The Evidence of Prophecy

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Historical Testimony TO THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE.

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CHAPTER III.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

The Jews remain to this day not only the guardians of the Old Testament Scriptures, but living witnesses of the truth of many prophecies, which, in the first ages of their history, unfolded their fate until the latest generations. Jewish and heathen historians fully describe the dreadful miseries which they suffered, when all their cities were laid waste, when Jerusalem itself was destroyed in the seventieth year of the Christian era, and the remnant of their race, after an almost uninterrupted possession of Judea by their forefathers for fifteen hundred years, were driven from their country, and scattered throughout the world. A brief detail of the unparalleled miseries which they then endured may serve to connect their former history with their subsequent alike unparalleled fate, and to show that the prophecies respecting the destruction of Jerusalem are as circumstantial and precise, and were as minutely fulfilled, as those in which their more recent and present history may now be read.

The Israelites were chosen to be a peculiar people. The worship of the only living and true God was maintained among them alone for many ages, while idolatry and polytheism (or the worship of many gods) otherwise universally prevailed. But the Father of the universe is no respecter of persons. A Divine law was given to the
descendants of Abraham; and blessings and curses were set before them, to cleave to their race in every age, according as they would observe and obey the commandments of the Lord, or refuse to hearken unto his voice, and to do all his commandments and statutes. Their history, and their continued preservation as a people, is thus an express record and manifestation of the doings of Providence. To read of their calamities, is to see the judgments of God; and to compare them with the prophecies, is to witness the truth of his word. There were intermingled seasons of prosperity and triumph, or of oppression and misery, as they enjoyed or forfeited their promised blessings, throughout the long period that they dwelt in the land of Canaan. But their punishments were to rise progressively with their sins; and so awfully sinful were the inhabitants of Jerusalem, after the time of their merciful visitation had passed, and when the dark unbroken era of their miseries began, that Josephus, their great historian, and the greatest of their generals in their wars with the Romans, has recorded his opinion, that, had they delayed their coming, the city would have been swallowed up by an earthquake, or overflowed by water, or, as it was worse than Sodom, would have been destroyed by fire from heaven. The vial of wrath was not poured out till the measure of their iniquities was full.

Instruments are never wanting for the execution of the purposes of God; nor, when needful for the confirmation of his word, is there any want of full testimony that his declared purposes have been fulfilled. There is nothing similar in history to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and to the miseries which its inhabitants

inflicted and brought upon themselves by their savage barbarity and unyielding obstinacy. Nor was there ever any other city or country, of whose destruction, devastation, and misery, there is so clear and authenticated a detail. Josephus, himself a Jew, and an eye-witness of the facts he relates, gives a circumstantial account of the whole war, which furnishes complete evidence, not only of the truth of what Moses and the prophets had foretold, but also of all that, in clearer vision, and to the perturbation and astonishment of his disciples, Christ had explicitly revealed concerning its then approaching fate. Heathen writers also record many of the facts.

The prophecies from the Old Testament and from the New, relative to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, are so numerous, that the insertion of them at length would occupy a greater space than can here be devoted to the consideration of the subject. The reader may peruse them as they are to be found in the written word. They require no other exposition of their meaning. Exclusive of literal predictions, frequent allusions are interspersed throughout the Gospels, respecting the abolition of the Mosaic dispensation, and the utter subversion of the Jewish state.

A nation of fierce countenance, of an unknown tongue, and swift as the eagle flieth, were to come from a distant land against the Jews—to despoil them of all their goods—to besiege them in all their gates—to bring down their high and fenced walls. They were to be left few in number—to be slain before their enemies—the pride of their power was to be broken—their cities were to be laid

1 Lev xxvi. 14, etc.; Deut. xxviii. 15, etc.; Isa. xxi. 1, etc.; Ezek. vi., vii.; Jer. xxvi. 18; Mic. iii. 12; Matt. xxii. 43-46; xxii. 1-7; xxiv.; Mark xii.; Luke xx. 9-18; xxi.; xxiii. 27-31.
waste, and themselves to be destroyed—to be brought to nought—to be plucked from off their own land—to be sold into slavery, and to be so despised that none would buy them. Their high places were to be rendered desolate—their bones to be scattered about their altars—Jerusalem was to be encompassed round about—to be besieged with a mount—to have forts raised against it—to be ploughed over like a field—to become heaps, and to come to an end. The sword, the famine, and the pestilence were to destroy them.

