

PROPHECY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM IN A.D. 70

THE HISTORY DOES NOT CORRESPOND TO THE DETAILS IN THE PROPHECIES

Preterists, Historicists and many Futurists assume that Jesus' great Mount of Olives prophecy given in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 found either its complete fulfilment at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Roman armies or a first or partial fulfilment in this event. However, thoughtful comparison and examination of all the historical and biblical details show that this is not the case. Therefore, the Futurist approach advocated in the following study presents a yet future destruction of Jerusalem as the single fulfilment of Jesus' words and the words of earlier prophets.

THE FAILURE TO FIND PARALLELS IN A.D. 70 WITH THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

1. Because there were **no major wars** prior to the Jewish revolt Jesus' prophecy of "*Nation against nation*" went unfulfilled up to A.D. 70.
2. Although there were **earthquakes** in the 60s the greater earthquakes came after A.D. 70 e.g. Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79 and earthquakes in Corinth and Cyprus in the 70s. The one earthquake that Jesus may have had in mind, which was to split the Mount of Olives in two and recorded in Zechariah 14:5, has not yet happened.
3. Although there were 1st century food shortages and famines they did not compare to **the famines** in later decades and centuries. Jesus, in fact, predicted famines rather than just food shortages.
4. Matthew 24:14 was not fulfilled in the first century, inasmuch as **the gospel** had not been proclaimed to all nations. One cannot imagine that Jesus' words were to apply to only the Roman Empire.
5. The slow progress [*several years*] of the Roman army in approaching Jerusalem does not square well with the **urgency** of Jesus' command (Matt. 24:16-20) for Christians to flee and not to gather their belongings from their homes.
6. There is no match between the approach of the Roman army **from the west** toward Jerusalem and Jesus' description of his future arrival:
"For just **as the lightning** comes *from the east* and flashes even **to the west**, so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:27).
7. The signal for Christians to flee was when they could see the **Abomination of desolation** actually **set up in the temple**—"standing where he should not." By the time Titus stood in the sanctuary, there no longer was any realistic opportunity for Christians to **flee** to the mountains.
8. The prophecy to "*flee to the mountains*" does not match the 1st century fleeing to **Pella**—a major city on a thoroughfare. Also flight from Jerusalem during the siege would have meant running into the hands of the Roman army.
9. Jesus prophesied the complete and total razing to the ground of **the temple complex**. This was never entirely fulfilled in the 1st century.

10. The demolishing of the city itself was greatly emphasized by Josephus and that by **fire**. Jesus mentions neither of these scenarios in Matthew 24 or Mark 13. He does, however give the warning to “recognize that her **desolation** is near” in Luke 21:20. *Desolation* does not necessarily mean the kind of outright destruction that was wrought by the Romans. In the NT the word “desolate” usually means *abandoned* i.e. **depopulated** without destruction and often implies *deseccration* or *defilement*.

11. The Roman invasion in A.D. 70, even with the deaths of one million Jews, was **insignificant compared to the Flood** of Noah’s day and many later events. Yet Jesus had said:

- ❖ “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has **not been from the beginning** of the world until now, no, **and never will be**” (*Matt. 24:21*).

12. Worse tribulation came in the form of later events such as the murder of 6 million Jews and the deaths of tens of millions of non-Jews during WW2, and Stalin’s responsibility for the starvation of 20 million Russians. So by any stretch of the imagination the Great Tribulation cannot have been the A.D. 70 destruction caused by the Roman army.

13. Jesus prophesied that “Unless those days had been cut short no life would have been saved” (*Matt. 24:22*) indicating that the **fate of the whole of humanity** will hang in the balance. This was hardly the case in A.D. 70.

14. Jesus compared the prophesied destruction to occur with that of Noah’s time (*Matt. 24:37-39*) which encompassed the entire world population of the time. In fact, the destruction was to be worse than at Noah’s time. The A.D. 70 event does **not in any way compare with that great flood**.

15. Those who believe that Jesus’ *parousia* occurred so that he could direct the Roman armies in their siege of Jerusalem must take that time of **trampling down as being the 5 months** of the Roman siege and subsequent destruction rather than the 42 months detailed in Revelation 11:2. Furthermore, this would make for an **external trampling on the city**, which is, of course impossible.

