

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Duke University, 1980

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Roman History 54
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DUKE UNIVERSITY
SPRING 1980
(Unedited)

Purpose of paper

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: to describe the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD—to bring it to life—and to show how this fulfilled certain prophecies¹ made forty years previously.

For the most part, sources date to the earliest centuries of the first millennium. This treatment of events in 70 is not exhaustive; those events pertaining to specific prophecies in the synoptic gospels² are highlighted. The text of Matthew 24 has been chosen for its breadth. Occasionally this text will be supplemented with other synoptic references. The parallel passages to Matthew 24:1-42 are Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36. A cursory comparison reveals the congruity between these accounts.

24:1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

2 But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.”³

The historical events we shall later examine culminate in this point. As with other events foretold by Jesus, had they not come to pass, by the canons of Judaic prophecy he himself would have proven to be a false prophet. The test of prophecy found in Deuteronomy 18:22 is rigorous.⁴ (“...if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously...”)

3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”

The four disciples (Mk 13:4) were asking Jesus at what time the temple would be destroyed. If the temple were ever to be destroyed, that would automatically signify the end of the Mosaic age; thus we may understand the disciples to be asking about the termination of the current Temple system. As for Jesus’ “coming,” the Scriptures afford much needed perspective about this term. In the Bible “coming” often refers to God’s coming in judgment on a people. Consider a few passages from Isaiah, Micah, Malachi, and Jude:

ISA 66:15 See, the LORD is **coming** with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.¹⁶ For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.

MIC 1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.² Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.³ Look! The LORD is **coming** from his dwelling place; he **comes** down and treads the high places of the earth.⁴ The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope.⁵ All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel.

¹ We shall consider the New Testament prophecies of the destruction, not those found in the Old Testament (such as that found in Daniel 9).

² As to dates of the gospels, the author holds to pre-eighth decade dates for the composition of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Of course the real issue is whether Jesus did or did not say these things. If they are accurately recorded, we can be fairly sure that the prophetic passages were spoken in the early part of the fourth decade. This is the real crux of the matter.

³ Cf. Mk 13:2, Lk 21:6.

⁴ It even entails a death penalty for false prophecy.

MAL 3:1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will **come** to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will **come**," says the LORD Almighty.² But who can endure the day of his **coming**? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.⁵ So I will **come** near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

JUDE 1:14 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is **coming** with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Images of judgment typically involve a "coming." This is true whether the subject is judgment against the nations or judgment against Israel. When the disciples asked in 24:3, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" it is clear they expected none other than Jesus himself to return in judgment on the apostate nation of Israel. And while there may be certain parallels between Mt 24 and the end of the world, Jesus intended to answer the question of verse 3. When God acts in judgment or to bring deliverance, a "coming" is taking place. The "Second Coming" is simply the greatest, not the only, scriptural instance of God's delivering his people.

- 4 **And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray.**
 5 **"For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ", and they will lead many astray.**
 6 **"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars⁵; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet.**
 7 **For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines⁶ and earthquakes in various places:**
 8 **"all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs⁷.**
 9 **"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.⁸**
 10 **"And many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another.**
 11 **"And many false prophets⁹ will arise and lead many astray.**
 12 **"And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold."**
 13 **"But he who endures to the end shall be saved.**
 14 **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.¹⁰**
 15 **"So when you see the desolating sacrilege¹¹ spoken of by the prophet Daniel¹², standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),"¹³**

⁵ From history we know that in the four years preceding the year 70 AD there were many wars and rumors of war in Judea. For a brief though excellent treatment of this, see Vermes & Miller, art. 20, 1-3.

⁶ Between the uttering of this prophecy and 70 there occurred many famines—esp. in the reign of Claudius. Cf. Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, xviii, 2, Tacitus, *Annals*, xii, 43, Dio Cassius, *History*, 1x, 11, Eusebius, *Chronicle*, Year of Abraham 2065, and Orosius, *History*, vii.6.17.

⁷ Mk 13:8, Lk 21:11.

⁸ The book of Acts, esp. chapters 3-28.

⁹ The epistles — e.g. Galatians 1:6, II Timothy 4:3, Jude 4, and many more.

¹⁰ From Colossians 1:23 it is evident that the gospel had been proclaimed to everyone in the known (Roman) world. "The end" referred to is not the end of human life on earth, but that of Jerusalem and the last vestiges of the Jewish religion.

¹¹ An obvious reference to Roman religion, whose idolatrous nature constituted an abomination to the Jews (Exodus 20:3-4). Yet one might argue that by the time this sacrilege was in the area of the temple, destruction would be too close at hand for anyone to "flee to the mountains." Perhaps the parenthetical "let the reader understand" refers to the observation of the imminent location of this abomination at the temple site. More likely, the parenthetical comment tries to connect the relevant passages in Daniel with the mini-apocalypse of Matthew—a connection that would have been familiar to the student of scripture.

