MILITARY CAMPS AROUND JERUSALEM AND THE MEANING OF ΣΤΡΑΤΟΠΕΔΟΝ IN LUKE 21.20

David H. Wenkel

LCC International University, Klaipėda, Lithuania

1. *Introduction*

Jesus' description of the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21.20-24) includes instructions for his disciples: They must watch for certain events that would imply the city will shortly be destroyed and the temple would be desolated.[1] Specifically, they will know that the end of the city and the temple is nigh when they 'see Jerusalem surrounded' (Lk. 21.20).[2] Thankfully, Lk. 21.20 is unencumbered by text-critical issues.[3] The salient question is this, however: What will Jerusalem be surrounded by? Luke narrates Jesus as teaching that they would see it surrounded by the στρατοπέδων (the genitive neuter plural form of the noun, στρατόπεδον). While etymology is never determinative of meaning, it is noteworthy that this is a compound word based on the verb 'to make war' (στρατεύω) and the noun 'ground, site' (πέδον). This particular Greek word is difficult to interpret because it is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament. There are several other words in

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1.   Thanks to Dr. Mark Ward Jr. for his insightful comments and editorial suggestions.

2.   Parallel passages to Luke's Olivet Discourse are found in Mk 13 and Mt. 24–25.

3.   There are no relevant variants according to the NA28 textual apparatus (Barbara Aland et al. [eds.], *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece: Based on the Work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 28th edn, 2012], p. 272).

the New Testament related to the military-related stem στρατο-.[4] The word στρατόπεδον appears seven times in the LXX and a few times in Hellenistic papyri.[5] Most contemporary English translations render this word as 'armies'. This paper offers a critical analysis of contemporary translations by considering its usage in Koine Greek contexts and offers suggestions for a more accurate translation of this word as 'military camps'.

2. *Translation Traditions*

Almost every single contemporary English translation renders στρατοπέδων as 'armies'. But this was not always so, and a robust inquiry will yield other possibilities.

   English translations of this word before the KJV (1611) used the word 'host' or something similar.[6] The variants of the Old English word 'host' and its variants meant 'army' or 'troops'. One translation that stands out from this time is the Geneva Bible (1560), which used 'with *souldiers*'

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   4.   The *TDNT* groups the following words together according to their related stem for military service: στρατεύομαι, στρατεία, στρατιά, στρατεύμα, στρατιώτης, συστρατιώτης, στρατηγός, στρατόπεδον, στρατολογέω (see Otto Bauernfeind, 'στρατεύομαι, στρατεία, στρατιά, στρατεύμα, στρατιώτης, συστρατιώτης, στρατηγός, στρατόπεδον, στρατολογέω', in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich [eds.], *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976], VII, p. 701). For a similar grouping, see *s.v.* στρατεύομαι in B.M. Newman, *A Concise Greek–English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010), p. 169.

   5.   For examples of usage in Hellenistic papyri, see, J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), pp. 86, 276. The occurrences in the LXX are discussed below. For a discussion of στρατοπέδων and στρατευμάτων in relation to the Latin term *praefectus castrorum*, see S.R. Llewelyn (ed.), *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (10 vols.; Sydney: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981–2012), VIII, pp. 153-54.

   6.   The John Wycliff translation of 1382 used 'an oost'. The Tyndale Bible (1534) and the Great Bible (1539) both used 'an hoste'. Similarly, the Bishop's Bible (1568) used 'an hoast'. This translation may be due to the fact that Latin military terms such as *exercituum* (genitive plural of *exercitus*) were sometimes translated as 'hosts' (e.g. PG, XV, p. 402).