16. One must also ask why there are no writings by those apostles or their emissaries who lived beyond A.D. 70 that give any statements showing that the Roman attacks on Jerusalem were, in fact, the fulfilment of Jesus’ prophecies in the Olivet discourse.

17. The phrase “Immediately after the tribulation” means that **the supernatural darkening** of the sun and the moon would lead straight to the visible and glorious appearing of Jesus. No such events have ever been recorded.

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE WAS MISAPPLIED BY FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

The failure of Preterists, Historicists and some Futurists to realize the many discrepancies between the prophecies and the A.D. 70 event is often because they make their interpretation with reference to the written works of the Jewish historian Josephus. These books are: *Jewish Antiquities* and *Wars of the Jews*. However, Josephus was not a Christian and, although he referred to Jesus and to certain phenomena in the skies, he did not write a significant account of Jesus’ second coming. Yet Preterists take what the unbelieving Josephus said about the Roman attack on the Jews as proof of Jesus’ second coming in spite of the fact that no Christian of the time or within the first few centuries afterward did so. It is clearly impossible to preserve Christian doctrine from only a secular source. It is comparable to establishing from only a single secular source that Jesus fulfilled the role as the ransom sacrifice, yet

without any proofs being given by true worshippers of God who were, at that time, actually waiting for the one who would fulfil this role. So the details that Preterists find in the single source of material from Josephus are simply inferred and history becomes more relevant than the details of Jesus' actual words. Additionally, the writings of early Christians conflict with the Preterist interpretation regarding the second coming because they all still looked forward to that event. Furthermore, Josephus was a highly superstitious man and in the pay of the Roman propagandists and so making it doubtful that he gave a plain and unbiased account of the Jewish wars e.g. Josephus interprets the clouds that Jesus states that he will arrive on as meaning *all the dust the Roman army kicked up during its march*. Confirming some of the above factors N.T. Wright informs us that:

For a start, Titus and his legions were occupying the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus, the two highest hills overlooking Jerusalem; fleeing to the hills would mean surrender and/or death. For another thing, by the time the Romans took the sanctuary itself it was too late to do anything about running away. Thirdly, the tradition of the Christians getting out of Jerusalem and going to Pella hardly counts as fleeing 'to the hills'; to get to Pella they would have to descend 3,000 feet to the Jordan valley and then travel north for about 30 miles (Pella itself is about 3 miles east of Jordan, and twenty miles south of the sea of Galilee). No one in their right mind would describe a flight to Pella as 'to the hills'.

PROPHECIES IN DANIEL AND ZECHARIAH WHICH DO NOT MATCH AD 70

DANIEL

- According to Daniel 9:27 the prophesied desolator of Jerusalem is to “make a **covenant with the many** for one unit of seven” i.e. **seven years**. Yet no such covenant was ever made by General Titus of the Roman army.
- The Romans breached the wall of the city and Titus entered the shambles of a temple 29 days after it had been gutted by fire. So the **Romans only desecrated the ruins of the temple**. This does not correspond with Daniel's description of the Abomination of desolation to which Jesus alluded. According to the cognate prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2 this Abomination will sit in the fully working temple of God and proclaim himself to be God.
- Both Daniel 9:26 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8 show that “*the prince who is to come*” [“*the man of lawlessness*”] comes to “*his end*” at that time i.e. dies soon after his invasion of Jerusalem. Yet General **Titus did not die** then, but went on to become emperor at Rome.
- The destruction of the temple **sacrificial system** in A.D. 70 does not correspond to the abolition of the daily sacrifices in Daniel's prophecies (Dan. 8:9-14) because this event is linked with **other periods of 1,290 and 1,335 days** (Dan.12:11,12), after which Daniel “*will rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age.*” This means that the resurrection should have occurred soon after the A.D. 70 destruction if this was the correct event.
- The city, the sanctuary and the people were **not restored at any time between A.D. 30-36 or A.D. 70** and are not yet restored. It would certainly be an **anticlimax** if the 70th 'seven' had ended with the **destruction** of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 rather than with its restoration. It would also be an anticlimax for such a grand prophecy to terminate simply with the acceptance of Gentiles into the congregation in about A.D.36.

