

**SIMPLE STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES**

**THE GREAT TRIBULATION**

**LEADER'S STUDY GUIDE**

*A Biblical Alternative for those  
who have been Taught to Fear the Future*



**Titus besieged and conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD**

**Foretold by Christ in  
Matthew 24 \* Mark 13 \* Luke 21**

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## **BEFORE THE STUDY BEGINS**

### **A CALL FOR KINDNESS**

In the conclusion to his excellent book, *The Great Tribulation*, William R. Kimball issues a call for Christian charity when discussing prophetic matters. The counsel of Mr. Kimball is worth keeping in mind.

The highly speculative nature of prophetic interpretation, coupled with a myriad of conflicting viewpoints, presents Christianity with a potentially volatile area of disagreement and confrontation. This potential for disagreement and discord presents a serious challenge to every believer in striving to maintain the essential balance of peace with those who may earnestly disagree with us concerning our private prophetic positions. Our differences should never cause us to malign the sincerity or genuineness of those who do not side with our opinions. Our essential unity and fellowship in Christ should never be severed or undermined because of our differences on prophetic points. Our eschatological differences should never be made a ground of fellowship, a test of orthodoxy, or a necessary element in Christian doctrine. We must faithfully exercise the spirit of liberty and charity towards opposing viewpoints. As the old maxim goes, 'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.' If we must disagree with one another in defending our prophetic opinions—we must agree to disagree—agreeably. In the final analysis, our prophetic appraisals must always be tempered by that wisdom which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy (Jas 3:17). In spite of whatever divergence of opinions we may possess concerning our private prophetic positions, may we all continue striving together in the faith of the gospel, looking for, hastening unto, and loving His appearing.

### **A GOOD PLACE TO BEGIN**

With an earnest desire to build up the body of Christ, with a deep conviction that the Word of God is the final authority for all matters of faith and practice, the Biblical teaching concerning the great tribulation should be reconsidered. A proper place to commence the study is Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. In these parallel passages Jesus Christ sets forth specific events that would happen within a fixed historical period. A critical passage for establishing the people and the place of the great tribulation period is Matthew 24:34. After speaking of false Christs', wars and rumors of wars, after teaching about the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, after warning of the great tribulation such as not since the beginning of the world, Jesus told His disciples an amazing thing saying: "*Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled*" (Matt. 24:34). When accepted in a normal, literal, grammatical, historical context it becomes very plain that Jesus was telling about prophetic

events that would be fulfilled within the life time of those who were listening to Him speak. The evidence for this is confirmed by letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

### **“THIS GENERATION”**

1. The following passages should be studied to find out how the phrase “*this generation*” is used.
  - Matthew 1:16 “*whereunto shall I liken this generation?*”
  - Matthew 12:41 “*shall rise in judgment with this generation.*”
  - Matthew 12:42 “*rise up in the judgment with this generation*”
  - Matthew 12:45 “*shall it be also unto this wicked generation*”
  - Matthew 23:36 “*things shall come upon this generation*”
  - Matthew 24:34 “*This generation shall not pass, till all*”
  - Mark 8: 38 “*shall no sign be given unto this generation*”
  - Mark 13:30 “*that this generation shall not pass, till all*”
  - Luke 11:29 “*He began to say, This is an evil generation*”
  - Luke 11:31 “*the men of this generation and condemn*”
  - Luke 11:30 “*also the Son of man be to this generation*”
  - Luke 11:32 “*with this generation and condemn it*”
  - Luke 11:51 “*It shall be required of this generation*”
  - Luke 17:25 “*and be rejected of this generation*”
  - Luke 21:32 “*This generation shall not pass, till*”
  - Acts 2:40 “*yourselves from this untoward generation*”
2. When the word of God wants to indicate another generation than the present one the proper language is used as in Hebrews 3:10 where the Lord says He was grieved with “that generation.” Everyone understands that the generation the Lord was not pleased with was the Exodus generation.
3. To contend that Jesus was speaking of things to come in a future generation is confusing at best and a violation of the normal usage of language. Jesus spoke many things that would come to pass in the generation in which the disciples lived and history confirms that what the Lord said would happen did indeed happen.

