them to determine not to be afraid and assured them that He would be with them.

These words of warning and encouragement were not only for them, but for us today as well. The world that we live in will not endure. Many have said that as the human race gets more evolved, that society will become more utopian, and the strife that we have now will one day come to an end. They believe that more “tolerance” is the answer. Unfortunately, they are merely fooling themselves. The human race, apart from God’s redemptive intervention, is totally depraved. The only hope of better days is found in Jesus. He alone can break down the walls that divide us. Sadly, just as He was despised and rejected by most people when He walked this earth, He is still despised and rejected today.

In **Matthew 24:8**, Jesus likens the terrible events that will occur in the world before the end finally comes to “Birth Pangs” that a woman has when delivering a child. Now, I’m no expert on the subject, but I was there with my wife when she gave birth to our sons, and as I recall, when the time of the “blessed event” was at hand, her pain and contractions became more frequent and intense and the time grew short. This world is nearing its end. The coming of God’s Kingdom is at hand. So, it would therefore stand to reason, that as the days grow shorter and shorter, the “labor pangs” will increase in intensity and frequency. In short, worse and worse stuff will happen, and it will happen more often! Welcome to life in the twenty-first century. Jesus warned us it would happen, and He told us how to respond. Over the next few weeks, I will attempt to clarify just what will happen in the “last days”. We will look at what the Bible calls, The Times of The Gentiles. We will examine The Church Age (or The Age of Grace as it is commonly called), and we will also discuss The Day of The LORD (the seven year Tribulation Period) that will occur at the very end, when God pours out His judgement for sin upon this fallen world. We will begin our study this morning by discussing The Times of The Gentiles. Let not your hearts be troubled, for all of the things that we now see happening around us are all part of God’s eternal plan. Put your complete confidence in Him today, and you will be just fine!

The Gentile’s Times

When Jesus walked the earth, Israel was under the heavy oppression of the Roman Government. Many Jews longed for the Messiah, whom they hoped would strike a blow against Roman tyranny and set the nation free to live in sovereignty, as they had done under King David. After Christ’s death upon the cross, many “would be” messiahs claimed to be sent by God to lead such a rebellion. Rome, however, was

intolerant of uprisings of any sort among its populace. In 70 AD, yet another Jewish revolt occurred, and Rome decided to make an example of the rebels. Jerusalem was besieged and subsequently destroyed by the Roman army. The Temple that had become a source of such pride among the Pharisees was completely destroyed. All that was left standing was the outer wall, which still stands to this day and is called “the wailing wall” by the Jews who still mourn the destruction of their beloved temple. Jesus had predicted that these things would happen (**vs. 2**), and they happened exactly as he said. By 136 AD, the Jews were completely banished from their homeland by the Romans, who renamed the area “Palestine”. Palestine is a form of the word “*Philistine*”, who were the arch enemies of king David. The Romans named the land after David’s sworn enemies as an insult to the Jewish people who had lived there. With their homeland gone, the Jews were scattered throughout the earth.

Since the Babylonian exile, the nation of Israel had ceased to have the authority to govern itself. One pagan nation after another had subjugated the Jews since the days of the prophet Daniel. This period of dark days is known in Israel as “The Times of the Gentiles”. Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be trampled by this succession of foreigners until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled (**vs. 24**). But, exactly what are “The Times of the Gentiles”? When did they begin, and more importantly, when will they come to an end? As I previously stated, the answers to these questions are actually found in the book of Daniel. Nothing on earth has ever come as a surprise to God. He knows exactly what must happen in order for His plans for His people to come to fruition. The nation of Israel had rebelled against Him by following after other gods. If left to their own devices, The Messiah (Christ) would have never been able to come and save the world, for Israel was about to be swallowed up by the same pagan culture as their neighbors. God had to intervene in order to bring them back to repentance. Enter the Babylonians, who much like The Romans in 70AD sacked Jerusalem, and carried off the people of Judah as captives to Babylon. Among those captives was a young Hebrew from the royal family. His name was Daniel.

