

Luke 21:20-24 Commentary

LUKE 21:20-24 COMMENTARY

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Luke 21:20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then **recognize** that her desolation is at hand: Hotan de idete kukloumenen (PPPFSA) hupo stratopedon Ierousalem tote **gnote** (2PAAM) hoti eggiken (3SRAI) he eremos autes.

THE SIGN OF COMING DESOLATION: SURROUNDED BY ARMIES

Introduction - Luke 21 is frequently referenced in commentaries on Matthew 24, especially to buttress the interpretation that Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24:15-22-note was fulfilled in 70AD at the time of the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem by the Roman armies commanded by Titus. The following commentary will attempt to highlight the **significant differences** between Luke 21 and Matthew 24, differences which are problematic (constituting or presenting a problem or difficulty) when one seeks to use the Luke discourse to support interpretation of Mt 24:15-22 as fulfilled in the past.

But (term of contrast) - What is Jesus contrasting? He has just stated "By your endurance you will gain your lives (literally "your souls")." (Lk 21:19) Clearly Jesus has just issued a call to remain faithful, for trusting in Him is the means to eternal (spiritual) life. Now however Jesus describes a danger to their physical lives and He will explain how they can preserve their physical lives.

When (note) means at that time, and in context Jesus explains it is at the "time" of the visible sign. Recall that after Jesus had predicted the Temple would be razed (Lk 21:6), the disciples did not question His prediction, but they did ask **when** this would occur, specifically asking "What will be the **sign when** these things are about to take place?" (Lk 21:7)

When you see (horao) (cf Mt 24:15-note = "therefore when you see") - The verb **horao** (aorist tense and active voice = the subject carries out the action) means literally to see with one's eyes. Jesus is saying that this event will be easily visible and clearly discernible. To keep this statement in context, recall that Luke records that

while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, "As for **these things** which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." (cf Mt 24:1-2) And they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, **when** therefore will **these things** be? And **what will be the sign when these things** are **about** (Notice "about" means almost, nearly or very close to doing something and thus is also a "time sensitive" word) to take place?" (Lk 21:5-7)

So the disciples asked **when** and **what**? They wanted to know the timing and the **sign**. Jesus responds by linking the **when** with the **what**, giving the Jews a specific **sign** that marks **when these things** were going to take place. The sign in Luke 21:20+ is Jerusalem **surrounded by armies**. Contrast this sign with the sign in Matthew 24:15+ of the **abomination of desolation standing in the holy place**. A simple reading of the text leaves little doubt that these are two different signs, one dealing with the city and the other with the Temple (holy place). To argue that this is not really what these verses are saying is in essence to argue with the plain sense of Jesus' description of these strategic signs! Ipso facto (because of that fact), they are **INDISPUTABLY NOT THE SAME (IDENTICAL) SIGN!**

Surrounded (encircled) ([2944](#)) (**kukloo** related to **kuklos** = a ring, a cycle) means to encircle. In Lk 21:20 **kukloo** is in the present tense and passive voice, which could be translated "*being surrounded*." This tense pictures Jerusalem as "*being surrounded*" which in other words would mean the city was in the *process* of being encircled but that the enemy forces had not yet completely encircled the city. Obviously if the encirclement were complete, Jesus' warnings could not be obeyed. It follows that there may have been a "window of opportunity" for the inhabitants of the city to escape once they saw this "sign." There is a historical record of Jewish believers who escaped when an initial Roman siege was then withdrawn prior to the final siege by Titus (see [discussion below by Fruchtenbaum](#))

Kukloo - 4 NT uses in NAS: encircled(1), gathered around(1), stood around(1), surrounded(1). **Note** - **KJV** has **kukloo** in Rev 20:9 but NAS has the verb **kukleuo** = to encircle, to wind around, to surround, to compass.

Luke 21:20 "But when you see Jerusalem **surrounded** by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.

John 10:24 The Jews then **gathered around** Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Acts 14:20 But while the disciples **stood around** him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

Hebrews 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been **encircled** for seven days.

Rev 20:9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and **surrounded** (**Kukloo in the KJV but kukleuo in the NAS**) the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

Kukloo - 73 verses in NAS in the Septuagint - Gen 2:11, 13 ("**flows around**"); Ex 13:18 ("God **led** the people

around"); Nu 34:4-5; Dt 2:1 ("circled Mount Seir for many days"), Dt 2:3; 32:10; Josh 6:7; Jdg 11:18; 16:2; 19:22; 20:5; 1Sa 7:16; 2Sa 18:15; 22:6; 24:6; 1Ki 5:3; 7:15, 23f; 22:32; 2Ki 3:9; 6:15; 8:21; 11:8; 2Chr 4:3; 18:31; 21:9; 23:2, 7; Job 1:17; 16:13; 19:12; 22:10; Ps 7:7; 22:16; 26:6; 27:6; 32:7, 10; 48:12; 49:5; 55:10; 59:6, 14; 88:17; 91:4; 109:3; 118:10ff; Eccl 1:6; 7:25; 9:14; 12:5; Song 3:2f; 5:7; Isa 29:3; 37:33; Lam 3:5; Ezek 43:17; Hos 7:2; 11:12; Jonah 2:3, 5; Hab 2:16; Zech 14:10.

Below are some uses of **kukloo** in the OT...

Psalms 7:7 Let the assembly of the peoples **encompass** You, And over them return on high.

Psalms 22:16 For dogs have **surrounded** me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.

Psalms 32:7 You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You **surround** me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Psalms 32:10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall **surround** him.

Psalms 49:5 Why should I fear in days of adversity, When the iniquity of my foes **surrounds** me,

Isaiah 29:3 And I will camp against you **encircling** (Heb = dur; Lxx = kukloo) you, And I will set siege works against you, And I will raise up battle towers against you.

Comment: Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled by Sennacherib in about 701BC (2Ki 18:17, cf Isa 37:33) and later by Nebuchadnezzar when the Babylonians surrounded Jerusalem (2Ki 24:11) with the final siege in 588BC lasting for 18 months (2Ki 25:1-4). Jesus made a similar prediction in Lk 19:43-44 and here in Lk 21:20.

Then (5119)(**tote**) is an adverb that functions as an **expression of time**. **Tote** means at that time or a point of time subsequent to another point of time. **Tote** is used with **when** (**hote**) and translated "**when...then**" as here in Luke 21:20 (cp other examples of "when...then" = Mt 9:15, 13:26, 21:1, Mt 25:31, Lk 5:35, 14:10, Jn 7:10, 8:28, 11:6, 12:15 Acts 13:12 [inverted order], Acts 28:1, 1Cor 15:28, 54, 2Cor 12:10, Col 3:4). In short Jesus' warning is crystal clear = "**WHEN** you **SEE**, **THEN** you **KNOW...THEN** you **FLEE!**" (Lk 21:21)

Recognize (1097)(**ginosko**) means to know by experience. **Ginosko** is in the **aorist imperative** which is a command that conveys a sense of urgency! Jesus is saying in essence "Do not miss this sign!" The implication is that "your life depends on your recognition!" It follows that the sign will not be ambiguous! The Jews in Israel were to know by experiencing (**ginosko**) the sight of the Roman armies laying siege to the city of Jerusalem. That was the sign they were to flee and not enter the city. This sign is clearly different from the sign in Mt 24:15+ because in that passage the sign to flee is when the **abomination of desolation** is **standing in the holy place**, the Temple. If the abomination that causes desolation is the Roman army as so many ancient and modern commentators propose, you can see the absurdity of this interpretation, for once the Romans had scaled the defense walls (thus enabling them to be "**standing in the holy place**"), it would have been too late to flee to safety! Furthermore, Josephus records that Titus had set up a perimeter fence to capture any Jews who might attempt to escape (**See Josephus' record**). And so the fact that Jesus gave very specific and different signs in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 is one of several reasons for stating that Mt 24:15-22 is not referring to the past destruction of Jerusalem (as Lk 21:20-24 clearly does) but to the future destruction of the Temple. Yes, I know what you are saying -- "There is no Temple in Jerusalem (as of April, 2016)." But if God can regenerate a nation as He did with Israel in May, 1948, surely He can rebuild a Temple in the city of Jerusalem! (**See "The Tribulation Temple"**) As **Paul Harvey** used to say "And now you know the rest of the story!" (Read Jeremiah declaration [Jer 32:17-note] and God's rhetorical question [Jer 32:27-note]).

Her - This refers to Jerusalem which is a feminine noun in Greek.