¹² Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11

Luke adds, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is a hand.” (Lk 21:20) At this point it is appropriate to cite Lk 19:41-44:

“And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children with you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.””

As we shall see later, the armies of Titus did encircle Jerusalem in this very way, thoroughly destroying the city and most of its inhabitants.

- 16** “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains¹⁴;
17 “let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house;

Indeed, there was a sort of “highway of the housetops” made of the roofs of many homes in the city of Jerusalem. We find this warning stated earlier in Lk 17:31: “On that day, let him who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away...” The urgency of leaving the city was to be so great that Jesus warned the faithful not to descend to retrieve their belongings even if they happened to be walking immediately above their own homes! See also Mk 13:15.

- 18** “and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle.¹⁵
19 “And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days!¹⁶
20 “Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

There would be obvious difficulties in fleeing the city in winter, because of the cold, and on the Sabbath, probably due to travel restrictions.

- 21** “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.”

The severity of the tribulation is most evident from the historical accounts left to us by Josephus, Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and others.

- 22** “And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”
23 “Then if any one says to you, “Lo, here is the Christ!” or “There he is!” do not believe it.”
24 “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”
25 “Lo, I have told you beforehand.”
26 “So, if they say to you, “Lo, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out; if they say, “Lo, he is in the inner rooms”, do not believe it.”
27 “For as lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man.”

¹³ Bk. III, ch. v of Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History possibly weakens the gospel account — or vice versa.

¹⁴ We will read of the adherence to this counsel, below.

¹⁵ Mt. 24:18; see v.40.

¹⁶ On the way to Calvary, Jesus said to a crowd of women who were following him, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!” They will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us”; and to the hills, “Cover us.” (Lk 23:28b-30) Doubtless the mass evacuation of the Christians was to be no easy thing—and how much more difficult for the pregnant and nursing? Or for those bound to observe the travel restrictions inherent in the Sabbath regulations?

Compare Lk 17:24. This may very well refer to the coming of the armies of Titus. We are to understand that the Son of man was “coming” in or by the agency of the Roman Army. See Isaiah 10:5: “*Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury.*” God has often dealt (judgmentally) with nations by means of other nations.

28 “Wherever the body is, there the vultures¹⁷ will be gathered together.”

At this point Luke reports some interesting words: “they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles...” (Lk 21:24) We will read, below, of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken”¹⁸

30 “then will appear the sign of the Son of Man 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;”

Deuteronomy 33:26—just one of a number of passages where God is described as riding through the skies—reads “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, and in his majesty through the skies.” See also Daniel 7:13, Nahum 1:3, Mt 26:64 (Mk 14:62), Acts 1:9, 11, and Revelation 1:7. In short, to portray himself as riding the skies was an implicit claim to divinity as well as a promise to protect and deliver his followers.

Continuing our study,

31 “and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other.”

32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.”

33 “So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”¹⁹

34 “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.”²⁰

35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”

37 “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man.”

38 “For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark,”

39 “and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.”

40 “Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left.”

41 “Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left.”

42 “Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

A parallel to these predictions is found in Lk 17:26-35:

“As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage²¹ until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed

¹⁷ The RSV translation of “eagles” for *aetoi* is less sensible than the rendering “vultures.” Considering the amount of carnage, one would expect a great number of vultures to be present.

¹⁸ This is the apocalyptic metaphor typical of prophetic literature; it is doubtful it was ever intended to be taken literally. Because Jesus was speaking in terms with which they were familiar, the apostles probably did not experience the confusion rampant in many fundamentalist sects today. Such language signifies an apocalyptic entrance into history by God, in order to effect his purpose. Cf. Isaiah 13:10, 34:4, Ezekiel 32:7-8, Joel 2:30-31.

¹⁹ Cf. Mk 13:29, Lk 21:31. See also Lk 23:28-31, esp. v. 31: “For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” Jesus wanted to enable the Christians to avoid being trapped in the coming disaster. After all, this judgment was to come not on the Christians, but on the Jews.

²⁰ Cf. Mk 13:30, Lk 21:32. These events were all to occur in the view of the present generation (not in the 20th century; as some have misinterpreted it). Certainly the year 70 is congruous with this verse.

²¹ The NAS rendering holds closer to the Greek imperfects (*esthion, epion, egamoun, egamidzonto*) than the RSV.

them all... On that day, let him who is on the housetop... and likewise let him who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife.²² Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together; one will be taken and the other left."

How are we to understand this?²³ It was to be unexpected—the surrounding days would not seem any different to the vigilant from the recent past. As ordinary events transpired, the purposes of God would suddenly erupt in decisive action. If there were two in the field, the one, understanding and believing the Lord's prophecy, knowing that the time was ripe for the holy city's destruction, would insist on leaving, regardless of what his unbelieving neighbor thought—and regardless of the time of day or night. Thus one would be taken, the other left.

