

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ZION, ILLINOIS

NONDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

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The Destruction Of Jerusalem (Part 2)

by David Padfield

Our Lord predicted the destruction of Jerusalem in the 24th chapter of Matthew. In [another article](#) we discussed the setting of the Olivet discourse and noted the signs given in Matthew 24 would come to pass within that generation (Matt. 24:36). We want to continue our examination of the signs given prior to the destruction of the city on 70 A.D.

Abomination In The Holy Place

Jesus warned his disciples, that, "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).

Josephus, a first century historian, tells of the sad state into which the temple fell prior to the arrival of [Titus](#), the Roman general. "And now, when the multitude were gotten together to an assembly, and every one was in indignation at these men's seizing upon the sanctuary, at their rapine and murders but had not yet begun their attacks upon them Agnus stood in the midst of them, and casting his eyes frequently at the temple, and having a flood of tears in his eyes he said, 'Certainly, it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places that ought not to be trodden upon at random, filled with the feet of these bloodshedding villains'" (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 4:3:10).

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem the temple became a gathering place for wicked men. Jesus instructs the disciples that when they see such "abomination of desolation" they were to "flee to the mountains." This passage does not refer in any way to some future return of our Lord. When this "abomination of desolation" took place, those in "Judea" were to flee to the mountains—not folks living in America today!

Jerusalem Surrounded

In Luke's account of the discourse, Jesus also told the disciples that "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her." (Luke 21:20-21).

Here the disciples are warned that when the Roman army was approaching Jerusalem they were to flee for their lives. Christians received ample warning about the approaching invasion. Josephus said, "And now Vespasian had fortified all the places round about Jerusalem, and erected citadels at Jericho and Adida, and placed garrisons in them both And now the war having gone through all the mountainous country, and all the plain country also, those that were at Jerusalem were deprived of the liberty of going out of the city; Now as Vespasian was returned to Caesarea, and was getting ready, with all his army to march directly to Jerusalem, he was informed that Nero was dead Wherefore Vespasian put off at first his expedition against Jerusalem, and stood waiting whither the empire would be transferred after the death of Nero the Roman empire being then in a fluctuating condition, and did not go on with the expedition against the Jews" (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 4:9:1, 2).

When the legions of Rome finally got to Jerusalem they camped at the Mount of Olives (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 5:2:3). Immediately after their arrival a trench was cast about Jerusalem. A nine mile long wall was constructed in three days that totally enclosed the city (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 5:12:2).

Great Tribulation

Jesus warned His disciples that when the Roman army arrived, those in Judea should flee to the mountains and "let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matt. 24:17-21).

It is amazing how many people today try to apply these words to a future return of our Lord! What possible difference would it make if Jesus returns on Saturday or Sunday? What difference could it make if He comes in winter or summer? However, if you were trying to flee from an invading army it would make a great deal of difference, for the gates of the city would be closed on the Sabbath day and there would be no way for you to escape. Fleeing from an invading army would be a lot easier if you did not have a nursing child to tend to.

Sometimes people underestimate to severity of the attack on Jerusalem. Josephus tells how Roman soldiers "went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses wither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine; they then stood in horror at this sight, and went out without touching anything. But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many houses was quenched with these men's blood." (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 6:8:5).

Over one million Jews died at the destruction of Jerusalem—another 97,000 were carried away as slaves!

The Stars Will Fall From Heaven

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matt. 24:29). [Premillennialists](#) will often use this passage to "prove" that Matthew 24 is talking about the return of Christ instead of the destruction of the holy city. They will often say, "Just look outside at night—the stars are still in the heavens right now."

To those unfamiliar with prophetic language the premillennialists sometimes sound convincing. However, a short trip through the Old Testament will show how similar language was used to describe the fall of monarchs and nations. Look at the following examples of God's righteous judgment and see how he describes the fall of national leaders:

- Babylon (Isa. 13:10, 13)
- Edom (Isa. 34:4-6)
- The Peoples (Isa. 51:5-6)
- Judah (Jer. 4:1-6, 23-28)
- Egypt (Ezek. 32:7-8)
- The Nations (Joel 3:15-16)
- [Nineveh](#) (Nah. 1:1-5)
- Israel (Amos 8:1-2, 9)

The Sign Of The Son Of Man

In Matthew 24:30, Jesus said, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (NKJV).

Please notice that Jesus did not say, "And then shall appear the Son of Man in heaven" or "then shall appear the sign in the heaven(s) of the Son of Man." The phrase is literally: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven" (*Berry's Interlinear*). The phrase "in heaven" denotes the locality of the Son of Man, not the locality of the sign.

The destruction of Jerusalem itself served as a sign of the fact the Son of Man was ruling in heaven, because it was the fulfillment of His prediction (cf. Deut. 18:20-22).

One Stone Not Upon Another

At the very beginning of the Olivet discourse, while looking at the temple, Jesus said, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Matt. 24:2).

Titus, the Roman general, did not want to destroy the temple. In a speech to the Jewish defenders of the city he said, "I appeal to my own army, and the Jews that are now with me, and even to you yourselves, that I do not force you to defile this sanctuary; and if you will but change the place whereon you will fight, no Roman shall either come near your sanctuary, or offer any affront to it; nay, I will endeavor to preserve you your holy house, whether you will or not." (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 6:2:4).

However, after the city was taken, he "gave order that they should now demolish the entire city and temple but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited." (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 7:1:1). Truly, the words of the prophet came to pass, "Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest" (Micah 3:12).

Significant Contrasts

Sign after sign was given so the disciples would know in advance about the destruction of Jerusalem. Warnings were given so men could flee during those abnormal times when a limited, local judgment of God would fall upon Jerusalem.

We now look for the final return of our Lord, "but of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:26). Jesus will return during normal times and without prior warning. Instead of a limited judgment upon a rebellious nation, "all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:32).

FOR FURTHER STUDY...

- [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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