Even resources that interpret Mt 24:15 are forced to acknowledge the difficulty of their proposed interpretation. Thus **A L Williams** in the **Pulpit Commentary** on Matthew favors the identity of the **abomination** as the Roman army and as with most similar commentaries, appeals to Jesus' "sign" in Lk 21:20+ to support his interpretation of Mt 24:15. And yet **Williams** admits that

*the presence of the Latin forces would be no new sign to the Jewish people, as they had been familiar with such a sight for many years. If the Temple itself is meant (referring to the phrase "holy place"), **it is plain that it would be too late to fly from that doomed city** when the Roman eagles were already in the hallowed courts.*

I agree with **Williams** on this point. It would be TOO LATE TO FLEE! In addition Williams records that Josephus states that Titus had a wall constructed which encompassed the entire city of Jerusalem

to guard against the Jews' coming out....So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city

Here is **Josephus' record** of Roman General Titus building a "retaining" wall around Jerusalem to remove all hope of escape...

That therefore his opinion was, that if they aimed at quickness, joined with security, they must build a wall round about the whole city. Which was, he thought, the only way to prevent the Jews from coming out any way. And that then they would either entirely despair of saving the city, and so would surrender it up to him; or be still the more easily conquered when the famine had farther weakened them. For that besides this wall, he would not lie entirely at rest afterward; but would take care then to have banks raised again, when those that would oppose them were become weaker. But that if any one should think such a work to be too great, and not to be finished without much difficulty, he ought to consider, that it is not fit for Romans to undertake any small work: and that none but God himself could with ease accomplish any great thing whatsoever.....When Titus had therefore **encompassed the city with this wall**, and put garrisons into proper places, he went round the wall, at the first watch of the night, and observed how the guard was kept...3. **So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city.** Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families. The upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine: and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged. The children also, and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead, wheresoever their misery seized them. [Read [Josephus's description of the wall in Book 5, Chapter 12, Verses 1-3](#)].

Notice that this retaining wall was built before the Roman Army even broke through the walls of Jerusalem, before the Roman Army could even possibly stand in the **holy place**! Do you see the problem one encounters if they interpret the sign of the **abomination of desolation** in Mt 24:15 as the event marking when the Jews were to flee the city (Mt 24:16)? As it has already been reasoned, this record by Josephus makes it virtually impossible that the Roman Army was the **abomination of desolation** in Mt 24:15! To reiterate, if the Roman army is the **abomination** and it must stand in the **holy place** and that would be the warning to the Jews to flee, then the warning sign was (as they say) "*too little, too late!*" So from both historical and Biblical perspectives, the interpretation which ascribes the **abomination** to the Roman army is nigh to impossible if one interprets the Biblical text **Literally!**

Her desolation is at hand - This refers to the desolation of the holy city of Jerusalem. In contrast Matthew refers to the desolation of the holy Temple. One might argue that desolation of the city would obviously include desolation of the Temple, but they are specifically identified because Luke is referring to a different event than Matthew and Mark. To say that all three are referring to the same event requires one to "twist" the words of Jesus to make them "fit" one's predetermined preterist interpretation of Matthew 24 and Mark 13!

NET Bible on Lk 21:20 - This passage refers to the events associated with the fall of Jerusalem, when the city is *surrounded by armies*. (**Ed:** In contrast Mt 24:15-note is associated with the fall of the Temple, when it is occupied by the *abomination of desolation*.)

JESUS FIRST PREDICTION OF JERUSALEM'S DESOLATION

If we compare Luke 21:20-24 with Luke 19:41-44+, we see that Jesus had already prophesied that Jerusalem would be surrounded and made desolate

And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this **day** (**More literally** = "on this day, even you" - the day that had been given to the Jews in Daniel's prophecy!), even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another (**Ed:** This would certainly qualify as "desolation!"), because you did not recognize the **time** of your visitation (**Ed:** If the Jews had studied and believed Da 9:25, 26+ they would have known the **day** and **time** of Jesus' visitation! See also Lk 1:68-79+)." (Lk 19:41-43+).

Desolation (2050) (**eremos** from **eremoo** = to desolate, lay waste) means a state of being made uninhabitable = devastation, destruction, depopulation. Luke 21:20 refers to the city of Jerusalem. Matthew 24:15-note refers to the holy place (the Temple). Mark 13:14 clearly parallels Mt 24:15 but instead of "standing in the holy place" Mark has "standing where it should not be."

The related adjective **eremos** was used by Jesus when He prophesied to the Jews "**Behold**, your house (Temple) is being left to you **desolate!**" (Mt 23:38). In Mt 24:26 **eremos** is translated wilderness, which is the most frequent way it is translated in the NT.

Eremosis - 3v - Mt 24:15, Mark 13:14, Luke 21:20

Eremosis - 26x in 23v in the Septuagint - Lev 26:34-35; 2Chr 30:7; 36:21; Ps 73:19; Jer 4:7 ("To make your land a **waste**"); Jer 7:34 ("the land will become a **ruin**"); Jer 22:5; 25:18; 44:6, 22; Da 8:13; 9:2, 18, 25, 27; 11:31; 12:11. See discussion of Daniel passages in discussion of **abomination of desolation** below.

Leviticus 26:34-35 'Then the land will enjoy its Sabbaths all the days of the **desolation** (Hebrew = **shamen/samen**; Lxx = **eremosis**) while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. 35 'All the days of its **desolation** it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your Sabbaths, while you were living on it.

2Chronicles 36:21 - (verse 20 for context) And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation (Hebrew = **shamen/samen**; Lxx = **eremosis**) it kept Sabbath until seventy years were complete.

Jeremiah 7:34 "Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a **ruin**. (Hebrew = chorbah = waste, desolation; Lxx = eremosis)

Jeremiah 22:5 "But if you will not obey these words, I swear by Myself," declares the LORD, "that this house will become a **desolation** (Hebrew = chorbah = waste, desolation; Lxx = eremosis)."

Daniel 9:2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the **desolations** (Hebrew = chorbah = waste, desolation; Lxx = eremosis) of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Daniel 8:13-commentary (**FULFILLED PROPHECY**) Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision *about* the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror ("the transgression that makes desolate"), so as to allow both the holy place (Temple) and the host (the Jews) to be trampled?"

This prophecy was fulfilled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the "Antichrist of the Old Testament", who caused an altar to be set up in the Temple and placed an idolatrous image of Zeus on the altar (cf 2Macc 6:2). In addition, he turned the priest's chambers into brothels, creating the "abomination that causes desolation". In other words, the Temple was desolate to pious Jews because of the desecration of the holy altar. The Jews had no desire to worship in such a polluted environment and thus the Temple was deprived of (made "desolate" of) Jewish worshippers. In a similar way the future **Antichrist** will set up an **abomination** in the sanctuary, which is in essence demonic counterfeit worship (Da 9:27-note; Da 12:11-note). Even more blatantly defiant of God, the **Antichrist** will command worship of himself and his image! (2Th 2:3-note, 2Th 2:4-note, Rev 13:14-note, Rev 13:15-note) God will allow this gross evil because He is using this devilish man to fulfill His purging and purifying purpose in the nation of Israel (cp Da 12:10-note). While the infinitely good and holy God does not cause evil, in His infinite wisdom and omnipotence is able to bring good out of what others mean for evil. (cf Ge 50:20, Ro 8:28-note)

Read 1Mac 1:41-64NRSV (Note that 1Mac 1:54NRSV is approximately 167BC) (See especially **1Mac 1:46-50NRSV** = "[The king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, gave written orders] to **defile the sanctuary** and the priests, 47 to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, **to sacrifice swine** and other unclean animals, 48 and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves **abominable** by everything unclean and profane, 49 so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. 50 He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.")

Daniel 9:27-commentary (**NOT FULFILLED**) "And **he** (the prince in Da 9:26-commentary) will make a firm covenant with the many (the Jews) for one week (7 years), but in the middle of the week (3.5 years) **he** will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of **abominations** will come one who makes **desolate**, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes **desolate**."

The NIV translation of Da 9:27 says he "will set up an **abomination** that **causes desolation** until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (Da 9:27NIV)

Comment: Notice that both Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11 refer to the abolition of sacrifices and association with **abomination** that makes **desolate**. The question arises as to who is "**he**" in Daniel 9:27? Without going into a detailed discussion, this individual has all the attributes of the future "Antichrist." (See

also Da 11:36+ where he is referred to as "the king" who "will do as he pleases.") For an in depth discussion of "**one week**" and the identity of "**he**" as the future Antichrist see the **commentary** on Daniel 9:27.