These Scriptures fit together to paint the prophetic picture of the fated fall of Jerusalem. There are other allusions to the destruction in the New Testament—eg, Mt 21:33ff, 22:7, and Lk 20:9ff, especially v. 16—but our overview is adequate. Having established the basis, let us now read the history—and determine how well events corroborate Jesus' words.

The sources for the events pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem are several. While apparently there were a number of anonymous authors²⁴ on the war, their contribution has been negligible. Of the historians with whom we are concerned,²⁵

Josephus is the most important—followed by Tacitus, Dio, Suetonius, and Eusebius²⁶. Josephus is especially important because he was an eyewitness.²⁷ Naturally, the account of events that follows owes much to Josephus' observations.

Concerning the preconditions of the destruction of Jerusalem, we will look at a few highlights²⁸. We will briefly focus on Roman military presence in the area, the internal conditions in Jerusalem; and some of the "signs" that preceded the war.

Tacitus²⁹ tells us that in 63 BC Pompey razed the walls of Jerusalem, though the temple was left standing. He was the first man to do this by right of conquest.³⁰ According to Tacitus, "Later, in the time of our civil wars, when these eastern provinces had fallen into the hands of Mark Anthony, the Parthian prince, Procorus³¹, seized Judea, but he was slain by Publius Veintidus³², and the Parthians were thrown back across the Euphrates; the Jews were subdued by Gaius Sosius..."³³ As we can see, Judea was a hot spot ever since the Romans possessed it. One ought to recall that the Hebrew people were quite rebellious under the Greeks—eg., the rebellion led by Judas Maccabaeus when Antiochus

²² Genesis 19:26.

²³ Certainly not as the "rapture"—a doctrine found nowhere in the NT. That tendentious doctrine is based on a single verse in 1 Thessalonians 4. Even though it is stated that believers still living at the end of human history will be snatched ("raptured") up to meet the Lord, nowhere does the text indicate that the unsaved will be left on the earth to undergo the torments of a "tribulation period." The premillennial doctrine is a forced conflation of 1 Thess 4 and the judgment images of the Apocalypse.

²⁴ Josephus noted that there were those writers who were not eyewitnesses of the Jewish War, and there were those eyewitnesses burdened so by excessive flattery of the Romans or hatred towards the Jews that their stories are slanted. Of course, as Josephus pointed out, disparaging the Jews in no way makes the Romans look great! (*Ouch horo de, pos an einai megaloi dokoien hoi mikrous nenikekotes*, 200:14-15). Naturally, Josephus fell into neither of these untrustworthy categories.

²⁵ Admittedly, there are other known writers, who could be cited, eg., Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* ii, 30. Also of interest may be the list of 89 authors on Judaism in Menachem Stern's *Gk. & Lt. authors on Jews and Jud.*, xi-xiii.

²⁶ It is most interesting to view the war from a Christian perspective.

²⁷ Having been captured, he "prophesied" that Vespasian would be the next Emperor. (*Suet. Hist. Of Twelve Caes., Titus Flavius Vespasianus Augustus*, 5) He was present at the siege (*Jos. Vita*, 25), and says, of the events he saw there, "I have accurately related them in the books concerning the War of the Jews." (*The Complete Works of Jos., Vol. III*, 73) He, having been a statesman before his capture, played an active role in Titus' efforts to obtain a surrender from the Jews.

²⁸ For a fairly good, concise summary of these events, see Vermes & Miller, pp. 496-508. Also good is Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, ch. xxvi.

²⁹ Tacitus also told many lies [pyorative word; & what is the reference to comply 36?] about the Jew's background, eg., "Profana illic omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apud illos quae nobis incesta." (*Hist.*, V, iv.)

³⁰ Tac. *Hist.* V, ix.

³¹ 40 BC.

³² A disputed figure.

³³ Tac. *Hist.* V., ix.

Epiphanes IV was ruler in Syria, in the second century BC. Later, Tacitus relates, “After Herod’s death, the kingdom was divided into three parts and given to his three sons.”³⁴ In the procuratorship of Gessius Florus (64-66 AD) the war began. Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, was unable to quell it. After his death, Nero sent Vespasian to Judea, who, in two summer campaigns, occupied, with his victorious army, all the fields of every city except Jerusalem.³⁵ Tacitus says³⁶ that there were many rabble in the city right before the siege. They came largely from the cities that had been taken by Vespasian and by his son Titus, in 67 and 68.³⁷ Internal conditions were terrible. The Zealots were now warring among themselves³⁸, and the result was a city already full of corpses before the Romans arrived. It was a city under a reign of terror. In their zeal, these men had even destroyed most of their own corn supply, which would have sustained them for many years against the besieging Romans.³⁹