ZECHARIAH

- Zechariah 12 (see LXX) and 14 are prophecies on which Jesus had based his later prophecies. Both these chapters show that it is **not just a single nation's army, as with Rome in AD 70**, that attacks Jerusalem, but those of many nations (Zech. 12:2, 3; 14:2). Jesus also speaks of armies in Luke 21:20.
- Zechariah 14:2 prophesied that **half Jerusalem's population** would go into exile and the rest not be cut off, whereas in A.D. 70 Titus removed all who survived.
- “In that day the LORD will **protect the inhabitants** of Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:8) and “Then the LORD will go out and **fight against those nations**, as when He fights on a day of battle” (Zech. 14:3). Such a defence and rescue of Israel by Yahweh does **not match what happened to Jerusalem in AD 70** when the Romans conquered Israel. So these prophecies in Zechariah were not fulfilled in AD 70 and are yet to be fulfilled. Therefore, this does not fit with the Preterist (both Consistent and Partial) scheme. It also does not fit with the schemes of many Historicists.
- Zechariah 12 and 14 parallel Matthew 24:30, 31; Mark 13:26, 27; and Luke 21:27, 28 which speak of the rescue of God's people. Yet Preterists mistakenly take these passages to refer to the event of AD 70.

DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE, JESUS' RETURN AND THE END OF THE AGE ARE ALL IN THE SAME TIME-FRAME

Jesus' statements that Israel's “house is left...desolate” (Matt. 23:38) and that “there will not be one stone left upon another” prompts his disciples to ask:

- ❖ “...when will these things [*desolation of **the temple***] happen? And what is the sign of **your coming** and of the **end of the age?**” (Matt 24:3).

It is evident that the three aspects of the question are to be fulfilled within the same time-frame. In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* D.A. Carson states that:

If we make the reasonable assumption that in the disciples' mind their question as to the temple's destruction and the signs that will presage it are linked to the end of the age and Jesus' return (cf. 16:27-28; 23:39; Luke 19:11-27), there is little problem. Matthew makes explicit what was implicit in their question and what Jesus recognized as implicit in their question. Volume 8, p. 497.

So in this two-fold question asking “**when?**” and “**what will be the sign?**” the three events are locked together in the same time-frame: (1) The desolation and destruction of the temple, (2) Jesus' return, and (3) the end of the age. This means that any scheme which proposes that the temple of which Jesus spoke was what was destroyed in AD 70 cannot be right. There must be a future temple.

MORE ON “IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION”

Jesus answer to the disciples' question is:

- ❖ “When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel standing in the holy place flee to the mountains ... For then shall be **great tribulation.**” ... “**Immediately after** the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened ... and *then* they will see the **Son of man coming** in power...And he shall send forth his angels...to gather the elect”
(Matt. 24: 15, 16, 21, 29-31).

Mark's account gives us: "In those days, after *that* tribulation" (13:24) and these events occur in quick succession. Also former professor of theology at Cambridge A.H. McNeile, commented on verse 29 as follows:

This verse is the true sequel to verse 15. The tribulation (v. 21) is the climax of the birthpangs (v. 8) being followed *immediately* by the end. In Mark, too, the tribulation and the second coming are *in those days*, i.e., they are successive events in the same period...The tribulation will be terrible, but the Parousia [Second Coming] will follow it at once. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 352.

There were no cosmic signs occurring at around A.D.70. Also because Jesus returns just once (see STUDY 16) and fully visibly (see Volume 4 STUDY 2) it is evident that he didn't return in A.D. 70 so the prophecy could not have been fulfilled at that time.

FURTHER EVIDENCE

1. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to the nations; and then **the end** shall come" (vs.14). "When you **therefore** see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)..." (v. 15).

The word "therefore" connects "the abomination of desolation" with "the end" in verse 14 i.e. the end of the age and showing that Titus in A.D 70 could not have been "the abomination of desolation."

2. Jesus' reference in Matthew 24:15 to Daniel gives us the information that there is to be only **approximately 3½ years between the appearance of "the abomination of desolation" and the end of the age.** (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).