## **THE STORY BEGINS**

Between AD 66 and AD 70, the prophetic utterances of Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 began to be fulfilled. Briefly the known facts can be stated. In the summer of the year AD 66, a Jewish revolt broke out in Jerusalem. Led by fanatical zealots this revolt took place against the overbearing Roman procurator named Gessius Florus. From May through November the Jews reacted against his oppressive reign. As a result, Neapolitanus, a Roman military tribune, was sent from Antioch by Cestius Gallus, the Roman governor of Syria, to try to calm the Jews. The Jews refused to be pacified and in the battle that followed they actually gained an advantage against the troops of the governor of Syria. Cestius had to order a retreat, much to the delight of the Jews. It was not long before word finally reached the emperor Nero in Rome about the explosive situation unfolding in Israel. After deliberation, Nero commissioned a seasoned general, Vespasian, to put down the revolt against imperial Rome and to restore the *Pax Romana* (the Roman peace). War against the Jews in Jerusalem was officially declared in February, AD 67, when Vespasian received his commission from Nero. In the Spring of AD 67, Vespasian finally arrived to take charge of the operations in Jerusalem. But the Jews proved to be a strong and resourceful people, not easily subdued. They desperately wanted to be free of Roman bondage and were willing to die for the cause of freedom. History records that Jerusalem did finally fall to Titus, the son of Vespasian, who took charge of the siege in the late summer of AD 70. For about forty-two months the Jewish people held out against the greatest military power on the face of the earth.

In broad strokes this was the terrible picture of death and destruction, violence and chaos between AD 66 and AD 70. The words of Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 can be used to paint in the details of this period. What will be seen is a historical fulfillment of the great tribulation that Jesus predicted would come upon the generation He ministered to. These were days of vengeance as God poured out His wrath on those who dared to kill His Son. The evidence is compelling for a historical fulfillment of the Lord's prophetic utterances of great tribulation upon Israel in AD 70. Those who were eyewitnesses of the events testify to the judgment of God upon the land. One of the leading eyewitnesses for the history of this time was a man called Josephus. A number of facts can be stated about Josephus.

### **JOSEPHUS: EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY**

1. Flavius Josephus was born in AD 37 or AD 38.
2. He was named Joseph ben Matthias (Joseph, son of Matthias).
3. Since he was born into a priestly family, Josephus was educated in both Jewish and Hellenistic cultures.
4. He was an advanced child and at the age of fourteen was consulted by the chief priests and community leaders concerning the meaning of the Jewish ordinances.
5. At the age of sixteen, Josephus began to investigate the major Jewish sects with the intent to join the one that demonstrated the most piety. At the age of nineteen he joined the Pharisees.

6. Josephus quietly performed his religious duties until he was twenty-six years old when he was catapulted into prominence. It happened this way.
7. Felix the Procurator imprisoned some of his fellow priests and sent them to Rome on a minor charge.
8. Josephus was sent to Rome to try to obtain their release.
9. On his journey, Josephus was shipwrecked but was rescued and continued on his journey.
10. Once in Rome, Josephus managed to befriend Alityrus, a Jewish actor who was a favorite of Nero. Through this connection Josephus was able to obtain the release of the priests.
11. Returning to Palestine, Josephus found many of his fellow Jews preparing for a revolt against Rome. He argued against such action, then bowed to peer pressures of nationalism and joined the rebellion.
12. At the age of thirty, while in Galilee on a mission from the leadership in Jerusalem, Josephus witnessed the advance of the army of Vespasian in the spring of AD 67.
13. Josephus took refuge in the fortress at Jotapata.
14. Forty-seven days later the fortress fell and Josephus was taken as a prisoner of war to Vespasian.
15. In the presence of the Roman general, Josephus uttered the unlikely prediction that Vespasian would soon be the Emperor of Rome. The general was impressed.
16. In July, AD 69, Vespasian was indeed proclaimed Emperor by his own soldiers.
17. The friendship that Josephus had with the Romans made him *persona non grata* among many of his own people.
18. The capable diplomat had other problems, especially at home, for Josephus was married three times. The first wife was a captive woman from Caesara. The second wife was from Alexandria. By this wife Josephus had three children but only one, Hyrcanes survived. The third wife was a Jewish woman from Crete who became the mother of Justus and Agrippa.
19. Josephus died in the year AD 100.
20. His major works are: *The Jewish War*, *The Antiquities of the Jew*, *The Life*, and *Against Apion*.