There were three commanders, each with his own army, in Jerusalem. Simon commanded the outer circuit; John the mid-city; and Eleazar the temple precincts.⁴⁰ We would expect there were few, if any, Christians in the armies of Jerusalem. According to Eusebius, “The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella.”⁴¹

Before we describe the Roman military units that came to Jerusalem, and what they did to the city, we should make mention of the signs that preceded the war. In Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter VIII, we read:

Taking, then, the work of the author, read for yourself the account⁴² given by him in the sixth book of his history. “The wretched people” says he, “at this time were readily persuaded to give credit to the impostors and liars against God, but they neither believed nor paid regard to the significant and wonderful events that prognosticated the approaching desolation. On the contrary, as if struck with stupidity, and as if they had neither eyes nor understanding, they slighted the declarations of God. At one time, when a star very like a sword stood above the city, as also a comet that continued to be seen a whole year, at another, when before the rebellion and the commotions that preceded the war, whilst the people were collected at the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth of the month of April, about the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone around the altar and the temple, as to seem a bright day. And this continued for half an hour. To the ignorant this appeared a good omen, but by the scribes it was immediately judged to refer to the events that took place at the issue. At the same festival also, a cow struck by the priest for sacrifice, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple. The eastern gate also, of the inner temple, which was of brass and immense weight, and which at evening was scarcely shut by twenty men, and resting on ironbound hinges, and secured with bolts very deeply sunk in the ground, was seen in the sixth hour of the night to open of itself.”

And also:

“For before the setting of the sun there were seen chariots and armed troops on high, wheeling through the clouds around the whole region, and surrounding cities.”

Eusebius proceeds to tell us the tale of a rustic who prophesied the coming destruction. Whether this is true or not, it held significance for someone. And Eusebius is not alone in recounting this (as he quotes Josephus), for Tacitus also mentioned certain omens that failed to sober the Jews.⁴³ Similarly, many Jews were interpreting Daniel 2:44 to give them a basis for optimism, as they thought God would defeat the Romans before the establishment of the kingdom.⁴⁴

³⁴ Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Philip.

³⁵ “Cuncta camporum omnisque praeter Hierosolyma urbis”—Tac. Hist. V, x.

³⁶ Ibid., V, xii.

³⁷ “Nam pervicacissimus quisque illic perfugerat eo...”

³⁸ Josephus, The Jewish War, V, I, 5.

³⁹ Ibid., V, I, 5, and Tac. Hist., V, xii.

⁴⁰ John later killed Eleazar, leaving only himself and Simon to fight the Romans. Driven out of necessity, they joined forces to fight the armies of Titus.

⁴¹ H.E., III, V, 2-3. See also Epiphanius, Haer, 29, 7; De Mensuris, 15. Whatever the “divine revelation” was that was given to the Christian leaders, it does not seem Eusebius had in mind any of the synoptic admonitions, but a separate message. However, it does seem probable that a number of Christians failed to heed the warning — we would infer this from the tone of Mt. 24:24-25.

⁴² Eusebius is quoting Josephus.

⁴³ Tac. Hist. V, xiii.

⁴⁴ The kingdom is a concept that the Jews never understood (they expected something physical, not spiritual), but which clearly is seen from the Scriptures to be present on earth at the coming of the church on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But the Romans thought that this prophetic passage from Daniel chapter two⁴⁵ applied to themselves.⁴⁶ It is not difficult to imagine the tension in the air even before Titus drew near.

As for Titus' armies⁴⁷ themselves, he took command of three legions already in Judea, which had belonged to his father (the 5th, 10th, and 15th), the 12th, from Syria, 2000 men from the 22nd and the 3rd, from Alexandria, plus 20 cohorts of allied infantry, 8 squadrons of cavalry, auxiliaries from King Antiochus, and many Arabians.⁴⁸ This could easily have been a force of 30,000 men! Yet, according to Tacitus, the Jews were more internally cohesive than the Roman forces.⁴⁹ Josephus also notes that the Jews seemed more organized than the Romans.⁵⁰ At any rate, Titus displayed the legions in formation, now arrayed impressively before the walls of Jerusalem.⁵¹ The Romans soon were erecting embankments⁵² against Jerusalem, which was extremely well fortified. But the Jews assiduously repulsed the Romans night and day⁵³, as the forces of John and Simon were united. In order to frighten the Jews, Titus crucified alive a Jew in front on the walls.⁵⁴ The Romans kept pushing; despite the difficult nature of the ground, they were able to break through the first wall.⁵⁵ As a result, many Romans and Jews forfeited their lives. The Romans had effected a great slaughter⁵⁶, but they were suffering severely from a lack of water; what they had was of poor quality, and what they could obtain was available a great distance away.⁵⁷ The second wall was easier to defend than the first wall⁵⁸, and it took a long time before the Romans had broken through it.⁵⁹ The Jews continued to fight bravely. Titus had been offering immunity to the Jews, if only they would surrender. When Jewish deserters (and the captives) started killing the Roman soldiers and fouling their water, Titus stopped receiving them.⁶⁰ Yet even a number of the Roman soldiers deserted to the other side — there was a rumor that the city was impregnable.⁶¹ Having broken through the second wall, the Romans neared the temple; as they approached, the Jews fought harder and harder. They met death willingly⁶². Josephus comments, “For God had blinded their minds for the transgressions they had been guilty of, nor could they see how much greater forces the Roman had than those that were now expelled, no more than they could discern how a famine was coming upon them.”⁶³ This even more surprising in light of the fact that Titus repeatedly made the offer of sparing their lives if only they would stop fighting and surrender. One cannot but be struck by Titus's sense of justice.