(emphasis mine). The translation of the KJV is an inflection point for English Bibles with respect to the translation of Lk. 21.20 because of the phrase, 'compassed with *armies*' (emphasis mine). Ever since the KJV, most English translations of Lk. 21.20 identify the city of Jerusalem as being surrounded 'by armies'.[7]

Some specialized English translations indicate that there are other ways to translate this word. This includes *The Message*, which is often paraphrastic. The entire verse reads: 'When you see *soldiers camped* all around Jerusalem, then you'll know that she is about to be devastated' (emphasis mine). D.B. Hart's *The New Testament* (2017) renders this verse as, 'But, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by *arms and encampments*, then know that her desolation has drawn near.'[8]

There are two problems with the use of the English word 'armies'. First, this rendering is confusing because it suggests the presence of multiple nations. The plural use of the contemporary English word 'armies' denotes multiple countries, as each country is typically understood to have its own singular (or collective) 'army'.[9] In modern English, each country has a singular 'army'. Even where 'armies' is understood to refer to the collective forces of a singular nation, this does not reflect standard English usage. Second, the use of 'armies' is unnecessarily prejudicial toward an entirely futuristic fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. The use of 'armies' in Lk. 21.20 almost ensures a futuristic reading of this text because there was only one national army present in the attack upon the city in 70 CE—Rome's army. Modern readers may point out that it was not possible for this text to have been fulfilled if the Roman army was the only one present. Whether or not a futuristic reading of Luke's Olivet Discourse is accurate is beside the point. Theological readings of eschatological discourses must be built upon an

7.   The list of English translations that use 'armies' in Lk. 21.20 includes: ESV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NIV, NET, NASB (1995, 2020), ISV, NLT, NEB, CSB, LEB, LSB and the KNT.

8.   D.B. Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). Emphasis mine.

9.   The *Collins English Dictionary* (*s.v.* army) uses the singular to define the primary sense of 'army' as 'the military land forces of a nation' (Patrick Hanks [ed.], *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* [London: William Collins Sons, 1979], p. 78).

accurate reading of the grammatical-historical sense of the original languages.

To summarize this section: Ever since the KJV, the English translation tradition has held to the rendering of στρατοπέδων in Lk. 21.20 as 'armies'. The translation of this word as 'armies' is now almost ubiquitous in Bible translations. A comparison of multiple English translations may lead readers to erroneously conclude that the best translation of στρατοπέδων is the word 'armies'. However, this unanimity begins to break down and other possibilities appear as the study deepens. Specifically, a number of secondary sources suggest that this word means military 'encampment(s)' of Roman legions. The next three sections return *ad fontes* in order to evaluate these options.

3. *A Term for Encampment*

This section argues that the word στρατόπεδον is a technical military term that always refers to a military force that is encamped, in contrast to being on the march.[10] In most cases, this word conceives of a military force that is in a state of abstraction, preparation or rest, rather than being in an active state.

There are also a number of technical commentaries that suggest alternative translations for this word. Conceptually, Joel B. Green comments that this verse 'describes only what one might expect in the context of a military operation whose objective was the defeat of a walled city like Jerusalem'.[11] When it comes to translation alternatives, some commentators suggest 'camps' or 'encamped soldiers' would be a better rendering of στρατοπέδων.[12]

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10.   L. Okamura concludes that soldiers on the march constitute an *exercitus* or στρατιά (see L. Okamura, 'Plotinus in Syria and Mesopotamia', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 46 [1995], pp. 87-112 [109]).

11.   J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 738.

12.   For the suggestion of 'camps', see J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (WBC, 35C; Dallas: Word, 1993), p. 999; for 'encamped soldiers', see D.L. Bock, *Luke* (BECNT, 2; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), II, p. 1676.

A brief survey of Greek–English lexicons suggests that there are better alternatives than 'armies' for στρατοπέδων in Lk. 21.20. Only the *EDNT* actually suggests that this word should be translated as 'armies' in Lk. 21.20, but also suggests that 'legions' is an option.[13] The now dated lexicon commonly known as Moulton and Milligan (*s.v.* στρατόπεδον) renders this word as 'soldiers in a camp', or 'army' specifically for Lk. 21.20. This same entry concludes by stating that Egyptian papyri from 128–127 BCE indicate that 'the word seems to have its ordinary meaning as "camp"'. It is significant to observe that several other lexicons generally suggest glosses such as 'encampment' or 'camp' (in relation to the military).[14] The presence of these suggestions for alternative translations draws attention to the primary sources for this word.

