

# Commentary on Luke Part 12

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In this section of the commentary of Luke, Luke deals with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Luke then leads up to the revelation of Jesus as the beloved Son, followed by His coming as the glorious Son of Man. Unlike Mark and Matthew, who speak of it in veiled terms, Luke makes patently clear that in the apocalyptic discourse Jesus is talking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, followed by the worldwide dispersal of the Jews. Luke then calls on all men to be ready for the second coming of Christ. For the full text of the commentary of Luke Part 12, see below.

## SECTION 7 God's Only Beloved Son (19.29-21.38).

Throughout Luke the glory, and power, and uniqueness of Jesus has been revealed, and especially His uniqueness in His relationship with God. And now the central idea of this Section is that Jesus has come as God's only and unique Son (20.13). He reveals His authority in His ride into Jerusalem (19.29-40), in His cleansing of the Temple (19.45-46), in His decisive teaching (19.47-20.8; 20.19-21.4), by His direct claim in the parable of the wicked tenants (the wicked husbandmen - 20.9-18), and in His final prophecies concerning the future of Jerusalem and the world (21.5-38), all of which reveal that He is God's Chosen One.

In chapter 19 Luke puts all this together in such a way as to emphasise Jesus' glory even more strongly.

- Twice he stresses that Jesus is entering as 'the Lord' Who has the right to commandeer His means of travel as He will (19.31, 34, compare 20.41-44).
- He reveals that He is proclaimed in terms of 'the King Who has come in the name of the Lord' (19.38) Whose entry is such that if men were silent the very stones would cry out (19.40).
- Then he portrays Him as the Prophet Who is prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem because it has not responded to His coming (19.41).
- And finally he reveals why this is necessary by depicting Jesus as entering the Temple and clearing 'His House' of unscrupulous traders, calling it 'a Den of Robbers' (19.45), when it was intended by Him to be a House of Prayer.

The full significance of all this is brought out in the way that Luke presents the material, for the events themselves were partly veiled, and at the time were not all fully understood.

## Jesus Rides Into Jerusalem, And Reveals Himself As God's Only Son, Which Finally Results in His Description of His Triumphant Return (19.29-21.58).

The Section may be analysed as follows:

- a After initial preparations Jesus rides into Jerusalem in triumph on a colt revealing Himself as the Messianic King. If the people had not welcomed Him the very stones would have cried out (19.29-40).
- b Jesus weeps over a Jerusalem which will be desolated, thus revealing Himself as the Messianic Judge. Not one stone will be left upon another (19.41-44).
- c Jesus enters the Temple, in which Israel trusts, revealing Himself as its Lord, and as God's Cleanser, of the Temple, as a warning against the unworthiness of the chief priests, who have forfeited their authority, and of the state of their Temple which is subject to condemnation as a Den of Robbers, thus revealing Himself as the Messianic Purger (19.45-46).

- d The chief priests and scribes and elders seek to destroy Jesus but could not, revealing that they lack any real authority (19.47-48).
- e Jesus is challenged as to His authority and reveals their inability to judge levels of authority, because they are fearful of being stoned (20.1-8).
- f The parable of the vineyard - Jesus is revealed as the only Son and the Head Cornerstone, the One in supreme authority. He is the Great Cornerstone on which His people will be established, but on which His antagonists will stumble (20.9-18).
- e Jesus challenges His questioners use of Caesar's image, and reveals that their authority comes only from Caesar (20.19-26).
- d The Sadducees seek to undermine Jesus' teaching, but could not, and have to admit His authority (20.27-40).
- c Jesus as David's Lord, the Messiah, Who has come with authority from God, is contrasted with the unworthiness of the Scribes who claim that authority and yet desolate others, for they will receive the greater condemnation in that they have forfeited their authority. They in turn are contrasted with the poor widow (20.41-21.4).
- b Jerusalem is to be desolated. Not one stone will be left upon another (21.5-7).
- a After initial preparations Jesus will come back in triumph to the world (21.8-36).
- "But you, watch at every season, making supplication, that you may prevail to escape all these things that will come about, and to stand before the Son of man" (21.36).

Note that the section commences in 'a' with the ride in triumph into Jerusalem and in the parallel it ends in the return in triumph to the world. In 'b' Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, not one stone will be left on another and in the parallel Jerusalem is to be devastated, and not one stone left on another. In 'c' Jesus as God's Messiah cleanses the Temple as an indication of the unworthiness of the Jewish leaders, and in the parallel He demonstrates that David had declared Him to be the Messiah, and that the Scribes are unworthy. In 'd' the Jewish leadership conspire to destroy Jesus but could not, and in the parallel they seek to undermine His teaching, but could not. In 'e' Jesus is challenged concerning His authority, and in the parallel He challenges whose authority the leaders are under. In 'f' He reveals His unique sonship and the unworthiness of the present Jewish leadership.

#### After Initial Preparations Jesus Rides Into Jerusalem In Triumph On A Colt (19.29-40).

Jesus here deliberately fulfils the prophecy of Zechariah 9.9 (Matthew 21.4) by riding into Jerusalem on an ass's colt, and there He is greeted by the crowds. Contrary to what at first sight seems to be the case He is welcomed as the wonder-working prophet of Galilee (19.37-38), for none are at the time completely aware of the full significance of it (John 12.16), and the cries of the people are those which normally greeted pilgrims entering Jerusalem and approaching the Temple for the Feast. although no doubt all the louder because of Who He was. But there is certainly a significance there, which is rightly read into it by the Pharisees who are concerned about its implications. When, however, they expostulate at what is happening Jesus assures them that His entry is so significant that if His followers were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Why then was His entry so significant? Firstly it was because it was a declaration to Jerusalem, and to the whole world that He was here as the One promised in the Old Testament, the One Who had come from God, and was God's chosen One. He was revealing Himself as the promised Messiah, the promised King, but making it clear that He was not One Who had come in order to enforce His rule on men by force of arms, but One Who, as in Zechariah 9.9, had come in gentleness and humility in order to win men to Himself. And yet at the same time it was a quiet demand for recognition. It was one of those moments when all are challenged as to what their response will be. Had the eyes of Jerusalem been open they would have fully welcomed Him in these terms (even the stones recognised it).

Secondly it was because to His followers He was making clear that while He was the Messiah,

He would not take up His position by force of arms. He wanted them to recognise that He was here to conquer through His words. Thus when His assault on Jerusalem began it was by preaching in the Temple, not by raising an insurrection. And it was an indication that once He was gone, they too must go forward with His word. It was a dampening down of wrong expectations about the Kingly Rule of God (see 19.11).

The supreme courage of what Jesus did should not be overlooked. He knew that the Jewish leaders were waiting in Jerusalem for Him to arrive so that they could arrest Him and seal His fate. And yet He entered Jerusalem in as public a way as possible, so that none could doubt that He was there. And He did it as a last acted out prophecy in which He proclaimed His kingship, and His fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Zechariah 9.9), plain for all to see. He was proclaiming Who He was and why He had come, even though He knew that He would have to die for it. And yet in spite of the cries that welcomed Him even His own disciples did not fully recognise what He had done until after His resurrection (John 12.16). Nevertheless it caused a huge stir, and produced a sense of expectation, even though there was divided opinion as to what that expectation was.

It is noteworthy that in the Section chiasmus above this coming of Jesus into Jerusalem is in parallel with the coming of the Son of Man in glory (21.28). Both were to be declarations as to Who He was, the first in an appeal of compassionate love, the second in a revelation of total power. And central to both is that He is God's only beloved Son (20.9-18).

#### Analysis of the passage:

- a When He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, He sent two of the disciples (29).
- b Saying, "Go your way into the village over against you, in which as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no man ever yet sat. Loose him, and bring him" (30).
- c "And if any one ask you, 'Why do you loose him?', thus shall you say, 'The Lord has need of him'" (31).
- d And those who were sent went away, and found even as He had said to them (32).
- c And as they were loosing the colt, its owners said to them, "Why do you loose the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of him" (33-34).
- b And they brought him to Jesus, and they threw their garments on the colt, and set Jesus on it. And as He went, they spread their garments in the way (35-36).
- a As He was now drawing near, even at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." (37-38).

Note that in 'a' they draw near to the Mount of Olives, and in the parallel the same occurs. In 'b' they are told to go and bring the colt, and in the parallel they bring it. In 'c' they are asked why they are loosing the colt and told what they reply, and in the parallel they do as they are told. In 'd' they discover it to be exactly as the Lord has said.

19.29 'And it came to about that, when he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples,'

Coming along the mountain road from Jericho Jesus approaches Bethphage and Bethany, two villages on the outskirts of Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives, the latter being on its lower slopes. The double mention of the Mount of Olives (see also verse 37) indicates the significance that Luke sees in this. Possibly he has Zechariah 14.4 in mind, where the expectation was that the Lord Himself would appear on the Mount of Olives. And from there Jesus sent two disciples to find an ass's colt on which no man had ever ridden, which He has presumably arranged with its owners to make use of, or alternately which He knew was for hire and could be commandeered by a Prophet.

Bethphage means 'house of unripe figs' and was a hamlet between Bethany, and Jerusalem. We learn from elsewhere that it marked the limit of Jerusalem proper for ritual purposes. Thus it is being emphasised that Jesus enters from the edges of Jerusalem, moving on to its religious centre as He takes possession of it in the name of the Lord. It is a 'holy' journey, the purposeful journey of One set apart totally to God, and now offering Himself up to God. Bethany ('house of dates') is probably El Azariyeh (named after Lazarus), two miles south east of Jerusalem, and on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. It was two miles/three kilometres outside Jerusalem. It is mainly mentioned in order to make the connection with the Mount of Olives, but is possibly also mentioned in order to indicate the whereabouts of tiny Bethphage (which is also unidentifiable to us).

19.30 'Saying, "Go your way into the village over against you, in which as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no man ever yet sat. Loose him, and bring him." '

The 'village over against you' is presumably Bethphage, which may also explain why its name is mentioned, and there they were to find an untried colt, which would be with its mother. They were then to loose it and bring it to Jesus. It is possible that the mother ass especially was available for hire by travellers. Most would not want to try to ride an untried colt. The site at the edge of the city would be seen as suitable for the hire of such animals. In the event it would be expected that the mother ass would accompany the colt, if only to keep it from becoming too nervous (Matthew 21.7).

However Jesus' intention to use the untried, unriden colt had religious significance (Numbers 19.2; Deuteronomy 21.3; 1 Samuel 6.7; 2 Samuel 6.3). It indicated either sacred use or use by royalty. Compare Genesis 49.11. There an ass's colt which is tied up is connected with the coming King. And see also Zechariah 9.9 where Israel's king comes to Jerusalem on an ass's colt. Luke in fact takes up this aspect of things for he concentrates in his account on the kingly aspects of the entry. He wants us to know that Israel's King is entering Jerusalem.

19.31 "And if any one ask you, 'Why do you loose him?', thus shall you say, 'The Lord has need of him.' "

It may well be that He had already made an arrangement that He would collect it when He needed it and that whoever collected it would give a kind of password, 'the Lord has need of him'. Or He may have been making use of the custom of 'angaria' under which a major religious figure was entitled to procure for himself the use of a means of transport for a period of time by a simple act of appropriation. We are in fact probably intended to see in the use of the title 'Lord' a deliberate indication that this was an unusual situation by which Jesus' supreme authority is being revealed. The whole arrangement thus indicates that Jesus has a special significance in what He is about to do. So it may well be that the ass's colt was offered for His free use as a major religious figure in accordance with the custom of angaria without previous arrangement.

19.32 'And those who were sent went away, and found even as he had said to them.'

Not surprisingly those who went to collect the ass's colt found everything exactly as Jesus had said. But its centrality in the chiasmus indicates that the detail of the collection, and the fact that it went smoothly, was seen as important. Again it emphasised the significance of what Jesus was doing, and that all was in accordance with His word. At this hour it was Jesus Who was in control.

19.33-34 'And as they were loosing the colt, its owners said to them, "Why do you loose the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of him".'

Luke then tells us that the arrangements worked smoothly and were followed word for word. 'Its owners.' This may possibly confirm that the ass was available for hiring out (along with other asses) so that the business was jointly owned.

**“The Lord has need of him.” This has been repeated twice for emphasis, underlying the importance that Luke sees in it. The One Who is Lord of all is exercising His authority.**

**19.35 ‘And they brought him to Jesus, and they threw their garments on the colt, and set Jesus on it.’**

**The disciples then brought the colt to Jesus, threw their garments on it, and set Jesus on it. This was a further action indicating the royalty of the rider. We can compare this with 1 Kings 1.33 where a similar action precedes the crown prince’s coronation. The garments would be in order to enable a comfortable ride, but it may well be that one of the garments was put over the colt’s eyes so as to keep it from panicking while the process of mounting took place. A young, previously unriden, colt would be frisky.**

**Neither Luke nor Mark does not mention that it was an ass on which Jesus rode, but Matthew 21.2 stresses it. We must not underestimate this. The ass was looked on by the Jews as a noble beast. When kings rode in peace they regularly rode on an ass. Thus the prophecy, and Jesus’ action in riding on an ass, revealed Him as a King, but it also revealed that He came, not as a warrior on His war horse, but as the lowly Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9.6). He had not come as the kind of Messiah that most Jews were expecting.**

**19.36 ‘And as he went, they spread their garments in the way.’**

**Garments were then spread in the path before the colt for Jesus to ride over. This was a regular way of showing honour to someone important. Rabbinic literature offers parallels, and Plutarch tells us that when Cato Minor left his troops they spread their clothes at his feet. This was a clear indication of the supreme importance of the rider and the honour in which He was held (see 2 Kings 9.13 where the same happened to Jehu). Such an action may indicate the right of the king to possess their possessions, or the idea may have been one of maintaining the ass’s purity, and preventing it being soiled by the common ground. But everything about the incident indicates its connection with the proclamation of royalty to those in the know.**

**In 19.11 we were told that they were expecting that this particular time of entry of Jesus into Jerusalem would have Messianic consequences. This was an idea which Jesus had, however, dampened down. Perhaps they now began to hope that this might be it. But Jesus was going out of His way to make it clear that there was nothing warlike about it. He wanted it to be more the recognition of a king coming in peace than the proclamation of a warrior Messiah. He had come to Jerusalem with His message of Salvation as proclaimed through His words.**

**19.37 ‘And as he was now drawing near, even at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen,’**

**We are reminded here that we must see what was happening in a twofold way. Firstly in the way that it was being taken by the disciples, as described here, and secondly in the way in which it was to be seen later. Luke is very much bringing out what would be seen later, that its King had entered Jerusalem in triumph. Thus the stress on its connection with the Mount of Olives.**

**But here the disciples are pictured in terms of thinking of His prophetic status and as the procession moved forward they praised God for the mighty works that He had done. Such mighty works are a theme of Luke (4.32-33, 41; 5.17; 6.19; 7.21-23; 8.46; 9.1; 19.37; Acts 4.33; 6.8; 8.13; 10.38). In the end they were rejoicing at the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem for whatever purpose He intended, because they did believe that He was the One sent from God, while various elements of the crowds probably had various views of what He intended to do. All, however, apart from the Pharisees, saw Him as One Who, in one way or another, had come from God.**

**19.38 ‘Saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven, and**

glory in the highest.” ’

At first sight this appears to give the solution to the question of how the crowds saw it. But in fact it does not. For this quotation from the Psalm 118.26, which probably referred to the entry of the king into Jerusalem, (with ‘king’ thus here able to replace ‘one’) was regularly shouted out year by year in greeting to pilgrims entering Jerusalem for the Passover, in remembrance of the promise in Zechariah 9.9. Each pilgrim to the Passover was a reminder of God’s great past deliverance, and of the future deliverance of which they were so confident. Each one was a reminder that one day the King would come. This was presumably why the Romans did not get excited over the matter. They saw little in it that was different from the normal greeting of pilgrims at Passover, possibly slightly increased because of the nature of the One Who was entering, whom they would know of as the Jewish prophet of Galilee. As far as they were concerned the people could shout all that they liked as long as no weapons could be seen, and no attempts were made to stir up the crowds. They knew that it was a regular part of their annual festival. (In this regard we cannot doubt that Jesus had been constantly subject to surveillance by them. No one who had gathered such huge crowds would have been ignored. And they would have sufficiently gathered that whatever He was, He was not preaching insurrection).

We may note the differences in what was cried out in the different Gospels. This merely demonstrates that they did not copy directly from each other and were not shouting the same thing. It was not orchestrated. In such a varied crowd the cries would be many and varied, given with different inflections. Different witnesses would remember the different cries that he had heard, and all would be right. The evangelists could thus pick and choose.

Note the cry of the crowds here, ‘peace in Heaven and glory in the Highest.’ These were not the cries of insurrectionists. They were the cries of those who were looking to Heaven. We may compare this with the words of the angels in 2.14, at the birth of the ‘Saviour Who is Christ the Lord’, where they cried “glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among men on whom His favour rests”. There it was the angels who sang of His glory. This is man’s reply to God at the coming of this One sent from God. Men may now find peace with God in Heaven through His Prophet, because through His words God’s favour rests on His chosen ones (compare Acts 10.36. Also contrast verse 42 below). Alternately it may be an ascription of praise to the God of peace, Who brings peace to all (Romans 15.33), Who bruises Satan under men’s feet (Romans 16.20, Who sanctifies men wholly and preserves them blameless to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5.23), and equips them with every good work to do His will that they may be well pleasing in His sight (Hebrews 13.20).

#### The Response of The Pharisees: God’s Coming Judgment on Jerusalem (19.39-46).

It was not to be expected that this hearty welcome of Jesus would please the Pharisees. Perhaps they were afraid of the reaction of Rome, or possibly they felt that it was coming near to blasphemy. But either way they wanted the enthusiasm stilled. There is possibly a hint in this of, ‘Now look what you have done by entering Jerusalem in this spectacular way.’ Jesus’ reply is significant. It stresses to them that what He has done has a deep significance. Indeed such is the importance of this occasion that if the people are silent the very stones will cry out. If man will not welcome his Creator, then creation itself will do it. Again we are made aware of Jesus’ supernatural claims.

But in view of what follows it also includes the thought of the stones crying out at the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the thought then being that if this One is not welcomed by Jerusalem only the severest of judgment can follow. One day the stones will truly cry out.

#### Analysis.

- a Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples”, and He answered and said, “I tell you that, if these hold their peace, the stones will cry

- out” (39-40).
- b When He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it (41).
  - c Saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to peace! But now they are hid from your eyes” (42).
  - d “For the days will come on you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you, and surround you, and keep you in on every side”(43).
  - c “And will dash you to the ground, and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone on another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (44).
  - b And He entered into the temple, and began to cast out those who sold (45).
  - a Saying to them, “It is written, And my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers” (46).

Note than in ‘a’ the stones will bear witness to the One Who is God’s true witness, while in the parallel His action in the Temple bears witness against the ‘robbers’ within it, those who have proved to be false witnesses. In ‘b’ He wept over the city and in the parallel He cast out evil from the Temple, revealing its sad state. In ‘c’ the truth was hidden from their eyes, and in the parallel they did not know the time of their visitation. Centrally in ‘d’ is the description of the besieging of Jerusalem.

**19.39 ‘And some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ’**

The Pharisees did not like what they were hearing, and they called on Jesus to rebuke these who were shouting out. It may have been concern for His and their safety. It may have been because they did not like such ascriptions being made to the Prophet with Whom they were at disagreement, and were seeking to calm the fervour, feeling that Jesus could not want it also, as it was surely going too far. It was one thing for pilgrims to be received with general cries which were just the product of the festal mood, it was quite another when it was apparent that a number of them were possibly taking their ascriptions seriously.

**19.40 ‘And he answered and said, “I tell you that, if these hold their peace, the stones will cry out.” ’**

Jesus’ reply was simple and striking. If these men held their peace, the very stones would be constrained to cry out. It was an indication that there was One here Whom creation recognised (compare how the storm obeyed His word - 8.24 - and how the unbroken ass’s colt obeyed His will and retained its calm amidst the maddened crowd). We can compare with this 3.8 where John declared that if need be God could raise up from the stones children to Abraham. There is the same general idea. What is happening is of God, and if necessary God could supplement it through a new work of creation using the very stones of the ground.

Alternately Jesus may have had in mind Habakkuk 2.11 where the stones would cry out against what was shameful, indicating that it would indeed be shameful if the people did not cry out to welcome Him.

But in view of what immediately follows it is probable that there is also an indirect reference to when the stones will cry out as they are left in a tangled mess after the destruction of the Temple (21.6). His words were thus another parable from which each was to read what they would, and which would have deeper meaning in the future.