Daniel was captured and made a eunuch (emasculated) and brought into King Nebuchadnezzar’s palace in Babylon as a slave of the king. This humiliation was standard procedure in those days, for slaves in the king’s household could then be trusted around the king’s harem. This was actually a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (**Isaiah 39:5-7**), as a consequence of the foolish pride of Hezekiah, king of Judah. Hezekiah had received envoys from Babylon and had given them the royal welcome, showing them all the treasures of his kingdom. He was blissfully unaware that the envoys sent from Babylon were merely spies trying to gain intel in order to one day invade their land. God was about to punish Israel for her crimes. The enslavement of Daniel was but a tragic consequence of this sanction against Israel, but through it all, the young prince remained determined to honor His God. No matter what was done to him. He would endure it with the integrity of one who put his faith above his own personal well being. Daniel was a true man of God! God honored him by endowing him with great wisdom, which earned Daniel a promotion as one of the king’s many “wise men”, who were consulted from time to time for advice.

On one such occasion, King Nebuchadnezzar was given a terrifying dream from The LORD. It was such a vivid dream that he could not get it out of his mind, and yet, he could not discern its interpretation. He called upon all the wise men in the kingdom to interpret the dream, and to insure that their answer was not some conjured up “mumbo-jumbo”, he insisted that they not only interpret the dream, but to do so without being told what the dream was! Needless to say, the astrologers and necromancers (psychics who speak with the dead) of the kingdom had no clue how to do such a thing. Their “wisdom” came from faulty sources, but Daniel prayed to the God of heaven, who not only revealed the dream to him, but also gave the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar had actually been shown by God a revelation of all the days of the Gentiles, from his kingdom to the very last kingdom. He would be shown all the kingdoms that would trample Jerusalem underfoot until the throne of David would be once again restored. How fitting it was that Daniel, a Jew from the royal family, would be shown not only the times of his nation’s captivity, but also the days of the house of Israel’s restoration, when the cruel treatment by the Gentiles would be forever terminated. Daniel would know that although he would never experience true freedom in his lifetime, that freedom would in fact one day come to his people. The times of the Gentiles would last for millennia, but they would not last forever!

The Game of Thrones

The colossal statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream actually depicted four great empires that would rule over the earth in succession. Each kingdom was represented by a specific metal, with each metallic value density declining as they progressed downward on the statue. This is a telling reality, for the kingdoms of man are not getting better with time, but rather, the opposite. With each passing millennia man’s ability to

govern his peers is actually becoming more and more inferior. Atop the great statue was Nebuchadnezzar's own Babylon, represented by the head of our gold. Nebuchadnezzar was arguably the most powerful man who ever lived. He ruled most of the known world simply upon his own say so. His word was law. He had no accountability from any man whatsoever. Babylon had wealth that was unimaginable. Stockpiles of gold were the treasury of the kingdom. The land of Babylon wanted for nothing when it came to material things. The hanging gardens that Nebuchadnezzar had built for his wife, Amytis, were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It is said that atop the wall of the city was a road so wide that two chariots could pass each other with plenty of room to spare. Babylon was a magnificent city ruled at the whims of its King. The Israelites were brought under his subjection and remained there in captivity for seventy long years. Until the second kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's dream rose to take the power away from Babylon.

The chest and arms of silver on the statue represented a government of two peoples (hence the two arms). This was the Medo-Persian empire that came to power after the Babylonian dynasty was ended. It was King Artaxerxes of Persia, who allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the wall and temple of Jerusalem (**Nehemiah 2**). Nonetheless, the Jews were still subject to Persian law. The Medo-Persian Empire was somewhat less a monarchy than that of Babylon. Kings of the Medes and Persians were subject to law. A monarch had no power to overrule a law once it had been decreed. We see an example of this when Darius the Mede is coerced into sending Daniel to the lions den by his corrupt officials (**Daniel 6**). Silver is a great depiction of the Medo-Persian empire for the kingdom traded in silver, and the national treasury was kept in silver. The Medo-Persian Empire was mighty indeed, until it was conquered in 330 BC by the King of the next great dynasty.