See also: Time Phrases - 3.5 years, "Time, times, half a time", 42 mo, 1260 days - The chances that the Spirit inspired these identical time phrases as simply coincidence is highly unlikely. Any intelligent observer must be struck by the fact that they are (1) identical times and (2) used in a similar, sometimes identical eschatological context. To interpret these time phrases as figures of speech is as absurd as interpreting Jesus' promise to rise from the grave in 3 days! Just as Jesus literally meant what He said, so too these time phrases are to be interpreted literally. To not do so is to not be intellectually honest (in my opinion)!

Daniel 11:31-commentary (**FULFILLED PROPHECY**) - "And forces from him ([Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#)) will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the **abomination of desolation**."

Comment: In the **context** of Daniel 11:1-45, this prophetic passage was fulfilled in 167 BC when [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#) (the "Rather Small Horn" of Da 8:9-commentary) placed an idol in the Temple to honor the pagan god Zeus. Antiochus' soldiers even profaned the Temple by spreading sow's broth on the altar and banning daily sacrifices (see comments on Da 8:14-note). This passage would not fulfill Matthew 24:15-note because it was past history at the time Jesus spoke His words of warning. Remember that the **context** is Jesus giving His disciples a description of what the end of the age and His return would look like. As an aside, it is reasonable to refer to this abomination committed by Antiochus in 167 BC as an act which foreshadowed the final, yet to come **abomination**.

John MacArthur - He took to himself the title *Theos Epiphanes*, which means "manifest god," but his enemies nicknamed him *Epimanes*, which means "madman" or "the insane one." Ironically, when he died in 163, he was totally insane, outraged to the point of madness because of his military defeats by the Jewish rebel Judas Maccabaeus. The text of Daniel 11:21-35-note perfectly describes the rule of Antiochus, who gained his throne "by intrigue" (Da 11:21-note), made numerous excursions into Egypt (Da 11:24-27-note), broke his covenant with Israel (Da 11:28-note), and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem (Da 11:31-note). The apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees vividly portray the time of Antiochus and the Jews' zealous resistance to his brutal and sacrilegious tyranny. He slaughtered countless thousands of Jewish men, sold many of their wives and children into slavery, and tried to completely obliterate the Jewish religion. He desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a pig, the most ceremonially unclean of all animals, on the altar and forcing the priests to eat its flesh. He then set up in the Temple an idol of Zeus, the pagan deity he fancied himself as manifesting. That horrible defilement by Antiochus was a preview of the even greater abomination of desolation to be committed by the Antichrist in the end time.

Daniel 12:11-commentary (**NOT FULFILLED**) "And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the **abomination of desolation** is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

Comment: In the **context** of Daniel 12:1-13 (end times), this could be the passage to which Jesus referred in Mt 24:15-note. If one compares Scripture to Scripture, the seminal event (abolition of regular sacrifice and setting up the abomination of desolation) is similar to Daniel's description of the sacrifices in Daniel 9:27.

It is sad that even one of the better pre-1900 commentators like **Jamieson** (Critical Commentary) refer to the Roman army as the **abomination of desolation**! Others say that Luke did not use the phrase **abomination of desolation** because it would have had very little meaning to the Gentile audience. That sounds good but it is mere speculation, especially in light of the context even in Luke that Jesus, a Jew, is answering the question of Jews regarding the Jewish Temple! Not to mention that Matthew and Mark who both use this phrase (and reference Daniel) are recording a different discourse. It follows that it should not surprise us if there are significant differences between Luke and the other two synoptic gospels ([as there are - see chart](#))! The reason **abomination of desolation** and Daniel's prophecy is not mentioned by Luke is because Luke is referring to a different event!

NET Note on Luke 21:20 - The phrase **its desolation** is a reference to the fall of the city, which is the only antecedent present in Luke's account. The parallels to this in Mt 24:15-note and Mk 13:14 refer to the temple's desolation, though Matthew's allusion is clearer. They focus on the parallel events of the end (**Ed**: the end of this age, cp Mt 24:14b), not on the short term realization in A.D. 70. The entire passage has a prophetic "two events in one" typology, where the near term destruction (A.D. 70) is like the end. So the evangelists could choose to focus on the near time realization (Luke) or on its long term fulfillment, which mirrors it (Matthew,

Mark).

Robert Stein makes an interesting comment that "Luke reworded **"abomination of desolation"** (Mk 13:14, Mt 24:15-note) in order to keep his readers from confusing the fall of Jerusalem with the end time." (New American Commentary - Luke) **Comment** - Unfortunately many of the commentators over the years have failed to make the clear distinction with the result that many saints are confused about these important eschatological passages!

In view of the fact that Luke 21 is similar to Matthew 24, it would be prudent to compare these two accounts focusing especially on Luke 21:20-24 which is somewhat controversial. Below is a simple chart comparing Luke 21:19-24 and Matthew 24:14-21 line by line, passage by passage. If you go through these passages and make simple observations of the plain meaning of the text, it is clear that these two discourses share a several similarities, but it also becomes clear that there are many differences.

As **Warren Wiersbe** say commenting on Luke 21:20-24

"This paragraph is peculiar to Luke; there is no parallel in Matthew or Mark, in spite of the similar language in Matthew 24:16-21 (Ed: Better Mt 24:14-21) and Mark 13:14-17. However, it is clear that both Matthew and Mark were referring to events in the middle of the Tribulation when **"the abomination of desolation"** would be set up in the Jewish temple and the Antichrist (the world ruler) would begin to persecute Israel (Da 9:24-27; Rev. 13:1-18). Jesus warned the people to flee and go into hiding, for **"great tribulation"** was about to fall. Luke's account refers not to a distant event to occur during the Tribulation but to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 70, just forty years from that time (see Luke 19:41-44). This terrible event was in many respects a "dress rehearsal" for what will happen when Satan vents his anger on Israel and the believing Gentiles during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev. 12:7-17). The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that nearly a million people were killed by the Romans, and over 100,000 taken captive, when Titus captured the city."

MATTHEW & MARK'S SIGN IS DIFFERENT THAN LUKE

Most of the writers who favor Mt 24:15 as historically fulfilled in 70AD appeal to Luke 21:20-24 to support their interpretation, for Luke's passage clearly describes the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. These writers seem to automatically "default" to the assumption that Luke 21 is describing the same event as Matthew. However, if one **carefully observes** the parallel passages in Luke and Matthew, it is very clear that there are a number of differences ([See Chart Comparison](#)). In fact, if one reads Mt 24:15ff and Lk 21:20-24 literally, it seems clear that Jesus is describing two distinctly different events, one that is yet to occur (Mt 24:15) and one that has occurred (Lk 21:20). A number of commentaries agree that Luke 21:20-24 is not describing the same event as Mt 24:15-21.

Hiebert comments on the differences in the **signs** in Mt 24:15 and Luke 21:20-24 -

"The **sign** given in Luke 21:20 relates to the historical fall of Jerusalem. But **Luke's sign**, Jerusalem surrounded by armies, is **not the same as that given in the other Synoptics** namely, the **abomination of desolation in the temple**. Luke 21:20-24 records a part of the Olivet Discourse which has not exact parallel in the other two Gospels. It vividly pictures the capture of the city and the resultant condition reaching to the end of the age. The similarity of Luke's picture to that of the other Synoptics had generally led to the assumption that they refer to the same event. **While the two events have much in common, there are features in Mark's account which clearly look beyond the fall of Jerusalem and relate to the eschatological end.**" ([The Gospel of Mark- An Expository Commentary- D. Edmond Hiebert](#))

Thomas Constable writes that "The similar passages in Matthew and Mark are sufficiently different to alert the reader to the fact that they deal with a different incident from what Luke described (Matthew 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20). Even some commentators who believe that Luke depended heavily on Mark for his material admit this difference. [Note: E.g, Marshall, The Gospel . . . , p770-71.] (Ed: See Marshall's comments below) ([Luke 21 Commentary](#))

I Howard Marshall admits to significant differences between Luke 21:20-24 and Mark 13:14-20 writing

"The passage is parallel to Mk 13:14-20, but the amount of verbal parallelism is slight (four words in Mk 13:20, 21a and Mk 13:23a). Mark refers cryptically to the '*desolating sacrilege*' and to the need for the people of Judaea to flee; he emphasizes the awful plight of the people under tribulation. **By contrast** Luke specifically names Jerusalem and refers clearly to a siege. Mark's warning about delay (cf. Lk. 17:31) is replaced by a warning to keep away from Jerusalem." ([he Gospel of Luke - The New International Greek Testament Commentary- I. Howard Marshall-](#)).