**19.41 ‘And when he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it,’**

Then Jesus moved solemnly on towards the city, and as He saw its future He wept over it. His thoughts were full and overflowing. He had no pleasure at the thought of the judgment that was coming on this city because of what they were going to do to Him. There was only the thought of, ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do’. There is something hugely

**dramatic about this entry into Jerusalem, with Jesus offering Himself as its King and Messiah, and yet weeping because He knows that it will reject Him and bring on itself its own judgment, even though the final result will be God's offer of salvation to the world.**

**For a comparison with the weeping of Jeremiah over what was to happen to the old Jerusalem see Jeremiah 8.18, 21; 9.1; 15.5. He too foresaw hope following disaster (Jeremiah 29.10; 31.31-34).**

**19.42 'Saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to peace! But now they are hid from your eyes." '**

**His heart was torn because Jerusalem could not recognise its day. He was here as its King, and through Him they could have found peace. And that would have saved them from the ferment of their hearts that would bring destruction on them. But their eyes were closed and God's offer was hidden from their eyes. They were lost in darkness (Acts 26.18). They did not know where they were going (John 12.35). And thus they did not see. Their Day had come, but apart from the few, they had failed to see it.**

**19.43-44 "For the days will come on you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you, and surround you, and keep you in on every side, and will dash you to the ground, and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone on another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."**

**And there could be only one result. The same thing that had happened in the days of Jeremiah would happen again. Because they had missed their day of salvation, days of judgment would come on them. Jerusalem would be destroyed. The holy stones would lie scattered at the end of every street (Lamentations 4.1). In Jeremiah's day it had been brought about because of their support for a false son of David, one of the rejected house, of whom God had warned that no son of that house would inherit the throne of David, so that it was rather to be given to One miraculously born (Isaiah 7.13-14; see also 39.6-7). Here it was because of the rejection of that One Who had been miraculously born, Whose death would seal their fate unless they repented. The vivid description fits well with the descriptions of the siege of Nebuchadnezzar (compare Psalm 137.7-8; Jeremiah 6.6; Lamentations 1.15; 2.8-9, 17; 4.1; Ezekiel 4.2; 26.8 ), as well as its repetition by Titus in 70 AD. (See also 2 Samuel 17.13; Isaiah 29.3; 37.33; Hosea 13.16; Nahum 3.10). Sadly it was a description of all sieges where resistance was offered. There would be nothing unusual about it, only its severity and its cause.**

**And all this would come on them, the consequence of their own rash folly, because they had not recognised that the time of their visitation had come (compare Jeremiah 10.15; 51.18), that the acceptable year of the Lord was here (4.19), a time that would then be followed by the day of vengeance (Isaiah 61.1-2).**

**19.45 'And he entered into the temple, and began to cast out those who sold,'**

**And He entered the Temple, and looking around at what was happening there in the Court of the Gentiles, He was angry. And so He began to cast out those who sold (He began and continued), emptying it of the noisy traders so that it was possible for those present to pray in comparative peace. Compare here Malachi 3.1. The Lord had come to His Temple. He was not weeping now. This was the next day (Mark 11.12), but Luke ignores that because he wants us to recognise its connection with the preceding words. The emptying of the traders from the Temples is a symbol of the judgment that is coming. Now He is here in anger at the duplicity of the priesthood, and warning of what will happen if they do not cleanse up their act.**

**The effectiveness of what He did resulted as much from His moral authority as from brute force, and the traders were also no doubt aware of the twelve husky looking Apostles in the background.**

**Perhaps also we are to link it with His entry into Jerusalem as its Messiah. For He may well**

by this have indicated that one purpose of His coming was in order to purify the Temple worship, by removing what corrupted it and making it a place of prayer. We can compare how both Hezekiah and Josiah were noted as having cleansed the Temple of what offended (2 Kings 23.4; 2 Chronicles 29.5, 16; 34.8), and in both cases it was followed by the observance of the Passover (2 Kings 23.21; 2 Chronicles 30.1; 35.1). They had emptied it of idolatry, Jesus was emptying it of the new idolatry, Mammon.

19.46 ‘Saying to them, “It is written, And my house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.” ’

And as He thrust out the dishonest traders He called on them to consider their ways, citing Jeremiah 7.11 and pointing out their dishonesty, likening them to a bandit’s cavern. The dishonesty of the Temple trade as the chief priest sought to enrich themselves, was one of the scandals of Jerusalem, and the avariciousness of some of the High priests a byword. It was totally the opposite of those in Josiah’s day (2 Kings 22.7). And all this in the house of prayer that God had intended should be for all nations (see Isaiah 56.7). But Luke’s concentration is here on the awful fact that in the House of prayer was extreme iniquity. Jerusalem was rotten at its core.

We note here the omission of the words ‘for all nations’. We may feel this surprising in Luke who always has the Gentiles in mind. But in fact that might be the very reason. He did not want the Gentile Christians looking with nostalgia to the Temple.

The trading that took place was indeed a scandal. Worshippers would find that the animals that they brought for sacrifice were declare blemished. They would then exchange them with the traders for an unblemished animal, at considerable loss to themselves. And lo, the animal would suddenly become unblemished, ready for sale to the next victim. Furthermore offerings to the Temple had to be paid in coinage not containing an image on them. These were obtainable from the money changers, but at a very inflated rate of exchange. Thus what had originally been intended as a means of assistance to worshippers had become a ramp. And a share of the profits went to the chief priests who ran the Temple. They already received the fleeces of sacrificed animals, and meat from certain types of sacrifices, both very lucrative, so that this was a bonus on top. It really was a den of thieves.

Some have asked why, if Jesus really did this, no witnesses could be found at His trial to testify against Him on the matter. The answer, of course, is simple. Firstly they probably recognised that to bring such a situation to court would probably only have made Pilate laugh, and would have made them look a little ridiculous. After all no one had been hurt and there had been no provable loss. He would have had Jesus beaten and probably have felt that those ‘sneaky Jewish priests’ had got what they deserved. But that was not what they wanted. They were after a capital charge. And secondly it is unlikely that those of the priests, especially the chief priests, who were involved would want to draw attention to what was an unsavoury situation. Who knew what might come out if a case actually came to court? It might not be easily hushed up. For all would know that there were probably quite a number on the Sanhedrin who were also not too happy at the situation. They could not interfere with the running of the Temple, but they certainly could have come out with some scathing comments, when the question of motive was gone into.

#### Note on the Cleansing of the Temple in John 2.13-16.

Jesus has carried out a similar activity a few years before at the beginning of His ministry. But then as a young and enthusiastic prophet His aim had been in order to get rid of the trading from God’s house so that it would not be like a public market. He had then had no notion of the dishonesty that went on there. That incident had probably been written off by the authorities (although not totally forgotten) as the enthusiasm of a beginner, for, while it had been somewhat spectacular, it had only been a small inconvenience as far as profits were

concerned, rather than a major event, and as He had subsequently visited Jerusalem a number of times since without seeming to have any intention of doing the same, their guard had been let down, and we must remember that many not involved with the Temple activities, including some priests, might secretly have sympathised. All were, however, caught unprepared by His second visit for the same purpose. The story is so different there (apart from the necessary parts that would arise in any cleansing of the Temple in this way) that it confirms that it was on a different occasion, and there its motive fits aptly into the beginning of His ministry. He now had different concerns, for He had come to know about the corruption that riddled the Temple.

End of Note.

### Jesus Preaches In The Temple (19.47-21.38).

Having driven the traders out of the Temple in His prophetic zeal Jesus then revealed the greatness of His great courage by returning daily to that same Temple in order to teach the people. As the traders, who would quickly have returned, watched with baleful eyes, and the Temple police stood by alert for trouble, Jesus boldly entered the Temple again, and ignoring both, proceeded to address the crowds gathered there. Indeed the great crowds that gathered to Him would make it seem to the authorities as though He had almost taken over the Temple, apart from the Sanctuary itself.

And perhaps that was how He intended it to be seen. Having driven out the traders He has now taken possession of it in the name of the Lord, for its genuine purpose, that of proclaiming the word of God within it (a theme of Luke/Acts) and of prayer. In the coming months and years this will be one of its purposes until at length it will be finally rejected because it had rejected Him (see 19.47. 20.1; 21.37, 38; 24.53; Acts 2.46; 3.1, 8; 4.1; 5.20-21, 25, 42). While it continued as the hub of the Jewish religion, it also became for a time the source from which light could go out from the Jews to the world (Isaiah 2.2-4).

But whereas the authorities wanted to arrest Him they did not dare make a move in public, because He was too popular. They were forced to recognise that any move against Him could only result in tumult, and that that would then bring down on them the wrath of their Roman overlords. Thus they turned to a new tactic, and got together to decide how they might discredit Him in the eyes of the people. They knew that if they could only do that, then they could take Him. This therefore resulted in a number of challenges which are found in what follows. These included the challenge as to His authority for behaving as He did (20.1-8), the challenge as to whether it was right to give tribute to Caesar (20.20-26), and the challenge concerning the truth of the resurrection (20.27-38).

In dealing with these Jesus not only showed them up as being hypocritical and incompetent, but went on to denounce them and their fellow leaders by means of a parable which demonstrated their connection with the villainy of those who in the past had persecuted those sent from God (20.9-18). Within this parable at the same time He revealed His own uniqueness as God's only Son. Then once their challenges were exhausted He riposted with a quotation from Scripture concerning His Messiahship (20.41-44), following it up with a further attack on the Scribes (20.45-47) and a contrasting of them with an impoverished widow whose godly giving aroused His admiration (21.1-4). This was then followed by His description to His disciples of the future destruction of the Temple, along with prophecies concerning the future, which ended up with the promise of His return in glory (21.5-36). And during all this period He continued teaching daily to the crowds in the Temple (21.37-38).

In all these episodes Luke was calling, at least to some extent, on Marcan material, but altered so as to suit the points that he was trying to get over, and in terms of other information received. This was, however done without altering their essential message. It all begins with an attack on His authority.

## Jesus Is Challenged By The Sanhedrin Members As To His Authority (19.47-20.8).

This challenge came at the beginning of this week in which Jesus was constantly tested out, and in each case His replies were more than sufficient to deal with the matters brought against Him, so that there soon came a time when they dared not ask Him any more questions. This first challenge was as to His authority for doing ‘the things’ that He does. Probably largely in mind by ‘the things’ was the incident of the cleansing of the Temple, but it also included his miracles and His apparent occasional disregard for the Sabbath. Their purpose in coming there was deliberately in order to show Him up before all the people, for they knew that if they were to be able to do with Him what they wanted, it was first necessary to get the support of the people. So their first aim was to demonstrate to the crowds that in fact He had no authority.

Their question seemed reasonable. There was no doubt that He was claiming some special kind of authority, and that He had caused some disruption in the Temple, and it was after all their genuine responsibility to check the credentials of any who claimed such religious authority, and they were also responsible for public order, especially in the Temple. Yet the fact is that they had had plenty of opportunity for questioning Him and weighing Him up before this, and even now they could have spoken with Him in private and discussed matters reasonably. But the truth was that they had taken on an attitude of extreme belligerence. For the way in which Jesus now dealt with them demonstrated that He saw their challenge as hostile, not as neutral.

That their approach was over more than just His actions in the Temple comes out in the strength of the deputation. His act in the Temple could have been dealt with by the Temple police. It was His whole activity that was in question and the ‘hidden’ claims that He was thus making.

### Analysis.

- a He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people sought to destroy Him (19.47).
- b They could not find what they might do, for the people all hung on Him, listening (19.48).
- c And it came about that, on one of the days, as He was teaching the people in the temple, and preaching the gospel, there came on Him the chief priests and the scribes with the elders, and they spoke, saying to Him, “Tell us, by what authority do you do these things? or who is he who gave you this authority?” (20.1-2).
- d He answered and said to them, “I also will ask you a question, and you tell me, The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?” (20.3-4).
- c And they reasoned with themselves, saying, “If we shall say, From heaven, he will say, Why did you not believe him? But if we shall say, From men, all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet” (20.5-6).
- b They answered, that they knew not whence it was (20.7).
- a And Jesus said to them, “Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things” (20.8).

Note that in ‘a’ the leaders of Israel acting in God’s name (they come officially together) but on their own authority were determined to destroy Him, while in the parallel Jesus refused to divulge His authority which was from that same God, on the grounds that they had revealed their incapacity to judge it. In ‘b’ they were baffled as to what to do before the people, and in the parallel they were baffled in seeking to answer Jesus’ question. In ‘c’ they questioned His authority, and in the parallel they reasoned unsuccessfully concerning John’s authority. Centrally in ‘d’ came the crunch question about the source of John’s authority.

19.47 ‘And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the

**principal men of the people sought to destroy him,'**

**Every day Jesus returned to the Temple to preach (and to heal 'the blind and the lame'- Matthew 21.14). Meanwhile all the leading authorities were banded together, differences forgotten, in order to find a way of destroying Him, the chief priests because He had affected their profits and their reputations, the Scribes because he had shown up their teaching and their lives, and the principal men of the people because they had no doubt yielded to the pressure of the other two parties and were concerned that there might be disorder in the city which might affect their wealth. Not being willing to go and listen to Jesus themselves, they accepted the word of their respected colleagues. So the leaders of the most religious nation on earth were banded together against the most gracious and loving man on earth, and all for the wrong reasons. Like the monkeys in the story of Mowgli they gathered together and said in unison, 'We all say so, so it must be true'. Thus almost the whole Sanhedrin, the leading judicial authority in Jerusalem, were banded up against Him. Truth had to come second when the status quo, which benefited them all, was at stake.**

**19.48 'And they could not find what they might do, for the people all hung upon him, listening.'**

**However they were prevented from open action because all the people were eager to hear His teaching and saw Him as a prophet. They were well aware that to publicly arrest One Who was seen as a prophet of God at such a time would be to raise a ferment, even possibly to cause an uprising. It was something that they dared not risk, unless they could somehow loosen the ties between Jesus and the people. And that was what they now attempted to do.**

**20.1 'And it came about that, on one of the days, as he was teaching the people in the temple, and preaching the gospel, there came on him the chief priests and the scribes with the elders,'**

**So one day while He was teaching in the Temple, and preaching the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God, the members of the Sanhedrin approached Him. The chief priests were the leading authorities in the Temple including the High Priest himself, the temple Treasurer, the leaders of the priestly courses, ex-High Priests, and their blood relations. The Scribes mainly represented Pharisaic opinion, although there were some Scribes of the Sadducees. The elders were the wealthy laymen from aristocratic families.**

**20.2 'And they spoke, saying to him, "Tell us, by what authority do you do these things? or who is he who gave you this authority?" '**

**Their question, as an official deputation from the leadership, was twofold. Firstly on what did He base His authority for His actions, and secondly, who had given Him that authority? Did He, for example, claim Rabbinic authority, or Prophetic authority, or what? And if any of these, who had so authorised Him? To them 'authorisation' by the right people was all. Unless a man was authorised he had no right to speak. What authorisation then had Jesus?**

**The approach was high handed and officious. 'By what authority -- who gave you this authority?' Their first hope was that He would have no answer and be caught unprepared. Then the people would see that He was a charlatan. Alternately they were hoping to make Him declare Himself, and say something 'foolish', such as making a claim to Messiahship, and whatever He said they would use against Him. They could accuse Him of self-exaltation, or even worse, of being a Messianic claimant and an insurrectionist. So the question was, was He claiming to be a prophet? Was He claiming to be the Messiah? Was He claiming to be the coming Elijah? And if He was not claiming to be anyone so important, how could He then claim to have God's personal authority? Compare 9.7-8; Mark 6.15; John 1.19-25.**

**20.3-4 'And he answered and said to them, "I also will ask you a question, and you tell me, The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?" '**

**Jesus replied by using the Rabbinic method of dealing with a question by a question. He had,**

of course, twofold authority, the first came as a result of what had happened when He had been baptised by John, and John as a prophet had testified to Him both then and afterwards, while the second came through His mighty signs and wonders that demonstrated that God was with Him (see John 5.31-37). This was why initially He had every reason for seeking to establish John's authority.

So in support of the first basis for His authority He sought to establish the credentials of John the Baptist, and He did it by a counter-question. But while we need not doubt that He probably saw it as a foregone conclusion that His opponents would dodge the question, for how could they do otherwise when they had not supported John, it was not a trick question. The answer to it was fundamental to His own claims. But although they had not supported John, He would know that they would not dare speak against John because of the number of John's supporters among the crowds. So He certainly knew that He was putting them on the spot.

The question that He put was outwardly simple and straightforward. Here they were claiming the authority to decide on other people's claims to authority, so let them now tell Him and the crowd the answer to this question, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?" The way He put the question was very subtle, for He and they knew that they were surrounded by people who had been baptised by John, a baptism which they believed to be extremely important to them. Thus, as they themselves realised, to have denied John's baptism in front of such a festal crowd, who were in a high state of religious emotion, and many of whom treasured the fact that they had been baptised by John, and most of whom saw him as a prophet, would have been the equivalent of suicide. For as a result of his martyrdom John's memory was especially sanctified.

20.5-6 'And they reasoned with themselves, saying, "If we shall say, From heaven, he will say, Why did you not believe him? But if we shall say, From men, all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

His opponents in their discussions together revealed how clearly they themselves recognised their predicament. They knew that if they said that John's baptism was 'from Heaven' Jesus would ask why in that case they had not supported John more, and why they had not listened to him, and promulgated his baptism, and He would then also point out what John had said of Him, describing Him as greater than himself. But if they said 'from men' they knew very well that the crowds, who still remembered John vividly, and the method of his death, would stone them for the equivalent of blasphemy. For all the crowds knew that John was a prophet, and at this time feelings were running high. The principle behind the crowd's thinking would be that while it was true that a false prophet had to be stoned, it was also true that any who falsely accused a true prophet of being a false prophet was also liable to stoning, the false accuser bearing the penalty that would have been that of the accused if the charge had been proved. This was an ancient principle of the Law (see Deuteronomy 13.1-11; 19.15-21). And the members of the Sanhedrin were well enough aware of the mood of the crowd to realise that feelings were such that such a stoning would be a very likely consequence of any denial.

20.7 'And they answered, that they knew not whence it was.'

So they replied lamely that they did not know the answer to His question. Lame though their reply was they were really left with no option. But we can imagine their sense of extreme humiliation at having to do it. For by answering like this they would know that they were admitting that they in fact were in no position to decide on genuine bases of authority when it came to someone like John. And if they admitted that they could not judge John's authority, how could they then be credibly seen as being able to judge any prophet's authority?

Furthermore at the same time the crowds, who were not stupid, would know from their reply exactly what the situation was. To the crowds they would simply be revealing themselves as

treacherous. So their whole position was being undermined by their inability to answer, and instead of showing up Jesus they had shown themselves up.

And, of course, the consequence of this was that as they could not decide on what John's authority was, it was quite clear that there was no point in Jesus appealing to that authority. His appeal must await their deciding on John's authority. But it had answered the question. For the crowds, who would know of Jesus' connection with John would again draw their own conclusions. They would accept His authority, both because they accepted John's authority, and because of His own works and teaching.

20.8 'And Jesus said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." '

So when Jesus then declared that He was not willing to submit His case to the very people who had admitted that they did not know how to judge a prophet's authority, the people would recognise that He had really answered their question. His claim was that the source of His authority was the same as that of John, which was what they thought anyway. The Sanhedrin were stymied, and the belief of the people was thus confirmed.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants of a Vineyard (20.9-19).

But Jesus did not leave it there, He riposted with a parable that connected His accusers with the slayers of the prophets, by this confirming their connection with others in the past who had been unable to recognise those who came from God, and at the same time remarkably laying down His claim to being the unique and only Son of God, thus answering their question about the source of His authority indirectly, which is one reason why in both in Mark and Luke the parable immediately follows the question about authority.

The importance that Luke places on this parable comes out in that he places it centrally in the chiasmus of the whole Section (see above). It is the message around which the whole chiasmus is based.

In this parable He spoke of Israel as a vineyard, of God as its owner, and of the Jewish leaders as the tenants responsible for it. All this would be recognisable from the Old Testament. Those then sent by the Owner in order to collect the proceeds from the vineyard could only be the prophets, and Who then must be the last to come, the only beloved Son? In view of all His earlier claims we can be in no doubt that it is Jesus. (And yet there are still those who close their eyes and refuse to see this. Spiritual blindness is still among us).

The parable is based on real life. In Palestine at that time there were many farms and vineyards tenanted by tenant farmers, with absent landlords who expected to receive their rents. And we can with regard to some of those farms and vineyards that there was much skulduggery.

With regard to Luke's sources for the parable, we need have no doubt that he had Mark's Gospel in front of him, and yet he clearly did not just copy from Mark. It would seem that he also had other sources. This should not surprise us as he would have spoken with a number of people who were probably eyewitnesses, including especially some of the Apostles. His concern was not to ape Mark but to present the truth succinctly without altering it, while emphasising what he saw as important.

Analysis of the passage.

- a He began to speak to the people this parable. "A man planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country for a long time" (9).
- b "And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard, but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty, and he sent yet another servant, and him also they beat, and handled him shamefully, and sent him away empty, and he sent yet a third, and him also they wounded, and cast him out" (10-12).

- c “And the lord of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. It may be that they will reverence him’” (13).
- d “But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours’” (14a).
- e “And they cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him.” (14b).
- d “What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others.” And when they heard it, they said, ‘God forbid’ ” (15-16)
- c ‘But He looked on them, and said, “What then is this that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made the head of the corner? Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust” (17-18).
- b And the scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on Him in that very hour (19a).
- a And they feared the people, for they perceived that He spoke this parable against them (19b).

Note that in ‘a’ he speaks the parable concerning the husbandmen, and in the parallel the Scribes and Pharisees noted that He spoke it against them. In ‘b’ their ancestors had laid hands on the prophets, and in the parallel they were seeking to lay hands on Jesus. In ‘c’ the Lord determines to send His only Son, trusting that they will at least reverence Him as the One Who represents the owner most closely, and in the parallel they rejected Him with the obvious consequences. In ‘d’ they make their decision to act against the heir and prospective owner by killing Him so as to gain possession of the vineyard, and in the parallel the owner kills them and takes over the vineyard. And centrally in ‘e’ are their acts of deliberate rejection and brutal murder.

20.9 ‘And he began to speak to the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country for a long time.” ’

Jesus’ words are spoken to the people, but as ever among these were a number of antagonists, including chief priests and Scribes. The idea of Israel as a vineyard is found regularly in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 5.1-7 we have a similar opening to this, ‘My wellbeloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill’ (Isaiah 5.1). And there the choicest vine was planted and it produced wild grapes, so that it was ripe for judgment. And that vineyard and vine were Israel and Judah Compare also Psalm 80.8-16; Jeremiah 2.21-22; Hosea 9.10, where again the vineyard is Israel/Judah.

Here the vineyard is planted (Luke omits the further details) and put under the control of others who are made responsible for ensuring that a fair rental in terms of produce is paid to the owner. The owner, Who is clearly the God of Israel, then leaves it in their hands ‘for a long time’. It would take four years for the vineyard to become fruitful in such a way that rents (paid in produce) could be expected (see Leviticus 19.23-25). Even the Jewish leaders recognised that here He was speaking about them (verse 19). It was they who saw themselves as having the responsibility for God’s vineyard.