Now the Romans relaxed the siege, in hopes that the Jews would reconsider, but they were not to mollified. Therefore the Romans increased the intensity of the siege even more. Josephus was sent to discuss terms of peace with the Jews. (Let us not forget that he had been a governor of these people's kinsmen; he was doubtless known to many of the Jews personally, and he would be able to empathize with their problems.) He said among other things: “God, when he had gone round the nations with this dominion, was now settled in Italy.”⁶⁴ Josephus failed, however, to persuade the Jews, who held onto their concept that God was with them. He then said to them that in their own history God had

⁴⁵ “...And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever...” (Daniel 2:44)

⁴⁶ Hence Tacitus: “*quae ambages Vespasianum ac Titum praedixerat, sed vulgus more humanae cupidinis sibi tantam Fatorum magnitudinem interpretatione adversis quidem ad vera mutabantur.*” See Skerrett's Doctoral thesis, IV, 5; Also, Tac. Hist. 5.13, Jos. B.I. 6.5.4, and Hegesip. 5.44, art. 2. Also, Suetonius HTC, Flav. Vesp. Aug., 4.

⁴⁷ Cf. B.I. 3.7.22, Tac. Hist. 4.51; Titus was chosen sole commander of the prosecution of this war in the end of 69. Tac. Hist. V.1: “*perdomandae Iudaeae.*” Jos. B.I. V, I, 5 and Tac. Hist. V, I.

⁴⁸ Tac. Hist. V, I.

⁴⁹ “... *et quia apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnis alios hostile odium* (V, v).

⁵⁰ B.I. V, III, 4.

⁵¹ “*Castris...ante moenia Hierosolymorum positis instructas legiones ostentavit*”—Tac. Hist. V, ix. Tacitus notes that it was beneath the Romans' *dignitas* to wait for Jerusalem to starve; they were ready to fight.

⁵² Jos. B.I., V, vi. Dio (Lxvi 4,1) notes that the first battles were indecisive — therefore, the Romans began heaping up mounds. See Tac. V, xiii.

⁵³ B.I., V, vi; Dio, Lxvi 4, 4—the Jews, in their sallies, set fire to the siege engines, hurled missiles (4,3) tunneled under and ruined the battering rams.

⁵⁴ B.I., V, vi.

⁵⁵ Ibid, V, vii. Dio Lxvi, 5, 1.

⁵⁶ B.I., V, vii.

⁵⁷ Dio, Lxvi 4, 5

⁵⁸ Ibid, Lxvi, 5, 2.

⁵⁹ B.I., V, viii; Dio Lxvi, 6, 1.

⁶⁰ Dio, Lxvi, 5, 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., Lxvi, 5, 4.

⁶² *Kai edokei pāsi ouch hoti olethros alla kai nikē kai sōtēria eudaimonia te einai, hoti tō naō sunapōllunto* (Lxvi, 6, 3).

⁶³ B.I. V, viii, 2.

⁶⁴ B.I. V, ix, 3.

brought retribution only to the evil oppressors of the Jewish nation—but the Romans, by comparison with other past oppressors were very mild.⁶⁵ Still, there were no terms of peace, for the seditious, the Zealots, were still in power. Many, however, did want to desert — and many did. They were allowed to exit into the country, provided they didn't look suspicious, in which case their throats were slashed⁶⁶. The main reason so many Jews were now wanting to desert was that the famine was reaching terrible proportions. At this point it is appropriate to quote Eusebius. He has just been telling us how gangs of robbers invaded private residences in search of food, scourging the inhabitants whether they had food or not, for they were very hungry. People were still willing to sell food—especially some of the rich, and money still had its value. This was soon to change. Then Eusebius tells us of how psychological behavior was grossly perverted:

*“Wretched indeed was the fare, and a lamentable sight it was, where the most powerful grasped after all, and the weaker were constrained to mourn. For famine surpasses all other evils, but it destroys nothing so effectually as shame; for that which otherwise would demand some regard, is contemned in this. Thus wives tore away the food from the very mouths of their husbands, children from their parents, and what was most wretched of all, mothers from their infants; so that whilst their dearest children lay wasting in their arms, there was not shame enough to prevent them taking away the very drops that supported life. And even in doing this, they did not remain undiscovered; for whenever they saw a door locked, this was a sign that those within were taking food, and then immediately bursting open the doors they rushed in, and choked them, almost forcing the morsels out of their very throats. Old men were beaten that held back their food, and women were torn by the hair, if they concealed what they had in their hands. Nor was there any pity for gray hairs or for infants; but taking up the infants clinging to the morsels, they dashed them to the ground. But they were much more cruel to those who anticipated their entrance, and were devouring what they wished to seize, just as if they had been wronged by them. They also devised terrible modes of torture, to discover where there was any food...”*⁶⁷

Josephus is more explicit: “...to stop up the passages of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundamentals; and a man was forced to bear what it is terrible even to hear...” (We will read more about the famine, below.) Meanwhile, it seems John and Simon were eating well enough. They “...drank the blood of the populace to one another, and divided the dead bodies of the poor creatures between them.”⁶⁸

Meanwhile Titus decided to crucify a multitude of Jews before their wall.⁶⁹ One detects gradual progression of cruelty in this war. We read that, for a time, five hundred Jews were whipped, tortured, and crucified every day — to instill fear in the Jews.⁷⁰ Equally disgusting, Titus started lopping off the hands of men who had gone out from the Jews, and sending them back to John and Simon to entreat them to surrender.⁷¹ But the Jews remained fearless!⁷² There is a description of one scene where the two armies are so intermixed that, because of the dust in the air and all the noise, one man was unidentifiable from another, and the result was a mass mutual slaughter. However, the Jews did not flinch, though not so much their real strength, as for their despair of deliverance. The Romans also would not yield, by reason of the regard they had to glory, and to their reputation in war, and because Caesar himself went into the danger before them...”⁷³

Finally Titus decided to build a wall about the city—and let the famine consume it. In its construction, we see the tremendous desire of each man to please his decurion, of each decurion to please his centurion, each centurion his tribune, each tribune his superior commanders, and the superior commanders Caesar.⁷⁴ The famine that was accelerated within the wall as a result of the Romans' brilliant teamwork was gruesome.⁷⁵ The deserters who exited

⁶⁵ Ibid, V, ix, 4. Interesting verse, like a passage in Tac. Hist. about Civilis' rebellion—Pettillius Cerealis (Roman governor) says that the Romans are to be commended for their mildness. But of course it all goes back to Thuc. I. 125 or so.

⁶⁶ Ibid, V, x, 1.

⁶⁷ Eusebius H.E., III, vi.

⁶⁸ B.I. V, x, 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid., V, xi.

⁷⁰ Ibid., V, xi.

⁷¹ B.I. V, xi, 2.

⁷² B.I. V, xi, 3.

⁷³ B.I. V, xi, 6. See Tac. Hist. V, xi, where he describes the Romans' motives: a mixture of bravery, a savage nature, and a desire for booty.

⁷⁴ B.I. V, xii

⁷⁵ B.I. V, xii, 3.

from Jerusalem often were immoderate in their taking solid food again, and as a result their bodies literally exploded. When rumor had it that somebody had swallowed gold before leaving the city for the Romans, two thousand live bodies were dissected in one night in a mad search for gold.⁷⁶ Josephus then tells us that 600,000 corpses were removed from the city; he then describes the dung-eating that occurred.⁷⁷ The words of Jesus in Mt. 24:21 come alive with meaning. It was every bit as bad as he said it would be. But there's more!

I pass over additional Roman military maneuvers. Eventually there was a need for someone of the Roman soldiers to scale the wall the Jews were now defending. Titus began to speak⁷⁸: "Why is it not then a very mean thing for us not to yield up that to the public benefit, which we must yield up to fate?" One man out of thousands volunteered. Eventually eleven others joined him in the spirit of sacrifice. One cannot help being impressed by the bravery on both sides—especially the Romans', as this example illustrates so well.⁷⁹ At last the Romans overcame this barrier, and had a great slaughter.⁸⁰ Again Josephus emphasizes the zeal of the Jews, and the bravery of the Romans.⁸¹

We read of more destruction (the siege has by now been going on for several months), more attempted diplomacy (Josephus, of course), and a stratagem whereby the Jewish soldiers fry a large band of Roman soldiers. Then Josephus returns to the famine conditions.⁸² Attend closely:

*The houses were filled with women and children that had thus perished; the byways with the dead bodies of old men. But the boys and the young men, swelling up, tottered and reeled like shadows through the markets, and then falling down, lay wheresoever the malady had overtaken them. The sick were not even able to bury their dead, and those yet in health and strength were loath to do it, both on account of the number of the dead, and the uncertainty of their own fates. Many, indeed, fell down and died upon those they were burying.*⁸³

Josephus then tells how some of the Jews went about thrusting their swords through the corpses and near-corpses that were lying about. Sport. At any rate, the corpse-disposal problem became more and more severe:

*... at first, not bearing the effluvia from the dead bodies, ordered them to be buried out of the public treasury; afterwards, when they were not able to do this, they threw the bodies from the walls into the ditches below. As Titus went around these, and saw them filled with the dead, and the deep gore flowing around the putrid bodies, he groaned heavily...*⁸⁴

Returning to his discussion of the robbers' actions, Eusebius quotes:

*But the robbers themselves, with their mouths wide open for want of food, roved and straggled hither and thither, like mad dogs, beating the doors as if they were drunk; and for want of counsel, rushing twice or thrice an hour into the same houses. Indeed, necessity forced them to apply their teeth to every thing, and gathering what was no food, even for the filthiest of irrational animals, they devoured it, and did not abstain at last even from belts and shoes. They took off the hides from their shields and devoured them...*⁸⁵

Then there is the story of Maria:

A woman that dwelt beyond the Jordan, named Maria...distinguished for her family and wealth, having taken refuge at Jerusalem with the rest of the multitude, was shut up in the city with them. The tyrants had already robbed her of all her other possessions, as much as she had collected...But as to the relics of her property, and whatever food she provided, the ruffians daily rushing in, seized and bore it away. A dreadful indignation overpowered the woman, and

⁷⁶ B.I. V, xiii.

⁷⁷ B.I. V, xiii, 7

⁷⁸ B.I., VI, i, 5.

⁷⁹ B.I., VI, i, 6..

⁸⁰ B.I., VI, i, 7.

⁸¹ B.I., VI, i, 8

⁸² B.I., VI, iii., 3. (Euseb. quoting Jos.)

⁸³ Euseb. H.E., III, vi.

⁸⁴ Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Bk. III, ch. vi.

⁸⁵ Ibid, Bk. III, ch. vi.

frequently reviling and cursing the robbers, she endeavored by these means to irritate them against herself. But as no one either through resentment or pity would slay her, and she was wary of providing food for others, and there was now no probability of finding it anywhere; the famine now penetrated the very bowels and marrow, and resentment raged more violently than the famine. Urged by frenzy and necessity as her counselors, she proceeded against nature herself. Seizing her little son, who was yet at her breast, she said, “wretched child! in the midst of war, famine, and faction, for what do I preserve thee? Our condition among the Romans, though we might live, is slavery. But even slavery is anticipated by famine, and the assassins are more cruel than either — come, be thou food to me, fury to the assassins, and a tale for men, the only one yet wanting to complete the miseries of the Jews.” As she said this, she slew her son; then roasting him, she eat one half herself, and covering the rest, she kept it. It was not long before the murderers came in, and perceiving the fumes of the execrable food, they immediately threatened to slay her if she did not produce what she had prepared. She answered she had reserved a fine portion of it for them, and then uncovered the relics of her son. Horror and amazement immediately seized them.. “This is my own son, “ said she, “and the deed is mine. Eat, for I too have eaten, be not more delicate than a woman, nor more tender than a mother; but if you are so pious, and reject my offering, I have already eaten half, and let the rest remain for me.” After this, they indeed, went trembling away, cowardly at least in this one instance, and yet scarcely yielding to the mother even this kind of food. Forthwith the whole city was filled with dreadful crime, and every one placing the wickedness before his eyes, was struck with horror as if it had been perpetrated by himself..⁸⁶

Soon the temple, against Titus’ desires, was afire, and it burned completely.⁸⁷ Several days later, the entire city was burned⁸⁸, “nor was there any part of the city that had no dead bodies in it.”⁸⁹ The destruction was nearly complete. But what was done with the survivors?

The aged, the sick, the seditious, the robbers, and those impeached by their fellow Jews were all slain. Those men older than seventeen years of age were sent to the provinces⁹⁰, while those younger than seventeen were enslaved—a total of 97,000. Josephus reports that even after the war had ended, 11,000 more Jews died of famine—through either refusal to eat or being refused feeding.⁹¹ Because so many Jews who were in the city for the Passover were trapped there, a total of 1.1 million were slaughtered or starved on the Jewish side during the course of the war. Tacitus says there were 600,000 in the city, all of whom were armed. (Yet this figure seems unlikely, for the proportion of those young men sold into slavery, after accounting for those perishing, seems unnaturally high.) All of Jerusalem was destroyed except for three towers⁹² of Herod’s palace, and part of a wall, “the first as memorials to the city’s former strength, the other as protection for the garrison remaining behind.”⁹³ One may read of the triumph that followed in Book VII of Josephus’ Jewish War.⁹⁴

Now that the temple had been destroyed, there remained no basis for the Jewish religion. Whereas previously the people were in relationship to God by means of the priests’ offerings at the temple (see Leviticus 1:1-7:21), now there was no means of atonement. How can Jews today, apart from a continual observance of all the law, claim to be God’s people? Without atonement, an imperfect human being is cut off from his God. How can this be rationalized? The standard response is that, after 70 AD, devotion to Torah replaced the Temple sacrifices.