A C Gaebelein adds that

"Luke's account however differs in many ways from the account given of the prophetic Olivet discourse in Matthew and also that in Mark." ([Luke 21 Commentary - Arno Gaebelein's Annotated Bible](#))

HCSB Study Notes also draws attention to the differences between Luke 21 and Matthew 24 - Matthew 24:15-note refers to "**the abomination of desolation**" spoken of by Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) that will be set up in the holy place in the temple. Luke spoke **only** of the **desolation** of Jerusalem. ([Study Notes](#))

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LUKE 21 AND MATTHEW 24

In the following chart, the points of difference between Luke 21 and Matthew 24 are highlighted in **bold green font** in the Luke 21:19-24 column. From a quick overview, it should be obvious that these two passages have more differences than similarities. It is therefore surprising that so many commentators (especially those explaining on Matthew 24:15-22) see these two sections as parallel passages. If one reasons from simple observation, **they do not appear to be parallel passages!**

Note that the two major irreconcilable differences, "**The Sign**" and "**The Great Distress**" are highlighted in **Green Background**.

COMPARISON OF TWO SIMILAR BUT NOT IDENTICAL PASSAGES	
Luke 21:19-24	Matthew 24:14-22
Immediate Context = Lk 21:19 "By your endurance you will gain your lives"	Immediate Context = Mt 24:14 "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come."
Comment: Context focuses on one's life	Comment: Context focuses on "the end"
Lk 21:20 But when	Mt 24:15-note Therefore when
Lk 21:20 You see	Mt 24:15-note You see
Lk 21:20 What they are to see: Relates to the city of Jerusalem	Mt 24:15-note What they are to see: Relates to the Holy Place
Addresses "you"	Addresses "you" and "the reader"
Comment: "You" suggests direct address to disciples	Comment: "The Reader" suggests a broader audience
"THE SIGN" Jerusalem Surrounded by armies = Her desolation	"THE SIGN" Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy Place
Surrounded	Standing Neuter Gender in Matthew 24:15 Masculine Gender in Mark 13:14
No specific mention of the abomination of desolation	Abomination of Desolation: Also mentioned in Mk 13:14

Armies mentioned	No mention of Armies "In Luke the flight is from the besieging armies, in Matthew, Mark from the persecutions to be waged by Antichrist." (McNeile - 1915)
Her desolation = refers to the desolation of the city	Desolation = refers to the desolation of the Holy Place
No mention of a related prophecy in Daniel	Related prophecy in Daniel - especially Daniel 9:27-note, Da 12:11-note
Lk 21:21 Those in midst of city depart Lk 21:21 Those in country not to enter the city Note emphasis is on the city	No mention of city
Lk 21:22 Days of vengeance in order that all things written may be fulfilled	No Parallel
Lk 21:23 Woe to those with child and nursing	Mt 24:19 - Woe to those with child and nursing
No Parallel	Mt 24:20 - Pray your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath
Lk 21:23 Great distress	Mt 24:21+ - Great Tribulation
Distress = Greek word anagke	Tribulation = Greek word thlipsis
In the Septuagint anagke is used to describe the great Day of the LORD (Zeph 1:15), but never used to specifically describe the future time of distress on Israel. One might argue that distress on Israel is inherent in the "Day of the LORD."	In Septuagint thlipsis is used in Da 12:1+ which describes "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation (of Israel) until that time" (cp Mt 24:21+- time phrases)
Lk 21:23 Upon the land Implies distress local	Mt 24:21-note Implies tribulation global ("since the beginning" [cf "flood"] "no life...saved" both imply global)
"THE GREAT DISTRESS" Distress NOT described as unique or unprecedented	"THE GREAT TRIBULATION" Tribulation described as unique, unprecedented
Lk 21:24 Fall by sword, led captive into all nations - c/w Jewish dispersion - if this were the final destruction of Jerusalem how could the Jews be led captive into all nations?	No parallel
Lk 21:24 Jerusalem trampled under foot until times of Gentiles fulfilled	No parallel
No Parallel	Mt 24:22 those days shall be cut short

DIFFERENT SIGNS POINT TO A DIFFERENT "DESOLATION"

Notice that both Luke 21:20 and Mt 24:15-note begin with the same phrase **"when you see."** Then Jesus goes on to describe distinctly different **"signs"** in Luke and Matthew. Luke says the **"sign"** the Jews are to look for is when Jerusalem is be**surrounded by armies**. When they see that **"sign"** "then recognize that her **desolation** is at hand." In Matthew 24:15 (and Mk 13:14) the **sign** for which the Jews were to watch was **"the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION...standing in the holy place"** While both passages use

the word "**desolation**," Luke associates it with the desolation of the city of Jerusalem and Matthew associates it with the desolation of the "**holy place**," the Temple. If one observes these texts with an unbiased view not trying to read anything into the words of Jesus, it is clear that Jesus is giving two distinctly different signs which pointing to two different events, events occurring at different times. The other major difference between Luke and Matthew (Mark) that cannot be easily resolved is that the **tribulation** in Matthew (Mt 24:21) and Mark (Mk 13:19, cf similar description in Da 12:1) is a unique historical event that will never be repeated. While 70 AD was a time of horrible distress to the Jews, even the distress of World War II proved to be even more horrible. Thus Mt 24:21, Mk 13:19 and Da 12:1 describe a time that will surpass the horror of 70AD! And while there is disagreement regarding the interpretation of Luke 21:20-24 (discussed below), my view is that historically this was fulfilled in 70AD.

COMMENTARIES FAVORING LUKE 21:20-24 AS HISTORICALLY FULFILLED

Almost all evangelical commentaries interpret Luke 21:20-24 as descriptive of a historical event that was fulfilled in 70AD. Here is just a sample: Arnold Fruchtenbaum (see his comments above), [David Guzik](#), [Arno Gaebelein's Annotated Bible](#), [Harry Ironside's Notes](#), [Thomas Ice](#), Warren Wiersbe, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, [Henry Morris](#) (see below), [Steven Cole](#), [NET Bible Notes](#), [J. Vernon McGee](#), ESV Study Bible, NIV Study Bible, NLT Study Bible, Faith Life Study Bible (Logos Software), KJV Study Bible, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Believer's Study Bible (W A Criswell), New Unger's Bible Handbook, Kent Hughes (Preaching the Word: Luke), [John Walvoord](#). Note that all of these writers see a future fulfillment in the following verses in Luke (Luke 21:25ff). Below are some representative comments of those who interpret Luke 20:21-24 as fulfilled in the past...

Henry Morris - In context, this sign refers to the future [Siege of Jerusalem \(70 AD\)](#) by Titus, climaxing with its invasion and destruction in A.D. 70. Seeing Jerusalem surrounded by Roman armies would be the signal for believers to flee to the mountains. This event can be considered as a type of the coming flight during the great tribulation period, except that then the sign will be seeing the abomination of desolation set up in the rebuilt temple by the Antichrist (Matthew 24:15,16-note). In the meantime, after the destruction of the temple by Titus in A.D. 70, Jerusalem was more completely "desolated" by Hadrian's armies in A.D. 135. ([Defender's Study Bible Notes](#))

John Walvoord - The prophecies of Luke 21:20-24 are clearly fulfilled in the first century, whereas the answers to the questions in Matthew and Mark and in Luke 21:9-19 and 21:25-28 have reference to the end of the age. ([Ref](#))

NET Bible Notes - (On phrase "her desolation) = "**her**," referring to the city of Jerusalem (the name "Jerusalem" in Greek is a feminine noun). The phrase **its desolation** is a reference to the fall of the city, which is the only antecedent present in Luke's account. The parallels to this in Mt 24:15-note and Mk 13:14 refer to the **temple's desolation**, though Matthew's allusion is clearer. They focus on the parallel events of **the end**, not on the short term realization in A.D. 70. The entire passage has a prophetic "two events in one" typology, where the near term destruction (A.D. 70) is like the end. So the evangelists could choose to focus on the near time realization (Luke) or on its long term fulfillment, which mirrors it (Matthew, Mark). ([Ref](#)) (Bolding added)

COMMENTARIES FAVORING LUKE 21:20-24 AS YET FUTURE

Commentaries that interpret Luke 21:20-24 as describing a yet future fulfillment: John MacArthur's commentary on Luke and his study Bible ([Sermon on Lk 21:20-24](#)), Moody Bible Commentary (Kevin Zuber), Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Walter Liefeld) (Actually it is a "hybrid" = "It is certainly possible to assume that Jesus' predictions incorporated two phases: [1] the events of AD 70 involving the Temple and [2] those in the distant future"). Below are some representative comments...