The reason why the primary sources should be reconsidered is that J. Sievers argues that Josephus's use of the expression κινέω στρατόπεδον in *War* 1.297 and *Ant.* 14.406 is a technical translation of the common Latin counterpart *castra movere*, which meant 'to move camp'.[15] Previously, S. Gero argued along the same lines by concluding that the Latin words *castellum* and *castra* were 'technical military terms'.[16] It stands to reason that, if the Latin word *castra* was a technical military term for encampments of Romans soldiers, then it may be the case that Greek uses of στρατόπεδον may also have been technical in nature. The strong connection between the

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13. See *s.v.* στρατόπεδον in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1993), III, p. 280.

14. For example, see *s.v.* στρᾰτόπεδον in Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); *s.v.* στρᾰτόπεδον in Henry George Liddell et al. (eds.), *A Greek–English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 1653.; *s.v.* στρατός in Robert Beekes and Alexander Lubotsky (eds.), *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 1411. By contrast, Louw and Nida (*s.v.* στρατόπεδον) affirm the use of 'army' and the plural use of 'armies' in Lk. 21:20 (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida [eds.], *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988], p. 549).

15. J. Sievers, 'Josephus' Rendering of Latin Terminology in Greek', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 64 (2013), pp. 1-18 (17-18).

16. S. Gero, '"Miles Gloriosus": The Christian and Military Service According to Tertullian', *Church History* 39 (1970), pp. 285-98 (292).

Latin word *castra* and the Greek word στρατόπεδον is likely the reason that the online lexicon Perseus identifies the latter primarily as 'the ground on which soldiers are encamped', as well as 'a camp' or 'encampment'.[17]

Christopher Francese explains that the '*castra* symbolized military life, as the toga symbolized civilian life' in Roman imagination.[18] Francese concludes that the 'many metaphorical uses of the word [*castra*] in Latin show the central place of the military camp in the Roman imagination and the militarized quality of Roman culture in general'.[19]

With respect to diachronic usage, the Greek historian Arrian of Nicomedia or Flavius Arrianus (c. 86/89–after 146/160 CE) clearly differentiated between a military unit as a στρατεία, στρατιά or στρατεύμα and the land or camp it occupied as a στρατόπεδον.[20] Later, a writer as late as Tertullian (c. 155–240 CE) was using this Latin word *castra* to describe the army as one of the social institutions where Christians could be found.[21] In early third-century Alexandria, 'στρατόπεδον could refer to either "camps" or "soldiers".'[22] Such usage demonstrates that there was a long and enduring history of using the concept of Roman encampments in vernacular language throughout the first century.

The technical nature of this word with respect to an encampment is borne out by the rules reflective of its usage. J.E. Harry goes to great lengths to explain the technicality of στρατόπεδον and its cognates as they relate to classical Greek syntax: 'A general does not "lead on" (προσάγει) a "camp", for the latter ceases to exist as soon as it is led to the attack—it is no longer a στρατόπεδον, but a στρατεύμα or στρατός.'[23] Harry continues, 'Of course, a στρατιά can be spoken of loosely as a στρατόπεδον (Hdt. I. 76; 5.113; 9.51); but the fact remains that the Greeks did not say προσάγειν

17.   See *s.v.* στρατόπεδον online: https://perseus.uchicago.edu.

18.   C. Francese, *Ancient Rome in So Many Words* (New York: Hippocrene, 2007), p. 133. Italics original.

19.   Francese, *Ancient Rome*, p. 133.

20.   Okamura, 'Plotinus', p. 107.

21.   Francese, *Ancient Rome*, p. 133; Gero, '"Miles Gloriosus"', p. 292.

22.   Okamura, 'Plotinus', p. 107.

23.   Here, J.E. Harry is referring to the Greek syntax in the Athenian tragedy *Heraclidae* by Euripides (c. 480–406 BCE) (J.E. Harry, *The Greek Tragic Poets: Emendations, Discussions, and Critical Notes* [Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1914], p. 112).