As a writer of events, Josephus is considered to be a reliable historian. It is noteworthy that it was the Christian community that preserved the works of Josephus and not the Jewish community that considered him to be a traitor. The works of Josephus were preserved by the Christians because he made reference to Jesus Christ. Josephus also recorded those events that the early church came to believe were the fulfilled prophecy of Christ in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

## **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

Turning to the gospel narratives, the initial words of Jesus are given as He responded to specific questions raised by His disciples. The biblical narrative is very clear. Jesus and His disciples were in the temple of Jerusalem. The disciples were very impressed with the magnificent structure and they pointed to the building and said unto the Lord:

*“...Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”* (Mk 13:1).

The Temple was indeed magnificent, not only for its architectural beauty, but also for its rich historical setting that can be traced back to Abraham. From the moment that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son to God on the site of Mount Moriah (2 Chr 3:1; also called Mount Zion) the place has been a sacred spot to the nation of Israel. Here the Temple was built. Here the Temple was rebuilt after being destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonians.

Two basic Temples have stood on Mount Zion: the Temple which Solomon built and the reconstructed Temple of Zerrubbabel following the seventy years of captivity in Babylon. The reconstructed Temple was dedicated in 515 BC. For those who remembered the beauty, size, and opulence of Solomon's Temple, the reconstructed Temple paled in comparison. (Hag. 2:3)

Time passed and the second Temple stood unchanged until the days of Christ under the reign of Herod the Great. Herod had no real interest in religion but he did enjoy building. One of his many projects included the renovation of the Temple in Jerusalem that had been rebuilt by the returned exiles five hundred years before. In 19 BC the craftsmen of Herod began working on the second Temple. In AD 64 the renovation was completed — just six years before the Temple was again destroyed, this time by the Romans.

## **A THIRD TEMPLE?**

Since AD 70, many Jews have longed for a rebuilding of the Temple. Some people in the Christian community encourage such a construction. The concept and prophetic expectations for a third Jewish Temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem is being promoted today. Recent publications advocate a third Temple and prophetic speakers are strongly suggesting that all is ready for the Temple to be constructed. Talk goes on about how easy it would be to destroy the great Mosque of El Aksah that has occupied the site of Solomon's Temple area for 1000 years. Talk is made of secret plans for the construction of a third Temple and it is said that the very cornerstone has already been cut and dedicated. While the speculation continues it is often forgotten that God has already spoken on this whole matter.

## THE NEED TO REFOCUS

It should be remembered that there was a Temple that once existed and which saw the establishment of all God's promises and purposes in Christ realized. The Temple was the second Temple rebuilt under the leadership of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerrubbabel following the Babylonian captivity of BC 606-538. The first Temple or Solomon's Temple was destroyed in BC 586. The Jews built the Second Temple after they returned from the Captivity. The second Temple was not as impressive as the one built by Solomon and yet the prophets arose to tell the people that the Lord would honor the second Temple by sending the Messiah to it. Here are the wonderful words of Haggai with the Divine promise:

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; And I will shake all nations and the Desire of all Nations shall come, and I will fill this house with the glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former [i.e. Solomon's Temple] saith the Lord of Hosts, and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts (Hag 2:6-9).*

Haggai was speaking at the dedication of the second Temple built by Ezra and others who returned from the great captivity. He was declaring that despite the more inferior structure the second Temple would still be honored and it was for the Lord Jesus did come to this very Temple. With the coming of the Messiah, heaven and earth shook. The shaking of heaven and earth denotes the passing of the Old Covenant and the establishment of the New Covenant. On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted a similar prophecy from Joel to prove the same thing (Acts 2:19-21). There are some very serious theological problems for the conservative Christian if the Temple vision of Ezekiel is to be considered to be a prophetic reference to a third Temple that is literal and is to be built in the future. The following points should be considered.

## EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE VISION

1. A restored third Temple would invalidate Christ's current eternal priesthood for the sons of Zadok would have the last, exalted position over Melchizedek and Aaron's priesthood. (Ezek 18:27)
2. Sin offerings would again be made by the blood of bulls and goats. It has been suggested that the sacrifices of a future third Temple during the millennium period would be for a *memorial* but many times in Ezekiel the sin offering is mentioned without qualification. (Ezek. 43:19, 21, 25, etc.) The word *memorial* is used twenty-nine times in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament. The term is not used in the book of Ezekiel.
3. The whole purpose of Ezekiel's vision is lost if it be literal. The Lord spoke to Ezekiel and told him that the very object or purpose of the vision was to show the perfect holiness of the Lord by which the people of Israel might measure the extent of their iniquities. (Ezek. 43:10-12)



4. If Ezekiel's vision Temple is to be interpreted literally and still futuristic then circumcision must be re-established as a requirement of access to God (Ezek 44:9): *"Thus saith the Lord God; No stranger [i.e., Gentile], uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel."* Long ago the apostle Paul found it necessary to withstand Peter face to face over the very issue of the return of the Church to circumcision. (Gal 2:11 ff) Now, once again, in a very subtle way the concept of having mandatory circumcision for the people of God is being embraced within the body of Christ.
5. If Ezekiel's vision Temple is literal and futuristic, then the Lord will again dwell in a building (Ezek 43:1, 2). The New Testament teaches that the Lord does not dwell in Temples made with hands. (Acts 7:8)
6. If Ezekiel's vision Temple is to be understood literally and in the future then there will again be priests of a Levitical order who will be required to avoid woolen undergarments lest they sweat. (Ezek 44:18) These future priests must also have a hair cut according to a certain length. (Ezek 44:20) They must avoid contact with the dead (Ezek 44:31), and receive the first of the sacrificial flour in order to bestow a priestly blessing. (Ezek 44:3) The whole book of Hebrews forbids the Christian community to consider the re-establishment of a Levitical priesthood for there is a better way.
7. If Ezekiel's vision Temple is to be understood to be literal and yet future, there will be again on earth, following the Second Advent and with the Lord's approval, all that Christ came to abolish: sin, suffering, sacrifices, and death.
8. In Ezekiel 47, the highlight of the Temple vision is found in the living waters rising inside the Temple and issuing from the threshold. The river flows from the Temple, getting deeper and wider in its course as it sweeps across the country till it empties itself into the Dead Sea where it heals the waters. Everything springs to life where the water flows. Fishermen stand upon the banks of the river and fill their baskets and spread their nets. Trees of paradise flourish on either bank yielding a continuous harvest of fruit and yielding their leaves as healing medicine. Spiritually, this could be a wonderful description of the gospel river of grace flowing from Jerusalem until it comes to cover the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas. (John 2:21 cp. John 7:37, 38) (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Institute For Christian Economics, Tyler, Texas, 1989)
9. Hebrews 9 teaches that the tabernacle and of necessity, therefore, the Temple is only a type of heavenly things and figures of the true. There is no need for a literal Temple to teach anyone anything, for the reality has come in the Person of Jesus Christ. There is no need for a literal Temple to fulfill any prophetic utterances, for all that the prophets spoke has been fulfilled in the Lord.

In light of these gospel truths there is no need for the Christian community to anticipate or promote the rebuilding of a third Jewish Temple. If such a Temple is every rebuilt in the course of human history, it will not be based upon any biblical mandate.

## **DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE**

Despite His disciples being impressed with the buildings that constituted the second Temple, Jesus was not. The Lord began to tell them what would happen to that which so many loved more than the Messiah. The words of Jesus are vivid and precise.

