

Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matt. 24: 15, 16).¹

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains --" (Luke 21: 20, 21).²

There are strong indications that these two verses do not refer to the same event and time. Notice some important differences which appear to distinguish them:

The questions asked in the preceding contexts are not the same. In **Matthew** there are three concerns expressed in the questions posed by the disciples. *"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and [the sign] of the end of the age?'" (Matt. 24:3).* In **Luke** there is no inquiry about Christ's coming or the end of the age (though Christ touches on both in His answer). *"So they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things [bringing about the destruction of the Temple] are about to take place?'" (Luke 21:7).* They only question when the Temple will be destroyed.

The sign given is different. In **Matthew** it is the inward corruption of the Temple that is in view. In **Luke** it is the outward aggression against Jerusalem that is to alert them. During the future Tribulation, there will probably be scant need for surrounding the city, for it will already be under the control of the Antichrist. He will have sufficient access to even the Temple to set up his image there. Also the Temple could not be corrupted by the Romans in 70 ad. (for it was under the total control of the Jews until it was destroyed).

While in both cases they are to flee to the mountains, the prospect before them is different. In **Matthew**, the Great Tribulation is to begin, lasting (as other Scriptures depict) 3 1/2 years (Matt. 24:21). In **Luke**, Jerusalem is to be desolated and trodden under the feet of the Gentiles for (as we now know) nearly two thousand years. The time when Jerusalem is to be trodden down by the Gentiles does not begin in the midst of the Tribulation, only its conclusion at the end of that time is in view in Luke 21:24.

In **Matthew**, where the mid-Tribulation situation is before us, the Jews will be protected from the wrath of Satan and the Antichrist and gathered into the wilderness from all nations. Compare Rev. 12:14 with Ezekiel 20:34 and following. The very verse which coins the expression "the Time of Jacob's trouble" goes on to say, "but he [Jacob] shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). In **Luke** the time following the desolation of Jerusalem is described as a time when

¹The New King James Version will be used unless noted otherwise.

²"The whole body, of the church at Jerusalem [in 70 ad.], having been commanded by a divine revelation . . . removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain place beyond the Jordan, called Pella." -- Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea (265 - 339 ad.): cited in "Israel My Glory" magazine for April/May 1989, page 23.

there will be a great slaughter, and the Jews will be led captive into all nations (Luke 21:23, 24).

The last 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation, as it touches the nation of Israel, is described in Ezekiel twenty and Revelation twelve. *"'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,' says the Lord GOD. 'I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD'"* (Ezek. 20:33 - 38).

"Then the woman [Israel] fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days [3 1/2 years]. ... Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3 1/2 years], from the presence of the serpent" (Rev. 12:6, 13, 14).

Israel will be forced, by the fury of the LORD and His mighty hand (Ezek. 20:33, 34), to flee from the countries where they have been scattered. From Rev. 12:13, 14 it is evident that God will use Satan and his pawn, the Antichrist, as His tools to accomplish His wrath (even as He used the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar to take them out of the land earlier -- Isa. 10:5, 6, 15). This flight into the "wilderness of the peoples" (Ezek. 20:35; Rev. 12:14) is specifically compared to the Exodus. In the Exodus God used Pharaoh to drive Israel into the wilderness, but there God protected them from him. The wilderness was a place of refuge. However, in that wilderness God dealt with them Himself in judgment after judgment -- until a whole generation died there. So in the last half of the Tribulation God will protect His people from Antichrist, but will then judge them Himself -- purging out the rebels from among them.

If Luke 21:24 refers to the mid-Tribulation situation, there would not be time for them to be taken into all nations as captives and then be gathered back out of all nations into the wilderness. There are only 3 1/2 years for the total operation, and Rev. 12:14 tells us they will be protected in that wilderness for that full time.

But, with so much parallelism between Matthew 24 and Luke 21, how can Christ be speaking in **Matthew** of an event still in the future today and, in **Luke**, of a similar one which happened almost 2,000 years ago? I think there are at least two possibilities worthy of consideration.

Both the 24th of Matthew and the 21st of Luke are prophetic passages. At the time Christ was speaking, in either passage, all of the events delineated were still future. One of the characteristics of prophecy which has caused a great deal of perplexity among students, but which bears rich fruit when recognized and implemented, is the intentional discontinuity exhibited at times. For instance, in Ezekiel twenty-eight there is a prophecy about Tyre. The first ten verses have to do with the man sitting on the throne as their ruler, addressed as the

"Prince of Tyre." Then, with only a few hints of a change, it is Satan, the power behind the throne, the true "King of Tyre," who is in view, and the time leaps back to the distant past. Again, near the end of the chapter (about verse 17), the topic seems to revert back to the human king of Tyre -- or, perhaps, to the city itself (Ezek. 28:17 - 19).