στρατόπεδον.'[24] Harry concludes that this is significant because a 'general encamps the army'.[25] The Oxford classicist Reginald Macan follows suit when he explains that the maritime reference to the Persian fleet by Herodotus (*Hist.* 8.75) as τὸ στρατόπεδον 'can hardly be used consciously for the fleet at sea'.[26] The word always referred to a military body at rest. For our purposes, it is significant that στρατόπεδον denotes an encamped military force or a fleet at rest if used in a maritime context.

The canons of classical Greek syntax appear to hold true for usage that moves closer to Luke's Koine Greek of the first century.[27] There are exceptions, but there is a general sense in which στρατόπεδον continues to refer to an encamped army in Koine Greek. The Hellenistic *diēgēsis* called the *Letter of Aristeas* uses στρατόπεδον to refer to an entire army, but not in a context describing military action:[28]

> He showed the greatest enthusiasm in the business, for it was God who had brought our purpose to fulfilment in its entirety and constrained him to redeem not only those who had come into Egypt with the army (τῷ στρατοπέδῳ) of his father but any who had come before that time or had been subsequently brought into the kingdom. (*Let.Aris.* 20)

Likewise, S. Mason notes that there is some interchangeable use of παρεμβολή for a site or grounds for encampments and στρατόπεδον for the

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24. Harry, *Greek Tragic Poets*, p. 112.

25. Harry, *Greek Tragic Poets*, p. 112.

26. R.W. Macan, *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth, Ninth Books with Introduction and Commentary (English)* (repr., Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 2000), p. 475.

27. The linguistic fallacy of 'semantic obsolescence' assumes that a word that means one thing in classical Greek still retains that same meaning at a later stage in Koine Greek (see D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2nd edn, 1996], p. 35).

28. For the use of 'army' to translate στρατοπέδων in *Let.Aris.* 20, see M. Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates: Letter of Aristeas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 105; J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament* (2 vols.; repr.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983–1985), II, p. 13.

encampments themselves (e.g. Josephus, *War* 3.76-77, 90).[29] This is also the word used for establishing a military base in Josephus's *Life* (214, 398, 405).[30] When Josephus discusses the biblical book of Numbers (22.41), he uses στρατόπεδον as *a military term* to describe the Israelites' camp as it was being inspected by Balak and Balaam (*Ant*. 4.112).[31] Thus, Mason concludes that the word στρατόπεδον is Josephus's 'normal word for military or legionary camps'.[32] This semantic overlap supports the conclusion that the latter remained a technical term for military encampments.

Every instance of στρατόπεδον in the LXX refers to an entire army and uses adjectival modifiers to clarify the scope of the referent because its typical meaning is for subset(s) of such an army encampment. The use of adjectival modifiers is used in LXX Jer. 41.1 '… and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and his whole army (πᾶν τὸ στρατόπεδον αὐτοῦ) …' Likewise, a similar form of the adjectival modifier *pas* is used in LXX Jer. 48.12a 'And they brought their whole army (καὶ ἤγαγον ἅπαν τὸ στρατόπεδον αὐτῶν) and departed to make war against him.' Similar usages of the Greek modifier *pas* are found in 2 Macc. 9.9 (πᾶν τὸ στρατόπεδον) and 4 Macc. 3.13 (πᾶν τὸ τῶν πολεμίων στρατόπεδον). This usage supports the conclusion that στρατόπεδον could refer to an entire army, but because it was primarily for units or encampments, it required an adjectival modifier.

Further support for the technicality of this word in Koine Greek as referring to *passive* military encampments is found in contrastive texts with descriptions of *active* military actions. To be clear, the word could be used for an army at rest or in motion, but not engaged in an attack.[33] A text from the New Testament that portrays an army in an active military state of operations is described in Rev. 19.19: 'And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies (στράτευμα) gathered to make war' (ESV). Here, the relevant noun is στράτευμα, which refers to an active military force or a

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29.   S. Mason (ed.), *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Judean War 2* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2008), I, p. 177.