According to a recent writer⁹⁵, there remained four main problems: how to make atonement without the temple cult; how to explain the disaster of the destruction, how to live in the new age; and what new social forms were consequent upon the collapse of the old social structure. Obviously, in the light of the Old Testament, the major problem is the first one. The proposed solution: “the life of the community in perfect obedience to the law is represented as the true sacrifice offered in the new temple.” One reason that this argument is flawed is that under Mosaic law the community

⁸⁶ H.E., III. vi.

⁸⁷ B.I., VI, iv, esp. 6-7.

⁸⁸ B.I., VI vii-viii.

⁸⁹ Ibid., VI, vii, 2.

⁹⁰ B.I. VI. ix, 2; Euseb. says (HE III, vii) many were sent to labor mines in Egypt. Also Dio, 7.

⁹¹ B.I., VI, ix, 2.

⁹² B.I., VII.

⁹³ Vermes & Miller, p. 508.

⁹⁴ See Lewis & Reinhold, Rom. Civ., pp. 91-92, i.e., B.I. VII, 122-156.

⁹⁵ J. Neusner, Judaism 21, pp. 313-27. Helpful apocryphal literature may be found in The Apocalypse of Ezra, and The Vision of

was already supposed to be living in obedience to the law—in other words, the Jews were substituting one part of the law for another. This is like saying that you may murder if you do not commit adultery. (See James 2:11.) The second reason for the invalidity of this line of thought is that it is plainly unscriptural—the sacrifice commanded by the Lord was actual animal sacrifice. A third reason we must reject this argument is that “perfect obedience to the law” would include obedience to the commands of Leviticus 1:1-7:21, etc. Thus there is disobedience, hence not “perfect obedience.” The conclusion is that Judaism no longer has a solid theological basis. We may be forced to agree with Paul in Galatians 3:7! Hence the destruction of Jerusalem was more than just a physical destruction and loss of life; it was the final destruction of biblical Judaism.⁹⁶

Let us now compare the first half of this paper, an examination of the prophecies, with the second half, the record of history. What do we find? Moreover, how many of the prophecies are fulfilled? Indeed, are any unfulfilled, or contradicted, or was Jesus perfectly correct as he forewarned the apostles?

Prophecy	Verse
1. destruction of temple	Mt. 24:2
2. wars and rumors of wars	Mt 24:6
3. famines in various places	Mt 24:7
4. execution/hatred of church	Mt 24:9
5. false prophets	Mt 24:11
6. gospel preached to the whole Roman world	Mt 24:14
7. desolating sacrilege	Mt 24:15
8. the exodus	Mt 24:16ff.
9. great tribulation	Mt 24:21
10. false signs	Mt 24:24
11. coming of armies of Titus	Mt 24:27
12. vultures feed on corpses	Mt 24:28
13. fulfillment in present generation	Mt 24:34
14. embankment	Lk 19:43
15. encirclement	Lk 19:43
16. captivity	Lk 21:24

In conclusion, it is clear that the gospel accounts are amazingly congruous with the historical facts of the destruction of Jerusalem. In this study we have approached events theologically, journalistically, and historically. Unless we harbor a priori disposition against the spiritual world, there is no reason to assume we are not here dealing with accurately recorded prophecies and actual historical fulfillment.

* * * * *

Note: the original bibliography has been omitted, as the sources are now out of date. Among works cited were a lecture series on by Dan Alison at the University of North Carolina, Gardner Hall, 21 February 1980; Jim Bishop's The Day Christ Died, Harper & Row's The Roman World, Dio's Roman's History, vol. VIII, Josephus, the Vol. X of The Cambridge Ancient History, Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Bk. III, Lewis' and Meyer's Roman Civilization, Vol. II, Ramsay MacMullen's Enemies of the Roman Order, Tacitus, and the insightful article by J. Neusner, "Judaism in a Time of Crisis: Four Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple" (1972).

⁹⁶ It is a spiritual truth that in some sense Judaism was abolished at the cross (Colossians 2:14). The forty-year interval between the crucifixion and the catastrophe of 70 may be seen as a last chance to the Jews for repentance. This was the interpretation of Eusebius et al.