Kevin Zuber in the **Moody Bible Commentary** - The tribulation will be a time of unprecedented persecution and hardship for the Jewish people and nation of Israel (Lk 21:23b; cf. Jer 30:7). The height of persecution will come with a siege of Jerusalem (Lk 21:20a; Zech 12:1-9). The description here and in parallel texts on this point in prophetic history (cf. Mt 24:4-31) make it unlikely that this is a description of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. (**Ed**: See comparison of "parallel texts" in Luke 21 and Matthew 24 in chart below).

John MacArthur sermon on Luke 21:20-24 - Was He talking about 70 A.D. here? I don't think so. Keep reading. Lk 21:21, "**Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains**" that happened then (**ED: When is the "then" to which MacArthur refers?** Sure sounds like he is referring to 70AD). "**Let those who are in the midst of the city depart**," that happened (**Ed: When did it happen?** 70AD). "Let those who are in the

country not enter the city," and they didn't (**Ed**: So it was also fulfilled). Then Lk 21:22, "**Because these are the days of vengeance in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled.**" Wait a minute here. That language does not lend itself to a 70 A.D. interpretation. These are not the **days of vengeance**. These are not the events which cause things which have been written to all be fulfilled. The **days of vengeance**, just take that phrase. That is an Old Testament expression used to describe the coming time of Tribulation. It is an Old Testament expression to speak of divine vengeance from God in the end time, the time of Jacob's trouble. You read about the days of vengeance in Isaiah 34, 35, 61, 63. Daniel 12:1 speaks of the days of vengeance (**ED**: THAT IS **NOT EXACTLY** WHAT IT SAYS - "THERE WILL BE A **TIME OF DISTRESS**," AND THE GREEK WORD IS "THLIPSIS" WHICH IS NOT FOUND IN LUKE'S GOSPEL BUT IS FOUND IN Mt 24:21+ IN THE PHRASE "THE GREAT TRIBULATION", ALSO IN Mt 24:29, Mk 13:19, Mk 13:24), Hosea 9, Micah 5, Zechariah 12, Zechariah 14. You're talking here about the final end, when God's final vengeance falls on the ungodly and on human history. The days of vengeance when all things which are written become fulfilled...that's a sweeping statement...sweeping statement. When all things which are written become fulfilled. This is far more than what happened in 70 A.D. ([The Terrors of the Great Tribulation, Part 1](#))

Comment: It is interesting that MacArthur writes that the actions Jesus called for in Luke 20:21 actually "happened then." And as I note above the time to which he refers seems to be 70AD. So I do find it surprising that MacArthur goes on to discount the possibility that Luke 21:20-24 was not fulfilled in 70AD. If I am assessing his comments correctly, it looks as if he is primarily basing his conclusion on the phrase "**days of vengeance**," since that term is used in the OT describing the "end times." (e.g., Isa 34:8, 35:4, 61:2, 63:4, Micah 5:15). While that observation does tend to weigh toward an end times fulfillment, there are still significant problems with that interpretation.

(1) The major problem is the sign in Luke is simply not the same as the sign in Matthew 24:15+. There is no way to avoid this conclusion. Yes, the word "**desolation**" is used by both Luke 21:20 and Matthew 24:15 (and Mk 13:14), but Luke ascribes the desolation to the **city** and Matthew ascribes desolation to the **holy place** in the Temple. One might argue that the Temple is in the city, so **desolation** of the city would include desolation of the Temple. Possibly, but why did Jesus give a very unique sign for the **desolation** of the Temple? And why did He cross reference that sign with the prophecy of Daniel to help the reader understand the sign in Matthew 24:15+? I think the answer is that these were different signs pointing to different historical events, one past and one yet future.

(2) Another problem with a futuristic interpretation of Luke 21:20-24 is that historically the actions Jesus' encouraged were heeded by first century believers who escaped the city when the initial Roman siege was withdrawn ([see Fruchtenbaum's analysis below](#)). MacArthur agrees with this observation.

(3) A third problem is that **distress (anagke)** in Lk 21:23 is a different Greek word than **tribulation (thlipsis)**. Matthew and Mark which are clearly parallel passages, and both use the same Greek word **thlipsis**. But even more significant is the fact that Matthew describes the **Tribulation** as a unique, unprecedented event in the history of the world (Mt 24:22), but **Luke makes no such distinction**. While one might argue that Luke just left out this distinctive, important detail, the other conclusion is that Luke's **distress** was a qualitatively and quantitatively different **distress** than the **tribulation** in the end times.

(4) Finally, if Luke is describing a future event, why would Jews be led captive into all nations in the last 3.5 years of this age, during the time of the **Great Tribulation**? That simply makes no sense. In fact we know from several texts, not only will the Jews not be led captive, but they will be hounded and persecuted by Satan who seeks their total annihilation! He seeks to kill them, not capture them! (See Rev 12:12-14+ where "**dragon**" = Satan and "**woman**" = Israel). Zechariah 13:8 also describes a time of horrible bloodshed for 2/3's of the Jews in the end times - "And it will come about in all the land," Declares the LORD, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it." In sum, the Scripture would seem to be quite clear that the Jews in the end times will not be led captive but will be killed (or at least attempted to be exterminated).

In summary, while I have the greatest respect for Dr MacArthur, I still think that the weight of evidence favors the interpretation of Luke 21:20-24 as descriptive of an event which has been historically fulfilled in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70AD. The majority of evangelical writers who espouse a futuristic interpretation of other passages (especially Mt 24:15-28+) also favor the

past historical fulfillment of Luke 21:20-24 in 70AD. For example, Thomas Ice, an avid [dispensationalist](#), comments on Luke 21:20-24...

[Preterists](#) and [futurists](#) do not agree on much when it comes to the Olivet Discourse (**Ed**: I would argue that Luke's account *was not* spoken on the Mount of Olives and therefore strictly speaking is not an "*Olivet Discourse*." Read Lk 21:1-19, especially Lk 21:5-8). However, when it comes to the interpretation of Luke 21:20-24, we both agree that it is a literal prophecy of the AD 70 judgment (**Ed**: Not all futurists agree including expositors like John MacArthur - see list below). Preterist Dr. Kenneth Gentry says, "The **context** of Luke demands a literal Jerusalem (Luke 21:20) besieged by literal armies (Luke 21:20) in literal Judea (Luke 21:21)- which as a matter of indisputable historical record occurred in the events leading up to AD 70." [5] However, when expounding on Luke 21:25-28, preterists resort to massive doses of symbolic interpretation in their attempt to give these verses a first-century fulfillment. The futurist does not need to make such adjustments and continues a plain or literal reading of the text. I believe that Luke 21:25-28 is a brief prophecy that parallels Matthew 24 and Mark 13, as I will expound upon in the future....It is clear that Luke 21:20-24 is spoke of the first-century Roman invasion of Jerusalem. ([AN INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 24-25](#)) ([See Ice's 153 page paper on Matthew 24-25](#))

D A Carson in his comments on the identity of the **abomination of desolation** in Matthew 24:15 notes that

"Some have suggested Caligula's plan to set up a pagan altar and standards in the temple precincts (A.D. 40), a plan never carried out; but the description in the following verses cannot apply to that. **The obvious occasion, in general terms, is A.D. 70, though certain difficulties must be faced**"... (**Ed comment**: Then Carson mentions a major problem!)"by the time the Romans had actually desecrated the temple in A.D. 70, it was **too late for anyone in the city to flee**. Mark's language is less explicit: "standing where it does not belong" (Mark 13:14), instead of "standing in the holy place." Luke resolves the matter: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20)—but now there is no explicit mention of "the abomination of desolation." **Possibly** Jesus said something **ambiguous**, such as Mark reports." (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

Comment: Another **possibility** for Luke not mentioning the crucial phrase, **the abomination of desolation**, is that Luke 21:20-24 does not refer to the same event as Mt 24:15. It is also interesting that Carson quotes Mark 13:14 but not from the ESV translation which reads "the **abomination of desolation** standing where **he** (masculine, singular) ought not to be." The fact that Luke does not mention the **abomination of desolation** standing in the holy place coupled with the fact that the ESV translation of Mk 13:14ESV translates it as a "**he**" make an "A.D. 70" fulfillment less that "obvious!" In fact, the ESV rendering would favor a **man** standing in the holy place (cp 2Th 2:3+, 2Th 2:4+) rather than an **army** standing in the holy place!