30.   Mason, *Flavius Josephus*, I, p. 49 n. 429.

31.   For a discussion of this word as a 'military term', see Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 123, 127.

32.   Mason, *Flavius Josephus*, I, p. 341.

33.   Here I seek to develop Okamura's argument that στρατόπεδον could refer to an army 'at rest' or 'in motion' as a person could join or accompany one (Okamura, 'Plotinus', p. 109).

group of soldiers.[34] This word choice in Rev. 19.19 points to the enduring distinctions between στράτευμα and στρατόπεδον. Luke (23.11) uses the same noun to describe 'Herod with his soldiers (στράτευμα)' in the process of mocking and torturing Jesus during his Passion. It is noteworthy that when Luke uses the word στράτευμα, he refers to soldiers who are *not* encamped. Again, Luke's word choice reflects a distinction between 'soldiers' and an 'encampment'.

There are exceptions to this rule (of using στρατόπεδον for an encamped army) in the LXX; however, they represent a minority of its usage.[35] The word στρατόπεδον is used a total of seven times in the LXX and five of these refer to an army in abstraction (without reference to any military action, either active or passive).[36] The two usages of this word that refer to active military presence both occur in LXX Jeremiah (41.1; 48.12). The rest of the occurrences in the LXX refer either to an army in abstraction (Wis. 12.8; 2 Macc. 8.12; 9.9; 3 Macc. 6.17) or explicitly to an encampment (4 Macc. 3.13). Elsewhere, the LXX seems to use the noun στρατοπεδεία for an 'encampment' (e.g. 3 Kgdms 22.36). This means that the exceptions to the rule described here only occur in one text (LXX Jeremiah). Elsewhere, Josephus uses στρατόπεδον to describe a military encampment of tents (*Life* 398) and to describe armies in abstraction (*Ant.* 14.271).

The definition of this word as a reference to a military body in a passive state is important because it eliminates the suggestion of using 'foot soldiers', which implies a military force actively fighting.[37] In other words, a military body composed of 'foot soldiers' is much different from one en-

34. For other instances of στράτευμα in an active military context, see Mt. 22.7; for usage in an abstracted passive context, see *Let.Aris*. 37.

35. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (eds.), *Septuaginta: Id Est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta Lxx Interpreters* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2nd edn, 2006).

36. Two recent lexicons for the LXX only list 'army' as a possible gloss for στρατόπεδον, see *s.v.* στρατόπεδον in J. Lust, E. Eynikel and K. Hauspie (eds.), *A Greek–English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, rev. edn, 2003) and R. Brannan (ed.), *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Lexham Research Lexicons; Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020).

37. J.T. Carroll translates στρατοπέδων as 'armies of foot soldiers' and equivalent to 'the sword wielded by the nations or Gentiles' (J.T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* [NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012], p. 418).

camped, as a body of soldiers on foot may suggest they are a unit actively engaged in battle. Likewise, the English words 'troops' or 'soldiers' may be eliminated as potential glosses on the grounds that Luke would have used στράτευμα, a word he had already used (Lk. 23.11).

To summarize this section, στρατόπεδον and its usage in Greek contexts points to the conclusion that it mostly refers to a military body that is encamped, rather than active in battle. It is also used for describing a military body in abstraction and depicting its state apart from action or inaction. If στρατόπεδον was used for a specific military body such as a Roman legion, it would not be used to describe a legion on the move in a battle formation, charge or attack. This means that most translations of this word should communicate the concept of encampment, perhaps by using a two-word construction such as 'military camps'.

4. *The Question of Specificity*

In Lk. 21.20, the genitive construction ὑπὸ στρατοπέδων expresses the 'ultimate agency' of the singular passive participle κυκλουμένην as it applies to the city of Jerusalem.[38] The previous section demonstrated that στρατόπεδον mostly referred to an army at rest and not actively engaged in military marches, charges, or battles. In addition, the *EDNT* and BDAG (*s.v.* στρατόπεδον) offer an identical semantic range for this word, which includes three possibilities: (1) a military camp, (2) a body of troops or army and (3) a Roman legion. Thus, the question of specificity remains: Which one of these does Luke mean when he narrates the surrounding of Jerusalem?