The sermons recorded in the Gospels are very evidently but brief excerpts from the full text -- as the Holy Spirit edited them for incorporation into Scripture. Notice, for instance, that at one time Christ had been teaching for three days -- and had so kept their undivided attention that they had not even made provision for their food (Matt. 15:32). Yet His longest message recorded in Scripture can be read in much less than an hour. The Holy Spirit could easily have "edited" a lengthy message to fit the context in **Matthew** and, from the same message, selected the portion needed for **Luke's** record. There would be no conflict between the two accounts. They would supplement each other.

Another possibility is that the message recorded in Matthew was given on a different occasion from the one in Luke. During the few days before His arrest He was teaching diverse groups at various times. He could easily have encountered the same zeal for, and pride in, the Temple on separate occasions -- and responded in much the same way, but with significant differences. The background for the sermon in **Matthew** is the departure from the Temple after the dire predictions of Matt. 23:37 - 39 -- and it was in response to the remarks of the disciples. In **Luke** it follows close on the heels of the story of the widow's mite -- and in response to what "some" (Not specifically said to be disciples here) said about the Temple.

In regard to a destruction of the Temple in the middle of the Tribulation, I do not find Scripture clearly depicting such a destruction.

While Daniel 11:30 - 33 may be describing the events of the mid-Tribulation crisis, it seems clear to me it is describing events between the Testaments, which foreshadow the Tribulation.

Daniel 11:30 *For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant.*

31 *And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.*

32 *And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God [the Macaques?] shall be strong, and do exploits.*

33 *And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days.*

34 *Now when they [those who understand?] shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. (KJV)*

George Williams states, "This prophecy [Dan. 11:2 - 45] is an expansion of that of ch. viii. 22 - 25 . . . Up to the words 'on his part' in verse 31, it is past history; and from the words 'and they shall pollute,' etc. (v. 31), to the end, future history."³

However Harry Bultema, in his scholarly work on Daniel, takes the view that the prophecy

³The Students Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, by George Williams, page 627.

changes from history now past to events still future at Dan. 11:36. Concerning Dan. 11:31 - 35 he comments, "These verses speak of the terrible persecutions Antiochus [Epiphanes] inflicted upon the Jews. ... 'The arms that shall stand on his part' refer to the army corps, the troops. What is meant are the Syrian troops which Antiochus had placed in the fortress of Zion. 'The desecration of the sanctuary,' 'the termination of the daily sacrifice,' and the placing of 'the abomination that maketh desolate,' are spoken of in the first chapter of Maccabees, ... Verse 34 is a prophecy of the deliverance effected by the brave Maccabees."⁴

Footnote # 2 on page 917 of the revised Scofield Bible takes the same view.

Looking at the passage itself, notice it is not the Temple destroyed, but the Temple fortress desecrated (Dan. 11:33 NIV). Then, after this, the abomination will be set up -- set up where? The only place it could be placed to fulfill the scriptural records is in the Temple. But how could this be if the Temple has just been destroyed?

The abomination which will make desolate is described clearly in Second Thessalonians. There the "man of sin" "opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

Also, Dan. 11:33 and 34 indicate that many will fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering for many days after the desecration of the Temple fortress. But, according to the passages cited above in Revelation twelve and Ezekiel twenty, Israel will be protected in the wilderness during the full 3 1/2 years following the setting up of the abomination of desolation at the mid point of the Tribulation.

Another passage needs to be addressed concerning the Temple during the last half of the Tribulation.

"But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months" (Rev. 11:2 -- NKJV).

This passage, with its context, indicates that the court of the Temple will be distinguished from the Temple itself, implying that the Temple still exists. This is at the time the two witnesses will be miraculously protected from the wrath of the Antichrist, as they carry on their ministry (Rev. 11:3 - 6 and ff). Coming this late in the book of Revelation, it seems this 3 1/2 years must be the second half of the seven years of tribulation. So, instead of destroying the Temple, the fortress of the Temple will be desecrated, the Gentiles given free access to the court, and the Temple itself not destroyed at this time, but violated and desecrated.

--- William P Heath. Bible Study # 52 <My Documents\Bible Studies\matluke1> -- Microsoft Word

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⁴Commentary on Daniel, by Harry Bultema, page 331.