20.10-12 “And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard, but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And he sent yet another servant, and him also they beat, and handled him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And he sent yet a third, and him also they wounded, and cast him out.”

When the appropriate time came, and no fruit was forthcoming, the owner then sent a number of servants, one by one, in order to collect His portion of the fruit of the vineyard. But in each case the servants were handled shamefully in order to discourage them from persisting or returning. As so often ‘three’ indicates completeness. These three cover all the prophets and men of God down to John.

None would have any difficulty here in recognising that this indicated all godly men who had sought to speak to Israel, and none more so than the true prophets whose treatment by Israel/Judah was a byword.

‘Sent -- a servant.’ See Jeremiah 7.25-26 - ‘I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, day by day rising up early and sending them -- but they made their neck stiff and did worse than their fathers’, and 2 Chronicles 24.19 - ‘yet He sent prophets to them to bring them again to the Lord’. (See also Matthew 23.30-36). Compare also 2 Chronicles 36.15-19, ‘the Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwellingplace, but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy --- therefore He slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary ---and they burned down the house of God and broke down the walls of Jerusalem’. None knew better than Jesus that history repeats itself. For the maltreatment of successive men of God see also 1 Kings 18.13; 22.27; 2 Chronicles 24.20-21; Nehemiah 9.26; and for the sending of prophets, Jeremiah 25.4; Amos 3.7 Zechariah 1.6. The consequences that followed are also clearly described.

Note that Luke deliberately leaves out the mention of the death of some of the servants. He wants to emphasise the contrast between the servant and the son. It is only the Son Whose death is really significant.

20.13 “And the lord of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. It may be that they will reverence him.’”

Finally the owner of the vineyard decided that He would give them one last chance. He would send to them his beloved son. This was with the twofold hope, firstly that they would acknowledge the potential owner as having the right to collect payment, and secondly in the hope that their consciences might be moved at the thought of the special and precious beloved son, with the result that that they would repent and respond to Him. They would recognise that while they might get away with illtreating servants, it would be a very different matter with the only son. In Isaiah 5.1-7 the Beloved was God Himself. Here the Beloved is His Son. Compare also 3.22, ‘You are My beloved Son’. The implication was clear for all who had eyes to see. It is as clear a declaration of Jesus’ uniqueness, and of His Sonship as it is possible to have. Only the spiritually and obstinately blind could fail to see it.

And yet, as was necessary at this time of such bitterness, His claim was couched in such a way that it could not be used as an instrument against Him. All knew, however, that if they questioned Him about it He would come back with one of His devastating questions, such as, ‘Why do you think that this applies to Me?’ All would know that it did, and they would simply be left looking foolish. But it would equally appear foolish to charge Him with blasphemy on account of it unless they were willing to admit His claim.

The sending of the Son is seen as God’s final act towards men. If they will not respond to Him, and to those who go out in His Name, they will not respond to anyone. Hebrews 1.1-3 may well have partly resulted as a consequence of this parable.

Some may argue that no father in his right senses would do such a thing, and they would, of course, be right. But this is not speaking of any father. It is speaking of God. And this is precisely what God amazingly did do. It is meant to sound remarkable. It was remarkable (John 3.16; 1 John 4.9-10; Romans 5.8; Galatians 4.4-5; Hebrews 1.1-3).

20.14 “But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’”

The reaction of the husbandmen is then given. Reasoning with each other (which has been seen to be a trait of the Jewish leaders - verse 5) they determined what they would do. They

would kill the heir so that they might retain control of the inheritance. For the Law allowed for the fact that if those in physical possession of land were able to farm it untroubled by anyone for a number of years they could claim legal possession of it also.

Certainly as the Jewish leaders saw the great crowds hanging on to Jesus' every word they must have felt that 'their inheritance' was slipping away from them. Thus the picture is graphic, and in view of their plans to kill Jesus, telling. And once He was out of the way they would be able to regain control over the inheritance.

'Let us kill him.' The words are similar to those used by Joseph's brothers in Genesis 37.20 (see LXX). Jesus was likening these men to Joseph's brothers, full of hate and jealousy. They were the forerunners of the persecutors of the prophets, and of these men who now planned Jesus' downfall.

20.15 "And they cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them?"

The result was that the servants rejected the son, expelling him from the vineyard and killing him. This was a clear warning to the Jewish leaders that both God and Jesus were fully aware of their murderous intentions. The expulsion from the vineyard indicated that it was their intention that Jesus be seen as excommunicated and cut off from Israel (the vineyard is Israel, not Jerusalem), and the killing simply described what was in their minds. And then He gave His warning, "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them?" Let them think well of the consequences of what they were doing.

Mark has 'they killed him and cast him forth out of the vineyard'. The ideas are not necessarily contradictory. It is rather a matter of where they wish the emphasis. For if the son was physically attacked and mortally wounded on entering the vineyard, retreating before the onslaught and collapsing dead outside the vineyard under their final blows, either description would be true. The question would then be, is someone killed when they are first mortally wounded, or when they finally collapse and die? The difference is thus one of emphasis, not of chronological order. Luke is wanting to lay stress on the son as being like the One Who is numbered among the Gentiles in His death, as well as on His being killed, Mark's emphasis is on the blows that commenced the death throes of the son in the first place, the first initial, vindictive and murderous attack. 'Killed him and cast him out' are simply two events that took place together. The verbs in translation can therefore be in any order that fits the grammar, for the physical order of words in one language is never the same as the physical order in another.

'Cast him forth out of/from the vineyard.' This could signify:

- 1). The expulsion of Him from Israel by being cut off from among the people and 'branded' a renegade, and an excommunicate
- 2). The expulsion of Him to take His place among the Gentiles, the greatest humiliation that the Jews could place on a homeborn Israelite.
- 3). Simply a parabolic description.

As with all Jesus' parables that were not explained the actual application was left to the listener and the reader, so that different ones could take it in different ways which were not exclusive.

20.16 "He will come and destroy these husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others." And when they heard it, they said, "God forbid." '

What the Lord of the vineyard will do is then spelled out by means of the answer to a typical question. What will He do with them? He will destroy the evil men who have done this thing, and give the vineyard to others. No one could really have been in doubt about the final ending. It was the obvious conclusion. Nevertheless its literal fulfilment was remarkable. For

Jerusalem would, within forty years after the death of Jesus, be destroyed, and the care of God's people would have been removed elsewhere, initially, among other places, to Syrian Antioch (Acts 13), and then to the church leaders of the local communities. But Jerusalem would be left empty.

'To others.' Presumably the Apostles, compare 22.30; Matthew 16.18-19; 18.18. We can compare here Matthew 21.43, 'The Kingly Rule of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits', not strictly another nation, but a new Israel as headed by His followers. It was of that new Israel, which excluded the unbelievers in the old Israel, that all who became Christians would become a member (Romans 11.17-27; Galatians 3.29; 6.16; Ephesians 2.11-22).

'And when they heard it, they said, "God forbid." ' As we must surely assume that a good number present recognised the significance of His parable from the start, at least in general outline, some such expostulation is not unexpected. The thought of God's people being removed from the control of the High Priest and of the Sanhedrin would have appeared to the people like the end of the world. It would sound like another Exile. What would have been surprising would have been if there had been no reaction. For the consequences had been vividly described. This is, of course, a summary of the reaction which would have been even more vociferous. We are not expected to think that everyone said exactly this like some huge automaton. It indicates their intended meaning, not actually what everyone said. But what it does bring out is that they all recognised what the parable was saying.

It should be noted that the fact that the resurrection is not in some way included in the parable serves to confirm that the parable is as given before the resurrection and not altered afterwards. We thus have it in its pre-resurrection state. But the idea of the resurrection is now introduced, although as something added in additionally, not as a direct part of the parable, and it is in the form of a quotation from Scripture.

20.17 'But he looked on them, and said, "What then is this that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made the head of the corner?" '

This method of finishing off a parable with a Scripture quotation is regularly found among the Rabbis.

For then Jesus looked at them and emphasised the reference to Himself as the beloved Son by citing Psalm 118.22, and declaring that 'The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made the head of the corner.' They might reject Him, He is telling them, but they cannot prevent Him from being made the chief cornerstone of God's saving purposes. For while they may kill the Son it will not be the end. He will rise again and be the foundation and seal on which God's salvation will be based. The verse is used similarly in Acts 4.11; 1 Peter 2.7.

The chief corner stone was either the corner stone of the foundation which had to bear the weight of the building, or the stone which when it was finally set in place, completed the building and held it together as one (the cap-piece). Here it is seen as being in the first place rejected by the builders because they cannot see how it will fit in, only for them to discover in the end that it was the essential cornerstone. (We are not intended to ask whether builders could be so stupid, although no doubt some could. The whole point of the parable is to bring out the stupidity of those of whom it speaks by an exaggerated picture).

In contrast to this firm Foundation Stone on Whom the future will be based, and on which other stones will be erected (Ephesians 2.19-22), are the 'goodly stones' of the Temple which will be cast down and left not one stone upon another (19.44; 21.5-6). The One is to replace the other (compare John 2.19-22; 1 Corinthians 3.11-17; 2 Corinthians 6.16-18).

It should be noted that it was from this Psalm that the people greeted Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem (see verse 26). It was probably a Psalm used in festal situations for among other

things welcoming the king or ruler of Israel as he ceremonially entered Jerusalem or the Temple with a view to making an offering (verse 27). It was thus a suitable picture for application to the King Himself Who would shortly offer Himself upon the altar chosen by God.

**20.18** "Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust (or 'blow him away as chaff')."

And the stone will not only become the head of the corner, but it will also become a stone of destruction on which men will fall, like a pot on a hard stone, and be broken in pieces, and which itself will fall on men, as a stone may fall on pots, scattering them as dust. The picture may well have in mind the idea of a city which is being destroyed after siege, with stones being torn down and falling on the pottery beneath, while other pottery is seized and dashed (like the children - 19.44) against stones. (There is an interesting Jewish proverb which illustrates this, "If the stone falls on the pot, alas for the pot; if the pot falls on the stone, alas for the pot!" It was one therefore to which they should have taken heed. However, where the pictures are used elsewhere in Scripture they refer to what happens to men (Isaiah 8.14-15; Daniel 2.34). He will thus be for both salvation and judgment. Some will be founded on Him and become strong, others will fall on Him, or be crushed by Him, and will be destroyed. Both in the comparatively near future and in the last Judgment (both are again brought together in chapter 21).

The picture is taken from a combination of Isaiah 8.14-15, 'He will become a Sanctuary, and a stone of offence, --- and many will stumble on it, they will fall and be broken', and Daniel 2.34, 'a stone was cut out by no human hand and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces'.

As this verse is not cited by either Matthew or Mark in this context this may have been added by Luke from other sayings of Jesus, in order to give a satisfactory conclusion to the passage, for in contrast with them he has omitted 'this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes' (Mark 11.11; Matthew 21.42). By it he brings together salvation and judgment in a way quite in keeping with the parable, and consonant with the whole wider context of the passage. Compare also 1 Peter 2.7-8 where similar ideas to those here are linked.

**20.19** 'And the scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him in that very hour, and they feared the people, for they perceived that he spoke this parable against them.'

The parable made the Scribes and the chief priests even more determined to arrest Jesus, and they sought to find ways of doing so, but always the people got in the way, for they would not leave Jesus alone. And while the people were there in such huge numbers they recognised that any attempt to arrest Him would simply cause excessive trouble.

We may, perhaps, conclude our comments on this passage by drawing from the application made of the parable by a well known scholar:

- It tells us of human privilege. God had given to His people an inheritance which all recognised as a blessing.
- It tells us of human sin. Man misuses what God has given and appropriates it for his own purposes.
- It tells us of human responsibility. The inheritance was given in order that man may pay his proper respects to God and show his proper respect to his neighbour.
- It tells us of God's patience. Over the long centuries, while God had chastened His people, He had preserved them through it all and had even brought them back to their land. And now He was still lovingly reaching out to them.
- It tells us of God's mercy. In reaching out to them He even gave His only beloved Son.
- It tells us of God's judgment. One day the consequence of this can only be that for those who have rejected His Son will come judgment.

- It tells us that Jesus knew what was coming and yet did not turn back from it. he suffered for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.
- It tells us that He never doubted God's ultimate triumph. He knew that in the end God's purposes would prevail and man's folly be revealed for what it is.
- It tells us that He is the only beloved Son of God, greater than Moses and all the prophets, even greater than John the Baptist. They were beloved servants but He is the beloved Son. There is no other.

### The Second Test: Is It Lawful To Give Tribute To Caesar? (20.20-26).

In the chiasmus of the Section this challenge parallels the challenge concerning His authority (20.1-8). Sneakily they seek to take advantage of His claim to speak with authority by trapping Him into subversive remarks that can then be passed on to the Roman Governor as examples of His treasonable behaviour.

In most countries the question would have been fairly easy to answer, but in Israel it was a minefield, for while most reluctantly paid their denarius poll tax they did so because of what would have happened to them and their children if they did not, but they did it with reluctance and with hatred in their hearts.

However, for any prophet to suggest that they should pay it even reluctantly would have been the death knell for any hopes that the prophet had to be listened to. He would be instantly discredited. Prophets were supposed to stand out for what was right, not to give in to expediency (that was for common folk like them).

#### Analysis.

- a They watched Him, and sent out spies, who put on a pretence that they themselves were righteous, in order that they might take hold of His speech, so as to deliver Him up to the rule and to the authority of the governor (20).
- b They asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that you say and teach rightly, and do not accept the person of any, but of a truth teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (21-22)
- c But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose image and superscription has it?" And they said, "Caesar's" (23-24).
- b And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (25).
- a And they were not able to take hold of the saying before the people, and they marvelled at His answer, and held their peace (26).

Note that in 'a' their aim was to 'take hold of Him in His speech, and in the parallel we learn that they were unable to take hold of His saying before the people. In 'b' the question was as to whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar, and in the parallel He gave His answer. And centrally in 'c' He calls on them to produce the coin that He will cite in evidence against them.

20.20 'And they watched him, and sent out spies (or 'ambushers'), who put on a pretence that they themselves were righteous, in order that they might take hold of his speech, so as to deliver him up to the rule and to the authority of the governor.'

This verse beautifully sums up the true situation. These men who approached Jesus, who were sent by the Sanhedrin who waited out in the darkness, and pretended to a great deal of righteousness and godly concern, were actually tricksters whose one aim was to catch Him out and report Him to the governor for subversion. They wanted to entrap Him into saying something seditious, i.e. that 'it was not lawful to pay tribute to Caesar'.

Mark tell us that they were an unholy alliance of Pharisees and Herodians (Galilean court officials), but Luke does not want to complicate things for his readers, who would know nothing of the Herodians (see Mark 12.13 and compare Mark 3.6).

**20.21 ‘And they asked him, saying, “Teacher, we know that you say and teach rightly, and do not accept the person of any, but of a truth teach the way of God.” ’**

Their approach was with obsequious flattery. It is a warning to us to beware of those who speak too well of us. Very often it is because they seek to trap us. Here they lauded Him to the skies. They addressed Him as ‘Teacher’ (‘Rabbi), and then declared firstly that they knew that He only ever spoke and taught what was true, secondly that He was not afraid of any man’s person, and thirdly that He always spoke God’s way in truth. Such flattery could only have made Him suspicious, (any sensible person would have thought on receiving it, ‘now what do they want?’), but they did it because they hoped that it would make Him drop His guard and that, eager to show them how right they were about Him, He would give them the answer that they wanted.

**20.22 “Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”**

Their question was as to whether it was ‘lawful’ or not to give tribute to Caesar. That is whether it was in line with the teaching of Moses. Now strictly speaking the Law does not deal with that question. But the Law does make it clear that the people of Israel were God’s people, God’s holy nation, and thus that for them to be ruled over by anyone else was contrary to God’s intention. It was something that would only happen to them as a result of disobedience. So to every Jew the answer as to whether tribute should be paid to Caesar would have been a resounding ‘No!’ For while they reluctantly did on the whole give such tribute, they certainly did not see it as ‘lawful’. In their view the Law required rather that they directed their gifts towards God, His Sanctuary and His people, and the Roman poll tax was highly and deeply resented as an imposition, and as an evidence of their submission to Rome.

Thus if Jesus answered the question by declaring that it was lawful He would instantly have been denounced by the whole nation as a false prophet. On the other hand if He said that it was not lawful, (and that was the answer towards which they were working), then they could immediately denounce him to the Roman governor for stirring up the people to avoid paying their taxes, a crime subject to the most serious punishment.

**20.23-24 ‘But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose image and superscription has it?” And they said, “Caesar’s.” ’**

Jesus, however, saw through them immediately. And so He called for them to produce a denarius, the silver coin in which the tax would be paid, which bore on it the head of the reigning Caesar at the time that the coin was minted, and what was actually a blasphemous superscription describing him.. Countries who were under Rome could at the time produce their own bronze coinage, but their silver coinage had to be that issued by Rome. This was partly because it was then an indication to the peoples involved that they were subject to the overall control of Caesar and the Empire. The use of Caesar’s coin demonstrated the allegiance that they owed to Caesar.

Having that in mind, as soon as they produced a denarius (having the value of a day’s wage to a working man) He asked them whose image and details were on the coin. Their reply could only be, ‘Caesar’s’.

**20.25 ‘And he said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” ’**

His reply was then, in that case, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”. It was a very wise reply. It was pointing out that anyone who could produce a denarius was thereby testifying to the overlordship of Caesar. It was right therefore that they rendered back to him, what they had received from him. All denarii essentially belonged to Caesar. Furthermore a good patriot should strictly not have touched a denarius with a bargepole, and so good patriots would actually have agreed with Jesus that all denarii

should be got rid of by handing them back to Caesar. Of course, if they would not touch a denarius they would have to go into hiding for non-payment of taxes, but at least they would see themselves as being kept pure. However, the moment one descended to the depths of obtaining a denarius in order to pay the tax he was by it acknowledging his debt to Caesar. And it was therefore right that he gave the hated coin back to him. Thus Jesus was both in the clear with the extreme patriots, who agreed with Him on the fact that the denarii should be handed over to Caesar, and should not be touched by any patriotic Jew, while all else belonged to God, and also with the Roman authorities, whose only concern was to be paid the denarius in poll tax.

What this did not teach was that a certain amount should be given to God, and the rest could then be looked on as ‘Caesar’s’, to be looked on as ‘secular’, and therefore usable as a man wished. It applied to a specific situation. It might, however, be seen as saying that for any benefits that we receive from the state we have an obligation to make a contribution back to them. But while that is true, it is not really what Jesus was positively teaching.

For what was of general application in what He said was the command to render “to God the things that are God’s”. The point here was that all that we have, we have received from God, and we should therefore recognise that for it we are accountable to God as His stewards. This is continuing the theme of numerous parables that we have already looked at. It is confirming that every man must give an account of himself to God with regard to his use of wealth.

20.26 ‘And they were not able to take hold of the saying before the people, and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.’

The ‘spies’ were staggered at His reply. They recognised how cleverly He had avoided their trap, while at the same time teaching something very positive. And they recognised that there was nothing in His reply that they could take hold of in order to use it to set the people against Him. He had indeed agreed that all that a man had should be dedicated to God, apart from the hated denarius which no godly person would touch. And yet that by leaving the latter open for those who wanted them to pay their tax, however reluctantly, He was preventing them coming under condemnation for doing so.

#### The Sadducees and the Resurrection (20.27-40).

Having made two attempts the Pharisees now withdrew for the time being in order to nurse their wounds. They were deeply chagrined, but unable to do anything about it. Jesus had thwarted their every move, and shown them up in the process. Now, however, came the turn of the Sadducees who were concerned about His teaching about the resurrection. And they came to Him with what may well have been a standard conundrum levelled at all who taught and believed in the resurrection from the dead.

#### Analysis.

- a ‘And there came to him certain of the Sadducees, those who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him, saying’ (27-28a).
- b “Teacher, Moses wrote to us, that if a man’s brother die, having a wife, and he be childless, his brother should take the wife, and raise up seed to his brother. There were therefore seven brothers, and the first took a wife, and died childless; and the second, and the third took her, and likewise the seven also left no children, and died. Afterward the woman also died” (28b-32).
- c “In the resurrection therefore whose wife of them shall she be? for the seven had her to wife” (33).
- d And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this world marry, and are given in marriage, but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, for neither can they die any more. (34-35).

- c “For they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (36).
- b “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the place concerning the Bush, when he calls the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him” (37-38).
- a And certain of the scribes answering said, “Teacher, you have well said.” For they dared not any more ask him any question’ (39-40).

Note that in ‘a’ the Sadducees asked Him a question, and in the parallel the Scribes say that He has ‘well said’. In ‘b’ there is a continual emphasis on death, and in the parallel a continual emphasis on the fact that the dead are raised to new life. In ‘c’ the question is as to prospects in the future life, and in the parallel those prospects are described. And centrally in ‘d’ the condition of those who enjoy the future resurrected life is described.

20.27 ‘And there came to him certain of the Sadducees, those who say that there is no resurrection,’

The Pharisees having been defeated in their attempts to discredit Jesus, the Sadducees now approached Him in order to dispute His teaching on the resurrection of the body. Like many Greeks they did not believe in such a resurrection. They did it by an appeal to levirate marriage. The principle of that is that if a man dies having no children to inherit his property, with the result that his wife is childless and has no one to care for her, His brother who lives in the same household should marry and impregnate the widow and thus produce seed to his brother’s name (see Deuteronomy 25.5-10). The child will then grow up to look after his ageing mother, and to inherit the dead brother’s inheritance. It is questionable, although not certainly so, whether levirate marriage was actually practised in New Testament days, but whether it was or not it had certainly been practised in the past, and was even more certainly spoken of in the Law.