The proper use of linguistics clarifies the issue. Luke does not mean and cannot mean the entire semantic range all at once. In other words, it is not reasonable to argue that Luke intended to use this word to reflect all three or more possibilities. This type of reasoning is sometimes called 'illegitimate totality transfer' and would overload the word with an entire range of meanings not justified by the context.[39] This means that the common translation of στρατοπέδων as 'armies' is making an implicit argument that Luke does

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38.   For the genitive of 'ultimate agency', see M. Culy, M.C. Parsons and J.J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), p. 651.

39.   Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 60-61.

not mean 'military camps' or a 'Roman legion'. One of these has to be the most accurate. The question of specificity is clear: Was Jesus referring to entire 'armies' from various nations surrounding Jerusalem, or to a subset of a military force such as a legion or encampment?

The problem of ambiguity or specificity is inherent in the nature of the referent, for a military unit of any kind is built upon the concept of nested hierarchy.[40] Military hierarchies universally depend upon subsets of each other in order for a chain of command to function. This means that any discussion of military actors or action will inevitably require some kind of specification in the context, or the question of specificity will remain open. The literary context will determine how specificity matters.

As in any case, context is determinative of meaning. Here in Lk. 21.20, the context of the genitive construction (ὑπὸ στρατοπέδων) yields the significant point that Luke seems to be intentionally ambiguous about the exact identity of this enemy. This ambiguity may be due to Luke's usage of Mark (Mk 13.14).[41] The literary quality of the larger context in Luke (his version of the Olivet Discourse) is best understood as apocalyptic discourse, a subgenre given to apocalyptic qualities and prophetic visions that may have multiple fulfillments.[42] Jesus' use of the word 'desolation' (ἐρήμωσις) in Lk. 21.20 signals the prophetic visions of Daniel (Dan. 9.26) of eschatological desolations in God's temple. Ambiguity is important to preserve in this

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40.   For a discussion of a 'carefully graduated system of subordination' with respect to the use of this term in classical Greek and Latin, see *s.v. exercitus* in W. Smith (ed.), *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: John Murray, 1849), p. 485.

41.   On this point, C. Tuckett suggests Lk. 21.20 is an interpretation of Mark's (13.14) 'apocalyptic and enigmatic' passage (C. Tuckett, *Luke* [London: T. & T. Clark, 2000], p. 39).

42.   With respect to the Gospel of Mark, E. Shively argues that it is characterized by 'apocalyptic discourse' and that the microcosm of Mk 3.20-30 'provides the program for the whole Gospel' (E. Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22-30* [BZNW, 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012], p. 1). For the definition of 'apocalyptic discourse' as 'the literary, ideological, and social characteristics of apocalyptic language', see R.A. Taylor, *Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), p. 35. Similarly, G. Carey distinguishes between 'apocalyptic discourse' from 'apocalyptic literature' (G. Carey, *Apocalyptic Literature in the New Testament* [CBS; Nashville: Abingdon, 2016], p. 9).

translation because it reflects Luke's intention to 'provide a view of the ultimate End in the distant future through the lens of destruction of Jerusalem in the immediate future'.[43] However, the word choice and depth of description likely reflect the fact that Jesus may have provided just enough information to warn his original audience without appearing to be anti-Roman. Luke adds to the description of the time when Jerusalem might be surrounded by using the equally ambiguous term 'enemies' (Lk. 19.43), which confirms his intention.

Luke's ambiguity in this textual unit is important to consider because it rules out the translation of στρατοπέδων with 'Roman legions' or 'legionary camps'. Using either of these two terms would mistake the *sense* of the word with its *referent*. This is important to consider because this word was used to precisely refer to Roman legions (Polybius, *Hist*. 1.16.2; 1.26.6).[44] This is in spite of the fact that the original audience most likely only had familiarity with the Roman army and would only have conceived of Jesus' warning in these terms.