The Jews lived fearless of judgments like these, when they dwelt in peace, and would not listen to the voice of Jesus. They would have no king but Caesar; and they trusted in the power of the Roman empire as the security of their state. But He whom they rejected showed how God had rejected them, how they were filling up the measure of their fathers, and how all these judgments that had been denounced of old, and others of which their fathers had not heard, were to be felt by many, and to be all witnessed by some who were living then. And the Man of sorrows, whose face was set as a flint against his own unequalled sufferings, and who shed not a tear on his own account, was moved to pity, and his heart was melted into child-like tenderness, on contemplating the great crimes, and the coming calamities of the wicked, impenitent, and devoted city; and “when he beheld Jerusalem he wept over it.”

The expiration of thirty-six years from the death of Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem—the death, previous to that event, of at least two of the evangelists who record the prophecies concerning it—the manner in which the predictions and allusions respecting the fate of Jerusalem are interwoven throughout the gospel—the warning
given to the disciples of Christ to escape from the impending calamities, and the announcement of the signs whereby they would know of their approach—the unanimous assent of antiquity to the prior publication of the gospel—and the continued truth of the prophecy still manifested in Jerusalem being yet trodden down of the Gentiles—afford as full a proof as could now be thought of, that the predictions were delivered previous to the event.

No coincidence can be closer, in relation to the facts, than that which subsists between the predictions of Jesus, and the narrative of the Jewish historian. Yet, as the reader will afterwards perceive, this coincidence is not more clear than that which subsists between the testimony of modern unbelievers and those prophecies which refer to the past and present desolation of Judea.

Wars, rumours of wars, and commotions, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places, though the greatest of human evils that mortals fear, were to be but the "beginning of sorrows"—the heralds of heavier woes. Many false Christs were to appear, and to deceive many. The disciples of Jesus were to be cast out of the synagogue, persecuted, afflicted, imprisoned, hated of all nations, and brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake, and many of them were to be put to death. Iniquity was to abound, and the love of many was to wax cold, but the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached throughout the world. The abomination of desolation was to be seen standing in the place where it ought not. Jerusalem was to be compassed about with armies; a trench was to be cast about it, and they were to be hemmed in on every side. And there were to be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. These were
to be the signs that the destruction of Jerusalem was at hand. And there was to be great distress upon the land, and wrath upon the people: the tribulation was to be such as had never been. The Jews were to fall by the edge of the sword; a remnant was to be led captive in all nations; of the temple, and of Jerusalem itself, one stone was not to be left upon another, and it was to be trodden down of the Gentiles till the time of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.

These prophecies were delivered in a time of perfect peace, and yet were all fulfilled ere the lapse of a single generation. The deceptions that were practised by false Christs, or pretended prophets, occasioned some of the earliest of the commotions which soon spread over Judea. Every city in Syria became the seat of a civil war. The Jews were goaded on to revolt by the indignities and oppressions to which they were subjected under Florus, the Roman procurator. They openly rebelled at last against the Romans. These wars and rumours of wars and commotions were not confined to Syria. In Alexandria many thousand Jews were slaughtered at one time. Italy was so convulsed, that in the brief space of two years four emperors suffered death. Famines and pestilences also prevailed. There was a great mortality at Babylon and at Rome. There were great earthquakes in divers places, by which different cities were overthrown. "The constitution of nature," says Josephus, "was confounded, and no common calamities were portended." Signs and fearful sights there were which might have awed the most daring. Iniquity abounded, and even Christian faith and love decayed. The name of Christians became a signal for persecution, and a mark for hatred. They were taken before rulers and kings.
Paul, deserted by false brethren, stood alone before Nero. In the persecution under that cruel emperor, the bodies of Christians, covered over with combustible matter, lighted up the streets of Rome. But though the disciples of Jesus were hated, persecuted, imprisoned, afflicted, scourged, and many of them slain, burned, or crucified, the gospel of the kingdom was preached from Spain to India, and published throughout the world. They bore unto the death the triumph of their faith; but in the judgments of God against Jerusalem not a hair of their heads perished. For the last sign was given. The idolatrous ensigns of the Romans spread over Judea. Jerusalem was compassed about with armies. These, for a time, again withdrew. Many escaped from the city. The Christians forewarned, as Eusebius relates, fled unto Pella, in the mountains. But multitudes of others, going up to the passover, or fleeing for a temporary security of their property and lives, crowded within the walls of Jerusalem. And when the people of the prince came, (of Vespasian, who was chosen emperor of Rome while in Judea,) there was no escaping. The city and the sanctuary were about to be destroyed; and the day of the wrath of God was come upon Jerusalem. 