This is the only mention of the Sadducees in Luke’s Gospel, but see Acts 4.1; 5.17; 23.6-8. They do not seem to feature in Galilee and Peraea. We can only pick up something of what their teaching was from such passages as this, and from the literature of their opponents. They appear to have founded their teaching on the first five books of the Bible (the Torah, the Books of Moses), having a secondary view of the prophets. This included the rejection of the idea of either the resurrection of the body or of the existence of angels, which they saw as the newfangled teaching of some of the Prophets (Isaiah 26.19; Daniel 12.2) and of the Pharisees. They tended to be Hellenistic and to be politically tolerant of Rome. The leading priests were in fact Sadducees.

20.28-32 ‘And they asked him, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote to us, that if a man’s brother die, having a wife, and he be childless, his brother should take the wife, and raise up seed to his brother. There were therefore seven brothers, and the first took a wife, and died childless; and the second, and the third took her, and likewise the seven also left no children, and died. Afterward the woman also died.”

His questioners cited a case where the levirate principle had been applied to seven brothers one by one, with each marrying the woman who had been left a widow by the previous brother when the previous brother died. She had thus married all seven brothers.

20.33 “In the resurrection therefore whose wife of them shall she be? for the seven had her to wife.”

Thus their question was, assuming the resurrection of the body, to which of the brothers would she belong as his wife when they were all raised again in the body? They considered that this therefore made the doctrine of the resurrection absurd.

20.34-36 ‘And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this world marry, and are given in marriage,

but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, for neither can they die any more. For they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” ’

Jesus’ reply, indicating a detailed knowledge of the afterlife which demonstrated His heavenly origin, declared that the question was based on the failure of the questioners to appreciate the truth about the afterlife. For in the afterlife there is no such thing as marriage and reproduction. Those raised from the dead at the resurrection become similar to the angels, with spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15.44), and become ‘sons of God’ (an Old Testament title used of angels - Genesis 6.2, 4; Job 1.6-2.7; 38.7) indicating their then enjoying a wholly spiritual nature and body, similar to that of God and the angels. They cannot die any more, and thus reproduction is unnecessary. They are ‘sons of the resurrection’, that is products of the results of God’s resurrection power resulting in eternal life.

‘Those who are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead.’ Jesus’ emphasises here that not all will experience resurrection to life, and enjoy the life of the age to come. Only those who will be considered fit and suitable because God counts them as worthy (e.g. Genesis 15.6) will attain to that world. (Thus not all of the seven brothers, for example, would necessarily experience it). And they will thus have become immortal, and will never again experience death, will not marry or have children, but will enjoy a similar life of immortality to that of angels enjoying their ecstasy, not in sex, but in enjoying the presence of God.

(Thus those who teach a millennial kingdom on earth have the problem of having a mixture of spiritual beings who cannot bear children, mixing with physical beings who can have children. This is not the impression given by taking all that is said in the Old Testament in its overly-literal meaning e.g. Isaiah 65.17-25).

20.37-38 “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the place concerning the Bush, when he calls the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”

Jesus then dealt with the Torah’s basis for the resurrection. In Exodus 3.6 Moses had spoken of God as ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’. But, says Jesus, God cannot be the God of the dead, for to be someone’s God they must be able to appreciate His Godhood. Thus He can only be the God of the living. That must mean that all who have truly known God, and have entered into covenant relationship with Him, must have life in Him, and are indeed seen by Him as having such life. That being so resurrection to life for His own necessarily follows so that they can fully enjoy God in this way.

Putting it another way. The dead do not praise God (Psalm 88.10; 115.7). He is not their God. So if God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob they must in some way be enjoying life, even though they have apparently died. For He is the God only of the living. There may also be solidly included in this the significance of the covenant relationship with God which was indicated by the title, ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’. God could not be seen as being in a covenant relationship, which was a deeper one than that of marriage, with those who were no more. Thus they must in some way have been alive when God spoke these words. Some of the Psalmists also actually reveal a vague belief in an afterlife on the same basis, that they could not believe that their positive and glorious relationship with God, which was in such contrast with those whose minds were set on earthly things, could cease on death (e.g. Psalm 16.9-11; 17.15; 23.6; 49.15; 73.24, see its whole context; 139.7-12, 24).

It will be noted that this teaching does away with any possible belief in reincarnation. In Jesus’ eyes there was no thought that any of them could be reincarnated. His argument indicated the opposite. Thus it is impossible to take Jesus seriously and believe in reincarnation.

**'In the Bush.'** In Jesus' day the Old Testament was split up into sections each of which had a heading. This was probably for the purpose of synagogue worship. The section headed 'the Bush' contained Exodus 3.

**20.39** 'And certain of the scribes answering said, "Teacher, you have well said."

Then certain of the Scribes, almost certainly Pharisees, who had been searching for such an argument in the Law of Moses for a long time, expressed their admiration for Jesus' argument. To move such men, who were among His opponents, demonstrated His superiority indeed.

**20.40** 'For they dared not any more ask him any question.'

And from then on no one dared to come to Him with any more questions in order to try to prove Him wrong and to discredit Him. They recognised that they had met their match.

**Jesus Himself Now Puts a Question: Who Is David's Lord? (20.41-43).**

In the chiasmus of the Section (see above) this statement, where Jesus reveals Himself as 'David's Lord', and denounces the ostentation and claims of the Rabbis who set themselves up as false deliverers, a situation in which their fleecing of widows is prominent, is paralleled with the depiction of Jesus' entry into the Temple to cleanse it as its 'Lord' (19.31, 34), and the declaration that the Temple is a 'den of Robbers (19.45-46).

The question of Jesus here would seem to be directed at a Rabbinic idea that the Christ was merely the son of David and therefore not superior to David, thus making him purely merely political and secondary. But Jesus wanted to bring out that the Messiah was not only superior to David, but was of a totally higher status. he was Lord over all. For even David addressed Him as 'my Lord', thus exalting the Messiah high above David. He leaves men to recognise how this applies to Himself.

The contrast with the Scribes is striking. Jesus, the Messiah, Who is destined shortly to receive glory, and exaltation to the chief seat from God, walks in lowliness and meekness on earth, taking on Himself the form of a servant, and eschewing wealth, awaiting His destiny, while the Scribes strut and prance around as though they were the Messiah, and seize for themselves the wealth of the vulnerable, while putting on a pretence of sanctity. For at the time when this was spoken there was a sense in which these Scribes did rule their religious world.

The reference here is to Psalm 110 which is headed 'a psalm of David'. Reference in that Psalm to the institution of 'the order of Melchizedek' (verse 4), referring to the old King of Salem in Genesis 14, may suggest that it was written not long after the capture of Jerusalem by David, when it would have been suitable for pacifying the Jebusites, and yet have come before the time when such an idea would have been looked on as heresy. In it David and his heirs were to be seen as non-sacrificing priest-kings in Jerusalem, acknowledged by the Jebusites and Jerusalemites, even if seen as priest-king nowhere else in Judah and Israel. This would have aided the assimilation of the Jebusites into the faith of Israel.

Furthermore as David considered the promise that one day his heir would rule over an everlasting Kingdom (2 Samuel 7.16) and be God's Anointed, triumphant over the all the nations of the earth (Psalm 2.8-9), it could well have raised within him a paean of praise and a declaration that this future son of his would be greater than he was himself, that he would indeed be his superior, 'my Lord'. But what matters in Jesus' use of it in this passage is not so much its background, as how the Psalm was seen in His own day (although it is clear in Mark that Jesus saw it as written by David under inspiration of the Holy Spirit - Mark 12.36).

There are good grounds for stating that this Psalm was interpreted Messianically in the pre-Christian period. This is confirmed by the Midrash on Psalm 18.36 where Psalm 110.1 is quoted by way of illustration in a Messianic sense. Later the interpretation was dropped by

the Rabbis because the Christians had taken it over. Now, says Jesus, if David wrote this Psalm with a future king in mind, now interpreted as the Messiah, then David was addressing the Messiah as 'Lord'. And indeed he was not only addressing Him as Lord but was portraying Him as God's right hand man. That being so he must have recognised the Messiah as being far superior to himself.

This receives some confirmation in that Psalm 110 is constantly quoted Messianically in the New Testament. See for example Acts 2.34 where it is cited of His ascending the throne of God as both Lord and Messiah; Hebrews 10.12 where, after offering one sacrifice for sins for ever, He 'sat down at the right hand of God'. See also Acts 7.55-56; 13:33-39; 1 Cor 15:22-28; Eph 1:19-23; Heb 1:3-14; 5--7. With regard to the Melchizedek priesthood see Hebrews 6.20; 7.17, 21.

So we may see that Jesus was here concerned to bring home to His listeners, in what was at this time His usual veiled way, that His status in fact far exceeded that of David and that He was destined to sit at God's right hand with His enemies subdued before Him (Acts 2.36) as made clear especially in Psalm 2; Isaiah 9.6-7; 11.1-4; Zechariah 14,3-4, 9.

### Analysis.

- a He said to them, "How say they that the Christ is David's son?" (41).
- b "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit you on my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet' " (42-43).
- a "David therefore calls him Lord, and how is He his son?" (44).

The comparisons are simple. In 'a' and its parallel are the questions, in 'b' is the answer.

20.41 'And he said to them, "How say they that the Christ is David's son?"

Mark has "How do the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" We must assume from this, as mentioned above, that some Rabbis, especially perhaps even with Jesus in mind, were downgrading 'the Messiah to come' into a lesser David, a mere 'son of David', in contrast with the glorious figure usually presented. Their idea may well have been someone who was subservient to the Pharisees. There were in fact many differing and varying views about the Messiah as is especially witnessed by the Dead Sea Scrolls where the Messiah of David appears in some cases to be inferior to the Messiah of Aaron. In contrast some of the apocalyptists endowed him with the highest honours.

Jesus was not by His words denying that He was the son of David, for both Matthew and Luke have already made clear in their genealogies that He was. See also 1.27, 32, 69; 2.11; 18.38, 39; Acts 13.34. What He was arguing against was the idea that that was all that He was. As we have seen earlier (on 18.38) 'Son of David' was not a prominent Messianic title at this time, even though clearly used by some, although as far as Luke is concerned it was certainly used by the blind man whose eyes were opened (18.38).

20.42-43 "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit you on my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.' "

Jesus here took the Psalm to be Davidic, as His opponents did, and His argument was based on what David had said of the coming King in his psalm. In it he had declared that the coming King Who would sit at God's right hand until all His foes were subjected to Him, was also his (David's) Lord, One Who had demonstrated Himself to be superior to David. He thus foresaw a more exalted position for Him as sitting on God's right hand in the seat of divine power and authority, until all his foes submitted to Him and were subjected before Him.

We note here how once again Luke omits the reference to the Holy Spirit included by Mark. This non-reference to the Holy Spirit is his studied purpose in these final chapters of his Gospel, ready for the transformation that will take place at the commencement of Acts.

#### **20.44 “David therefore calls him Lord, and how is he his son?”**

Now if this were the case, asks Jesus, how can He be limited to being described merely as David’s son, when He is in fact declared to be David’s Lord? Whatever else this therefore demonstrates it certainly reveals Jesus’ exalted view of His own position as Greater than David, and as One Whom He declares to all who heard Him to be ‘David’s Lord’. It thus reveals why He had the authority which gave Him the right to cleanse the Temple, which, following the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah, would be seen as a Messianic task. And all this in One Who walked humbly and graciously among men, with nowhere to lay His head. He made no attempt to ape His future glory.

#### **Jesus Warns Against The Hypocrisy Of The Pharisees and Commends The Example Of The Poor Widow (20.45-21.3).**

Having established His position over against Pharisaic teaching, Jesus now warned further against following the ways of the Pharisees, who did ape such ways. Just as in the parallel in the Section chiasmus above, the Temple was a Den of Robbers, thus condemning the chief priests, so are the Rabbis hypocritical seekers of glory in the eyes of the world, and despoilers of widows. And an example of one such widow is then given, who in spite of her poverty, gives all that she has to God, her consecration highlighting the godliness of such people in contrast with the unscrupulousness and greed of these Rabbis.

We can compare His condemnation here with that in 11.39-52, but there it was the Pharisees who received the initial assault, whereas here all was reserved for the Scribes. It will be noted that unusually for Luke, who generally avoids repetitions, there is almost a ‘repetition’ of 11.43, for there He accuses the Pharisees of loving the best seats in the synagogues and the salutations in the marketplaces, whereas here He applies the same accusations to the Scribes. Clearly He felt that this typified what they were truly like. Spiritual pride has been the downfall of far too many for it not to be taken with the deepest seriousness.

#### **Analysis.**

- a ‘And in the hearing of all the people He said to His disciples, “Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feasts” (20.45-46).
- b “Who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers” (20.47a).
- c “These will receive greater condemnation” (20.47b).
- b And he looked up, and saw the rich men who were casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw a certain poor widow casting in there two mites (21.1-2).
- a And he said, “Of a truth I say to you, This poor widow cast in more than they all, for all these did of their superfluity cast in to the gifts, but she of her want did cast in all the living that she had” (21.3).

Note that in ‘a’ the Scribes make a great show of their own importance, and in the parallel, where men continue to make a show, they are shown up in contrast with a poor widow. In ‘b’ the Scribes devour widow’s houses and yet make a pretence of sanctity by praying long prayers, and in the parallel their giving is contrasted with that of a widow who in what she is represents all whom they have despoiled. In ‘c’, and centrally, their great condemnation is declared.

#### **20.45 ‘And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples,’**

Jesus now turns to teaching His disciples, but in such a way that all the people overhear Him. It will then be up to them how they take it.

#### **20.46 “Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feasts,”**

His warning is that they beware of a particular type of Scribe of whom there were far too

many (not all Scribes could be put on the same level), the showy and ostentatious ones whom everyone noticed, and not be like them. The wearing of long robes was an indication that someone was wealthy enough not to need to work, or it may mainly have in mind special and distinctive festal garments worn on the Sabbath, or the long robes of the teacher. But whichever is in mind (and more than one may be), they were worn in order to draw attention to themselves. We know that special salutations were given to Rabbis, and a certain type of Rabbi loved going through the marketplace so that he would receive the deference that he felt was his due. And they would be offered the chief seats in the synagogues, sitting facing the ordinary worshippers (with the chief one taking 'Moses' seat' - Matthew 23.2). All this was in order to draw attention to themselves and make them feel good. They loved it. The disciples were to avoid such behaviour, and probably continued to succeed in doing so, but as the centuries went by the so-called Christian leadership would mainly go the way of the Jewish leadership. It is but a short step from deserved distinction to spiritual pride. The pride of life is regularly a huge stumblingblock that stands in the way of those who serve Christ, as it was to the Pharisees and Scribes, and if not checked it eventually produces the worst types of behaviour.

Note how all this apes the picture of the Messiah drawn in the previous passage. Their distinctive clothing, their love of being hailed, their taking of 'chief seats', their being honoured at feasts, which will be followed by their devouring of widow's houses, is all similar to the behaviour of kings. In their own way they were setting themselves up as messiahs to whom the people should look for deliverance. We are reminded of Paul's words in another context, 'You have reigned as king's without us, would to God that you did reign' (1 Corinthians 4.8).

**20.47a "Who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers."**

We do not know quite how they devoured widow's houses. They were not supposed to receive payment for teaching. But they could soon find themselves idolised, and the worst would then no doubt be open to receiving munificent gifts on some pretext, and to the misusing of hospitality offered to them, along with their friends, by fairly wealthy widows, or even less wealthy ones, until the wealth ran out. Or it may be that they wangled their way into acting in trust for widows on behalf of their deceased husbands, in the process wasting their goods like the unrighteous steward. Jesus clearly knew of a number of widows who had been impoverished by the greed of the Scribes.

Furthermore they added to their sins by ostentatious praying. While behaving in such ways they would spend much time in prayer in order to impress people with their sanctity, and pray openly in public, both in the synagogues and in the marketplaces (Matthew 6.5) and in the Temple (18.10), doing it openly and for longer periods than normal with a view to gaining people's trust. The thought among the less knowing would be that anyone who prayed like that must be trustworthy. It was only Jesus Who knew men's hearts fully for what they were.

**20.47b "These will receive greater condemnation."**

And these will receive greater condemnation because they have abused the trust given to them, and the trust that others have in them (compare 17.1-2). In what way would it be greater?

- 1). It will be greater than the condemnation of Chorazin and Bethsaida, greater than that of Capernaum (10.13-15), because they had received greater privileges and had failed to take advantage of them in order to become truly spiritual (compare 12.47).
- It will also be greater than the high estimation that they have of themselves.
- It will be greater even than their hypocrisy.

**21.1 'And he looked up, and saw the rich men who were casting their gifts into the treasury.'**

As we see from the chiasmus of the passage Luke connects the behaviour of the Scribes towards widows' possessions with the behaviour of a godly widow towards God. Here we see one whose livelihood is swallowed up, but by her own choice because of her trust in God to provide for her. And she is also here compared with the wealthy generally. We are here reminded of Jesus' words, 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingly Rule of God' (6.20).

In this case, which also connects up with the next passage, Jesus is possibly sitting with His disciples in the Temple courtyard not far from a group of trumpet shaped collection boxes placed in the wall of the court of the women for the purpose of receiving nominated contributions to various needs. Each box was for a different purpose which was clearly indicated on it. From there the gifts would make their way to the Temple strong room. Or it may be that they were seated near where the vow offerings were made, when the amount being offered would be openly stated to the officiating priest.

He noted how the rich men came along and ostentatiously 'cast' their gifts into the Treasury. This ostentation linked them with the follies of the Scribes. Or it may be that they handed them over ostentatiously, making sure that all knew what they were giving. And no doubt many were watching in admiration, including possibly the disciples, who may even have commented on particularly generous gifts.

21.2 'And he saw a certain poor widow casting in there two mites.'

But then Jesus noted a woman who cast in 'a very few lepta', the very smallest Jewish coin. The number 'two' was often used to indicate 'a very few' (compare 1 Kings 17.12). Numbers in those days tended not to be used strictly mathematically but as adjectives which were intended to convey an impression. Thus Jesus may not have known the exact amount. Although if it was a vow offering it would be declared. In this latter case we can imagine what the priest thought when he announced 'two lepta'. Even if he was a good man he would not have been moved by the thought of it. But whether it was a general gift or a vow offering, in either case Jesus knew that it was all that she had. And He was moved in His heart by how much she had given.

21.3 'And he said, "Of a truth I say to you, This poor widow cast in more than they all, for all these did of their superfluity cast in to the gifts, but she of her want did cast in all the living that she had."'

And this time it was Jesus turn to comment on the munificence of the gift, and He does it with characteristic firmness. 'Truly I say to you'. And what He wanted to point out was that while others had given out of their plenty, and would hardly notice the loss of what they had given, this 'poor widow' (the unusual adjective emphasises it) has actually given her whole living. She has cast herself on God. Thus she had given more than all the others put together, for she had given all that she had. Here was one who had done what the rich ruler had failed to do, she had given all that she had to God. Her attitude of 'giving' was in direct contrast with the 'devouring' of the Scribes. And from it we gain that important lesson, that God does not judge our giving by the amount that we give, but by the amount that we keep for ourselves. We also see in it an example of how and why it is the 'poor' to whom the Good News will come (4.18).

Prophecy Concerning the Destruction of the Temple, the Scattering of the Jews, and the Coming of the Son of Man (21.5-36).

This passage connects with the last in that the disciples begin to discuss the offerings that had resulted in the building of the glorious Temple which they could see before them, first as they left the Temple, and then as they sat on the Mount of Olives (Marl 13.3-4). These had been great indeed. Tens of thousand of people who flocked to the Temple would be amazed and awed at the splendour of the gifts made to the Temple by the very wealthy. It was one of the wonders of the world. The disciples had been amazed and awed when they had first seen it, and they were equally amazed and awed every time they came to Jerusalem and saw it. It had

that kind of splendour that no provincial ever got used to.

Luke here wants us to contrast this amazement at the glory of the gifts of the wealthy with Jesus amazement at the glory of the gift of the widow. Note indeed the contrasts within these verses, which Luke has deliberately associated together:

- 1). Certain of the Scribes devour widow's houses.
- 2). The rich toss into the temple treasury of their abundance.
- 3). The poor widow gives all that she has.
- 4). Jesus admires the giving of the widow. She has laid up treasure in Heaven.
- 5). The disciples admire the giving of the rich who display their gifts.
- 6). Jesus declares that the Gentiles will devour the Temple.

So Jesus tells His disciples to look well at the gifts displayed on the Temple. And that these splendid gifts, admired by all, will in fact be pulled down along with the stonework of the Temple until not one stone is left on another, (while the few lepta of the widow will go on for ever and be remembered in the Day when those who are Christ's receive their reward). It was the sight of the Temple, shining in the sun as they were leaving, that drew the admiring comments from the disciples, and the same splendour as they looked at it from the Mount of Olives (Mark 13.3-4) that made them ask when it would happen, but Luke mentions none of this. He continues the discourse without mentioning the change of place because he wishes a direct contrast to be made with the gift of the widow and for it to be closely connected with the Temple ministry (21.1-4, 37). He wants his readers to see that the Temple is being given its warning.

It is difficult to overstress the splendour of the Temple. It was a huge edifice built on top of the Temple mount. Its building commenced in 19 BC and the main structure was completed within ten years, but the finishing touches went on and were still in progress at this time, not being finished until 64 AD (just in time for its destruction). It was enclosed by a wall of massive stone blocks, each block on average about 1 metre high and five metres long. The front of the Temple was covered in gold plating that shone brilliantly in the sun, and its stones were of glistening white marble. There were stones in the Temple measuring 20 metres by 2.5 metres by 2.25 metres (68 feet by 9 feet by 7.5 feet), while the Temple area itself was about 450 metres (1450 feet) by 300 metres (950 feet). All was on a vast scale. The large outer court, the Court of the Gentiles, which surrounded the inner courts and the Sanctuary on three sides, was surrounded by porticoes built on huge pillars. It was in these colonnades that Rabbis held their schools and debates (Luke 2.46), and the Temple trading took place (11.15). It would be here that the early church came together for worship.

