

## Why the Ignorance?

Whenever Jesus' prophecy as stated in Luke 21:24 is presented to a group of concerned Adventists where I have not spoken previously, or who are unacquainted with the work of the Adventist Laymen's Foundation, the reaction is that they are hearing a new teaching strange to Adventist thought. This ought not to be the case, but why is it? First let us consider the history of this teaching.

In 1898, Edson White wrote in The Coming King:

*We also read that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Jerusalem has never come again into the 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)*

In 1944, the question of Palestine again appeared in Adventist literature. The Voice of Prophecy published a paperback by J. C. Stevens, Palestine in Prophecy, as their "Gift of the Month" book. The concluding sentence read:

*Palestine and Jerusalem do not have a bright future in this present world, and those who are holding the hope of national restoration for the Jews are following a theological will-o'-wisp. (p. 95)*

This concept was followed in 1947 in another paperback published by the Pacific Press. Written by Roy F. Cottrell, it stated:

*The God of heaven who overthrew the city and nation and who because of their apostasy dispersed the inhabitants to the ends of the earth, forever settles the question of a complete return and restoration in old Canaan by asserting that it "cannot be." (p. 61)*

The very next year - 1948 - Israel did become a nation again, but a nation without Jerusalem under its jurisdiction. In 1952, a Bible Conference was held in the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. It was attended by Church leaders from around the world as well as theologians, pastors and evangelists of the Church. Arthur S. Maxwell, Editor of The Signs of the Times, presented a paper on the "Imminence of Christ's Second Coming." He listed three "Areas of Unfulfilled Prophecy." One of these was developments in Palestine. He commented:

*The recent dramatic restoration of the nation of Israel has focused the attention of mankind once more upon Palestine. ...*

*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.*

Maxwell noted that while the forces of Israel were victorious "in every other part of Palestine, they failed to take the most dazzling objective of all" - Jerusalem. He indi-

cated that Israel was restrained in this objective "as if by an unseen hand." Then he asks what could be the reason, and answers his own question - "Only that the times of the Gentiles are not yet fulfilled."

Citing the history of Israel when they were first promised Palestine, Maxwell commented that they could not possess it "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." Then he concludes:

*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, Vol. 2, pp. 230-231)*

It should be observed that Maxwell returned to the position of Edson White and associated the phrase, "times of the Gentiles," with the close of probation. What both failed either to see or to understand was that the term, "the Gentiles" is in the Greek, τα εθνη (ta ethne) the nations as corporate bodies. This one word is translated both ways in Luke 21:24-25 KJV.

When Luke 21:24 was fulfilled in 1967, what reaction is found in Adventist publications? In the 20th Century Bible Course, a series of Bible studies used in evangelistic outreach, Lesson 5 was captioned - "Time Running Out." Question #2 asks - "What sign did Jesus give that would indicate when the destruction of the city [Jerusalem] was at hand? Luke 21:20" A note reads:

*The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman armies in A.D. 66. After a period of time the army withdrew and the Christians, recognizing the sign given by Christ, fled the city and did not return. ... They watched for the sign Christ had given and obeyed His instructions. ... Christ foresaw the future and outlined it to His followers so that they could be saved. (Emphasis as in the lesson)*

Question #3 asks - "How long did Christ say that Jerusalem would be trodden down? (verse 24)" The note on this question reads:

*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 Jesus prophecy was fulfilled in our day!*

This is just what we have been holding forth for over two decades, and to many, who hear it for the first time, it is new and strange teaching, and others oppose it - previously published, Biblically based, Church teaching! But should not the same attitude apply to the fulfilled prophecy of Jesus in 1967, as indicated in the Bible Course, marked the Christians in A.D. 66? And is it not equally true in 1967, as stated for 66 - Jesus gave this prophecy to His disciples "so that they could be saved"?

In 1980, the Adult Sabbath School lessons for the second quarter were "devoted to the study of the testimony of Jesus as revealed in the book of Revelation." The author of these lessons, Dr. Jean Zurcher, was serving as secretary of the Euro-African Division. As a study help, a book by Dr. Zurcher, *Christ of the Revelation*, was translated and published by the then existing Southern Publishing Association. In the recommendation of this book as it appeared in the Sabbath School quarterly was the suggestion that "you'll also find out about the 'times of the Gentiles.'" (p. 4) What is of real interest in the relationship of these lessons to the prophecy of Jesus is that one month after these lessons were studied, Israel moved its government from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the Knesset reaffirmed that Jerusalem united was its capital. What Zurcher wrote and which the whole Church had opportunity to know was of the utmost significance.