*And Jesus said unto them, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (Matt 24:2)*

*And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (Mark 13:2)*

*As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (Luke 21:6)*

History records that just as Jesus predicted the holy Temple was destroyed. Josephus records the terrible scene.

## **THE TEMPLE IS BURNED**

So Titus retired into the tower of Antonia, and resolved to storm the temple the next day, early in the morning, with his whole army, and encamp round about the holy house; but, as for the house, God had for certain long ago doomed it to the fire; and now that fatal day was come, according to the revolution of ages: it was the tenth day of the month Lous (Ab), upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon; although these flames took their rise from the Jews themselves, and were occasioned by them; for upon Titus's retiring, the seditious lay still for a little while, and then attacked the Romans again, when those that guarded the holy house fought with those that quenched the fire that was burning in the inner (court of the) temple; but these Romans put the Jews to flight, and proceeded as far as the holy house itself.

At which time one of the soldiers, without staying for any orders, and without any concern or dread upon him at so great an undertaking, and being hurried on by a certain divine fury, snatched somewhat out of the materials that were on fire, and being lifted up by another soldier, he set fire to a golden window, through which there was a passage to the rooms that were round about the holy house, on the north side of it. As the flames went upward the Jews made a great clamor, such as so mighty an affliction required, and ran together to prevent it; and now they spared not their lives any longer, nor suffered anything to restrain their force, since that holy house was perishing, for whose sake it was that they kept such a guard about it. And now a certain person came running to Titus, and told him of this fire, as he was resting himself in his tent after the last battle; whereupon he rose up in great haste and, as he was, ran to the holy house, in order to have a stop put to the fire; after him followed all his commanders, and after them followed the several legions, in great astonishment; so there was great clamor and tumult raised, as was natural upon the disorderly motion of so great an army.

Then did Caesar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting, with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire; but they did not hear what he said, though he spake so loud, having their ears already dinned by the greater noise another way; nor did they attend to the signal he made with his hand neither, as still some of them were distracted with fighting, and others with passion; but as for the legions that came running thither, neither any persuasions nor any threatenings could restrain their violence, but each one's own passion was his commander at this time; and as they were crowding into the temple together, many of them were trampled on by one another, while a great number fell among the ruins of the cloisters, which were still hot and smoking, and were destroyed in the same miserable way with those whom they had conquered: and when they were come near the holy house, they made as if they did not so much as hear Caesar's orders to the contrary; but they encouraged those that were before them to set it on fire. As for the seditious, they were in too great distress already to afford their assistance (towards quenching the fire); they were everywhere slain, and everywhere beaten; as for a great part of the people, they were weak and without arms, and had their throats cut wherever they were caught. Now, round about the altar lay dead bodies heaped one upon another; as at the steps going up to it ran a great quantity of their blood, wither also the dead bodies that were slain above (on the altar) fell down.

And now, since Caesar was no way able to restrain the enthusiastic fury of the soldiers, and the fire proceeded on more and more, he went into the holy place of the temple, with his commanders, and saw it, with what was in it, which he found to be far superior to what the relations of foreigners contained, and not inferior to what we ourselves boasted of and believed about it; but as the flame had not as yet reached to its inward parts, but was still consuming the rooms that were about the holy house, and Titus supposing what the fact was, that the house itself might yet be saved, he came in haste and endeavored to persuade the soldiers to quench the fire, and gave order to Liberality the centurion, and one of those spearmen that were about him, to beat the soldiers that were refractory with their staves, and to restrain them; yet were their passions too hard for the regards they had for Caesar, and the dread they had of him who forbade them, as was their hatred of the Jews, and a certain vehement inclination to fight them, too hard for them also.

Moreover, the hope of plunder induced many to go on, as having this opinion, that all the places within were full of money, and as seeing that all round about it was made of gold; and besides, one of those that went into the place prevented Caesar, when he ran so hastily out to restrain the soldiers, and threw the fire upon the hinges of the gate, in the dark; whereby the flame burst out from within the holy house itself immediately, when the commanders retired, and Caesar with them, and when nobody any longer forbade those that were without to set fire to it; and thus was the holy house burnt down, without Caesar's approbation (*The War of the Jews*, Book 6, Chapter 4:5-7).