Steps leading up to the first inner court, the court of the women, demonstrate that it was at a higher level than the outer court. This court was surrounded by balustrades on which were posted the signs warning death to any Gentile who trespassed within. (Two of these inscriptions have been discovered). Beyond this balustrade was the Court of the Women, through which men had to go to reach the court of Israel, and in which were found the thirteen trumpets for collection of funds for the Treasury. A further court, raised above the court of the women, and reached by further steps, was the Court of Israel, and beyond that again was the Priests' Court which contained the great Altar built of unhewn stone.

Within that Court, raised above all, was the holy shrine itself, entered through a porch that was 100 cubits high and 100 cubits wide (a cubit was 44.45 centimetres or 17.5 inches). The doorway that gave entry was 40 cubits high and 20 cubits wide, and another door, half the size, led into the Holy Place. This was 40 cubits long and 20 cubits wide, and separated from the Most Holy Place by doors over which hung a curtain (the veil). The Most Holy Place was 20 cubits square and 40 cubits high. But the height of the sanctuary was increased by an additional empty room above it which raised the height of the whole to 100 cubits.

**Josephus described the holy shrine and its magnificence thus. 'Now the outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look on it turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for as to those parts of it which were not gold they were exceeding white.' Some of these great white stones have been unearthed within the last decade.**

**This was the magnificence that so drew the attention of the disciples as they left the Temple, and then gazed at it from the Mount of Olives (Mark 13.3-4). They had seen it before but they never ceased to marvel at its massiveness and splendour, and as the sun went down they were again struck by the sight of it and began to discuss its marvellous stonework of massive white stones, and the glistening gold of the offerings made by Herod and others that shone in the sun. It drew a sense of wonder from their hearts. And these gifts had been made by great and powerful men. They never ceased being filled with awe. No wonder the widow's lepta seemed unimportant to all but Jesus. But Jesus saw it totally differently, for He knew it all for what it was.**

**So Luke deliberately make his introduction less personal and explanatory, and less detailed than the other Gospels. He wants all concentration to be on the message, and he wants attention to be maintained on the Temple (21.37). So while he nowhere contradicts Mark about where the questions and the speech took place, he is simply silent on the matter, thus intentionally linking the words directly with the Temple.**

**It is clear that in this speech Luke is not only calling on Mark, but also on one or more other sources, and it is interesting that if the identifiable Marcan extracts are removed the discourse is still on the whole a conjoined whole, hinting at this use of another source or sources. That is why he can give us words of Jesus omitted by Mark. Mark seeks to make his version of the speech (a speech which was probably a lot longer and more detailed than either Mark or Luke) carry straight through from the sacking of Jerusalem and the arrival of the Desolating Abomination, to the final coming of the Son of Man, so as to link the two, the initial judgment, which ends with the coming of the Desecrating Desolator, the great Beast of Daniel, being seen as followed by the final judgment and the coming of the glorious Son of Man. But Luke makes clear that there is a period of time of unknown dimension between the two, what Jesus calls 'the times of the Gentiles' (verse 24). Revelation will later depict this in terms of 'a thousand years' (20.4-7), a long period of unknown length which is within the perfection of God's plan, when the martyred people of God will also reign with Jesus above.**

**But the first three Gospels all make clear that there must be some considerable delay before His coming, although none can know how long. And during this period Jesus makes clear that there will be world catastrophes, 'worldwide' preaching of the Good News including persecution, and then the defiling of the Temple. It is only when these have taken place that the Son of Man will come.**

**The passage that now follows divides strictly into two. The first part deals with the answer to the question of the disciples, in response to His comment about what was to happen to the Temple (21.5-24). The second part deals with the final coming of the Son of Man (21.25-38). In the Section chiasmus the first part of this passage (21.5-24) is paralleled by Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (19.41-44). That parallels the destruction of Jerusalem as described here. The second part of this passage (21.25-36) parallels His triumphal coming to Jerusalem on an ass (19.28-40). The entry in Kingly humility on the ass thus parallels the coming of the Son of Man in glory. Jerusalem had refused to receive Him. A desolated Jerusalem would welcome His return.**

**The first part (21.5-24) then divides into three parts, the troubles coming on the world found**

in verses 8-11, the persecution of God's true people and the opportunity to be a testimony through it (including in Mark the proclamation of the Good News to all nations) which is found in verses 12-19, and the taking of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews among the nation found in verses 20-24.

Because of his readership and his background Luke is more wary of how he presents Jesus' words about the coming destruction of the Temple than Mark or Matthew, for he wants his readers to understand. Instead of speaking of the 'Desolating Abomination', a phrase pregnant with significance to Jews, but meaningless to Gentiles, he paraphrases it in terms of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies (accompanied by their idolatrous insignias) which will bring about its desolation. Alternately we may see it as signifying that he is quoting further words of Jesus, which Jesus gave in explanation of the phrase 'desolating abomination' (or 'the desecration that appals') not recorded by Mark and Matthew. But the ideas are actually the same. The Desolating Abomination in the time of the Maccabees, described in Daniel 11.31 and extended into the future in Daniel 9.27, from which the phrase comes, had been the result of Antiochus Epiphanes, together with his armies, surrounding Jerusalem and desecrating the Temple. That Luke's description in verse 20 does actually refer to the same thing as Mark 13.14; Matthew 24.15 is clear when we make a verse by verse comparison of Luke with Matthew and Mark which we will consider when we come to it.

We note now how Luke, with consummate skill, takes his sources and moulds them into one in the form of a chiasmus, in the way we have constantly seen him do previously, while yet still remaining faithful to the words of Jesus. That these are actually the words of Jesus comes out in the fact that these magnificent words require their author to be a magnificent personality, and as this magnificence is found in the passage in all the first three Gospels it is clearly not that of the writers. It must be found in it being the words of One Who stood out among His generation, along with His other words elsewhere that bear the same stamp. (Comparison with other writings reveals how distinctive Jesus' style was. He spoke as none other spoke). We will now analyse the chiasmic construction of the speech.

#### Analysis of 21.5-28.

- a As some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, He said (5).
- b "As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in which there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (6).
- c They asked him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things be? and what will be the sign when these things are about to occur?" (7).
- d 'And he said, "Take heed that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he', and, 'The time is at hand', do not go after them. And when you shall hear of wars and tumults, be not terrified, for these things must necessarily come about first, but the end is not immediately" (8-9).
- e Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in many and various places famines and pestilences, and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven" (10-11).
- f "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you, and will persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake" (12).
- g "It will turn out to you for a testimony" (13).
- h "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to withstand or to gainsay" (14-15).
- i "But you will be delivered up even by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and some of you they will cause to be put to death" (16).
- h "And you will be hated of all men for my name's sake, and not a hair of your head

- will perish” (17-18).
- g “In your patience endurance you will win your souls” (19).
  - f “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand, then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of her depart out, and let not those who are in the countryside enter into it” (20-21).
  - e “For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (22).
  - d “Woe to those who are with child and to those who are breast-feeding in those days! For there will be great distress on 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 trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (23-24).
  - c “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows, men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (25-26).
  - b “And then will they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (27).
  - a “But when these things begin to come about, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (28).

We note that in ‘a’ the disciples look up at the ‘goodly stones’ and ‘offerings’ of the Temple, the centre of Jewish worship and deliverance, and in the parallel in complete contrast they are to lift up their heads, watching for their coming redemption and deliverance from above. They are to seek the things which are above where He will shortly be seated at the right hand of God (22.69), setting their minds on things above and not on things on the earth (Colossians 3.1-2). In ‘b’ the things that they now see will be thrown down so that not one stone will be left on another, and in the parallel the Son of Man will come with power and great glory, for it is He Who replaces the glory of the Temple (John 2.18-21). In ‘c’ they ask Him for signs, and in the parallel signs are given. In ‘d’ will come false dawns to Jerusalem and Israel, and rumours of dreadful things, and in the parallel come the reality of those warnings and the news that rather than the coming of dawn, it is darkness that is coming on Jerusalem and Israel. In ‘e’ are outlined the dreadful things coming on the world, and in the parallel reference is made to the days of vengeance. In ‘f’ is outlined the future tribulation for the disciples, and in the parallel future tribulation for Jerusalem when the Roman armies invade (called in Matthew, with its aftermath, ‘great tribulation’). In ‘g’ the tribulation of the disciples will be a testimony, both to men and God, and in the parallel through their patient endurance they will win their inner life. In ‘h’ they will be provided with the means to withstand their adversaries in court, something which they will require, for in the parallel they will be hated of all men for His name’s sake. And in ‘i’, centrally to what they would now have to face in the future are given the consequences for them, and the warning that they will be hated by family and friends, and some will even be put to death. For this is all a sign of the fire that is now coming on the earth that will revolutionise their future (12.52-53 with 49), and bring about all that is being described.

As we have previously observed the passage may now be seen as divided into two main parts (with the first part divided into three), the two parts describing first the coming future judgment on Jerusalem, prior to the scattering of the Jews in Jerusalem throughout the world, which came about in 70 AD and what followed, and secondly the glorious appearing of the Son of Man. They are separated by ‘the times of the Gentiles’.

#### The Coming Destruction Of The Temple (21.5-24).

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD is now for us a simple fact of history of which today many are unaware, and most see it as almost an irrelevance, but its implications

were in fact huge for us all. To the disciples, and the Jews of Jesus' day, and in fact to the whole history of the Christian world, its significance was certainly immense. For the Temple was seen by many Jews, and even by large numbers of Christian Jews, both those in Palestine and those scattered around the world, as the indestructible centre of the world and of all true worship, and its destruction therefore was seen as shaking the very foundations of the world.

But what its destruction did accomplish was to free those who still looked to the Temple from its powerful grip. From the time of its destruction all Christians together, both former Jew and former Gentile, could concentrate their attention and their thoughts on the One Who had replaced the Temple, on Jesus Christ Himself, through Whom alone we can come to God. As Jesus had said, 'the time is coming when neither on this mountain (Gerizim) or in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. --- But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him' (John 4.21, 23).

So as the powerful words that follow demonstrate to all, it was God's purpose to destroy it as His purposes moved forward among the nations, and it is made clear here that He would do it in order to replace it with the promise of the coming of the Son of Man from Heaven and with the testimony of His disciples pointing to Him on earth. His message throughout all Jesus' words here is this, let all men therefore now look, not to the Temple, but to the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom the Apostles will give their testimony (verse 13), and Who will come again in glory (verse 27) to bring about the final redemption of His own (verse 28). For the Temple is now of the past.

#### Introductory words.

21.5 'And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, he said,'

Luke is deliberately vague about where and to whom these words were spoken. He does not want to move attention away from the Temple area, nor specifically restrict the words to the disciples. He wants it to be seen that these words were finally meant for all, and link them as closely as possible to the Temple in which Jesus has and will spend His last days.

#### Excursus on The Temple.

Luke's treatment of the Temple and Jerusalem is fascinating. He closely links it with Jesus' birth, (although the birth itself takes place outside it), as He is seen as it were to come from it, as we now discover, in order to replace it (1-2; John 2.18-21) as Samuel did of old (1 Samuel 1-4 with 1 Samuel 7.15-17). It is closely linked with these last days prior to His death as He comes there as God's Servant (Acts 4.27) to be examined as God's perfect sacrifice, ready for the offering of Himself outside the camp (23.26-31; Hebrews 13.11-14), and its final destruction (13.34-35; 19.41-44; 21.5-24; 23.28-31). In the first part of Acts (1-6, mentioned eleven times, followed by silence) it is closely linked with the first outreach of the church, although deliberately not mentioned in Acts 2 so that the 'birth' of the church might be seen as from above, and it is then seen as rejected, first in the defence of Stephen (Acts 7.48-49; compare 17.24), and then by its treatment of Paul (in Acts 21-24 it is mentioned ten times), once Paul has been ejected from its doors (Acts 21.30). The Good News, having first gone out from Jerusalem (Acts 1-12) in fulfilment of the idea in Isaiah 2.2-4, will then go out from a replacement of the Temple, which is found in those appointed by the Spirit to carry forth His word, the church of Christ as symbolised by the church in Syrian Antioch - Acts 13.1 onwards. This will be the result of the Lord coming in power to Jerusalem (Isaiah 52.7; Mark 9.1; Luke 22.69; 24.49) and the Apostles going out to the world bearing figuratively 'the vessels of the Lord', now to be made available to the whole world (Isaiah 52.11-12, see our commentary on Isaiah). The Servant will take out light to the nations (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6). The difference is that in Acts Luke depicts the Spirit as transferring His effective working to

Antioch, because Jerusalem had again accepted a false and blasphemous king (Acts 12). From now on in the New Testament the true Temple and the true Jerusalem is seen to be above (Acts 7.48-49 with 55-56), although present on earth in His true people as part of the corporate Servant (Acts 13.47) and as bearer of the Good News. The earthly Temple and the earthly Jerusalem are replaced by the heavenly Temple and the heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4.26-27; Hebrews 12.22-24; and in Revelation constantly, for in Revelation 11, as the description of it makes clear, the 'Temple' there is the true people of God in Jerusalem, not a building. See our commentary on Revelation), of which in Christ the people of God on earth are a part by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3.16; 2 Corinthians 6.16-18).

End of Excursus.

The goodly stones and offerings have already been mentioned above. The huge white stones and marble columns, the glistening gold plating and special 'gifts' such as the huge vine of pure gold whose clusters were each as tall as a man, gripped all by their splendour, and looking from the Mount of Olives, possibly while the sun was setting and making all shine with radiant light, we can understand why it impressed the disciples. It looked indestructible, and glorious. Only Jesus' heart was filled with the thought of that hugely costly gift of the poor widow, which surpassed all the others. And when He heard their admiration for the Temple He clearly felt it necessary for them to see that their minds should be on other things, rather than on a Temple which would shortly be destroyed. Their glorying in the Temple was all a part of their failure to see things from the right perspective.

21.6 "As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in which there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down."

And so He informed them that days were coming when the temple would be torn down, with not one stone to be left on another, just as it had been in the days of Jeremiah among the rubble of the houses (2 Chronicles 36.19; Jeremiah 7.12-14; Lamentations 4.1). God would repeat His judgments upon it as He had promised in the book of Daniel would happen once the Messiah had been cut off (Daniel 9.26). Interestingly there is little in these words of Jesus from verses 8-24 which has not already been clearly depicted by the prophets in the Old Testament as coming on the world in the future. His genius lies in bringing it all together.

21.7 'And they asked him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things be? and what shall be the sign when these things are about to occur?"'

Revealing their typical Jewishness his hearers then asked when these things would be and what would be the signs that introduced their occurrence. In context they were asking about the destruction of the Temple and the casting down of its stones and gifts. Jesus' reply is quite vivid. The signs that signify its end will not be the political or natural events of great magnitude which are coming (verses 8-11), nor will it be the tribulations that they themselves will have to face (verses 12-19). The first sign of it will be when Jerusalem is being surrounded by armies (verse 20), when it will be almost too late for anyone to do anything about it, although those who foresee it happening can flee (verses 21-22), as the early Jerusalem church seems to have done. This should warn us too against seeking special signs of the second coming. The sign of that also is clear. The sign will be the glory that accompanies His arrival (verse 27). So that will also be too late for anyone to do anything about. He will have come when least expected 'like a thief in the night'.

'Teacher.' This is a general standard method of addressing Jesus used by all types. It is an idea seen as applying to Him in connection with the Apostles (6.40); and is used by people of all kinds who approached Him (7.40; 8.49; 9.38; 10.25; 11.45; 12.13; 18.18; 19.39; 20.21, 28, 39; 22.11). Luke's desire is to make the questioners anonymous so that all can apply it to themselves.

Violent Political Events and Natural Catastrophes Will Not Be Signs of The Coming

## Destruction of The Temple, Nor Of The Coming Of The Son of Man (21.8-11).

Despite the warning of these verses each succeeding generation has among it some who have a huge interest in pointing to 'the signs of the times'. But while all these signs are reminders along the way, and an encouragement to persevere when they occur, they had all already occurred in 1st century AD, which was a tumultuous century, and would continue to occur century by century. And such signs have been pointed to again and again over the last two hundred years as indications of the nearness of the end. But as Jesus warned, they must not be seen as necessarily indicating the close of the age. They are reminders that it is coming, but not necessarily indicators of the end. 'The time is not (necessarily) yet', for when it does come, it will come with the suddenness and unexpectedness of a thief in the night, 'in such an hour as you think not' (Matthew 24.44).

21.8 'And he said, "Take heed that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he', and, 'The time is at hand', do not go after them." '

The first thing that His people will have to beware of is those who will arise saying, 'I am the one' in the name of the Messiah, or who will say 'the time is at hand'. The warning was very necessary as such things did happen in the first two centuries AD. While we know of only one who was actually officially proclaimed as the Messiah, Bar Kokhba, 'Son of the Star' (around 135 BC), who rebelled at the prospect of the building of a heathen city and temple on the site of the old city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, when Jewish Christians were persecuted for not being willing to follow him, we know of a number who were claimed as having special status, and were probably thought of by their followers in Messianic terms, including some in the last days of Jerusalem (66-70 AD), such as for example - John of Giscala, Simon Bar Giora, and Eleazar, Simon's son. There was certainly sufficient fanaticism about for it to be so (all we know about it is Josephus' watered down version, and he would not wish to raise the spectre of Messianic claimants. He wanted to please the emperor).

Among others who made special claims, some of whom arose even earlier, there were:

- A Samaritan 'prophet' who claimed that he would produce the ancient Temple vessels, and whose followers were slaughtered by Pilate on Mount Gerizim in 35 AD.
- A second Theudas, possibly the descendant of the Theudas mentioned in Acts 5.36, who gathered a large number of followers and promised that the Jordan would open before him, only for his followers to be slaughtered and dispersed, with himself being beheaded (c.44-46 AD).
- A Jewish Egyptian prophet (Acts 21.38) who assembled a large gathering in the wilderness, promising that the walls of Jerusalem would collapse at his approach and that the Roman garrison would be destroyed. His insurrection was, however, quashed almost before it had begun, although the Egyptian prophet escaped (around 54 AD).
- Another unnamed 'prophet' who gathered people in the wilderness, in the time of the Roman governor Festus, promising redemption and deliverance from all evils, and who was again violently crushed (around 60 AD).
- Later still Lucias/Andreas aroused the Jews in Cyrene and its surrounds in the time of Trajan, destroying many heathen temples, and being seen as 'king' by his followers and even by a number of Egyptians (around 116 AD).
- And around the same time we know that there were further insurrectionists in Palestine.

These all come to our attention because they were figures involved in direct military action taken by the Romans against them. Some almost certainly saw them as 'messiahs'. But John tells us that others also arose as false 'christs' (antichrists, those who set themselves up over against Christ), teaching heresy, and proving that it was 'the last hour', so that John could speak of them as antichrists (1 John 2.18).

Indeed at times of such religious ferment, with expectations running high, we can be confident that such claims were made or applied constantly by some of the common people to different figures who arose, and as quickly fell. We can compare how some did it with Jesus without really knowing the truth about Him (e.g. John 6.14-15; 7.41). Such 'messiahs' are depicted in Revelation 6.2 in terms of a horseman on a white horse (see our commentary on Revelation). The warning to Christians therefore was not to follow any who were like them, for in the nature of what He was about to say, none could be the Christ.

'In My name.' This could mean 'in the name of the Messiah' or 'in the name of Jesus'. For the latter compare Acts 19.13, and the later Gnostic heresies. 'I am the one' indicates 'the coming one' of whatever variety or hue. 'The time is at hand (or 'has drawn near')', is a warning against alarmists, whether first or twenty first century ones. For the legitimate use of this idea compare Revelation 1.3; 22.10. Jesus' implication behind all this is that there will be quite some interval before He returns. For He is going into a far country from which He will not return too soon (18.12). Compare here 17.23; Mark 13.8, 21-23; Matthew 24.8, 23, 26.

21.9 "And when you shall hear of wars and tumults, be not terrified, for these things must necessarily come about first, but the end is not immediately."

He then emphasises that as well as messiahs and deliverers there would also occur wars and 'tumults' (or 'civil wars', compare James 3.16. See Isaiah 19.2). But He makes clear that such things must be expected in view of what man is, and that they must therefore not be terrified by them into thinking that the end of the world was approaching. In Old Testament prophecy war is regularly indicated as resulting in and from 'the Day of the Lord' (the time when the Lord acts decisively), but it is always difficult in the prophets to separate these from the wars constantly prophesied there, and they prophesied local as well as far off 'days of the Lord'. In the New Testament 'the last days' were introduced by the coming of Christ, and His death and resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.16-21). Thus all that it really prophesies is war, war, war, which, with lulls, will rise and fall in intensity until the consummation.

These events are depicted in Revelation 6.3-4 in terms of a horseman on a red horse, and the greater detail of this is now outlined.

21.10 "Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,"

'Then he said to them.' This may indicate that there had been a lull in the conversation (it does not appear in Mark, but Luke's careful enquiry may have elicited the need for it from his witness). Or it may be with the intention of heightening the effect of what follows, as Jesus moves from relatively local situations to worldwide ones.

He now pointed out that wars between nations must be expected in the normal course of events (compare 2 Chronicles 15.5-6). They have always taken place, and they always will. This is something that the first century onwards, through to the twenty first century, have constantly made clear. The first century was a century of war and disasters, and it is doubtful if there has been any time in all the ensuing centuries when there have not been wars somewhere in the world, wars which were devastating and appeared like the end of the world, and was for many of those involved.