Noting the eschatological discourse of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, Zurcher commented:

*We shall not linger over the numerous signs given by Jesus in this discourse. Only one 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 the culmination of Jesus' prophecy. ... 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). (p. 71)*

He observed that few today would deny the precision of this prophecy. He cites the historical record of the city's destruction in AD 70; the dispersion of the Jews into all nations; the domination of the city by Gentile forces over the centuries; and its present restoration to the control of Israel in 1967. Then he states:

*This prophecy of Jesus was a sign for 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. (ibid.)*

Dr Zurcher then warns his readers that "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'?" (pp. 71-72)

The detailed analysis which follows this warning needs to be carefully studied. This we shall do in the next issue of WVN as well as to note official church reaction to this prophecy of Jesus.

(To Be Continued)

Note: If you do not have access to Dr. Zurcher's book, and would like photo copies of the pages noted above, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Foundation office with your request.

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"Nothing is more harmful to a new truth than an old error."

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## Why the Ignorance? (2)

Behind this question is another question - why should Luke 21:24 as presented in the publications of the Adventist Laymen's Foundation be considered a "new teaching in Adventism"? In answering this second question, we cited in the March issue of WWN, the statement of James Edson White in his book, *The Coming King*; we noted the emphasis placed on this verse by Arthur S. Maxwell in the paper he presented to the 1952 Bible Conference; we called attention to the teaching of this prophecy in the 20th Century Bible Course. Then we introduced what Dr. J. R. Zurcher had written in his book, *Christ of the Revelation*, released as a Sabbath School lesson help to the Adult Lessons he had written for the second quarter of 1980. We closed the March article with a warning given by Dr. Zurcher. This warning we shall repeat. It reads:

*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."? (pp. 71-72)*

How did Dr. Zurcher understand this prophecy of Jesus as given in Luke 21:24? He wrote:

*In order for us to understand Jesus' statement, three questions need answering, First, what exactly does the expression "the 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 the 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 in all the world for a witness to 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. The baptism of the first "heathens" - the Ethiopian eunuch and the centurion Cornelius - as well as the conversion of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles mark the beginning of these new times when the gospel would be preached to the nations. And if I have understood the prediction of Jesus properly, this time will be "fulfilled" when Jerusalem will 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 our Lord shows us that the history of this world is coming to its climax and that the restoration of all things is at hand. (p. 72)*

Granted, we through "Watchman, What of the Night?" taught these very same concepts some eight years prior to the release of Dr. Zurcher's book by the Southern Publishing Association. Yet the same things we were teaching during those years, were published by a recognised Church press, being used as the Adult Sabbath School Lessons' helps for that quarter. Further, the paper prepared by Arthur S. Maxwell, as published in Vol. II of the 1952 Bible Conference report, *Our Firm Foundation*, was called to my attention, after we had published our understanding of Luke 21:24, by Elder D. K. Short when I was visiting with him one day in his home in North Carolina. The 20th Century Bible Course lesson #5 was brought to me by a student who was taking the lessons. The teachings of the Adventist Laymen's Foundation regarding Luke 21:24 is not some fanciful "new light," but a neglected truth whose time has come. But with all of this documentation released in publications of the Church, why the ignorance of this truth on the part of so many of the laity?

The reaction of the Church to Zurcher's book when his comments on Luke 21:24 were publicised gives a clue. A friend wanted a copy of the book for himself and went to the ABC outlet in his conference to obtain a copy, but could not find one displayed. He made inquiry and was told that they had been asked to remove them from their shelves, but that he was holding them under the counter awaiting further instruction. This friend purchased them all, and sent me a second copy for our library.

Another factor put forth a deception both in fact of historical record and in teaching. In 1974, a series of Bible Conferences were held in the North American Division. The thrust of these conferences was to confirm the basic methodology of interpreting the Scriptures which lay at the Foundation of Adventism. It was an attempt to offset the liberalism entering Adventism because of the adoption of a different set of hermeneutics by which the Word of God was being studied and projected. That is another question in and of itself which is discussed in depth by a new publication, *Receiving the Word*. At the 1974 Bible Conferences, Dr. Herbert E. Douglass was assigned the topic - "The Unique Contribution of Adventist Eschatology." In this paper, 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)*

While it is true there is no theological importance to be attached to the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, except that "coming events [do] cast their shadows before." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 636) But, there is "importance" in "the annexation of Old Jerusalem in 1967."

