

The Treading Down of Jerusalem

***“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***

JESUS' PROPHECY CONCERNING the treading down of Jerusalem was part of his answer to the disciples' question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek, *presence*], and of the end of the world [age]?” (Matt. 24:3) In this scripture is one of the prophetic signs that was used by Jesus in connection with the city of Jerusalem, and its being a symbol

of the national polity of Israel. Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel, and would, therefore, properly represent the whole nation, even as national capitals do today.

Toward the close of our Lord's earthly ministry, he said to the religious rulers of Israel, and through

them to the rest of the nation, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:37,38) It was not the literal city of Jerusalem that had killed the prophets, but it was the religious leaders of Israel who represented the nation, and were, therefore, the ones who were responsible. Jesus spoke in this same representative sense in his prophecy concerning Jerusalem being ‘trodden down’ by the Gentiles ‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’

GENTILE POWERS

Jesus’ expression, trodden down, is therefore a reference to the fact that Israel at the time of his First Advent was not a free, but a subject, nation, and had been for hundreds of years. The nation lost its national independence in 606 B.C. when its last king, Zedekiah, was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people taken captive to Babylon. Seventy years after this, under a decree issued by King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire, the people were permitted to return to their own land, although still subject to Gentile rule and authority.

Later, the Medo-Persian Empire fell before the rising power of the Greeks; and the Grecian Empire, in turn, came under the domination of the Romans, while Israel continued to be a subject people to each of these Gentile powers. During the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Jews were being trodden down by Rome. In his prophecy, Jesus took note of this,

and foretold that this situation would continue until the end of this present Gospel Age when the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled.

COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

Through his servant Moses, God had entered into covenant relationship with Israel in which he promised to protect and bless the nation so long as they remained faithful to him and his word. “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them.” (Lev. 26:3) God reminded his people of the blessings of his special relationship with them. “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.”—vss. 12,13

The people were also warned by God of the disciplinary punishments that would come upon them if they were disobedient. In the event that they did not respect their favored relationship with God, and continued in their wayward course, a more drastic and long-lasting punishment was prophesied. Moses records, “If ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague [fever], that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and

ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.”—vss. 14-18

PROPHETIC TIME

This prophecy was stated with a degree of finality which makes it apparent that the ‘seven times’ was to be a more lasting and final punishment upon the nation of Israel, and that would come upon them because of their sins and disobedience. It was to this condition of heart that the Prophet Ezekiel referred when he said to Israel’s last king, Zedekiah, “Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

To understand the significance of this prophecy, it must be understood that Israel’s kings reigned as the representatives of God. Referring to the Divine rulership of the Jewish nation through him and his successors, David said in his prayer to God, “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.” (I Chron. 29:11) This arrangement was typical, and foreshadowed the future Messianic kingdom which will be established

in the hands of Christ, the rightful king over the earth.

It was this typical kingdom that came to an end with the overthrow of Zedekiah. It there ceased to function. It was overthrown until the antitypical kingdom should take its place as Ezekiel stated. This is a prophetic reference to Christ. It was with Zedekiah's overthrow that Israel's long and final period of punishment began, and from this historical point the prophetic seven times began to count—that long period of time during which Jerusalem would be trodden down by Gentile nations.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

It was Nebuchadnezzar and his armies that overthrew Israel's last king, Zedekiah, and took the people captive to Babylon. Among these captives was Daniel who, while serving in the Babylonian government, became one of God's outstanding holy prophets. He was especially used by God to focus attention on the great development which occurred in the Divine plan when King Zedekiah of Israel was overthrown. In the Lord's providence, this development is brought to light in connection with a dream given to Nebuchadnezzar.

The record of this is found in Daniel, chapter two. In the account, we read that King Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream that he was unable to remember when he awoke. He had been frightened by it, and sought the help of the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to help him recall his unusual dream. He also demanded that they provide him with an interpretation of the dream, which they acknowledged they were unable to do. When it was

learned that they could give him no help, it was then arranged that Daniel should be brought in to give him a possible interpretation of his dream.

DANIEL'S INTERPRETATION

With the Lord's help, Daniel was able to relate the king's dream to him, together with its interpretation. This was the dream in which Nebuchadnezzar saw a humanlike image having a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, trunk and thighs of brass, and legs of iron. The feet and toes of this image were made of iron and clay. In his dream, the king saw a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which smote the image on its feet. Then the image fell, was ground to powder and blown away by the wind. The stone which smote the image then grew until it became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

In his interpretation of the dream, Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold."—Dan. 2:37,38

FOUR WORLD EMPIRES

Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, as given to him by God, reveals remarkable truths concerning God's plan of the ages. It indicates that, beginning at that time with King Nebuchadnezzar, whatever authority God chose to exercise in the affairs of men would be through Gentile rulers rather than the typical kingdom of Israel,

which Nebuchadnezzar himself had overthrown. Daniel had explained (vss. 32,33) that Babylon—‘the head of gold’ in the image—would have three successors as represented by the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, and the legs of iron with feet part iron and part clay. These are identified historically as initially the Babylonian Empire, followed by Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. It was in the days of the Roman Empire that Paul wrote, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained [ordered, *Marginal Translation*] of God.”—Rom. 13:1

We do not conclude from Paul’s words that God blessed the rulerships of these successive world empires, or that he sanctioned everything that they did. Throughout the centuries since, God has permitted them to rule and to maintain a semblance of law and order in the part of the world in which they governed. Gentile nations had existed in the earth from the dawn of history. Powerful among these were Egypt, Assyria, Syria, and Babylon. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon had become supreme, conquering the last island of resistance, which was Israel. The Medes and Persians later began to threaten Babylon, and finally overthrew them. In time, they were also overthrown by Greece, and then finally by Rome.