## **JERUSALEM UNDER THE BAN**

While the holy house was on fire, every thing was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those that made supplication for their lives as those that defended themselves by fighting. The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire. Nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise, for there was at once a shout of the Roman legions, who were marching all together, and a sad clamor of the seditious, who were now surrounded with fire and sword.

The people also that were left above were beaten back upon the enemy, and under a great consternation, and made sad moans at the calamity they were under; the multitudes also that was in the city joined in this outcry with those that were upon the hill; and besides, many of those that were worn away by the famine, and their mouths almost closed, when they saw the fire of the holy house, they exerted their utmost strength, and brake out into groans and outcries again: Perea did also return the echo, as well as the mountains round about (the city), and augmented the force of the entire noise. Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething-hot, as full of fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of these bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them.

And now it was that the multitude of the robbers were thrust out (of the inner court of the temple) by the Romans, and had much ado to get into the outer court, and from thence into the city, while the remainder of the populace fled into the cloister of that outer court. As for the priests, some of them plucked up from the holy house the spikes that were upon it, with their bases, which were made of lead, and shot them at the Romans instead of darts. But then as they gained nothing by so doing, and as the fire burst out upon them, they retired to the wall that was eight cubits broad, and there they tarried; yet did two of these of eminence among them, who might have saved themselves by going over to the Romans, or have borne up with courage, and taken their fortune with the others, throw themselves into the fire, and were burnt together with the holy house; their names were Meirus the son of Belgas, and Joseph the son of Daleus (*Wars*, Book 6 Chapter 5:1).

## **PROPHECY FULFILLED**

In AD 30, when Jesus spoke of the destruction of the Temple, the disciples could not fully appreciate what the Lord knew was going to happen. They could not envision the bloodshed and violence, the fire and destruction that was to come. However, when Jesus spoke in AD 30, the disciples were curious enough and alarmed enough to ask Him for more details.

*As Jesus sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples [Peter, James, John and Andrew cf. Mk 13:3] came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world?' (Matt 24:3).*

*Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? (Mark 13:4).*

*And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? (Luke 21:7).*

Two basic questions are asked based on Matthew 24:3, Mark 13:4, and Luke 21:7;

- When shall the Temple be destroyed? and,
- What sign shall there be when these things come to pass?

### **THE FIRST SIGN**

While the disciples asked for a single sign for the Second Coming and the end of the age, in grace the Lord gave them several signs that would characterize the period between AD 30 and the destruction of Jerusalem. He also gave them the specific sign they were looking for because the “age” (Greek, *aion*, not the *kosmos* [world], as translated in Matt 24:3) was indeed coming to an end. Out of Judaism God intended to bring the New Testament expression of the church just as He brought His chosen people out of Egypt long ago.

The first sign that Jesus gave to characterize the specific period in question (AD 30 - AD 70) was the rise of false Christs and deceivers.

*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. (Matt 24:4-5)*

*And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. (Mark 13: 5-6)*

*And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them (Luke 21:8).*

## **FALSE CHRIST AND DECEIVERS**

The Jewish historian Josephus writes that many pretenders arose claiming Divine inspiration. They deceived the Jews by declaring that God would show the miraculous signs of deliverance from the Roman armies. The people followed the prophets into the desert (*Josephus*, Book 2, Chapter 13).

But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place; and if he could but once conquer the Roman garrison and the people, he intended to domineer over them by the assistance of those guards of his that were to break into the city with him, but Felix prevented his attempt, and met him with his Roman soldiers, while all the people assisted him in his attack upon them, insomuch that when it came to a battle, the Egyptian ran away, with a few others, while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive, but the rest of the multitude were dispersed every one to their own homes and there concealed themselves.