Alexander The Great was the king of the empire represented next upon the statue by the belly and thighs of bronze. The Greek empire became a conquering force under Alexander. Bronze is a fitting description of Alexander's kingdom. His massive army wore helmets made of bronze and carried bronze shields. When they invaded a territory it appeared as a molten sea of bronze coming to sweep over everything in its path. The Greek empire dominated most of the known world of its day, and it is said that when Alexander conquered his last city, he wept for there were no more worlds to conquer. Upon Alexander's death at the age of thirty three, his kingdoms were divided among his generals (hence the belly turning into two thighs). The Greek Empire was mighty in war, but she was nothing compared to the fourth kingdom that would come to take her place.

They were called the "Iron Legions" of Rome. When the Roman Empire rose to power around 146 BC, it was the strongest and most brutal of all the great empires. It crushed its enemies mercilessly and ruled the world with an iron fist. It was Rome who held dominion over the known world in the time of Christ. It was Rome who gave the world such torturous capital punishments as the cross. Rome was truly an iron empire. Ironically, its government was not nearly so powerful as those that came before it, however, for Rome was a government that was made up of not only a king (Caesar), but with a senate as well. Because such a system will begin to weaken over time, Rome was never actually conquered, it simply began to deteriorate. The iron legs of the statue depict this transitioning as the government of Rome devolved into what still remains today. Europe is the remnants of the Roman Empire. Democracy weakens a government's power. As the world's governments become more and more empowering to the common people, the less power those governments actually have. This is why what remains of the iron legs that were once Rome are now depicted by iron mingled with clay. The feet of Nebuchadnezzar's statue represent the last and final government that will have dominion over the earth. It will be a ten nation confederation (ten toes) ruled by The Anti-Christ himself. He will revive the Roman Empire and will be the last Gentile ruler to ever have dominion over the earth. When his kingdom ends, the times of the Gentiles will end along with it. One by one, we can see the thrones of the Gentiles pass by into history, fulfilling the times of the Gentiles. We find ourselves in the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's great statue (historically speaking). We are living in the last days my friends, and there is nothing more that needs to happen before King Jesus returns to set up his kingdom without end.

The God of All Times

Then came the best part of the entire dream! A STONE that was cut without hands came and crushed the entire statue, and that same stone became a mountain that filled the entire earth. That Stone, my friends, is none other than The Lord Jesus Christ Himself! He is the Stone that the builders rejected, but He has become the chief cornerstone (**Psalms 118:22**). He was made without hands. In other words, he is Almighty God. Jesus will come, when the seasons of this world have come to an end. He will establish an

everlasting kingdom that will fill the whole earth with his glory. **Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed (Matthew 21:44).**

Now you may ask why I am telling you all of this. Let me explain. Through Nebuchadnezzar's dream, God gave Daniel the entire history of the world! It was all in the future for Daniel, but most of it is in the history books for us today. It happened exactly as God said it would. Do you know what that means? It means that God is in control! There is no need for the believer to fear anything. Nothing has, or ever will happen, without God knowing about it. He has it all planned out. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus told his disciples that there will be wars and rumors of wars. There will be earthquakes in many places. He also said that nation would rise against nation. The word that He used for "nation" is *ethnos* in the Greek. It is where we derive our word ethnic. What Jesus was literally saying was that race will rise up against race.

Do those things sound like anything that is happening in our world today? Jesus told His disciples that those things "must occur" for the end to come (**Luke 21:9**). The word He uses there for "must" actually means "are necessary". Do you understand that? The things that are going on around us today in this wicked world are actually NECESSARY in order to bring about the end of days and the kingdom of God!

In The Lord's prayer we are taught to pray, **"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).** If we really mean that, then the "birth pangs" going on around us are necessary for that blessed event to come about! Kind of changes the perspective a little doesn't it?

Take heart this morning. God is in control, and everything that we see happening around us is all part of His plan. This world is not our home. So, we shouldn't be too surprised to see it falling apart around us. Share the love of Christ with everyone that you can. The more the world hates the more we must love. Let the Church of God stand united in love so that we may be able to draw the disenfranchised to the cross of Christ. Love one another. Jesus is coming soon.

I want to close today with the words of Simon Peter:

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' He promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With The LORD a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The LORD is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:3-9

Jesus is still just as much in control as He ever was. Don't let what is going on around us shake your faith. Just warn anyone who will listen that He is coming back for us soon, and these things must happen in order for His kingdom to come!

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!