Within the immediate literary context, Luke (Lk. 8.30) already uses the Greek word λεγιών ('legion') to refer to a demonic force and he chooses not to use that word here. Luke does not want to be too specific. Those who will surround Jerusalem will attack 'by the edge of the sword' (Lk. 21.24), but this description would apply to any army and could be interpreted symbolically. Likewise, the reference to the identity of these attackers as 'Gentiles' (Lk. 21.24) is equally nebulous, as that would include any military body that was not Jewish. Jesus' speech gives enough detail to whet the appetite of the imagination but does not provide absolute identification. These exegetical details support the conclusion that translating στρατοπέδων with specificity does not fit with the literary qualities in this section.

The salient point here is that the translation of στρατοπέδων with 'military camps' does justice to Luke's intentional ambiguity as reflected throughout his Olivet Discourse.[45] The use of 'military camps' is a superior

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43. J.R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 592.

44. Okamura notes that στρατόπεδον was used narrowly to refer to Roman legions in third-century texts by the Roman historian Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 55.23.2 (see Okamura, 'Plotinus', p. 108).

45. The Synoptics present Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Mt. 24–25, Mk 13 and Lk. 21.

option to 'armies' because it reflects the concept or sense of an encampment, as demonstrated by the section above. The use of 'military camps' is neither too specific, nor too broad. This expression offers the possibility of being applicable to Roman legionary camps that surrounded and eventually destroyed Jerusalem in 70 CE. It is also generic or vague enough to apply to any future nations that may have surrounded Jerusalem in order to maintain Jesus' prophetic and apocalyptic tone. For example, using the translation of 'military camps' would fit with the *both*/*and* concept, in which this prophetic saying was first applicable to Roman legions in 70 CE but has repeated application as well ('*whenever* they see Jerusalem encircled by military camps').[46] The use of 'military camps' captures the most accurate sense of what Jesus was warning his first-century audience about and it offers the most flexibility for a range of additional referents in this apocalyptic discourse.

5. *Jesus' Warning in Context(s)*

The argument that the word στρατοπέδων in Lk. 21.20 is best rendered as 'military camps' supports the nature of Jesus' prophetic warning in the context. First, Jesus intends for his audience to see a sign or signal to take action. The presence of Jerusalem being surrounded does not bring imminent death or destruction but allows for those who see it to 'flee to the mountains' and escape (Lk. 21.21). The military formation that Jesus is evoking is one that is getting ready to attack the city but has not done so yet. Luke uses a word to describe a military body that is at rest or in a passive state, rather than in the process of actively attacking the city. This means that those who surround Jerusalem are not στράτευμα but a στρατόπεδον.

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46.   Here I engage with D.E. Garland who understands this passage (Lk. 21.20) to refer to the 'Roman war machine' as described in Lk. 19.43. Garland also suggests that this may be a repeated feature found throughout Israel's history; he writes, 'whenever they see Jerusalem encircled by armies' (see D.E. Garland, *Luke* [ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], p. 832).

When the Roman army arrived to lay siege, they built a square-like camp with a ditch dug around it.[47] This was the *castrum* or στρατόπεδον. These forts were built with wood by soldiers as part of their typical military maneuvers. Inside the square or rectangle was a series of leather tents or smaller structures housing regular soldiers and the military hierarchy. The *praetorium* was the tent for the general. A main fairway or street called the *via principalis* connected the right and left gates, diving the camp down the middle. A password known as a *tessera* was used to securely allow the passage of men in and out of the gates. The outline of a similar structure from the Roman attack on Masada (73 or 74 CE) can still be seen today.[48] Again, the presence of the military camp near Jerusalem indicated an attack on the city was imminent, even though there was no actual fighting taking place yet. The initial work that was done to set up a camp such as this provides the background for Jesus' warning: When the inhabitants of Jerusalem see the construction of a camp such as this, there may be a window of time when one might be able to flee.