SUMMARY OF SEQUENCE

- Desolation of the temple by the abomination of desolation who triggers:
- the tribulation which is:
- followed *immediately* by cosmic signs and then:
- the second coming of Christ and finally:
- the gathering up of "Christians."

All of this must take place in just over 3½ years and so cannot involve the events of A.D. 70.

NOTE: It is the site of the temple which is relevant not which particular set of stones that are standing on it.

APPENDIX

LUKE 21:12-24 WAS NOT SEPARATE FROM THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

It has been stated by E.W. Bullinger, Robert Shank and many others that although Matthew 24/Mark 13 refers to the end-time scenario yet, because of differences in that account, Luke 21:10-24 applies only to the events of A.D. 70. They also see the Luke account as not given on the Mount of Olives but given earlier in the temple. However, there are reasons why the Luke account is the Olivet discourse and with no reference to A.D 70. Luke 21 varies from Matthew 24/Mark 13 in 2 key places. The first is that **Luke 21:12** says: "*But before all this they will lay their hands on you...*" This gives the impression that the Great Tribulation comes before the "*Nation against nation etc*" and is therefore out of sync with

Matthew and Mark. This is solved when one realizes that the phrase “*But before all this they will lay their hands on you...*” refers only to the immediately preceding details of the “*terrors and great signs from heaven*” in verse 11 which are later restated in verses 25, 26 concerning the “*signs in sun, moon and stars....distress of nations in perplexity...people fainting with fear and with foreboding...*”

WHY LUKE 21 IS PARALLEL TO MATTHEW 24 / MARK 13

- According to Matthew 24:1 and Mark 13:1 Jesus had already left the temple and was on his way to the Mount of Olives (verse 3) when the disciples comment on the wonderful stones of the temple buildings and Jesus replies (verse 2) that such stones would “be thrown down.” This is the exact event that is recorded in Luke 21:5, 6 which, therefore, cannot have led to an earlier temple discourse.
- Verse 20: “**But when you see...Jerusalem surrounded by armies//But when you see the Abomination of Desolation**” (Matthew and Mark). Possibly Jesus actually said both sets of words but Luke has chosen the words that his Gentile readers would best understand; whereas Matthew’s and Mark’s Jewish readership would easily understand the reference to “*abomination of desolation.*” Alternatively Luke has reinterpreted Jesus’ words about “*Abomination of Desolation*” in terms that his Gentile readership would understand.
- Verse 22 of Luke 21 “*that all things which are written will be fulfilled.*” The event of A.D. 70 was not written about in the prophets. Daniel 8.9.11 and 12 are all concerning antichrist.
- Verse 21: “those in Judea must flee to the mountains” // to the Matthew 24 account. The pattern of Matthew 24 gives a general overview of the coming Great Tribulation from verses 9 -14; and then verse 15 begins a detailed description of the Great Tribulation, starting with the Abomination of desolation appearing at the mid-point of the Daniel’s 70th week through to the end of this persecution (verse 28). Mark also follows this pattern.

Luke 21:12-19 as with Mark gives a general overview of persecution through the age including the coming Great Tribulation; then verse 20 begins giving the details of the key points of the Great Tribulation through to the end of this persecution (verse 24).

LUKE 21:20-24 IS NOT ABOUT A.D. 70.

The future events from verse 25 begin with “*and there will be signs in sun and moon and stars*” which connects to the events described in the 20-24 passage about “*when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies...*” This means that the whole passage in Luke 21: 5-36 is a single complex of events to occur in one period of time in the future. Similarly verse 27 begins with “*and then they will see the Son of Man coming.*” There is no good reason to interfere with the straightforward sequence expressed by Jesus expressed in verses 20 -28.

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES – YET FUTURE

- ❖ “They will fall by the edge of the sword and **be captive among all nations**, and *Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot* by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).
- ❖ “...do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will *trample the holy city* for forty-two months” (Rev. 11:2).

In Luke 21 Jesus linked the exile and trampling of Jerusalem with “the times of the Gentiles”

which Revelation 11 shows to last for 42 months. This exile is also prophesied in Zechariah 14:2 to be half the city.

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SUGGESTED READING

Until the Coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom by Robert Shank

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