21.11 "And there will be great earthquakes, and in many and various places famines and pestilences, and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."

And along with wars will come natural events, great earthquakes, famines, pestilences, terrors and portentous signs in the heavens. These will all be reminders that Christ is coming whenever they occur, but are not to be seen as evidence of His imminent return. Rather they are to be seen as evidence of God's continuing anger against the sin of man. Compare for 'earthquakes' Isaiah 13.13; 29.6; Haggai 2.6; Zechariah 14.4; Revelation 6.12; 8.5; and

regularly. For famines (loimoi) and pestilences (limoi) (note the play on words) compare Ezekiel 14.12, 19, 21; Jeremiah 15.2; Amos 4.6-10. For portents in the heavens compare Isaiah 13.10; 34.4; 51.6; Ezekiel 32.7-8; Joel 2.10, 31; Amos 8.9. Jesus had a wide background on which to draw. It is interesting that Josephus describes such signs and portents as having preceded the fall of Jerusalem, signs such as a 'tailed star', or comet, which resembled a sword which stood over the city for a considerable time. Events like these are all represented in Revelation in terms of the horsemen on black and pale coloured horses (Revelation 6.5-8) followed by vivid effects in the heavens (Revelation 6.12-14).

Tacitus, a first century Roman historian, after referring to the horrors and calamities, and disasters and portents, of the period, went on to say 'never has it been better proved, by such terrible disasters to Rome, or by such clear evidence, that the gods were concerned, not with our safety but with vengeance on our sins.' Thus he too saw the 1st century AD as a century of disasters. These included among others not only continued warfare, but also serious famines in the times of Claudius and Nero, a great earthquake in Phrygia in about 61 AD, and the later eruption of Vesuvius which buried Pompeii and neighbouring towns. It was fitting that it was in such a century that God sent His Son into the world.

We can see in these verses a picture of the whole history of nations. This is history as we know it, and there has been no century in which such things have not occurred, from the first to the last, including portents in the heavens, and a world which has seemed upside down. They are intended to be like a fire alarm practise, saying, 'Be ready for when I come, even though you do not know when it will be'.

#### The Coming Ministry of the Apostles And Its Consequences (21.12-19).

Meanwhile, while all these things are going on, the Apostles and those who follow them must be involved in testimony to the world, and must recognise that they will face hatred and persecution because they are His (see John 15.18-19; 16.1-3; Acts 8.1; 9.1 and regularly for Paul throughout Acts).

21.12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you, and will persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake."

"But before all these things." Mark omits this, probably because Peter did not include it in his summary of the speech, but Luke is concerned to ensure that we recognise that this would happen from the very beginning, as he makes clear in Acts 1-12, and having questioned his other witnesses carefully, feels that he can introduce these words as genuine words of Jesus. For these things will commence immediately after His resurrection and enthronement.

Jesus here assumes their future ministry, and reveals that as a result of it they will face persecution (Mark 13.10 makes their future ministry plain). He declares that His followers must expect to be taken hold of by men's hands, to be persecuted, to be delivered up to synagogues and prisons, and to be brought before kings and governors, for His name's sake. For if such people do it to Him they can be sure that they will do it to them (John 15.18-21). The fulfilment of all this Luke will depict clearly throughout Acts. And all this will happen 'for His name's sake', that is, because they are representing themselves as His and are going out in His name. And it will go on happening.

Synagogues are specially mentioned because they had as part of their responsibility the disciplining of heretical or openly sinful Jews, which would be done by beatings (compare Mark 13.9). Many early Christian Jews were no doubt subjected to such beatings because of their open testimony for Christ. The references to imprisonment, and being brought before kings and governors was a declaration of the wider nature of the future ministry of the Apostles. For examples of such beatings see Acts 22.19; see also 5.40; 16.22-23; for examples of imprisonment see Acts 4.3; 5.18; 8.3; 9.2; 16.23-24; etc. For being brought before kings and

governors see especially Paul's experiences in the last part of Acts, following on Jesus' own experiences of both in 23.1-25.

**21.13 "It will turn out to you for a testimony."**

But none of these things should disturb them, for it will result in their being able to testify before men concerning Him. It will be a part of their overall testimony. It will also result in the end in their being testified to by Him before the Father (12.8). Note that Luke here omits Mark 13.10 (the Good News will be preached to all nations, compare Romans 1.5) because he is concerned to keep the emphasis on their suffering for Christ's sake, but the idea behind the words is necessarily assumed in order for the persecutions to take place. 'All nations' in those early days would be seen as signifying all known nations. And later Luke is at pains to point out that even at Pentecost itself there were people from 'every nation under heaven' (Acts 2.5). We can compare also Romans 1.8, where Paul is able to say 'your faith is proclaimed in all the world'. Their 'world' was not as large as ours.

**21.14-15 "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to prepare in detail beforehand on how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to withstand or to gainsay."**

When such things occur they will not need to prepare clever defences beforehand. (It was usual to prepare long and verbose speeches along with suitable gestures in order to impress the court). For they are assured that Jesus will Himself at that time give them a mouth and wisdom which none will be able to prove wrong or rebut. We note again here Luke's deliberate omission of reference to the Holy Spirit in accordance with his pattern in this last part of the Gospel (but for such an idea compare Mark 13.11; and see Luke 12.12; Matthew 10.20). Instead note how Jesus Himself will be with them in His risen power, as in Matthew 28.20.

'I will give you a mouth and wisdom.' Compare here God's promise to Moses, 'I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say' (Exodus 4.12). Then He promised that Aaron would be his mouth (Exodus 4.16). The whole of Exodus 4.10-16 is worthy of study in this connection, the difference being that the persecuted Christian will have Christ standing with him rather than just Aaron. Compare Acts 6.10 where the hearing 'could not withstand the Spirit and wisdom with which he (Stephen) spoke'.

**21.16 "But you will be delivered up even by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and some of you they will cause to be put to death."**

The evidence of Jesus' fire being cast on earth is now forthcoming (compare 12.53 with 49). Even their own families and friends will betray them as Christians, denouncing them to the authorities and taking action against them. Note how this statement is central in the chiasmus of the passage. It is the very heart of what they will have to face in the future in preparation for His coming. Jesus did not water down the cost of following Him. 'Some of you', that is, of those who have been closely attendant on Him in His life.

**21.17 "And you will be hated of all men for my name's sake."**

And all this will happen to them because for His sake they will be hated by all men. By 'all men', of course, He means the generality of mankind. In contrast with the love of Christians for one another, and the general tolerance of society, they will always be open to hatred at any time, a hatred aroused by false fervour and the activities of wicked men, and which once aroused will affect the majority (compare Acts 13.50; 14.5, 19; 17.13; 19.28-29). They will never be able to be sure of how the world will react against them. That is why they will be ill-treated in the synagogues, put in prison, and brought before kings and governors. Beginning in Acts all this happened both in Judea and elsewhere. Indeed in the first two centuries it was often at the instigation of the Jews that it happened (compare Revelation 2.9; 3.9), until they

at length in later centuries in their turn became the persecuted.

Jews today try to paint over the part played by their leaders in the death of Christ, and their own behaviour to Christians in the first two centuries after Christ when they often acted as informers in a way that resulted in many Christian martyrdoms and imprisonments, preferring to concentrate on their own later persecution by so-called Christians. But any persecution, whether by Jews or by Christians, is totally indefensible, and both broke God's Law. Each was equally heinous. For whether Jews love us, or hate us, we must certainly love them, for Christ's sake, if not always for their own, and they are supposed to do the same (Leviticus 19.34).

21.18 "And not a hair of your head will perish."

But Jesus' final guarantee to His own was that not a hair of their heads would perish (compare 12.7; Acts 27.34). This was not intended to be taken literally, indeed could not be, for the number of our hairs is not fixed, and when we lose them they perish. The saying was probably proverbial. The point was that at the resurrection every hair would still be in place, even though they had been burned or had been ground to powder or had decayed in the grave. Eternally they were totally secure. That is why they did not need to fear those who could only kill the body (12.4), but could not prevent every hair from surviving. This is confirmed by the next verse which also has in mind eternity.

21.19 "In your patience endurance you will win your souls."

Note how in the chiasmus this statement parallels the earlier "It will turn out to you for a testimony" (verse 13). By their patient endurance as they gave testimony to Him and endured persecution they would gain in its fullest realisation the eternal life that they have received through Jesus. They will not lose their souls (12.5; see especially Mark 8.36). So the essence of these verses is twofold. The dreadful persecutions that must be faced and the certain security of all who are in Christ.

The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple And The Scattering of the Jerusalemites (in the Great Tribulation Mentioned by Matthew) (21.20-24).

The only sign that will be given of the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple will be the approaching foreign armies ('standing where they ought not' - Mark 13.14). That will be sufficient warning to those who will take heed. In the event Galilee was the first to be invaded, and eventually Tiberius was invested. Ample warning was therefore given to Judea and Jerusalem, and those who heeded it survived, including the Jerusalem church which fled to Pella.

In view of the diverse views held by many on this passage we will first consider it in contrast with Mark, setting the two side by side.

-----LUKE-----MARK-----

*But when you see Jerusalem-----But when you shall see the desolating abomin-  
surrounded with armies, then know-----ation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet,  
that her desolation is at hand. Then-----standing where it ought not, then  
let those who are in Judaea flee to-----let those who are in Judaea flee to  
the mountains, and let those who-----the mountains, and let him who is on the  
are in the midst of her depart out,-----housetop not go down into the house, nor enter  
and let not those who are in the-----into it to take anything out of the house, and let  
countryside enter into it. For these-----not those who are in the country not turn back  
are days of vengeance, that all things-----again to take up his garment,  
which are written may be fulfilled.  
Woe to those who are with child and-----but woe to those who are with child and  
to those who are breast-feeding in-----to those who are breast-feeding in*

*those days!*-----*those days!* And pray you that your flight is not  
-----in the winter.

For there will be great distress on the----For in those days shall be tribulation (Matthew -  
land, and wrath to this people. And-----great tribulation) such as was not from the beg-  
they will fall by the edge of the-----inning of creation which God created unto this  
sword, and will be led captive into-----time, nor shall be. And except the Lord had  
all the nations, and Jerusalem will be----shortened those days, no flesh would be saved,  
trodden down of the Gentiles, until-----but for the elect's sake whom he has chosen he  
the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. ----has shortened the days.

-----And then if any man shall say to you, lo here is  
-----Christ, or lo he is there, believe him not. For  
-----false Christs and false prophets will rise and will  
-----show signs and wonders, to deceive if it were  
-----possible even the elect. But take heed, behold I  
-----have told you all things. But in those days, after  
-----that tribulation

And there will be signs in sun and-----the sun will be darkened and the moon will not  
moon and stars, and on the earth-----give her light, and the stars of heaven will fall,  
distress of nations, in perplexity for  
the roaring of the sea and the  
billows, men fainting for fear, and  
for expectation of the things which  
are coming on the world.

*For the powers of the heavens will be---and the powers that are in heaven will be  
shaken. -----shaken.*

*And then shall they see the Son of -----And then shall they see the Son of  
man coming in a cloud with power-----man coming in the clouds with great power  
and great glory.-----and glory.*

Comparison between the two demonstrates broad agreement and some important differences. Instead of Luke's 'But when you see Jerusalem surrounded with armies, then know, that her desolation is at hand.' Mark has 'But when you shall see the desolating abomination, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not'. At first sight these might appear wildly different statements. But the initial 'desolating abomination' in Daniel did surround Jerusalem with armies preparatory to the desecration of the Temple, by the offering of a pig on the altar (Daniel 11.31), and Daniel also forecast that some such thing would occur again (Daniel 9.26-27). 'Standing where it ought not' clearly signifies, to a Jew, the surrounding of God's holy city and the temple, which was certainly where no idolatrous symbols ought to be, and the 'desolating abomination' is precisely how the Roman legions with their idolatrous eagles to which they offered sacrifices, and their intent to bring about the desolation of Jerusalem and raise it to the ground, would have been described. Thus Luke's version is either his own 'paraphrase' used in order to enable his readers to understand what was being indicated, by the 'desolating abomination standing where it ought not', or Jesus' own explanation given in His own words, tacked on by Him to the more ambiguous statement in order to explain more fully what He meant, possibly following the words 'let him who reads (what Daniel says) understand' (Mark 13.14). Mark's version with its Old Testament reference is clearly in itself original, but Luke may also be citing original words given in explanation, remembered by another eyewitness.

The fact that in both cases the warning is addressed to those in Judea and that escape is possible by fleeing into the mountains indicates a local situation, and the slight differences in explaining who is to flee may again be Luke's paraphrase to his Gentile readers who may not all have known about steps leading down from flat rooftops, or may be an indication that

**Jesus' more expansive statement has been abbreviated in both cases.**

**Mark then drops out the reference to the days of vengeance. He wishes to move on quickly from the destruction of Jerusalem to the second coming. But Luke wants to lay stress the deep significance of those days. After this they both deal with the question of being with child and breast-feeding, and Mark then further adds in the prayer that the flight may not be in the winter, which is omitted by Luke, again probably because it would not have great meaning to him or his readers, with their lack of knowledge of Palestinian weather conditions.**

**The 'great distress' in Luke parallels the 'tribulation' in Mark and the 'great tribulation' in Matthew, and it should be noted is to be seen as taking place before, and possibly during, the scattering of the Jews among the Gentiles. These parallel sayings might simply be extracted from a larger portrayal (Luke's words can on the whole easily be inserted within Mark's in a way that makes sense) or Luke's may again be an interpretation of the more Biblically based reference in Mark which has in mind Daniel 12.1. But either way it is made clear that the 'tribulation' (Mark) or the 'great tribulation' (Matthew) refers to the investment and sacking of Jerusalem and what followed, and not to some period in 'the end days' divorced from that. Note how in Mark the affliction is not only the greatest ever known but is also greater than any future affliction that will come, 'neither shall be'. In Daniel the statement looks only to the past. This suggests that they are not referring to the same event, otherwise why does Mark change Daniel's statement in this way?.**

**This is then followed by contrasting treatments of what is coming on the world in terms of sun, moon and stars. Both may in fact have been said by Jesus as He expanded on His theme, with Luke obtaining what he wrote from another eyewitness, and each writer selecting what he wanted to say, or again it may be a case of Luke interpreting and abbreviating Mark in the light of other sources and his own purpose. For in the end both are giving the gist of Jesus' words rather than the whole message. Both then end with the reference to the powers of heaven being shaken, followed by reference to the coming of the Son of Man.**

**The verses that do agree almost word for word should warn us that Luke is faithful to his sources, and therefore against too glibly assuming that Luke obtained the remainder by paraphrase rather than from another source which cited words of Jesus. We shall now consider Luke verse by verse, having the above suggestions in mind:**

**21.20 "But when you see Jerusalem being surrounded with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand."**

**The surrounding of Jerusalem by armies in the future was something constantly referred to in the Old Testament. We can consider, for example, Isaiah 4.4 where it can be assumed and is to happen 'in that day'; Zechariah 14.2, where in 'a day of the Lord', 'I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished ---; Daniel 9.26, where 'the people of the coming prince will destroy the city and the sanctuary' (in a context which mentions one who comes on the wing of abomination to make desolate); compare also Joel 3.2. So both Zechariah and Daniel describe such a future event vividly, and an example of what it would be like had been equally vividly portrayed in 2 Chronicles 36.16-21, where, speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem in around 587 BC, the writer says, 'until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy --- therefore He slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary ---and they burned down the house of God and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.' There is no difficulty then in seeing the source from which Jesus obtained the vividness of the picture, and like the prophets He is declaring that before the end can come Jerusalem must be destroyed.**

**21.21 "Then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of her depart out, and let not those who are in the countryside enter into it."**

**The warning here is vivid and pointed. At the first indication of approaching troops they are**

to find refuge not in the city (the natural place of refuge in time of war), for that is doomed, but in the caves on the wild, deserted mountains. That what is being described here is local can be seen from the fact that it can be avoided by fleeing to the mountains in the vicinity of Judea, a flight also to be engaged in by those in Jerusalem with all speed. Nor are those in the countryside to see Jerusalem as a refuge. The emphasis is on the fact that the judgment is centred on Jerusalem, and is certain, although necessarily it will involve all concerned with the welfare of Jerusalem. In the event the whole of Galilee and Judea would be affected, which was ever the case when Jerusalem was to be invested as past investments had made clear (when Sennacherib invested Jerusalem he had besieged and taken forty six large cities. Nebuchadnezzar had engaged in wholesale destruction). But Jerusalem would experience the total devastation, for after huge slaughter of both young and old, male and female, the remainder were carried off into captivity. No mercy was shown by the Roman invaders.

For this idea of fleeing to the mountains see Ezekiel 7.16; Genesis 19.26; Isaiah 15.5; and compare also Jeremiah 49.8; Zechariah 14.5; Amos 5.18-20. As Jerusalem is itself in the mountains the idea is of the remote mountains of the Judean wilderness in the Dead Sea area, to which David fled to escape from the vengeance of Saul (1 Samuel 26.1-3), as well as the mountains across the Jordan in Transjordan.

**21.22 “For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.”**

And the reason that they are to flee is because these are the days of vengeance, the days when God visits the people who have rejected Him with judgment. For the days of vengeance compare especially Deuteronomy 32.35-36 LXX where they are a part of what will happen as a result of breach of the covenant; Isaiah 61.2, where the day of vengeance follows the coming of the great prophet and the proclamation of the Good News; Hosea 9.7; Jeremiah 46.10. God has had many days of vengeance, but as Jesus will go on to say, these particular ones will be long and protracted.

**21.23 “Woe to those who are with child and to those who are breast-feeding in those days! For there will be great distress on the land, and wrath to this people.”**

The awfulness of the days that are coming on the land and on Jerusalem are emphasised in terms of the weakest and most vulnerable, those who are pregnant or breast-feeding. And yet in this very application (for the old and blind and lame are not mentioned) there is also stress on the effect it will have on the growth of the seed of these people. Even the most innocent will be affected. Many will be still born or will die in infancy because of what is coming.

We note that Luke omits the suggestion that they pray that their flight might not be in the winter. That suggestion (which did not say that it would be in the winter, only that they should pray that it was not) was in order to compound the horror. If it was not in the winter that would be at least one mercy. Instead he emphasises the distress in another way. Jesus’ full speech, which would include both, must have been even more terrifying.

‘Wrath.’ This is not a normal Lucan concept and confirms that he is giving us words that have been passed on to him. But it is not an idea from which he withdraws (see also 3.7). The idea is of impending doom because of the nature of God in response to sin (compare Mark 3.5; John 3.36; 10 times in Romans; 9 times elsewhere in Paul’s letters; twice in Hebrews; twice in James and six times in Revelation). It is the inevitable consequence of sin (Romans 1.18).

**21.24 “And they will fall by the edge (literally ‘mouth’) of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”**

And the result of the investment of Jerusalem will be many slain by the edge of the sword (compare Jeremiah 21.7; Hebrews 11.34), and many led captive among the nations (Deuteronomy 28.64). It will be like 587 BC all over again. And then Jerusalem will be left

deserted and trodden down by the Gentiles, and it will not rise again to its former glory for it will be trodden down by the Gentiles until their time comes to its fulfilment. Note that there is no promise that Jerusalem will then rise again. The Jerusalem that the prophets spoke of as having a glorious future is seen in the New Testament to be the heavenly Jerusalem. The earthly Jerusalem is finally dispensed with, from a spiritual point of view, in Acts. What happens to it is therefore of no more consequence from God's viewpoint (it is only man who has fixations on holy places).

As a result of God's judgments Jewish control over the Temple will cease, the godly among the nations will cease to look to Jerusalem, and all the Jewish hopes of world rulership will have collapsed. Jewish hopes will have been crushed. Their Temple will have been defiled, and then destroyed. Their Messianic expectations will have been thrust into a distant and empty future, for the simple reason that they did not receive Him when He came ('He came to His own inheritance and His own people did not receive Him' - John 1.11). It is the sign that God has replaced them with a new Israel, the Israel of God, to which belong all who are His (John 15.1-6; Galatians 3.29; 6.16; Romans 11.17-29; Ephesians 2.11-22; James 1.1; 1 Peter 1.1; 2.5, 9). So they are given the warning that unless they are willing to accept in Jesus their true Messiah, they will have to recognise and settle for the period of Gentile domination stretching forward into God's immeasurable but perfect time, the 'thousand years' of Revelation 20. For this will be the time of Gentile rule and of spiritual activity by the true Messiah Who will gather together His people through the proclamation of the Good News and make them one in Him, both Jew and Gentile. This will be accompanied by the literal domination of the world by the iron boot of earthly rulers, many of whom would crush the Jews, and others of whom would uphold them (and sadly some of them will do it in the name of Christ, although not in accordance with His teachings). The Jews will have been replaced in the purposes of God except in so far as they seek Him. For their future can now only be found in Christ.

For the warning of the treading down of the sanctuary and of Jerusalem compare Isaiah 63.18; Daniel 8.10, 13; Zechariah 12.3; Psalm 79.1-2; Revelation 11.2. This gradual transition from Jerusalem to the Gentile world is made clear in Acts. The first part of Acts is all concerning Jerusalem. It is the centre from which the word goes out (Isaiah 2.2-4). It is the hub of Apostolic activity. But from chapter 13 onwards this is all transferred to elsewhere. Peter has gone to 'another place' (Acts 12.17). Paul works from Syrian Antioch (13 onwards), and when given the choice the Temple finally and definitely closes its doors against him (21.30). Jerusalem has forfeited its significance, being replaced by the Jerusalem which is in Heaven (Galatians 4.26; Hebrews 12.22). For it is the idea that lies behind Jerusalem that God guarantees, not the physical city itself.