Luke 21:21 "Then let those who are in Judea **flee** to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city **depart**, and let not those who are in the country **enter** the city: tote oi en te loudaia pheugetosan (3PPAM) eis ta hore kai oi en meso autas ekchoreitosan (3PPAM) kai oi en tais chorais me eiserchesthosan (3PPAM) eis autas

- **flee** - Lu 17:31-33 Ge 19:17,26 Ex 9:20,21 Pr 22:3 Mt 24:16 Mk 13:15
- **let those**: Nu 16:26 Jer 6:1 35:11 37:12 Rev 18:4

GET OUTA TOWN QUICK

Then (expression of time) - **Then** signifies "at that time" or "next" and should always prompt a simple question of "At what time?" or "What's next?" Jesus has just given them a clear "sign" of **when** the Jews were to take action. This sign was to be a visible for all to see = Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies. The encircling army presaged the coming desolation of the city. As Stein says the "**then**" "refers to the **when**" of Lk 21:7." (Ibid) To reiterate Jesus' command = **'WHEN** you **SEE...THEN** you **FLEE!**"

Flee...depart...not enter - Jesus issues not one but three commands to emphasize the urgency of His warning to abandon the city of Jerusalem.

MacDonald - Unbelief might have argued that with a besieging army outside the walls, escape would be impossible; but God's Word never fails. The Roman general withdrew his armies for a short season, thus giving the believing Jews the opportunity to escape.

Flee to the mountains - This instruction is for those who are in Judea. These would be less accessible and familiar to the foreign forces and thus would be more likely to be safe havens.

Flee (escape) ([5343](#))(**pheugo**) means to flee away in the sense of to take to flight in order to seek safety. To flee in the sense of to escape something, being made safe from danger by eluding or avoiding it. **Flee** is a command (present imperative) calling for continual obedience - keep on fleeing!

Let not those who are in the country enter the city - This is the opposite of the normal reaction of country dwellers who would normally flee to the protective walls of the city when an enemy was invading their land. Jesus command counteracts the prevalent logic! As an aside Jesus said many things that countered the logic of men!

Eusebius a Roman historian (ad 260/265 - 339/340) describes the fleeing of the Christians from Jerusalem prior to the destruction in AD 70. There were several large scale revolts by the Jews against the Roman Empire between AD 66-135, the **First Jewish-Roman War (66-73AD)** being the one of interest to us and to which Eusebius alludes in the following quote:

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation (**Ed**: Could Eusebius be referring to Jesus' command in Luke 21? We cannot be certain, but it is possible.), vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called **Pella (in the Transjordan)**. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men. (**Eusebius Pamphilius- Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine**)

Arnold Fruchtenbaum elaborates on how Jesus' warning command to **flee** upon seeing the sign of surrounding armies Luke 21:20 was obeyed by the Jewish believers...

In answer to their first question (**Ed**: This refers to the questions the disciples ask Jesus. Lk 21:7 was their question about the Temple He had just predicted would be razed - Lk 21:6.), the Messiah gave them the **sign** (**Ed**: They asked for a specific "**sign**" in Lk 21:7) that would mark the fact that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. The **sign** was the surrounding of the City of Jerusalem by armies. The Jewish believers were told that, when they saw this **sign**, they were to leave Jerusalem and Judea and flee outside the Land. This **sign** would mark the coming **desolation** of Jerusalem and, from that point on, Jerusalem will be continually "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Lk 21:24)

This prophecy was fulfilled in a very marvelous way. In the year A.D. 66, the first Jewish revolt broke out against the Romans. When the revolt first began, the Roman general in the Land, **Cestius Gallus (see description of the Jewish Revolt AD 66-74)**, came with his armies from Caesarea and **surrounded** Jerusalem. The surrounding of the city marked the **sign** that Jesus had promised, and the Jewish believers knew that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. Jesus had commanded the Jewish believers to desert the city when they saw this happening (Lk 21:21). However, it was impossible to do so while the Romans were surrounding the city.

Then **Cestius Gallus** noticed that his supply lines were not secure. He did not have enough supplies to maintain an extended siege, so he lifted the siege of Jerusalem in order to go back to Caesarea. On the way, he was attacked by Jewish forces and killed (AD 67). **Temporarily, the city was no longer surrounded by the armies, so every single Jewish believer was able to leave Jerusalem.** They crossed the Jordan River and set up a new community of Jewish believers in the town of **Pella in the Transjordan**. They were joined by Jewish believers from Judea, Galilee, and the Golan. There, they waited for the prophecy of Yeshua to be fulfilled.

In the year A.D. 68, a new Roman general by the name of **Vespasian** and his son, **Titus**, again **besieged the city**, and in the year A.D. 70, the city and the Temple were destroyed. Altogether, 1,100,000 Jews were killed in this final onslaught (**Ed**: As noted elsewhere this estimate which is usually attributed to Josephus is felt by a number of historians to be an exaggeration), but not one Jewish believer died because they obeyed the words of their Messiah. Since that time, Jerusalem has indeed been trodden down by the Gentiles and continues to be so to the present day. Jerusalem will not be free of Gentile nations treading upon her until the Messiah returns. With these words, the Messiah answered their first question, the **sign** of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. (Lk 21:7) (**Ed**: Lk 21:7 = "what *will* be the **sign** when these things are about to take place?" - Context is Lk 21:6 = Jesus had just said "these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which

there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down.") (Messianic Bible Study Collection - Logos Software)

Joseph Benson (Methodist minister who wrote in mid-1700's) explained how the Jewish believers were able to flee Jerusalem even in the face of a Roman siege:

It is remarkable, that after the Romans, under Cestius Gallus, made their first advance toward Jerusalem, they suddenly withdrew again, in a most unexpected and impolitic manner. "This conduct of the Roman general," says Macknight, "so contrary to all the rules of prudence, was doubtless brought to pass by the **providence of God**, Who interposed in this manner for the deliverance of the disciples of his Son." For, at this juncture, the Christians, considering it as a signal to retire, left Jerusalem, and removed to Pella and other places beyond the river Jordan, so that they all marvelously escaped the general ruin of their country, and we do not read anywhere that so much as one of them perished. Of such signal service was this caution of our Lord to his followers!"

Eric Cline has an interesting historical note on wars and **Jerusalem** noting that "There have been at least 118 separate conflicts in and for Jerusalem during the past four millennia—conflicts that ranged from local religious struggles to strategic military campaigns and that embraced everything in between. Jerusalem has been destroyed completely at least twice, besieged twenty-three times, attacked an additional fifty-two times, and captured and recaptured forty-four times. It has been the scene of twenty revolts and innumerable riots, has had at least five separate periods of violent terrorist attacks during the past century, and has only changed hands completely peacefully twice in the past four thousand years. ([Jerusalem Besieged- From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel](#))

Luke 21:22 Because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled: hoti hemerai ekdikeseos autai eisin (3PPAI) tou plesthenai (APN) panta ta gegrammena (RPPNPA).

- **days:** Isa 34:8, Isa 61:2 Jer 51:6 Ro 2:5 2Pe 2:9, 3:7
- **all:** Lev 26:14-33 Dt 28:15-68, Dt 29:19-28, Dt 32:34,43 Ps 69:22-28, Ps 149:7-9 Isa 65:12-16 Da 9:26,27 Zec 11:1-3 14:1,2 Mal 4:1 Mk 13:19,20

Because - (term of explanation) Jesus is explaining why the residents are to flee Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem will not experience victory but vengeance.

These are days of vengeance ("time of retribution" - New English Bible) - While the instruments of **vengeance** were the Roman army, their destruction of Jerusalem was not an act of chance or fate, but an act of a faithful God, faithful to fulfill His promise of punishment for sin. Even as God had called King Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" (Jer 25:9), so too He would use the Roman armies of Vespasian commanded by Titus as His instrument to judge the nation of Israel.

The psalmist calls God a "God of vengeance" (Psalm 94:1) Isaiah recorded that "the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion." (Isa. 34:8). Here the context is not Israel per se, but God's coming wrath against the nations (Isa 34:1) that will occur in the last days (see Rev 6:1-Rev 19:21).