Jesus having been crucified, Caesar disowned, and the sceptre departed, the Jews were without a lawgiver and a king, when the conquerors of the world came to conquer them who had proved rebellious against God and man. The robbers, who had banded together amidst the preceding commotions, and resorted to the mountains of Judea, finding no protection from the power of the Romans, flocked to Jerusalem, and joined by the zealots and lawless mob, ruled over it. Plunder, murder, and destruction were still their work. The common provisions
of the siege were not only pillaged, but burned. Faction fought against faction, and the blood of thousands was shed by their brethren. Contests were not less frequent or severe with enemies without than with those within. The priests were slain at the altar, and their bones were scattered around it. The robbers or zealots at last held undisputed sway. But famine soon preyed indiscriminately on all. The sewers were searched for food; girdles and shoes, and the leather from off their shields, were gnawed. The most loathsome refuse was greedily devoured. The bodies of the famished fell dead in the streets. And the most appalling fact, which soon became notorious, and the discovery of which struck the whole suffering city with horror, and the besiegers with astonishment and rage—of a lady, once rich and noble, slaying, roasting, and eating her own sucking child, not only shows with what prophetic truth and pity Jesus had bewailed the "woe of them that gave suck in those days," and Moses had described, fifteen hundred years before, the very circumstances of the case; but also forbids that the most callous heart should seek further witness of great tribulation, such as none could be like. Yet the infuriated Jews, though they despaired of Divine assistance, when they heard of so unnatural and monstrous an act, would not yield. Of no treaty would they hear. Discomfited by their desperate assaults, the Romans built a wall, and hemmed them in on every side. "Crucify him! crucify him!" had once been their cry and that of their fathers, who imprecated the blood of Jesus on themselves and on their children; and surely it was upon them. Of fugitives from the famine, when taken prisoners, five hundred were crucified daily without

1 Deut. xxviii. 56, 57.
the walls of Jerusalem, till room could not be found for the crosses, nor crosses for the bodies. The purposed object of such cruelty failed, for even so sad and shocking a spectacle did not intimidate into submission the desperadoes who ruled over the wretched city. In the lacerated entrails of some of the slaughtered captives, gold was discovered, which, loving it as their life, they had swallowed in the hope of escape; and the Arabians and Syrians, who were confederate with the Romans, the harpies attendant on their camps, searched within the bodies of deserters for the treasures supposed to be hidden there; and thus, in one night, two thousand were dissected.

It is painful to dwell on a tale of accumulated horrors, and the example of Jesus forbids not Christians to weep. Let it suffice to be told. Josephus relates that a hundred and fifteen thousand dead bodies were carried out at one gate during the siege; six hundred thousand in all; these were the poor, to be cast out was their only burial. Many houses besides were filled with dead bodies; they were also heaped together in every open space, till there was no ground to be seen, nor was there any place in the city but what they covered. A mixed multitude, about six thousand, perished amid the burning cloisters of the temple, or cast themselves down headlong and died; ten thousand others were there slain; the city sewers were choked up with human carcasses: hundreds of thousands, eleven, as stated by Josephus, six by Tacitus—perished during the siege, and in the sacking of the city and the attacks of the slaughterers; and when Jerusalem was given to the devouring flame, every street ran down with blood.

Jerusalem was devoted to utter destruction; her walls
were destroyed, her battlements were taken away, for they were not the Lord's. The city and the sanctuary were razed from the foundation. The passing of the ploughshare over the place where it had been, was the last act of the Romans, as consigning Jerusalem to perpetual desolation, and was also the completion of their destined work, when they had laid it even with the ground, and had not left one stone of the temple upon another, but what had been thrown down.

The Jews were slain with the edge of the sword. Exclusive of those who were slaughtered in the seditions and the siege, two hundred and forty thousand were slain throughout the cities of Judah and in the neighbouring countries, as enumerated by Josephus, who specifies the numbers that were slain in each separate place. Ninety-seven thousand prisoners were led into captivity. Many were taken into Egypt, and were there sold for slaves.\(^1\) The slave marts were glutted with their vast number, till none would buy them. And on one occasion above eleven thousand captives were, through wilfulness or neglect, left destitute of food, and perished by hunger.

So closely did the judgments of God cleave unto the Jews, and so fully did they all come upon them and overtake them, that, as pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the devastation of their cities and country, every one of them was literally fulfilled.

Jerusalem was called "the city of the Lord," and Zion was his "holy mountain," where alone on all the earth praise had waited on Him. Yet the sins of Jerusalem could not be concealed from his sight. And his long-suffering patience, which had been tried in vain.