Second, there may be intentional ambiguity as to the referent of the military body which will surround Jerusalem, thus allowing for Jesus' warning to be applied to other attacks upon the city beyond that of the Romans in 70 CE. Jesus only identifies those who attack Jerusalem as 'Gentiles' (Lk. 21.24b). The identity of the 'Gentiles' who attack the city is chronologically delimited by the words: 'until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (Lk. 21.24c). This phrase is puzzling and only appears in Luke, with a possible parallel occurring in Mark 13.20. This reference to 'the times of the Gentiles' might be understood as (1) a time of Gentile dominance in salvation-history, (2) a period of Gentile mission or (3) a period of judgment upon the Gentiles. Luke is also keen to frame this activity as anticipating the fulfillment of 'all that is written' (Lk. 21.22). Several commentators under-stand this delimiter to reflect some element of ambiguity that allows for flexibility in its application.[49] The key point here is the ambiguity about the referent of

47.   On the use of trenches, see Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *The Military Institutions of the Romans* (trans. John Clarke; repr.; Los Angeles: Enhanced Media, 2017), pp. 19, 47-48.

48.   Gwyn Davies, 'Under Siege: Roman Field Works at Masada', *BASOR* 362 (2011), pp. 65-83 (66).

49.   Carroll translates the phrase in question as '… the times of [the] nations are fulfilled'. He views the phrase as 'ambiguous', referring to the period of Roman

the military body which surrounds Jerusalem and the possibility that this scenario would be played out through several fulfillments. What happened in 70 CE may not exhaust the potential of Jesus' warning so that it might apply to more than one historical context.

To summarize, the use of 'military camps' in Lk. 21.20 preserves Luke's intention to describe a military body that poses an imminent threat but is not actively attacking the city, thus preserving the point of Jesus' warning to his audience. This translation of στρατοπέδων also preserves Jesus' subtle word choice which allows for semantic polyvalence and a range of applications that supports the possibility of multiple fulfillments against the city of Jerusalem.

6. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this paper has argued against the majority of contemporary English translations of Lk. 21.20. This paper has argued that the best translation of στρατοπέδων in Lk. 21.20 should be 'military camps' rather than the ubiquitous translation of 'armies'. The difficulty of this passage should not be further complicated by the use of translation traditions that only encumber the reader by unnecessarily narrowing their interpretive choices. A few commentaries and lexicons have offered similar translations but without sufficient explication. The significance of this present inquiry lies in the fact that this word occurs within Luke's Olivet Discourse (21.5-28), a textual unit characterized by apocalyptic discourse and by a variety of possible ap-

domination of Jerusalem or to the mission to all nations prefigured in Lk. 24.47 and inaugurated in Acts. He suggests that both options may be in view in order to fuel hope for boundaries around the Roman domination that will give way to an era of fruitful mission (Carroll, *Luke*, p. 419). Diane G. Chen notes that the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE was 'but a foretaste of things to come' (Diane G. Chen, *Luke: A New Covenant Commentary* [NCCS; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017], pp. 272-73). This suggests that Jerusalem has a typological relationship to the end times. Joel B. Green also argues that the phrase 'times of the Gentiles' has a dual reference. Broadly speaking, it refers to a temporary season when 'the Gentiles occupy center stage in God's purposes' (Green, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 739). First, it refers to the time when the Gentiles are God's agents of destruction against the city of Jerusalem. Second, it refers to the time when the proclamation of God's kingdom and good news goes out among the Gentiles.

plications. This study has advanced the discussion by demonstrating that the word 'armies' is problematic because it does not communicate the concept of an army in a passive state of encampment. Whatever polysymmetry was inherent in the word στρατοπέδων (it could be joined or accompanied), it was not used for an army actively engaged in an attack.[50] This study also ruled out the possibility that 'foot soldiers', 'troops', or 'soldiers' should be used. When the literary context indicates intentional ambiguity so that there is no evidence in the context to adjudicate the meaning of a word, the translator should prefer the typical usage of a technical term; in this case it is 'military encampments'.

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50.   On the polysymmetry of στρατόπεδον, see Okamura, 'Plotinus', p. 106.