Vengeance ([1557](#)) (**ekdikesis** from **ekdikeo** = from **ek** = out or from + **dike** = right, justice) is literally that which proceeds from justice. **Ekdikesis** means to give justice to someone who has been wronged, in the present context the One wronged being God! It means to repay harm with harm on assumption that initial harm was unjustified and that retribution is therefore called for. The judgments of God are holy and right, and free from any element of self-gratification. There is thus no element of vindictiveness or sense of "taking revenge" in the judgments of God for they are both holy and righteous (right).

In order that - (term of purpose or result) The purpose of the **days of vengeance** is to fulfill what God has previously decreed.

All things which are written will be fulfilled - God said it. That settles it, whether we understand it or not. If it has not come to pass, then we can rest assured it will because as Joshua with some of his last words reminded Israel "Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:45) and "not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; **ALL have been fulfilled for you**, not one of them has failed." (Josh 23:14). Unfortunately for Israel the "**all things**" includes not only the wonderful promises (many of which are yet to be fulfilled) but also the righteous judgments (as in Lk 21:22)!

This phrase "all things which are written will be fulfilled" is the most difficult to resolve if one interprets Luke 21:21-24 as past fulfilled prophecy. I will agree that this suggests an end time destruction of Jerusalem.

Written (1125)(grapho) is in the **perfect tense** signifying it was written in the past and is still in effect. It speaks of permanence of the writing. To what writing Luke is referring is not clear, but there are a number of passages where God predicts vengeance on His people (cp Lev 26:14-33 Dt 28:15-68, Dt 29:19-28, Dt 32:34,43 Ps 69:22-28, Ps 149:7-9 Isa 65:12-16) For example in Leviticus 26:14-16, 31-32 God promises "But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you....I will lay waste (eremos - emptied, desolate, abandoned) **your cities** as well, and will make your **sanctuaries desolate** (exeremoo = make quite desolate, devastate); and I will not smell your soothing aromas. And I will **make the land desolate** so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it."

May be fulfilled (4092)(pimplemi) means to fill full. It can refer to spatial filling (Lk 5:7; Lxx of Ge 24:16 = "filled her jar", cp Ge 21:19; filling of wells with dirt = Ge 26:15). It can refer to being filled with the Holy Spirit (John the Baptist in utero = Lk 1:23). In Lk 21:22 and Lk 1:20 **pimplemi** refers to fulfilled prophecy, of prediction that would surely happen. **Pimplemi** was used to describe the days of Zacharias' priestly service as coming to an end (Lk 1:23). In the Septuagint **pimplemi** is used figuratively to satisfy a need totally or be satiated (Pr 1:31). In Ge 6:11, 13 the earth "was **filled** (Lxx - pimplemi) with violence." In Ex 16:12 God told the children of Israel "in the morning you **shall be filled** (Lxx - pimplemi) with bread." In Ps 65:4 David affirms "How blessed is the one whom Thou dost choose, and bring near to Thee, To dwell in Thy courts. We will be **satisfied** (Lxx = pimplemi) with the goodness of Thy house, Thy holy temple." This begs a question - Do I seek satisfaction in God or in "goods"? Only one will truly satisfy my soul! (cp Ps 23:6, Ps 27:4, Ps 84:10).

Liddell-Scott have some secular uses of **pimplemi** - to fill, discharge an office, to fill oneself a cup of wine, to get ships laden, to satiate one's desire with meat and drink, fill the plain full of your chariots, Passive - to be filled, become or be full of, to have enough of a thing.

Pimplemi - 24x in 24v - NAS Usage: come(1), completed(2), ended(1), filled(18), fulfilled(1), passed(1).

Matt 22:10; 27:48; Luke 1:15, 23, 41, 57, 67; 2:6, 21f; 4:28; 5:7, 26; 6:11; 21:22; Acts 2:4; 3:10; 4:8, 31; 5:17; 9:17; 13:9, 45; 19:29

Luke 21:23 Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people: ouai tais en gastri echousais (PAPFPD) kai tais thelazousais (PAPFPD) en ekeinai tais hemerais estai (3PSFMI) gar anagke megale epi tes ges kai orge tos lao touto,

- **woe:** Lu 23:29 De 28:56,57 La 4:10 Heb 9:12-17 13:16 Mt 24:19 Mk 13:17
- **great:** Lu 19:27,43 Mt 21:41,44 1Th 2:16 Heb 10:26-31 Jas 5:1 1Pe 4:17

Woe (Alas! How dreadful!) (3759)(ouai) (3750 - click and select "Phonetics" to hear "ouai" pronounced) (ouai pronounced "oo-ah'ee," an eerie, ominous foreboding sound some say is like the cry of an eagle) is an onomatopoeic word (an imitation of the sound) which serves as an interjection expressing a cry of intense distress, displeasure or horror. It may convey a warning of impending disaster to the hearers.

Those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days - This needs little comment, as it would be very difficult for pregnant and nursing women to flee quickly when the siege of Jerusalem occurs. Clearly **those days** are the days of Jerusalem's impending destruction. Jesus' disciples may have recalled His earlier warning when He declared "Behold, the **days** are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.'" (Lk 23:29).

For - This **term of explanation** should always prompt the reader to pause and ponder what the writer is explaining. In this context Jesus is explaining why it will be so horrible for pregnant women and nursing moms.

There will be great distress - As already noted, the Greek word Luke uses for **distress** (**anagke**) is different than that used by Matthew (**thlipsis**). It is notable that in the Septuagint **thlipsis** is used in Da 12:1-note which describes "a time of **distress** such as never occurred since there was a nation (of Israel) until that time." (cp Jesus' similar description in Mt 24:21). While the Greek verb **anagke** is used in one OT passage to describe the Day of the LORD (Zeph 1:15), it is not used by Daniel to describe the time of unique suffering that will come on Israel in the end times.

Great distress is very similar to the description of the time of **great tribulation** Jesus predicted in Mt 24:21. As discussed the text

uses different Greek verbs, but more importantly the great tribulation is distinguished by the solemn phrase "**such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.**" While Luke predicted **great distress** in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, Matthew predicted **great tribulation** of unprecedented proportions. If one reads Lk 21:23 and Mt 24:21 as would a little child, it seems clear that these two times of distress are different and that Luke's distress occurred in 70AD and Matthew's distress has yet to occur. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to make a futile (like a number of commentaries that fight hard against a future fulfillment of Matthew 24) attempt to make the text say something it does not say! These are serious, life and death passages, and it is hardly conceivable that a loving God would inspire a warning message that only an person with a theological doctorate could accurately interpret!

Distress (318)(**anagke** from **ana** = up, again, back, renewal, repetition, intensity, reversal + **agkale** = arm when bent) refers to any necessity or compulsion, outer or inner, brought on by a variety of circumstances. The idea of an obligation of compelling nature (a complete obligation, a necessary thing) is dominant in Mt 18:7; Lk 14:18; Ro 13:5; 1Co 7:37; 9:16; 2Co 9:7; Philemon 14; Heb 7:12, 27; 9:16, 23; Jude 3; Lk 23:17. **Anagke** can be subdivided into a moral necessity (as in Mt 18:7; Heb 7:12, 27; 9:16, 23) or a spiritual necessity (Ro 13:5; 1Cor 9:16; Jude 1:3) The other sense of **anagke** is that of trouble, distress or hardship, the meaning intended by Luke in the present passage (Used in a similar sense in 1Co 7:26; 2Co 6:4; 2Co 12:10, 1Thes 3:7).

Anagke is used in the Septuagint (Lxx) in Jeremiah 15:4 to describe the judgment of God on the nation of Judah (cf Jer 9:15 where the English of the Lxx says He will feed them with **trouble** [anagke]). Four times in Ps 107 Israel cried out to the LORD in their trouble (thlibo = press upon) and He delivered them out of their **distresses** (anagke) (Ps 107:6, 13, 19, 28). What a longsuffering God we serve! Zephaniah 1:15 describes a "day of trouble (thlipsis) and **distress** (anagke)," which is a description of the great Day of the LORD.

Wrath (3709)(**orge** from **orgaō** = to teem, to swell) conveys the picture of a swelling which eventually bursts, and thus describes an anger that proceeds from one's settled nature. Orge does not refer to uncontrollable anger to which men are so prone but to God's settled indignation and controlled passionate hostile feeling toward sin in all its various manifestations. Settled indignation means that God's holiness cannot and will not coexist with sin in any form whatsoever. Orge is not the momentary, emotional, and often uncontrolled anger (thumos) to which human beings are prone. Orge is used primarily of God's holy, righteous wrath but occasionally refers to the wrath of men (Eph 4:31)

To this people - Which people? In context this is specifically directly to the Jews. This distress is not global as implied in Matthew 24:21-22 but local.

