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NONDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

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[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Books](#)
[Debates](#)
[Photos](#)
[Articles](#)
[Search](#)

The Destruction Of Jerusalem (Part 1)

by David Padfield

The 24th chapter of Matthew is one of the most abused passages in the Bible. Premillennialists use this chapter as a springboard for all sorts of fanciful teaching and wild speculation. In this article we want to examine the context of the chapter and see its application to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

On the Tuesday before His [crucifixion](#), our Lord went into the temple and denounced its inhabitants as being the "sons of those who murdered the prophets," a "brood of vipers," and those destined for the "condemnation of hell" (Matt. 23:31, 33). He ends this scathing rebuke with these words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Matt. 23:37-39).

As Jesus left the temple, "His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple" (Matt. 24:1). While gazing upon the Herod's temple, Jesus told the disciples that the day was coming when "not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). After crossing the Kidron Valley, Jesus and His disciples sit upon the [Mount of Olives](#). His disciples came to Him privately and asked, "when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3).

The destruction of the temple was such a notable event that the disciples could only think of it happening in connection with the second coming of Christ. Jesus clears up their misunderstandings and answers their questions in order. First, He tells them about the various signs which would be given prior to the destruction of the temple. Second, Jesus explains there will be no signs given prior to His return and the end of the world. The events described in Matthew 24 are also recorded in Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36.

Key To The Discourse

It is my contention that everything spoken in Matthew 24:4-35 relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the remainder of the chapter deals with the second coming of Christ. After explaining all of the signs that would happen prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34). Jesus warned His followers that Jerusalem would be destroyed within their own generation.

Joseph Henry Thayer defines the Greek word for "generation" as "**1.** a begetting, birth, nativity **2.** passively, that which has been begotten, men of the same stock, a family the several ranks in a natural descent, the successive members of a genealogy **b.** metaph. a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character; and esp. in a bad sense a perverse race **3.** the whole multitude of men living at the same time: Mt. xxiv. 34; Mk. xiii. 30; Lk. i. 48 xxi. 32 **4.** an age (i.e. the time ordinarily occupied by each successive generation), the space of from 30 to 33 years" (*Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*).

W. E. Vine says the word is "connected with ginomai, to become, primarily signifies a begetting, or birth; then that which has been begotten, a family; or successive members of a genealogy or of a race of people, possessed of similar characteristics, pursuits, etc., (of a bad character) or the whole multitude of men living at the same time, Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 1:48; 21:32 Transferred from people to the time in which they lived, the word came to mean an age, i.e., a period ordinarily occupied by each successive generations, say, of thirty or forty years" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary Of Biblical Words*).

A generation is a period of time somewhere between thirty or forty years. Jesus gave the Olivet discourse in about 30 A.D.; Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, the Roman General, in 70 A.D.

Flavius Josephus

In this article we will be quoting at length from the first century historian Flavius Josephus, a Jewish priest who led a revolt against Roman oppression in Galilee. He was captured by the Romans at the fall of Yotapata in 67 A.D., and held as a prisoner in Caesarea till 69 A.D. He returned to Jerusalem with Titus in 70 A.D. and became an eyewitness to the final siege of Jerusalem. Josephus was made a Roman citizen by Vespasian. An excellent biography of Josephus by Steve Mason recently appeared in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (September/October 1997, pp. 58-69).

Let us now examine the signs Jesus said would appear prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

False Christs

Jesus warned His disciples that "many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:5). As predicted by Jesus, many false prophets did arise.

Josephus claimed that, "there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place." (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 2:13:5).

Josephus also wrote: "Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their efforts with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words." (*The Antiquities Of The Jews*, 20:5:1).

Wars And Rumors Of Wars

The disciples were warned that they would "hear of wars and rumors of wars," and yet Jesus told them, "See that you are not troubled" (Matt. 24:6). Today, every time a firecracker goes off in Jerusalem some preacher will start sweating and tell his congregation that the end of the world is at hand—you would think the Middle East had never experienced conflict before. It is hard to picture a time more trying than just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Tacitus, a Roman historian, said of this period: "The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time." (*The Histories*, 1:2).

Josephus tells of a day in which "the people of Caesarea had slain the Jews that were among them on the very same day and hour [when the soldiers were slain], which one would think must have come to pass by the direction of Providence; insomuch that in one hour's time above twenty thousand Jews were killed, and all Caesarea was emptied of its Jewish inhabitants." (*Wars*, 2:18:1).

Famines And Pestilences

The destruction of Jerusalem was to be preceded by a time of "famines and pestilences" (Matt. 24:7). You do not have to leave the pages of the New Testament to find the fulfillment of this. Luke, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded that, "in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar." (Acts 11:27-28).