So the question, "Teacher, when therefore will these things (the destruction of the Temple) be? and what shall be the sign when these things are about to occur?" is answered. Looking at it from Jesus' point of view on earth, it will occur some time in the future, and the sign will be the gathering of armies against Jerusalem. There are no good grounds, apart from speculation, for applying these ideas to any other than what happened in 70 AD. Indeed if we consider the question that both Mark and Luke emphasise (verse 7; Mark 13.4), both make clear that it specifically refers to that time, that is, to the time of the destruction of the Temple which at that moment of time was being observed by Jesus.

'The Times of the Gentiles.' This is the time when the Gentiles come into their own in the purposes of God, when the Servant will be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6), and when God will not oppose Gentile domination. Various nuances have been seen in the phrase. It has been referred to:

- 1). The times when the Gentiles will be exercising God's judgments on Israel.
- 2). The times leading up to when the Gentiles themselves will be judged.
- 3). Their times of opportunity for turning to God. Compare Romans 11.25 where the

- fullness of the Gentiles will come in.
- 4). Their times for enjoying the privileges that the Jews have forfeited.
  - 5). Their fixed times for lording it over Jerusalem.

In one way or another all these are involved. It is the period following the rejection of the old Israel, and its replacement by the new, when God's purposes in and for the Gentiles will be fulfilled, as Acts will reveal.

21.25-26 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows, men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

And what will happen during the period when the times of the Gentiles are being fulfilled? Will this be the time of worldwide peace? Jesus tells us quite plainly, if symbolically, that it will not be so. They will be times of portents, when the very lights of heaven are affected, times of distress, times of perplexity because of the roaring of the nations. This Gentile domination will not produce peace. Rather men will be fainting for fear as they look forward to what the future holds (compare Isaiah 13.6-8). For it is only the Messiah Who can bring a true, genuine and lasting peace (Isaiah 11).

The mention of the heavenly bodies here ties in with their use elsewhere to indicate dreadful events on earth. Things will happen of such a nature that they will appear to distort the heavens. Their friendly light will be affected. It will be as though the earth is falling in on itself. Compare Isaiah 13.10; 34.4; Ezekiel 32.7-8; Joel 2.10, 28; Haggai 2.6, 21; Revelation 6.12-14, all of which really in the end indicate political movements and dreadful things happening on earth, not all in the last days. When the smoke of warfare and the fires of destruction are on the earth it has a strange effect on the perception of the heavens. If 'the powers of the heavens' are seen as shaken, then times are really bad. That is not to deny that behind the words is the fact that unearthly influences might also be at work. If we consider Romans 8.38; Ephesians 1.21 (compare also Daniel 10) these may indicate that more is involved than just the physical. See also for this the images in Revelation such as 16.12-14. But if that is so we will not be aware of it. It will be going on unseen. And we should note that in Haggai the idea of the shaking of the heavens is as a preparation for the final triumph of God (Haggai 2.21-22). It finally indicates the activity of God.

'The roaring of the sea and the billows' reminds us that God regularly likens the nations to troubled seas. 'The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt' (Isaiah 57.20). God is thus the One who 'stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples' (Psalm 65.7), so that without Him it goes out of control. It is from the sea that the beastly empires arise (Daniel 7.2-3; Revelation 13.1). Thus the sea symbolises the nations. Furthermore the Israelites tended to fear the sea and would also see in this picture all of which they were afraid.

And there can be no doubt that such fear and distress and perplexity has been present in all centuries, and never more so than now as we see the rise of militant Islam, the fear of nuclear weapons reaching uncontrolled hands, the approach of the unknown effects of global warming, the possibility of the cessation of the gulf stream, the thinning of the ozone layer, the rising of sea levels, and the effects of other phenomena that could bring disaster on our world, and about which we can do very little, even more so because we are driven on by the insatiable demand of men and women for pleasure and enjoyment. Perhaps these will produce signs in sun, moon and stars, perhaps through this parts of the world will be burned up (2 Peter 3.10; Revelation 16.8), perhaps these will bring distress of nations and perplexity. No sensible person today doubts the possibility that such could be the result of what we are doing to the earth's atmosphere. Or perhaps in time these will pass by and little will seem to happen and another century will come and go, and then all these fears will again repeat themselves.

**We do not know. But in the midst of it we hear His warning, ‘Be ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man will come’.**

**21.27 “And then will they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”**

**For one day that is what will happen. It will be the event to end all events. All will come to its conclusion. God will sum up history. And the Son of Man, spoken of by Daniel the prophet as having been given all dominion (Daniel 7.13-14), will come personally and in great power and glory, seen by all, and lighting up the sky from east to west (17.24; Mark 13.26; Revelation 1.7; 19.11-16). For some it will bring fear as they look on the One Whom they had pierced, and from Whom they had turned away (Zechariah 12.10; Revelation 1.7). For others it will bring joy, for they will be made like Him and see Him as he is (1 John 3.1-3). It is the time of their final redemption. They are going home.**

**Or to put it another way the risen and enthroned Jesus will come visibly and in glory to receive His own and to bring judgment on the world (Matthew 24.31; Acts 1.11; 1 Thessalonians 4.13-17; 2 Thessalonians 1.7-10; Revelation 1.7; 11.12; 19.11-16). This idea of His return has already been highlighted in the parables ( 12.35-36, 40, 43, 45; 19.12, 15), and is a new emphasis in the teachings of Scripture (compare Acts 1.11). Previously it had been seen in terms of God acting climactically in world affairs, but now it is seen in terms of the One Who God has chosen, His only Son Who had become man, and now returns in person to bring about the consummation and then present all things to His Father, so that together with the Holy Spirit they may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15.23-28). It could only be vividly portrayed in this direct way once God had become man and had lived on earth.**

**It should be noted that Jesus has customarily called Himself ‘the Son of Man’ in front of His disciples. They could be in no doubt about Who was being referred to as ‘the Son of Man’. But to others not so much in the know it would be an enigmatic title, designed to make them reflect on its true nature. It was especially used by Him when thinking of the heavenly aspect of His activity, in order to distinguish the heavenly from the earthly, for He wished to keep a clear distinction before His disciples between His earthly and His heavenly life (John 3.13). But He also used it when claiming unearthly authority (5.24; 6.5) and in order to bring out the greatness of His humiliation in becoming the suffering Servant (9.22, 44, 58). For as in Daniel 7 the glory of the son of man (where the term represents the king who comes before God as the representative of His suffering people) results from his and their having undergone suffering (compare 24.26). The Apostles and the church recognised how enigmatic the title was when they mainly ceased using it after the resurrection. It was only used by Stephen in Acts 7.56 where his point was that the Son of Man had received His throne as promised, and in Revelation 1.13; 14.14 where the point was of His glory in the heavens as One Who had come to the throne of God and had received authority to judge the world. Instead the early church thought of Him in terms of the risen and glorified Christ (Messiah) and Lord (Acts 2.36). The Name no longer needed to be veiled. (In view of this lack of use by the early church it is quite astonishing that some try to claim that they invented it).**

**‘Coming in a cloud.’ The idea behind clouds is to indicate heavenly origin. But Luke deliberately presents the idea in the singular, bringing out even more the sense of the divine. For it was through a cloud that God constantly revealed His presence to His people (from Exodus 13.21 onwards until Exodus 40.34, 36, 38 and even beyond (e.g. Deuteronomy 31.15; 1 Kings 8.10). To come in a cloud was the symbol of deity.**

**21.28 “But when these things begin to come about, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”**

**So the final consequence of the sufferings and tragedies of the ages will be the coming of Christ to receive His own, and to bring His final judgment on the world. And the result is that as we become aware of such things it should cause us to lift up our heads, recognising that our**

final redemption draws ever closer. While he suffers with those who suffer, the Christian is not surprised at what is coming on the world, indeed he expects it. Whether it be earthquake, volcanic eruption, hurricane, tsunami, human bombs or whatever, he sees it as a reminder of man's sinfulness and judgment, and as God's reminder that His Son will be coming 'soon', to take His own to be with Himself, and to bring on the world a judgment which in Scripture is constantly pictured in terms of all these tragedies, and much, much more.

'Look up.' The verb means to raise oneself from a stooping position, to stand upright, and therefore to look with confidence and elation. Out of the trial that will come on him the Christian continually looks up in order to visualise the One Who is coming. He is able to lift up his head because he looks to his coming deliverance by Him.

'Your redemption.' The final release from the bondage of sin and of the world, which has become a possibility because He gave His life a ransom for many (Mark 10.45), paying the price for sin (1 Corinthians 6.20; 1 Peter 1.18-19). See also 22.37.

### Concluding Words (21.29-38).

Jesus now sums up the conclusions which result from what He has been saying. In His summing up He stresses the signs that will indicate the 'nearness' of the Kingly Rule of God, that is, the point at which there will be nothing between the sign and its fulfilment.

Firstly He is declaring that the eternal Kingly Rule of God cannot be manifested until the things that He has described have happened, for His coming (the timing of which He does not know - Mark 13.32) cannot take place until they have done so. Thus He makes clear both that there will be a delay before His coming. But secondly He stresses the fact of its imminence (as something that could happen at any time) once those things have occurred. The ideas are here held in tension as throughout the New Testament. In view of the fact that He clearly stated in an undoubtedly genuine saying that He did not know the time of His return we must certainly take that fact into account in our interpretation. It is not honest to suggest fallibility over something that He (quite remarkably) declared that while on earth He did not know.

First we shall analyse this passage:

- a He spoke to them a parable, "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees, when they now shoot forth, you see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now near" (29-30).
- b "Even so you also, when you see these things coming about, know you that the Kingly Rule of God is near" (31).
- c "Truly I say to you, This generation will not pass away, until all things be accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (32-33).
- b "But take heed to yourselves, lest it happen that your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare, for so will it come on all those who dwell on the face of all the earth" (34-35).
- a "But you, watch at every season, making supplication, that you may prevail to escape all these things that will come about, and to stand before the Son of man" (36).

In these final words Jesus applies what He has said to those who are listening. Note that in 'a' the description of what happens in a season is described and in the parallel they are told to watch every season. In 'b' His disciples are to see in the things that are coming the sign of the nearness of the Kingly Rule of God, and in the parallel there are those who will not observe these things and who will thus be caught up unexpectedly in judgment. And centrally in 'c' the point is made that all 'these things' prior to standing before the Son of Man (for even He did not know the time of the latter) will be accomplished within that generation. It is as certain as the existence of Heaven and earth.

**21.29 “And he spoke to them a parable, “Behold the fig tree, and all the trees, when they now shoot forth, you see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now near.”**

The parable is a simple one, and its basis is that men know when summer is coming because they observe the growth on the trees. Luke’s addition of ‘all the trees’ (contrast Mark 13.28) makes clear that nothing is to be gathered from the description of a particular tree. The fig tree is mentioned as the early blossomer, but the principle applies to all the trees. So the principle in his view is a universal one, and we need not doubt that he gathered that from his source. That being so the parable signifies nothing more than that His people should be observant and recognise that growth on trees reveals the approach of summer. But it is an indicator, not a guarantee. The summer is seen as ‘near’, not ‘now here’. In context the distinction is important. For in eschatological terms ‘near’ is subject to the timing of God with Whom a thousand years is as a watch in the night. As always the signs are in order to awaken interest, not in order to indicate certain timing. Jesus always rejected the idea of giving signs which would replace faith. They could be used to bolster faith, but not to replace it.

**21.31 “Even so you also, when you see these things coming about, know you that the Kingly Rule of God is near.”**

So in the same way when they see all ‘these things’ coming about they are to know that the Kingly Rule of God is near. Here it is clear that the future eternal Kingdom is in mind. In context ‘these things’ refers to the signs prior to the coming of the Son of Man for in verse 36 it is ‘these things’ which can be escaped from, whereas the coming of the Son of Man is inescapable. Compare also verse 28 where ‘these things’ cause men to look up and lift up their heads in anticipation of His coming. They cannot therefore include His coming. ‘These things’ are clearly therefore the indications of the possibility of His coming. This in fact agrees with Mark 13.4 where ‘these things’ refers to the destruction of the Temple and what will accompany it. Thus the main idea in mind here is that when they see the destruction of the Temple and the leading captive among all nations of the Jews, following on after the other ‘things’ that He has spoken of, they must then recognise the ‘imminence’ (the possibility of it happening at any time) of the establishment of the eternal kingdom. Nothing will then be required to happen before His coming occurs, although He does not know when that will be (Mark 13.32).

**21.32 Truly I say to you, This generation will not pass away, until all things be accomplished.”**

And indeed, He declares, all ‘these things’ that He has described as necessary before His coming will be accomplished within the lifetime of the current generation. It must necessarily be so. The blood of all the prophets would be required of this generation because of what they were going to do to God’s beloved Son (11.50-51). The judgment on Jerusalem must therefore necessarily happen within this generation.

This would then indicate that His return *could* also be within that time period, but would not necessarily be so, for His coming is not part of ‘these things’, it is the fulfilment resulting after ‘these things’. So the claim is that while all ‘these things’ that must take place before His coming will occur within a generation, the coming itself would not necessarily occur within that time period (for He did not know when it would be). All they could know when all these things had occurred was that it was ‘near’, that is, could possibly arrive at any time.

That Jesus was at this point no more aware than His disciples of how long would be the period between the destruction of Jerusalem and His coming comes out in these words. Later revelation would reveal that it would be a long, indeterminate, unlimited period, cited as a round ‘thousand years’ (Revelation 20.3, 4, 5, 6, 7), a period which to first century man would indicate immeasurable time.

However, the word *genea* can in fact mean, 1) the descendants of a common ancestor, that is, those ‘generated’ from such an ancestor (thus a particular race, e.g. the Jews); 2) a group of

people born at the same time ('generation' thus for example being seen as shorthand for 'the people in that generation'); or 3) a period of time occupied by such a group of people (roughly a period of forty years). It has therefore been suggested that 'this generation' could be interpreted in any one of a number of different ways as follows:

- 1). 'This generation' (this 'race') could mean the race of the Jews as 'generated' from Israel/Jacob, those who were born of Israel/Jacob. This would then be promising that the Jews as a race would not cease to exist before all these things were accomplished. It would be declaring that they would still be around at the end, and unlike other nations, would not just have disappeared. It would be a word of hope for the Jews. Certainly the fact of the survival of the Jews as a distinct entity through the centuries must be seen as quite remarkable. But there are other explanations for their survival, (the Arabs have also survived, and also see themselves as descendants of Abraham), and it is not a natural meaning of the phrase in this context without further amplification.
- 2). 'This generation', which is a phrase used regularly by Jesus of unbelievers who do not respond to His words (see 7.31; 9.41; 11.29, 30, 31, 32), could be seen as signifying people with a certain attitude against Him, like the 'generation of vipers' (those born of vipers) in 3.7, thus indicating a type of people who will not die out before the second coming. But it would again be an unusual use of the word without further amplification.
- 3). 'This generation' could indicate a generation in which certain of the events described will happen in the future, a generation which will then not pass away before all is fulfilled, e.g. the final generation at the end. The idea here would be to stress that all that is described must occur within the one generation, although in this case it is a later generation, 'this' referring to the generation who will actually be involved.
- 4). 'This generation' could mean the current generation when Jesus was speaking which would not pass away before all that necessarily had to lead up to His coming, especially the destruction of Jerusalem, was fulfilled. This is the most natural and straightforward meaning of the term.

We opt for the fourth as being Jesus' intention, simply because it is the most natural significance of the phrase and ties in with the thought that the blood of the prophets will be required of this generation. The point that He is then also stressing is that all that must necessarily lead up to His coming will be fulfilled within that generation so that His coming need not necessarily be looked at as something that will happen only in a remote future, long after that time. This holding out of the future as imminent, part of which had not yet been fulfilled by the time of Jesus, is seen as constant in the prophets. The aim was to keep people in expectancy. On the other hand it always left open the options that what was to happen might be soon, or might be in the more distant future. The point then is that by the time the current generation is passing away His coming will be 'near', that is, will be such that it could possibly occur at any time. Jesus did not want His followers to lose sight of the fact that the time of His return was unknown, even to Him. Thus he wanted them to see it as 'imminent' (that is, as possibly happening at any time), so that they must always be anticipating the possibility of it. Not knowing when it would be He knew that it could be near or far. There was no other way of presenting it.

21.33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Indeed so certain are the things that He has promised that even the passing away of Heaven and earth will not affect them. Their occurrence is certain and sure. They are more stable and certain than Heaven and earth (compare a similar thing said about God's Law - 16.17). Note how He puts His own words on a parallel with God's. No one else among the Jews would have dared to say that their words were more permanent than creation. It would have been seen as blasphemy.

21.34-35 “But take heed to yourselves, lest it happen that your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare, for so will it come on all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.”

In view of this certainty of the fulfilment of His words they must be sure that they keep a watch on their ways and are not caught out by their being too deeply involved in partying, and drunkenness and the affairs of life (a reminder that although Jesus ate and drank with public servants and sinners, He did not see their lifestyle as acceptable). If their hearts are taken up with such things then that day will come on them like a snare and a trap, in the same way as it will come on all who dwell on the face of the whole earth who are not believers and therefore are unready.

21.36 ‘But you, watch at every season, making supplication, that you may prevail to escape all these things that will come about, and to stand before the Son of man.’”

Rather than partying, and becoming drunk, and being too involved with worldly affairs they are to be ever on the watch at all times, praying that they might ‘prevail to escape’ all the things that will come about, by means of their being watchful, and by prayerful supplication, and may thus stand triumphantly before the Son of Man. To ‘stand before the Son of Man’ is come to Him and be acceptable to Him as one of His own, receiving His commendation.

‘Prevail to escape’ indicates a battle fought and won in escaping from what is false. Such a person has battled through the temptations of the flesh and of the world, and has won through, keeping his eye on Christ. He has not followed false signs or false teachers (verse 8), he has not been bowed down by the problems of the world (verses 9-11), he has maintained a good testimony (verse 13) and faced up to persecution (verse 12-18), he has patiently endured (verse 19), he has escaped the lure of Jerusalem (20-22), and he has not been caught up in frivolous living or the cares of the world (verse 34). And how has he done it? Humanly speaking he has done it by prayerful ‘watching’, by ‘making supplication’ to the One Who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2.13) and by ‘battling and prevailing’. Divinely speaking he has done it because God has chosen him from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1.4).

### EXCURSUS 1. Is the Church The New Israel?

#### Is The Church the True Israel?

The question being asked here is whether the early church saw itself as the true Israel, and whether they had any grounds for doing so? In Matthew 16 Jesus spoke to His disciples of ‘building His church (assembly, congregation)’ (Matthew 16.18) at a time when as far as the disciples were concerned He had come only to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 10.6; 15.24). Thus here ‘church’ certainly equated in their minds with ‘Israel’, as indeed it did in its use in the Greek translations of the Old Testament where ‘the congregation/assembly of Israel’ was translated as ‘the church (ekklesia) of Israel’. And it was on this basis that the early believers called themselves ‘the church’, that is the congregation of the new Israel.

Furthermore in Acts 4.27-28 we read, “For in truth in this city against your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles *and the peoples of Israel*, were gathered together, to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to come about.”

Note the mention of a king, a ruler, the Gentiles and ‘the peoples of Israel’. This follows as an explanation of a quotation from Psalm 2.1 in Acts 4.25- 26:

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,  
And the peoples imagine vain things,  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers were gathered together,

## **Against the Lord and against His anointed --.'**

The important point here is that 'the peoples' who imagined vain things, who in the Psalm were nations who were enemies of Israel, have become in Acts 'the peoples of Israel'. Thus the 'peoples of Israel' who were opposing the Apostles and refusing to believe are here seen as the enemy of God and His Anointed, and His people. It is a clear indication that old unbelieving Israel is now numbered among the nations, and that the Jews who have believed in Christ are the true Israel. As Jesus had said to Israel, 'the Kingly Rule of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruits' (Matthew 21.43). Thus the King now has a new people of Israel to guard and watch over.

The same idea is found in John 15.1-6. The false vine (the old Israel - Isaiah 5.1-7) has been cut down and replaced by the true vine of 'Christ at one with His people' (John 15.1-6; Ephesians 2.11-22). The church is the new Israel, growing from the true vine. The old Israel has been cut off and replaced by believing Gentiles (Romans 11.17-28).

The new Israel, the 'Israel of God', sprang from Jesus. It was He Who established its new leaders who would 'rule over ('judge') the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matthew 19.28; Luke 22.30). They were Jews, and were to be its foundation (Ephesians 2.20; Revelation 21.14). All its first foundation members were Jews. As it spread it did so among Jews until there were 'about five thousand men' to say nothing of women and children (Acts 4.4). Then it spread throughout all Judaea, and then through the synagogues of the world. Soon there were a multitude of Jews who were Christians. Thus the earliest church was almost fully Jewish. It represented faithful Israel. Then the proselytes (Gentile converts) and God-fearers (Gentile adherents to the synagogues) began to join and they were grafted in to the vine (John 15.1-6) and the olive tree (Romans 11.17-28). They became fellow-citizens with the Jewish believers ('the saints', a regular Old Testament name for the true Israelites who believed). And so the new Israel sprang up following the same pattern as the old. Paul described the new church as 'the Israel of God' (Galatians 6.16), because the Gentiles among them had become 'the seed of Abraham' (Galatians 3.29).

Those who deny that the church is Israel must in fact see all these believing Jews as cut off from Israel. For in the 1st century AD the Israel for which those who deny that the church is Israel contend, that is the Jews as a whole, did not include them. They cut them off. To them the church was outside Israel.

Meanwhile the church, the new Israel did see themselves as Israel. They saw themselves as the true Israel of God. And that is why Paul stresses to the Gentile Christians in Ephesians 2.11-22 that they are now a part of the new Israel having been made one with the true people of God in Jesus Christ. In order to consider all this in more detail let us look back in history.

