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Luke 21:24: Does "Until" Mean God Will Return To Modern Israel?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Many read the word "until" in Luke 21:24 and immediately assume Jesus was describing a temporary Gentile period that would eventually end with God turning His prophetic attention back to the modern state of Israel.

† But the word "until" doesn't automatically prove that whatever existed before the stated event will begin again afterward.

† The question isn't whether Jesus said "until." He clearly did.

The question is what event Jesus said would continue until its appointed limit, and whether He ever said national Israel would afterward be restored to a special prophetic position.

† Luke 21 answers that question within its own context. Jesus was describing the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the judgment of that generation, and the fulfillment of what had been written (Luke 21:20-22, 32).

† We can't take one word from verse 24, detach it from the surrounding prophecy, and build an entirely new prophetic program thousands of years beyond the generation Jesus was addressing.

Luke 21:20-22

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.

† Jesus identified the event plainly. Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies, and its desolation would be near.

† These were the days of vengeance connected directly with Jerusalem, not a prophecy about events thousands of years later (Luke 21:20-21).

† Jesus even said these were the days in which all things written concerning this judgment would be fulfilled (Luke 21:22).

Luke 21:23-24

Woe to those women who are pregnant, and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

† Notice exactly what Jesus said. The distress would be upon the land, and the wrath would come upon this people.

† The people would fall by the sword, others would be taken

captive, and Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles. This is judgment language directed toward first-century Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-23).

† The word "until" places a limit on the trampling. It doesn't say that when the trampling ended, God would restore national Israel to its former covenant status.

† Jesus didn't say, "Jerusalem will be trampled until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and then Israel will again become My covenant nation." That conclusion has been added to the text.

† The verse tells us when the trampling reaches its appointed completion. It doesn't establish a future Jewish prophetic age afterward.

Luke 21:29-32

And He told them a parable: Look at the fig tree and all the trees: as soon as they put forth leaves, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near. So you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.

† Jesus gave the timing of the prophecy Himself. The generation hearing Him wouldn't pass away until all these things were accomplished.

† Notice another use of "till." Jesus said that generation wouldn't pass away till all things were accomplished. The time limitation belongs to His first-century audience and the events they were told to watch for (Luke 21:28, 31).

† If Luke 21:24 is removed from this generation and extended thousands of years, the natural time boundary Jesus gave in the same discourse loses its force.

† The modern state of Israel didn't exist when Jesus spoke these words, and nothing in this passage tells His disciples to look thousands of years into the future for its establishment.

Romans 11:25-27

For I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be uninformed of this mystery-so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-

that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written: "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." "This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

† Romans 11 contains another important "until." Paul said a partial hardening had happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles came in.

† Paul was explaining a redemptive process already taking place in his own ministry, not announcing that God would stop saving Gentiles and later restart an Old Covenant arrangement with national Israel (Romans 11:5, 11-15).

† The salvation Paul described was centered in Christ and the removal of sins. He didn't describe the creation of a modern political state as the fulfillment of this promise (Romans 11:26-27).

† The covenant promise reaches its goal in the Deliverer and His saving work, not in returning to the covenant order that Christ fulfilled.

Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

† Paul tells us where covenant identity is found under the New Covenant. It's found in Christ.

† The distinction between Jew and Greek doesn't establish two separate covenant peoples with two separate prophetic destinies (Ephesians 2:14-18).

† Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise. Paul doesn't tell believers to expect God to reverse this and return to a flesh-based covenant identity.

Ephesians 2:14-16

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, which is the Law composed of commandments expressed in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, in this way establishing peace; and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the hostility.

† Christ made Jew and Gentile one. The New Covenant doesn't divide God's people back into separate covenant programs.

† Jesus created one new humanity in Himself and reconciled both to God in one body (Ephesians 2:18-22).

† A theology that expects God eventually to reverse this unity and restore a separate national covenant program must demonstrate that from Scripture. Luke 21:24 doesn't say it.

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† The Old Covenant wasn't waiting to be temporarily suspended so that it could return thousands of years later.

† Hebrews describes it as old, aging, and near disappearance. The direction of redemptive history was from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant, not from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant and eventually back again.

† The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 visibly removed the old covenantal order that had already been declared obsolete through Christ (Hebrews 8:6-12).

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than

the blood of Abel.

† The New Covenant destination isn't a return to the old earthly Jerusalem. Hebrews points believers to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem.

† The writer says believers had come to this reality through Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant.

† This is why Luke 21:24 shouldn't be interpreted as though the goal of prophecy is eventually to restore the old covenantal importance of earthly Jerusalem.

Historical References

† Josephus describes Jerusalem surrounded by Roman forces, the terrible famine within the city, enormous loss of life, captivity, and the final destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. His account provides a powerful historical parallel to the conditions Jesus described in Luke 21:20-24. Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7.

† Tacitus also records the Roman campaign against Jerusalem, the siege, the conditions within the city, and the eventual destruction associated with the Jewish war. Tacitus, Histories, Book 5.

† Eusebius records the early Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed before the city's destruction, connecting the first-century Christian community with the approaching judgment upon Jerusalem. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7.

† These historical accounts place the trampling of Jerusalem in the very first-century setting Jesus described. We don't need to move Luke 21:24 thousands of years beyond its stated context to find its historical setting.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We need to let "until" mean what its context allows it to mean. A word by itself can't establish an entire prophetic system.

† Luke 21:24 says Jerusalem would be trampled until the appointed times of the Gentiles reached their fulfillment. It doesn't say that afterward God would return to an Old Covenant

relationship with national Israel.

† Our covenant standing today isn't determined by ethnicity, geography, an earthly temple, or citizenship in a particular nation. It's found in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

† We aren't waiting for God to rebuild what Christ fulfilled. We've come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, through Jesus and the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† The modern state of Israel should be understood as a modern nation. Luke 21:24 doesn't identify its establishment as a prophetic event or say that God would someday resume a separate covenant program with it.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Doesn't the word "until" prove something changes afterward?

A: It proves that the condition being discussed has an appointed limit. It doesn't automatically tell us what happens afterward. The context must supply that information. Luke 21:24 limits Jerusalem's trampling, but it never says Israel afterward returns to its former covenant status (Luke 21:20-24).

Q: Doesn't "the times of the Gentiles" mean a Gentile age lasting thousands of years?

A: Jesus doesn't say that. His subject is Jerusalem's coming judgment, and He places the events of the discourse within the generation He was addressing (Luke 21:20-24, 29-32).

Q: Does Romans 11:25 teach that God will eventually turn away from Gentiles and back to national Israel?

A: Paul says a partial hardening had happened to Israel while God's saving purpose was bringing Gentiles in. Salvation remained centered in Christ, and Paul doesn't say God would later restore the Old Covenant system (Romans 11:25-27).

Q: Is modern Israel the fulfillment of Luke 21:24?

A: Luke 21:24 never mentions a modern political state. Jesus was discussing first-century Jerusalem, its siege, its inhabitants, its captivity, and its trampling by Gentile forces (Luke 21:20-24).

Q: Where is God's covenant people found today?

A: In Christ. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed

and heirs according to promise, and Jew and Gentile have been made one in Him (Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:14-16).

Q: Are we waiting for earthly Jerusalem to regain its former covenant position?

A: No. The New Testament directs God's people to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem under Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Luke 21:20-22; Luke 21:23-24; Luke 21:29-32; Romans 11:25-27; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:14-16; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:22-24

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7

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