The image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream represented Gentile powers that were given rule over Israel, and Gentile nations from that time until our own day at the end of this present Gospel Age. In the symbology of the king’s image, as Daniel reveals in his interpretation, the God of heaven gave him a kingdom. Then he explained to Nebuchadnezzar that

he was represented by the head of gold. (Dan.2:38) This was a new development in that God's typical kingdom Israel was overthrown, and that dominion had been given to a Gentile king. This marked the beginning of the Gentile Times in the overall purpose and plan of God.

THE HEAD OF GOLD

With Israel's exodus from Egypt, no Gentile ruler had for long been permitted to oppress this chosen people of God. Pharaoh and his hosts were destroyed in the Red Sea, and many other victories had been won by the Israelites over various Gentile rulers and armies. For brief periods, God had permitted Gentile nations to oppress his people as chastisement; but when they repented, and called to their God for help, they were subsequently delivered. Gentile nations no doubt realized the dangers that could be involved if they contemplated attacking Israel. But now the king of Babylon had overthrown Israel's ruler and taken the people captive. Instead of being severely punished for his actions, Israel's God had said through his Prophet Daniel that the God of heaven had given him a kingdom, and that he, Nebuchadnezzar, was represented as the head of gold in the strange image that he saw in his dream.

Not long after this commission, Nebuchadnezzar began to show his pride and, in an effort to magnify his power, he is reported as having said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30) For this show of pride the Lord temporarily removed the kingdom from King Nebuchadnezzar. The record continues, "While the word was in the (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." (vss. 31,32) Nebuchadnezzar's beastly characteristics for seven years portray the nature of Gentile rulership under which the people of Israel would be subjected during the many centuries of history that would follow this initial proclamation in the days of the Prophet Daniel.

SANITY RETURNED

When the king had been properly humbled, and after the seven years of his insanity were over, reason returned to him, and he extolled the God of heaven. He said, "At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation." (vs. 34) Furthermore, he said, "At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me."—vs. 36

The Prophet Daniel had become highly placed in the government of Babylon, and when it was overthrown he maintained his exalted position under the conquering Medo-Persian rulers. Under these

circumstances, it was probable that Cyrus and his successors would be impressed with the fact that Israel's God was in some manner overruling in their affairs. As evidence of this, we note the scriptural account as recorded by Ezra, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled (see Jeremiah 29:1-10), the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."—Ezra 1:1,2

SUCCESSIVE RULERSHIP

How true, then, was Daniel's marvelous prophecy concerning Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar. In the interpretation of his dream, Daniel made clear to him, "After thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee." (Dan. 2:39) The scriptural record does not provide many details of the several centuries of history that led up to the birth of Jesus. It was during that time, however, that the Greeks gained power and overthrew the Medo-Persian Empire. Afterward came the powerful Roman Empire which overtook Greece, and under whose rulership Israel was subject during Jesus earthly ministry.

The symbology that characterizes Nebuchadnezzar's image did not end with the legs of iron; for Daniel's prophecy indicates that there would also be feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. This points to an eventual weakening and dividing of the Roman

Empire, which we know to be historically true. The idea of Divine rulership through the Roman Empire would continue throughout the various divisions of Rome. We should expect that this conception of government would, with the passing of centuries, become grossly distorted. It was this ideology that was once so much hailed in Europe as the so-called “Divine right of kings” in fulfillment of the prophecy.—Dan. 4:17

Thus we are given the succession of Gentile rule pictured by gold (Babylon), the silver (Medo-Persia), the brass (Greece) and the iron (Rome). The clay that was mixed with iron represented the Holy Roman Empire. The intent is that the same fact would apply to all these; namely, that the God of heaven would give each one of them a kingdom. Each, in turn, helped carry out the inevitable treading down of Jerusalem which was foretold in our featured text, Luke 21:24.

ENDING OF THE GENTILE TIMES

Gentile rule had its beginning in the days of Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C., according to Ezekiel’s prophecy noted earlier. (Ezek. 21:25-27) Although Jerusalem was rebuilt under Cyrus after the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, Israel never again had a king to rule over them. They, as a people, were subject successively to the Persians, Grecians, and Romans. The beginning of Cyrus’ reign is substantiated by scripture (II Chron. 36:21-23), as well as by secular history, to be 536 B.C. Seventy years before that time, when Israel had been taken captive by Babylon would, therefore, have been 606 B.C., marking the beginning of the Gentile Times. A symbolic year, as used in the Scriptures, is calculated on the basis of the lunar year, or twelve months of

thirty days each, which would be 360 days. (Ezek. 4:4-6) Seven times 360 days equals 2,520 days. In the case of prophetic time, 2,520 years, beginning in 606 B.C., ended in A.D. 1914.

After World War I, major historical events took place in the Holy Land that pertained to the Jewish people, and began to indicate that the Times of the Gentiles had expired, as prophesied so long ago. Turkish rule over the land of Palestine ended with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, during the closing years of World War I, in 1917. At the conclusion of the war, the Balfour Declaration made provision for a Jewish National Home in Palestine. The League of Nations gave mandate to Great Britain in 1922, which placed the Land of Palestine under British political control. Turkey renounced all claims over their territory in the Holy Land by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

As a result of these and other events, there was an increasing interest by the Jewish people to emigrate to the land of their forefathers. During the intervening years between World Wars I and II, there was also increasing opposition to this incursion upon the land that Arab people had previously considered to be their own. During the Second World War, the Jewish people suffered at the hands of Nazi Germany and, soon after the conclusion of the war, the people of the nation of Israel were recognized by the United Nations in 1948. Since that time, the level of hostility and violence between the Arab and Israeli people has increased dramatically. We continue to watch with interest the fast-moving events that are transpiring in connection with God's plan of reconciliation for the people of Israel, and to all the families of the earth. ■