When Abraham entered the land of Canaan having been called there by God he was promised that in him all the world would be blessed, and this was later also promised to his seed (Genesis 12.3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4; 28.14). But Abraham did not enter the land alone. In Genesis 14 he had three hundred and eighteen fighting men 'born in his house'. One of his slave wives was an Egyptian (Genesis 16) and his steward was probably a Syrian, a Damascene (Genesis 15.2). Thus Abraham was patriarch over a family tribe, all of whom with him inherited the promises, *and they came from a number of different nationalities.*

From Abraham came Jacob, who was renamed Israel, and from his twelve sons came the twelve tribes of the 'children of Israel'. As with Abraham these would include retainers, servants and slaves. So the 'children of Israel' even at this stage would include people from many nations, Israel's own descendants and their wives, and their servants and retainers, and their wives and children. Israel was already a conglomerate people.

When they left Egypt they were joined by a 'mixed multitude' from many nations, who with them had been enslaved in Egypt, and these joined with them in their flight (Exodus 12.38). At

Sinai these were all joined within the covenant and became 'children of Israel'. These included an Ethiopian (Cushite) woman who became Moses' wife (Numbers 12.1). Thus 'Israel' from its commencement was an international community. Indeed it was made clear that any who would, could join Israel and become an Israelite by submission to the covenant and by being circumcised (Exodus 12.48-49). Membership of the people of God was thus to be open to all nations from the beginning by submission to God through the covenant. And these all connected themselves with one of the tribes of Israel, were absorbed, and began to trace their ancestry back to Abraham and Jacob even though they were not true born. There were indeed regulations as to who could enter the assembly or congregation of the Lord, and at what stage they could (Deuteronomy 23.1-8). They then became Israelites.

That this was carried out in practise is evidenced by the numerous Israelites who bear a foreign name, for example 'Uriah the Hittite' (2 Samuel 11). See also the mighty men of David (2 Samuel 23.8-28). Later again it became the practise in Israel, in accordance with Exodus 12. 48-49, for anyone who 'converted' to Judaism and began to believe in the God of Israel to be received into 'Israel' on equal terms by circumcision and submission to the covenant. These were called 'proselytes'. People also left Israel by desertion, and by not bringing their children within the covenant. They were then 'cut off from Israel', as were deep sinners.

When Jesus came His initial purpose was to call back to God 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 10.6). But He later declared that there were other sheep that He would also call and they would be one flock with Israel (John 10.16).

Thus when the Gospel began to reach out to the Gentiles those converted were welcomed as part of the one flock. The question then was, 'did they need to be circumcised in order to become members of the new Israel?' Paul nowhere argues that circumcision was not necessary because they were not becoming Israel. He accepts that they became members of Israel, but argues that circumcision was no longer necessary because they were already circumcised by faith. They had the circumcision of the heart, and were circumcised with the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2.11).

Thus in Romans 11.17-24 he speaks clearly of converted Gentiles being grafted into Israel through faith, and of Israelites being broken off through unbelief, to be welcomed again if they repent and come to Christ. Whatever we see actually see the olive tree as representing, it is quite clear that it is speaking of those who are cut off because they do not believe, and those who are ingrafted because they do believe, and this in the context of Israel being saved or not.

In Ephesians 2 Paul tells the Gentiles that they had in the past been 'alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise' (2.12). Thus in the past they did not belong to the twelve tribes. But then he tells them that they are now 'made nigh by the blood of Christ' (2.13), Who has 'made both one and broken down the wall of partition --- creating in Himself of two one new man' (2.14-15). Now therefore, through Christ, they have been made members of the commonwealth of Israel, and inherit the promises. So they are 'no longer strangers and sojourners (outsiders to Israel), but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (2.19-20). It is made as clear as can be that they have entered the 'new' Israel. They have entered into the covenant of promise (Galatians 3.29).

So as with people in the Old Testament who were regularly adopted into the twelve tribes of Israel (e.g. the mixed multitude - Exodus 12.38), Gentile Christians too are seen as so incorporated. That is why Paul can call the church 'the Israel of God', made up of Jews and ex-Gentiles, having declared circumcision and uncircumcision as unimportant because there is a new creation (Galatians 6.15-16). It is those who are in that new creation who are the Israel of God.

In context 'The Israel of God' can here only mean that new creation, the church of Christ,

otherwise he is being inconsistent. For as he points out, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters any more. What matters is the new creation. It must therefore be that which identifies the Israel of God. For if circumcision is irrelevant then the Israel of God cannot be made up of the circumcised, even the believing circumcised, for circumcision has lost its meaning. The point therefore behind both of these passages is that all Christians become, by adoption, members of the twelve tribes.

But there would be no point in mentioning circumcision if he was not thinking of incorporation into the twelve tribes. The importance of circumcision was that to the Jews it made the difference between those who became genuine proselytes, and thus members of the twelve tribes, and those who remained as 'God-fearers', loosely attached but not accepted as full Jews. So when Paul argues that Christians have been circumcised in heart (Romans 2.26, 29; 4.12; Philippians 3.3; Colossians 2.11) he is saying that that is all that is necessary in order to be members of the true Israel.

In Galatians 4.26 it is made clear that the true Jerusalem is the heavenly Jerusalem, the earthly having been rejected. This new heavenly Jerusalem is 'the mother of us all' just as Sarah had been the mother of Israel. All Christians are thus the children of the freewoman, that is, Sarah (4.31). They are therefore 'Israel'.

Again in Romans he points out to the Gentiles that there is a remnant of Israel which is faithful to God and they are the true Israel (11.5). The remainder have been cast off (Romans 10.27, 29; 11.15, 17, 20). Then he describes the Christian Gentiles as 'grafted in among them' becoming 'partakers with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree' (11.17). They are now part of the same tree so it is clear that he regards them as now being part of the faithful remnant of Israel. This is again declared quite clearly in Galatians, for 'those who are of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham' (Galatians 3.7).

Note that in Romans 9 Paul declares that not all earthly Israel are really Israel, only those who are chosen by God. They are the foreknown Israel. See 9.8, 24-26; 11.2.

The privilege of being a 'son of Abraham' is that one is adopted into the twelve tribes of Israel. It is the twelve tribes who proudly called themselves 'the sons of Abraham' (John 8.39, 53). That is why in the one man in Christ Jesus there can be neither Jew nor Gentile (Galatians 3.28). For they all become Israel. For 'if you are Abraham's seed, you are heirs according to the promise' (Galatians 3.29). To be Abraham's 'seed' within the promise is to be a member of the twelve tribes. The reference to 'seed' is decisive. You cannot be Abraham's seed through Sara and yet not a part of Israel.

That is why Paul can say, 'he is not a Jew who is one outwardly --- he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and the circumcision is that of the heart' (2.28-29 compare v.26). The true Jew is the one who is the inward Jew.

In the light of these passages it cannot really be doubted that the early church saw the converted Gentile as becoming a member of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are 'the seed of Abraham', 'sons of Abraham', spiritually circumcised, grafted in to the true Israel, fellow-citizens with the saints in the commonwealth of Israel, the Israel of God. What further evidence do we need?

In Romans 4 he makes clear that Abraham is the father of all who believe, including both circumcised and uncircumcised (4.9-13). Indeed he says we have been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2.11). All who believe are therefore circumcised children of Abraham.

When James writes to 'the twelve tribes which are of the dispersion' (1.1) (Jews living away from Palestine were seen as dispersed around the world and were therefore thought of as 'the dispersion'), there is not a single hint that he is writing other than to all in the churches. He

sees the whole church as having become members of the twelve tribes, as the true dispersion, and indeed refers to their 'assembly' with the same word used for synagogue (2.2). But he can also call them 'the church' (5.14).

There is not even the slightest suggestion anywhere in the remainder of his letter that he has just one section of the church in mind. In view of the importance of the subject, had he not been speaking of the whole church he must surely have commented on the attitude of Jewish Christians to Christian Gentiles, especially in the light of the ethical content of his letter, but there is not even a whisper of it. He speaks as though to the whole church. Unless he was a separatist this would seem impossible. It is inconceivable that in the situation of those days he could have written an ethical letter to Jewish Christians and not have mentioned Gentile Christians once. For relationships with them would have been central. Thus he must have seen the ex-Gentile Christians as part of the dispersion to which he was writing.

Peter also writes to 'the elect' and calls them 'sojourners of the dispersion' and when he speaks of 'Gentiles' (meaning unconverted Gentiles) is clearly assuming that those under that heading are not Christians (2.12; 4.3). So it is apparent that he too sees all Christians as members of the twelve tribes (as in the example above 'the dispersion' means the twelve tribes scattered around the world). Good numbers of Gentiles were becoming members of the Jewish faith at that time, and on being circumcised were accepted by the Jews as members of the twelve tribes (as proselytes). In the same way the Apostles, who were all Jews and also saw the pure in Israel as God's chosen people, saw the converted Gentiles as being incorporated into the new Israel, into the true twelve tribes. But they did not see circumcision as now necessary, because all who believed had been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.

Today we may not think in these terms but it is apparent that to the early church to become a Christian was to become a member of the twelve tribes of Israel. That is why there was such a furore over whether circumcision, the covenant sign of the Jew, was necessary for Christians. It was precisely because they were seen as entering the twelve tribes that many saw it as required. Paul's argument against it is never that Christians do not become members of the twelve tribes (as we have seen he actually argues that they do) but that what matters is spiritual circumcision, not physical circumcision. Thus early on Christians unquestionably saw themselves as the true twelve tribes of Israel.

This receives confirmation from the fact that the seven churches (the universal church) is seen in terms of the seven lampstands in chapter 1. The sevenfold lampstand in the Tabernacle and Temple represented Israel. In the seven lampstands the churches are seen as the true Israel.

Given that fact it is clear that reference to the hundred and forty four thousand from all the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7 is to Christians. But it is equally clear that the numbers are not to be taken literally. The twelve by twelve is stressing who and what they are, not how many there are. There is no example anywhere else in Scripture where God actually selects people on such an exact basis. Even the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19.18) were a round number based on seven as the number of divine perfection and completeness. The reason for the seemingly exact figures is to demonstrate that God has His people numbered and that not one is missing (compare Numbers 31.48-49). The message of these verses is that in the face of persecution to come, and of God's judgments against men, God knows, remembers and protects His own. But they are then described as a multitude who cannot be numbered (only God can number them).

It is noticeable that this description of the twelve tribes in Revelation is a little artificial in another respect. While Judah is placed first as the tribe from which Christ came, Dan is omitted, and Manasseh is included as well as Joseph, although Manasseh was the son of Joseph. Thus there is a deliberate omission of the names of Dan and Ephraim, even though Ephraim is included under Joseph's name. (This artificiality confirms that the tribes are not to be taken literally). The exclusion of Dan is because he is a tool of the Serpent (Genesis

49.17), and the exclusion of the two names is because of their specific connection with idolatry.

In Deuteronomy 29.17-20 the warning was given that God would 'blot out his name from under heaven', when speaking of those who gave themselves up to idolatrous worship and belief, and as we have seen idolatry and uncleanness were central in the warnings to the seven churches. Thus the exclusion of the names of Ephraim and Dan are a further warning against such things. They were particularly connected with idolatry.

For the names of both Ephraim and Dan are unquestionably connected with idolatry in such a way as to make them distinctive. Hosea declared, 'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone, their drink is become sour, they commit whoredom continually' (Hosea 4.17-18). This is distinctly reminiscent of the sins condemned in the seven churches. It is true that Ephraim here means the whole of Israel, as often, but John saw the connection with idolatry and whoredom as besmirching not the tribe but the *name* of Ephraim (Ephraimites are included under Joseph, it is the name that is excluded).

As for Dan, it was a man of the tribe of Dan who 'blasphemed the Name' (Leviticus 24.11), it was Dan that was first to set up a graven image (Judges 18.30) and Dan was the only tribe mentioned as being the site of one of the calves of gold set up by Jeroboam, as Amos stresses (Amos 8.14; 1 Kings 12.29-30; 2 Kings 10.29). Amos directly connects the name of Dan with 'the sin of Samaria'. Thus Dan is closely connected with blasphemy and idolatry. And to cap it all 'Dan will be a serpent in the way, and adder in the path' (Genesis 49.17). He is the tool of the Serpent. Typologically he is the Judas of the twelve. How could he not be excluded? It is also voices in Dan and Ephraim which declare the evil coming on Jerusalem (Jeremiah 4.15), closely connecting the two.

That what is excluded is the *name* of Ephraim and not its people (they are included in Joseph) is significant. Thus the message of these omissions is that those who partake in idolatry and sexual misbehaviour will be excluded from the new Israel (compare the warnings to the churches, especially Thyatira). The exclusion of Dan is to warn us that those who are not genuine will be excluded.

So Revelation 7 is telling us that in the face of the future activity of God against the world He provides His people with protection, and marks them off as distinctive from those who bear the mark of the Beast. God protects His true people. There is no reason for seeing these people as representing other than the church, the true Israel, of the current age. The fact is that we are continually liable to persecution, and while not all God's judgments have yet been visited on the world, we have experienced sufficient to know that we are not excluded. In John's day it was telling the church that God had sealed them, so that while they must be ready for the persecution to come, they need not fear the coming judgments of God that he will now reveal, for they are under His protection.

The New Testament tells us that all God's true people are sealed by God. Abraham received circumcision as a seal of 'the righteousness of (springing from) faith' (Romans 4.11), but circumcision is replaced in the New Testament by the 'seal of the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 1.22; Ephesians 1.13; 4.30). It is clear that Paul therefore sees all God's people as being 'sealed' by God in their enjoyment of the indwelling Holy Spirit and this would suggest that John's description here in Revelation 7 is a dramatic representation of that fact. His people have been open to spiritual attack from earliest New Testament days (and before) and it is not conceivable that they have not enjoyed God's seal of protection on them. Thus the seal here in Revelation refers to the sealing (or if someone considers it future, a re-sealing) with the Holy Spirit of promise. The whole idea behind the scene is in order to stress that all God's people have been specially sealed.

In Revelation 21 the 'new Jerusalem' is founded on twelve foundations which are the twelve Apostles of the Lamb (21.14), and its gates are the twelve tribes of the children of Israel

(21.12). Indeed Jesus said that he would found his 'church' on the Apostles and their statement of faith (Matthew 16.18) and the idea behind the word 'church' (ekklesia) here was as being the 'congregation' of Israel. (The word ekklesia is used of the latter in the Greek Old Testament). Jesus had come to establish the new Israel. Thus from the commencement the church were seen as being the true Israel, composed of both Jew and Gentile who entered within God's covenant, the 'new covenant', as it had been right from the beginning.

But what are the arguments against this? It has been said that *'Every reference to Israel in the New Testament refers to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'* And another expositor has taken the words and added the comment, 'This is true in the Old Testament also.' But such statements are again an oversimplification. They assume what they intend to prove, and as we have seen, they are in fact completely incorrect. For as we have seen above if there is one thing that is sure it is that many who saw themselves as Israelites were not physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Many were descended from the servants of the Patriarchs who went down into Egypt in their 'households', and were from a number of nationalities. Others were part of the mixed multitude which left Egypt with Israel (Exodus 12.38). They were adopted into Israel, and became Israelites, a situation which was sealed by the covenant.

It is made quite clear that anyone who was willing to worship God and become a member of the covenant through circumcision could do so and became accepted on equal terms as 'Israelites' (Exodus 12.47-49). They would then become united with the tribe among whom they dwelt or with which they had connections. There were indeed regulations as to who could enter the assembly or congregation of the Lord, and when (Deuteronomy 23.1-8). Later proselytes would also be absorbed into Israel. Thus 'Israel' was from the start very much a conglomerate, and continued to be so.

When we come to the New Testament Paul can speak of 'Israel after the flesh' (1 Corinthians 10.18). That suggests that he also conceives of an Israel not 'after the flesh'. That conclusion cannot be avoided. When we remember that outside Romans 9-11 Israel is only mentioned by Paul seven times, that 1 Corinthians 10.18 clearly points to another Israel and is one of the seven verses, and that Galatians 6.16 is most satisfactorily seen as signifying the church of Jesus Christ and not old Israel at all (or even converted Israel), the statement must be doubted. In Ephesians 2.11-22 where he speaks of the 'commonwealth of Israel' he immediately goes on to say that in Christ Jesus all who are His are 'made nigh', and then stresses that we are no more strangers and sojourners (outsiders from Israel) but are genuine fellow-citizens, and are of the household of God. If that does not mean becoming a part of the true Israel it is difficult to see what could.

Furthermore in the other four references the present status of Israel is not in mind, the term simply being used as an identifier in a historical sense with Old Testament connections. Thus the argument about the use of the word Israel is not very strong. In Hebrews all mentions of Israel are historical, referring back to the Old Testament. They refer to Israel in the past. In Revelation two mentions are simply historical, while many would consider that the other actually does refer to the church (Revelation 7.4).

In Romans 9-11 it is made very clear that Israel can mean more than one thing. When Paul says, 'they are not all Israel, who are of Israel' (Romans 9.6) and points out that it is the children of the promise who are counted as the seed (9.8), we are justified in seeing that there are two Israels in Paul's mind, one which is the Israel after the flesh, and includes old unconverted Israel, and one which is the Israel of the promise.

And when he says that 'Israel' have not attained to the law of righteousness while the Gentiles have attained to the righteousness which is of faith (9.30-31) he cannot be speaking of all Israel because it is simply not true that none in Israel have attained to the righteousness of faith. Many had become Christians as we have seen in Acts 1-5. Thus here 'Israel' must mean

old, unconverted Israel, and thus exclude Christian Israel, and thus they do not make up all of the so-called descendants of the Patriarchs.

So here we see three uses of Israel, each referring to a different entity.

- One is *all the old Israel*, whether believing or not, which includes both elect and non-elect (11.11) and is therefore a partly blind Israel (11.25).
- One is the Israel of promise (called in 11.11 ‘the election’), and which is therefore an Israel which excludes the old blind part of Israel. For not all of Israel who are descended from Israel, are Israel (Romans 9.6).
- And one is the old Israel which does not include the Israel of promise (9.31). It is the part of the old Israel which is the blind Israel. The term ‘Israel’ is therefore seen to be very fluid.

Furthermore here ‘the Gentiles’ must mean those who have come to faith. It cannot mean all Gentiles, for it speaks of those who have ‘attained to the righteousness of faith’ (which was what old Israel failed to obtain when it strove after it). Thus that term is also fluid. (In 1 Peter ‘Gentiles’ represents only those who are unconverted).

When we are also told that such Gentiles who have come to faith have become ‘Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise’ (Galatians 3.29) we are justified in seeing these converted Gentiles as having become part of the new Israel, along with the converted Jews. They are now actually stated to be ‘the seed of Abraham’. This clarifies the picture of the olive tree. Old unconverted Israel are cut out of it, the converted Gentiles are grafted into it. Thus old Israel are no longer God’s people (Romans 9.6-8) while the converted Gentiles are.

What then does Paul mean when he says that ‘all Israel will be saved’? (11.26). It clearly cannot mean literally ‘all’ of old Israel, both past and present. Scripture has made quite clear that not all of them will be saved (as also says Romans 9.27; 11.7). Does it then mean all Israel at the time that the fullness of the Gentiles has come in? That is unlikely as there is no stage in world history where all the people of a nation have been saved at one point in time. It would not be in accordance with God’s revealed way of working. It would also make nonsense of the many passages where God’s final judgment is poured out on Israel. Does he then mean ‘all the true Israel’, those elected in God’s purposes who are physically Jews, ‘the remnant according to the election of grace’ (11.5), who will be saved along with the fullness of the Gentiles? That is possible. And it does not require, although it might include, a final revival among the Jews in the end days. Or does it mean ‘all Israel’ who are part of the olive tree, including both Jews and the fullness of the Gentiles? That seems to be its most probable significance, and to be most in accordance with what we have seen above. After all, ‘all Israel’ including the Gentiles could not be saved until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in.

What in fact Paul is finally seeking to say is that in the whole salvation history God’s purposes will not be frustrated, and that in the final analysis all whom He has chosen and foreknown (11.2) will have come to Him.

In the light of all this it is difficult to see how we can deny that in the New Testament all who truly believed were seen as becoming a part of the new Israel’, the ‘Israel of God’.

End of Excursus 1.

#### EXCURSUS 2. What Does Matthew Mean In The Same Context By ‘Great Tribulation?’

If we set Matthew’s version of the speech of Jesus about the destruction of the Temple alongside that of Mark and Luke we find that the verse containing the phrase ‘great tribulation’ (no article) parallels Mark 13.19 and Luke 21.23-24. In other words it deals with the sufferings coming on Jerusalem (see the parallel versions of Mark and Luke above). The consequence of that has been evaded by claiming that in His speech Jesus actually taught both what Luke says, and what Matthew and Mark says, as two different parts of the same speech

**indicating two different destructions of Jerusalem. Now quite apart from the fact that the common phrases in the speeches reveal that that cannot be so, as comparison of the parallels between Mark and Luke have demonstrated, it is also beyond all reason. Is it really conceivable that Luke could have omitted a large chunk of Mark dealing with so important a subject as a second destruction of Jerusalem in the end days? Quite frankly it is not. Nor is it conceivable that when Mark records the disciples as asking, in response to the fact that Jesus says that the Temple they are looking at will be torn down, when that will be, he then does not include the answer that Jesus gives, but rather talks of another destruction and another temple. Exegesis on that basis can only be seen as making the text fit the theory without regard to common sense.**

**But if all are speaking of the one destruction of the Temple what then does the ‘great tribulation’ (great affliction), so bad that none has ever been like it or will ever be, refer to. Luke gives us the answer. It refers to the sufferings of the siege of Jerusalem followed by the sufferings of the Jews throughout at least a part of the times of the Gentiles. No other nation has ever gone through such an experience, nor ever will.**

**This being so it is clear that it does not refer to any period in ‘the end days’ called ‘The Great Tribulation’. If the latter is to be held it must be on the basis of other passages than this.**

**End of Excursus 2.**

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