\(^1\) Deut. xxviii. 68.
would not always strive even with the city, which He had chosen to put His name there. And when its iniquities had come to the full—when in the day of its visitation it would not be instructed, or made clean, or wash itself from its wickedness, though God had sent His Son to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, whose blood to all who believe, is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness—and when the Jews had rejected the Saviour, and would have other lords to have dominion over them—God would not pity nor spare it any more; his soul was avenged on such a nation; and yet His anger was not turned away, but his hand was stretched out still; and He gave Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches. And if God spare not the natural branches, take heed that He spare not thee. If the recompense of their iniquities was paid into the bosom of the children of Abraham His friend, who art thou, or what is thy father's house, that any sin of thine should pass unpunished, if thou continue impenitent, and if thus, in the time of thy merciful visitation, the Saviour be rejected and crucified again?

The security of nations rests not in the strength of their bulwarks, for none were stronger than those of Jerusalem; nor in the abundance of their riches, for such was the wealth accumulated in that city, that, after its demolition, gold was reduced in Syria to the half of its former value. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain;" and sin must finally be the ruin of any people. The combined sins of private individuals form the accumulated iniquity of a nation. And when these become greater and greater, the time is rapidly advancing when they rise up to heaven, and its thunderbolts can be restrained no more. There are other drunkards besides those of Ephraim, on whom judgment
was denounced, who are not less guilty than were they. And that covetousness which is idolatry, and for the iniquity of which the Jews were smitten, yet abounds. For where is the practical influence of the love of God to be seen, like that which the love of the world displays, or where is the fulfilling of the law of Christ, in bearing one another's burdens, compared with the signs of mammon's rule in each seeking his own wealth? But what the reader may ask, can one man do to avert national calamities, or to lessen the amount of the sins of any people? Were each man to repent, as in Nineveh of old, all would be saved though the threatened judgment were within forty days of its approach. And who, that continues in sin, and that thinks on Jerusalem, as it lay even with the ground, can say that, were the judgments of God to come upon his country, he would have no share in the guilt that brought them down? "I sought for a man among them," said He to whom all judgment pertains, "that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; and I found none."

But it is not to national and temporal judgments, though they might be terrible as were those of Jerusalem, but to his own individual and eternal destiny, that every man has chiefly to give heed, that he may flee from the wrath to come, fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life. Every man must stand or fall to his own Master. And as an earthly king, by making a fearful example in the punishment of some, would strike the hearts of his rebellious subjects with terror, so is Jerusalem set as an example before us, to show that iniquity will not pass unpunished, and that the terrors of the Lord,

1 Ezek. xxii. 30.
and his threatenings against impenitent sinners, shall all be executed, even as his word was true, and his wrath great, upon Jerusalem.

And it is no just reason, that, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the hearts of men should be therefore fully set in them to do evil. Seeing that the judgment itself, against every evil work, is sure, such conduct would be to all, what it proved to the Jews, a treasuring up of wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgments of God. And the passing of the Roman ploughshare over the site of that desolated city, which should have been the Lord's, is but a faint emblem of that utter desolation which must come over the soul of every one, who revolts now against the reign of the Redeemer, when every false foundation shall at last be razed, every sinful pleasure be destroyed, every towering imagination that exalteth itself against God, shall be laid even with the ground, and every delusive hope perish for ever.

But while we could not leave Jerusalem in its ruins, in showing how the word of the Lord was executed upon it, without imparting some warning to those who, in a spiritual sense, are not the subjects of Zion's king, we cannot close this tale of woe without expressing the hope, that the time is hastening when Jerusalem shall no longer be termed forsaken, and that the prophetic admonition, of another import, may now be received and acted upon, even as if it were a Christian precept. Ye that make mention of the Lord, ye to whom prayer is a familiar work, keep not silence, and give him no rest, cease not from fervent importunity, till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.¹

¹ Isa. lxii. 6, 7
And seeing that the time is come when men go not up either to Samaria or to Jerusalem to worship, but that the grace of God hath appeared, and that the true worshippers now worship the Father in spirit and in truth, let this office, dear reader, be yours; let your body be a temple of the Holy Ghost, your heart an altar to your God, and let your life, no less than your lips, show forth his praise, and be devoted to his glory. And if thus you would ever look to the Redeemer from all iniquity, as both the Author and Finisher of your faith, who once was crucified for the sins of men without the walls of Jerusalem, and to whom all judgment and power are now committed by the Father; and if you would receive the Saviour in all his offices, to teach, to atone, to intercede for you, and to rule over you by his word and Spirit; you may securely rest on that rock which is Christ, and look also to a city which hath foundations that can never be moved, whose maker and whose builder is God.