Luke 21:24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled: kai pesountai (3PFMI) stomati machaires kai aichmalotisthesontai (3PFPI) eis ta ethne panta kai Ierousalem estai (3PSFMI) patoumene (PPPFSN) hupo ethnon achri ou plerothosin (3PAPS) kairoi ethnon.

- **led**: Dt 28:64-68
- **Jerusalem**: Isa 5:5 63:18 La 1:15 Rev 11:2
- **until**: Isa 66:12,19 Da 9:27, 12:7 Mal 1:11 Ro 11:25

They - The Jews

Will fall by the edge of the sword - While it may be an exaggeration, Josephus reports that over 1 million Jews were killed when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and burned the Temple in 70AD.

Will be led captive into all the nations - Josephus reports that 97,000 prisoners were taken and carried off everywhere.

Moses had prophesied this fate would befall Israel if they disobeyed Jehovah writing "Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known. 65 "And among those nations you shall find no rest, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul. 66 "So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you shall be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life. 67 "In the morning you shall say, 'Would that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Would that it were morning!' because of the dread of your heart which you dread, and for the sight of your eyes which you shall see." (Dt 28:64-67)

Led captive (163)(**aichmalotizo** from **aichme** = a spear + **halotēōs** = to be taken or conquered) was a military term which mean to take captive as a prisoner or be led away captive.

Bob Deffinbaugh adds that "The Roman historian Tacitus states (Historiae, v, 13, 4) that the normal population of Jerusalem was 600,000 before A.D. 70. And if we bear in mind that before the investment of the city the Jews poured into Jerusalem in tens of thousands for the Passover and could not again return to their homes and thus remained in the city throughout the five months' siege, it may be understood that hundreds of thousands would perish in the over-populated city." ([Jerusalem in the Last Days Luke 21:5-38](#))

Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles - The Gentile Romans trampled Jerusalem in 70AD and the city will continue to be tread under foot by Gentiles until the end times for John writes that the Gentiles will "tread under foot the holy city for 42 months." It is notable that 42 months correlates perfectly with the last 3.5 years that is known as the Great Tribulation. (**See** Time Phrases - 3.5 years, "Time, times, half a time", 42 mo, 1260 days)

Warren Wiersbe explains that "This was not the first time Jerusalem would be "trodden down of the Gentiles," for the Babylonians had destroyed the city in 586 B.C. when "**the times of the Gentiles**" began. This significant period in God's plan will end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, destroys all Gentile power, and sets up His own righteous kingdom (Da 2:34-36, 44-45; Rev. 19:11ff)."

Related Discussion -

- [What are the times of the Gentiles?](#)
- [The Times of the Gentiles and "Fullness of the Gentiles"](#) - John Walvoord

Trampled ([3961](#))(**pateo**) means to tread on or step on. Transitively **pateo** means to set foot on, to tread, or to trample something (Rev 14:20). Pateo in a hostile sense means to tread down or trample under foot and figuratively to subdue by force, plunder, treat contemptuously (Lk 21:24, Rev 11:2). Intransitively pateo means to walk or step on something (Lk 10:19)

Pateo - 5x in NT - **NAS** Usage: trampled under(1), tread(1), tread under foot(1), treads(1), trodden(1).

Luke 10:19 "Behold, I have given you authority **totread** on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.

Luke 21:24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will **betrampled under** foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Revelation 11:2-[note](#) "Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will **tread under foot** the holy city for forty-two months.

Revelation 14:20-[note](#) And the wine press was **trodden** outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

Comment: We see a similar passage in Joel 3:13 "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, **tread**, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great."

Revelation 19:15-[note](#) From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He **treads** the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

Pateo - 17v in the Septuagint -

Deut 11:24; Jdg 9:27; Neh 13:15; Job 22:15; 28:8; Isa 1:12; 16:10; 25:10; 26:6; 32:20; 42:5, 16; Jer 48:33; Lam 1:15; Joel 3:13; Amos 2:7; Zech 10:5;

Deuteronomy 11:24 "Every place on which the sole of your foot **shall tread** shall be yours; your border shall be from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea.

Judges 9:27 And they went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and **trod** them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

Nehemiah 13:15 In those days I saw in Judah some who were **treading** wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food.

Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled - This phrase is mentioned only by Luke. Given the fact that Luke is speaking in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, some expositors feel that this date marks the beginning of the times of the Gentiles. Notice however that Luke actually does not state when these **times** begin but only predicts when they will terminate. So this

naturally begs the question "When did these times begin?" The majority of conservative writers feel that Jerusalem's defeat by Babylon (Gentiles) in 586BC marks the inception and that over the succeeding centuries Jerusalem has never been totally free of Gentile domination to some degree.

Until - This word is an **expression of time** and means something will continue to happen up to a point and then it will not happen. In the present context (and keep in mind the following analysis is based on a literal interpretation of Scripture, not someone's systematic theology!), Luke says something found in no other place in Scripture, that the city of Jerusalem will be trampled under foot **UNTIL**. So there is a day when the Gentiles will not tread on the city of Jerusalem. Luke says that the time allotted to the Gentiles to tread on Jerusalem is finite and will come to an end one day. One might ask if the [Six-Day War](#) of 1967 in which the Jews regained control of Jerusalem ([See "The Old City"](#)) brought an end to Gentile domination of the city and so that year marked the end of the "times of the Gentiles?" While one might suppose that is the case from a superficial reading of the text, one must ask if Israel today (2016) controls **ALL** of the city? In fact the truth is that they do not control the MOST IMPORTANT piece of land in the entire city and for that matter, in the entire world! What is that property? Of course it is the [Temple Mount](#) area, the site of the former Jewish Temples and the present site of the Muslim [Dome of the Rock](#) and the [Al-Aqsa Mosque](#), the third holiest site in Islam. This small but supremely strategic swath of real estate is under Muslim control, and so it is *tread under the feet* of the Gentiles so to speak.

The apostle John writes of a future day that they are to **leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.**" (Revelation 11:2-note; compare also Zech 12:2-3 which speaks of the last days) And so Jerusalem will be tread underfoot even to the end of this age, the Gentile domination (to one degree or another) coming to an end only after the 42 months which corresponds to Jesus' description of the coming "**Great Tribulation**," a tribulation which He will cut short by His glorious appearing (And praise God, He cuts it short! = Mt 24:22). At that time Christ the Rock will crush ALL Gentile powers, even as prophesied in the Stone's striking of Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel 2 (Da 2:34-35-note, Da 2:43-45-note). The Righteous One will then set up His **Kingdom** with Jerusalem as His capital and the newly rebuilt Temple (Ezek 40:1-Ezek 48:35-[See Jehovah Shammah-The Lord is There](#)) the site of His glorious throne. **In that day the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled! Hallelujah!**

The times of the Gentiles be fulfilled - From the preceding discussion it is clear that the "times of the Gentiles" will indeed be fulfilled at the end of this age at the **Second Coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Times (opportunities) ([2540](#))(**kairos**) means a point of time or period of time, time, period, frequently with the implication of being especially fit for something and without emphasis on precise chronology. It means a moment or period as especially appropriate the right, proper, favorable time (at the right time). A season. A point of time. A moment. An opportunity. Something that lasts for a season and so is transient, temporary or enduring only for a specific period of time. In short, the Gentile's treading of Jerusalem will last only for a "season," a season we are currently in and have been in since the Gentile power of Babylon first destroyed the holy city in 586BC.

R C Sproul makes a rather strange statement - "Luke's reference to **'the times of the Gentiles'** lends credence to the idea that Scripture distinguishes between a Jewish epoch and a Gentile epoch. This in turn supports the idea that "the end of the age" may refer to the end of the Jewish age." (The Last Days According to Jesus)

Comment: I think the apostles might vehemently disagree with Sproul for in their final question to Jesus before His ascension Luke records **"And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"**" (Acts 1:6) Notice that Jesus **did not** correct them saying "No, you are mistaken because the Jewish age has ended" (Acts 1:7) but gave them their "immediate assignment" to take the Gospel to the world (Acts 1:8)! The groundless speculation by R C Sproul is absolutely, unequivocally incorrect! To the contrary, the end of the age will mark the beginning of the Messianic age! Hallelujah! Amen!

Dr Walvoord's article

- [The Times of the Gentiles and "Fullness of the Gentiles"](#)