Josephus tells of queen Helena's relief effort for Jerusalem. "Now her coming was of very great advantage to the people of Jerusalem; for whereas a famine did oppress them at that time, and many people died for want of what was necessary to produce food withal, queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of corn, and others to Cyprus, to bring a cargo of dried figs" (*Antiquities*, 20:2:5).

Tacitus wrote: "Many prodigies occurred during the year. Ominous birds took their seat on the Capitol; houses were overturned by repeated shocks of earthquake, and, as the panic spread, the weak were trampled underfoot in the trepidation of the crowd. A shortage of corn, again, and the famine which resulted, were construed as a supernatural warning." (*The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 12:43). Pestilences usually accompany periods of famine.

Earthquakes

In addition to the havoc brought about by famine and pestilences, our Lord said that great earthquakes would shake the region prior to the siege of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:7).

J. Marcellus Kik said, "And as to earthquakes, many are mentioned by writers during a period just previous to 70 A.D. There were earthquakes in Crete, [Smyrna](#), [Miletus](#), Chios, Samos, [Laodicea](#), [Hierapolis](#), [Colosse](#), Campania, [Rome](#), and Judea. It is interesting to note that the city of Pompeii was much damaged by an earthquake occurring on February 5, 63 A.D." (*An Eschatology Of Victory*, p. 93).

Fearful Events From Heaven

In Luke's account of the Olivet discourse he records the warning of Christ that "there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11).

One night when "there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshadowed some great calamities that were coming." (*Wars*, 4:4:5).

On another occasion Josephus wrote: "Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet that continued a whole year. Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which light lasted for half an hour. Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] temple, which was of brass armed with iron, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night." (*Wars*, 4:4:5).

Gospel Preached To All Nations

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations" (Matt. 24:14). This came to pass in the first century. Paul wrote to the saints at Colosse and spoke of gospel "which was preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23).

"Tradition assigns the following fields to the various apostles and evangelists: Andrew is said to have labored in Scythia; hence the Russians worship him as their apostle. Philip spent his last years in Hierapolis in Phrygia. Bartholomew is said to have brought the gospel according to Matthew into India. The tradition concerning Matthew is rather confused. He is said to have preached to his own people, and afterward in foreign lands. James Alphaeus is said to have worked in Egypt. Thaddeus is said to have been the missionary to Persia. Simon Zelotes is said to have worked in Egypt and in Britain; while another report connects him with Persian and Babylonia. The evangelist John Mark is said to have founded the church in Alexandria." (Lars P. Qualben, *History Of The Christian Church*).

Stand Before Kings And Rulers

Jesus told the apostles to "watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them" (Mark 13:9).

You do not have to leave the pages of the New Testament to see the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Peter and John were brought up before the [Sanhedrin](#) (Acts 4). Stephen was stoned to death by an angry Jewish mob (Acts 7:54-60). Herod Agrippa "killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also" (Acts 12:2).

Paul stood before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12), Felix, a Roman governor (Acts 24), and King Agrippa (Acts 25). Paul was finally allowed to present his case before Caesar himself.

Read Part Two Of This Article

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- [The Kingdom Of Promise And Prophecy](#). Sixteen sermon charts showing that the church was established as a result of Divine prophecy. Discusses passages such as Daniel 2, Isaiah 2 and Joel 2 (PDF file size: 114k).

- [Jehovah: An Eternal King](#). Seven sermon charts showing how God has always had a kingdom, and has always been a sovereign king (PDF file size: 45k).
- [The Throne Of David](#). Fifteen sermon charts showing how Christ was seated on David's throne when He ascended into heaven. His being seated at God's right hand is a fulfillment of 2 Samuel 7:12-13 (PDF file size: 82K).
- [Reigning With Christ](#). Eight sermon charts showing how Christians reign with Christ right now, as spoken of in 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (PDF file size: 75k).
- [Matthew 24 And The Destruction Of Jerusalem](#). Nineteen **sermon charts** explaining how Matthew 24 was fulfilled when Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (PDF file size: 136k)
- A long article in **book** format on [Matthew 24 And The Destruction Of Jerusalem](#) is also available (PDF file size: 248k).
- [Days Of Vengeance](#), a very detailed and in-depth look at the destruction of Jerusalem. This book is extremely well-documented and has several color photographs (32 pages; PDF file size: 767k).
- Todd Weiner of York, Pennsylvania and David Padfield engaged in a public [Debate on Premillennialism](#) and the 1,000 reign of Christ on earth. The first two evenings of the debate were conducted in Evansville, Indiana on November 5 and 6, 1992. On November 19 and 20, 1992 the debate was continued in Baltimore, Maryland.

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