Observe again what Douglass was saying - "Adventists do not see..." Does this mean that Arthur S. Maxwell, as Editor of *The Signs of the Times*, who said at the 1952 Bible Conference - *There is one prophecy concerning Palestine that we should all be watching with special care* - and quoted Luke 21:24, was not an Adventist? Elder Denton E. Rebok, Secretary of the Bible Conference in his "General Introduction" to the two volume conference report, wrote that while these presentations were not to be understood as "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." (*Our Firm Foundation*, Vol. 1, p. 13)

Does this mean that Dr. J. R. Zurcher, who in 1974 was Secretary of the Euro-Africa Division of the General Conference was not a Seventh-day Adventist? He wrote plainly in his book, *Christ of the Revelation*, translated and published in 1980 by the Southern Publishing Association, that "if we cannot see that Jerusalem is an exceptional sign of the times," we could be making the same mistake the Jewish leaders of Israel did when they could not discern the Living Truth in their day. And he was referring to Luke 21:24!

Was A. E. Lickey, a pastor-evangelist of the Church, who authored the 20th Century Bible Course not a Adventist? He perceived the significance of Luke 21:24, and wrote in Lesson 5 - "This portion of Christ's prophecy was fulfilled in our day!"

The evidence indicates that it was Douglass who was out of step with Adventist thinking in regard to Luke 21:24. There is a reason. The implication of Luke 21:24 being fulfilled was not palatable to the hierarchy of the Church. So to counteract the significance of what God was saying by permitting this prophecy to be fulfilled, Douglass in his 1974 Bible Conference presentation adopted a new prophetic hermeneutic known as the "harvest principle." This concept teaches "the conditionality of the Advent," meaning that Christ will not come until "a prepared people" will "vindicate His integrity and law." (*Insight*, October 7, 1980, p. 5) This could prolong the coming of Jesus into the decades of the first century of the next millennium - if not longer! Further, it promotes a preparation which is "works" orientated muting the fact that the final atonement by which a people are prepared is the initiative of God in conjunction with the final ministry of the Great High Priest in the Heavenly Sanctuary. This is indicated in a clearer understanding of the typical Day of Atonement.

The "harvest principle" eschatology has no precedent in Salvation history. In fact, it is contrary to the revelation of God in the Scriptures. Of the antediluvian world, God said - "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." (Gen. 6:3) That God has not changed. Jesus said, "So shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." (Luke 17:26) To Dan-

iel was revealed the times of the Jewish nation - "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people." (Dan. 9:24) Jesus revealed the limit to "the times of the Gentiles," which followed (Luke 21:24). Paul warned the Gentiles - "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." (Rom. 11:21) There is a limit to God's forbearance. He has told us that the hour of forbearance has been reached in the fulfilment of Luke 21:24. #

## Proposed WCC Reorganization

The General Assembly of the World Council of Churches which is to convene in 1998 in Harare, Zimbabwe will receive proposals for radical changes in its structure and function. Some of the proposed changes are due to the necessity of a budget cut because of reduced income. The main objective is to have a more flexible organization. The proposals, outlined in a paper entitled "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision" (CUV), have been sent to WCC's 330 member churches. These proposals will first be discussed by the Central Committee in September before going before the General Assembly in Zimbabwe next year.

The proposals call for "the creation of a new ecumenical forum which would include the Roman Catholic Church and other churches which are not members of the WCC." The paper suggests that "in the year 2000, all Christian churches should - in a 'common act' - commit themselves to working 'towards the day when an ecumenical council of the entire Church of Jesus Christ, in the sense of the ancient undivided church, will take place.'"

The WCC has built up an organization of its own with a 200 plus staff at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. This has not accomplished the objectives which were first envisioned - "visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship." (By-laws of the Faith and Order Commission) Because of this the draft proposals emphasize that "the work of the WCC should be aimed at enhancing the fellowship among its member churches not at building up an organization for its own sake."

One of the controversial proposals suggested is that the WCC assembly, which convenes every seven years and is the organizations highest policy-making body, be discontinued. The paper points out that while, "at their best" the assemblies have been occasions "for renewal of ecumenical commitments," their "size, duration and infrequency makes them unsuited for carrying out many of the constitutionally mandated" responsibilities. Further, the paper notes that they have not "succeeded in providing a place for detailed reflection on theological issues." This last factor echoes Rome's reason for not being a part of the WCC. At the Seventh General Assembly in Canberra, Australia in 1991, Archbishop Edward Cassidy (now a Cardinal) when asked why the Roman Catholic Church was still outside the WCC, responded - "From Rome's point of view, the WCC [is] rather long on social and political issues and short on theology and doctrine." (*The Catholic Leader*, Feb. 24, 1991, p. 1).