During the reign of Nero, while Felix was procurator of Judea (Acts 23:26), deceivers and false prophets emerged to encourage the most immoral of behavior. But for the marriage of Drusilla with Azizus, it was in no long time afterward dissolved, upon the following occasion: — While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty, and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon, one of his friends; a Jew he was, and by birth a Cypriot, and one who pretended to be a magician; and endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry him; and promised, that if she would not refuse him, he would make a happy woman. Accordingly she acted ill, and because she was desirous to avoid her sister Bernice's envy, for she was very ill treated by her on account of her beauty, was prevailed upon to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix; and when he had a son by her, he named him Agrippa.

## **MORE DECEIVERS**

The testimony to the rise of false Christ's and deceivers is also recorded in the book of Acts. Simon Magus is spoken of (Acts 8:9, 10). Jerome quotes him as claiming, "I am the word of God, I am the comforter, I am almighty, I am all there is of God."

Acts 5 records the work of Theudas (Acts 5:37) and in Acts 13 Paul confronted the false prophet Bar-Jesus. In secular history, Origen mentions a deceiver by the name of Dositheus who asserted that he was the Messiah spoken of by Moses, and then there was Barchochebas who is supposed to have spit out flames. One of the more fanatical of the false Messiahs was the individual who appeared in AD 63. Historian Philip Schaff records the man and his message.

Not long before the outbreak of the Jewish war, seven years before the siege of Jerusalem (AD 63), a peasant by the name of Joshua, or Jesus, appeared in the city at the Feast of Tabernacles, and in a tone of prophetic ecstasy cried day and night on the street among the people: "A voice from the morning, a voice from the evening! A voice from the four winds! A voice of rain against Jerusalem and the Temple! A voice against the bridegrooms and the brides! A voice against the whole people! Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" The magistrates, terrified by this woe, had the prophet of evil taken up and scourged. He offered no resistance, and continued to cry his "Woe." Being brought before the procurator, Albinus, he was scourged till his bones could be seen, but interposed not a word for himself, uttered no curse on his enemies; simply exclaimed at every blow in a mournful tone: "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" To the governor's question, who and whence he was, he answered nothing. Finally they let him go, as a madman. But he continued for seven years and five months, till the outbreak of the war, especially at the three great feasts, to proclaim the approaching fall of Jerusalem. During the siege he was singing his dirge, for the last time, from the wall. Suddenly he added: "Woe, woe also to me!" and a stone of the Romans hurled at his head put an end to his prophetic lamentations.

## WAR AND RUMORS OF WAR

Besides deceivers, Jesus also warned of wars and rumors of war.

*And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. (Matt 24: 6-7)*

*And when ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. (Mark 13: 7-8)*

*But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. (Luke 21: 9-10)*

The forty-year period between the Olivet Discourse and the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was turbulent, violent, and bloody. The Jews knew the horrors of civil war as well as their long-standing attempts at revolting against Rome. Many people died in senseless agony. At Caesarea, 20,000 Jews were killed. At Scythopolis, 13,000 Jews were slaughtered. In Alexandria, 50,000 Jews were slain. Damascus, 10,000 Jews were killed.

There were rumors of war when the Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the Temple of Jerusalem in AD 40. When the Jews refused, Rome threatened to march.

Now Caius Caesar did so grossly abuse the fortune he had arrived at, as to take himself to be a god, and to desire to be so called also, and to cut off those of the greatest nobility out of his country. He also extended his impiety as far as the Jews. Accordingly, he sent Petronius with an army to Jerusalem, to place his status in the temple, and commanded him that, in case the Jews would not admit of them, he should slay those that opposed it, and carry all the rest of the nation into captivity; but God concerned himself with these his commands. However, Petronius marched out of Antioch into Judea, with three legions, and many Syrian auxiliaries. Now as to the Jews, some of them could not believe the stories that spoke of a war; but those that did believe them were in the utmost distress how to defend themselves, and the terror diffused itself presently through them all, for the army was already come to Ptolemais (*Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 10:1).

Just as Jesus predicted, there were wars and rumors of wars during this time of AD 30 through AD 70.

### **FAMINES, PESTILENCE, AND EARTHQUAKES**

Continuing the narrative Jesus said that there would be famines, pestilence, and earthquakes.

*For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes, in diverse places. (Matt 24:7)*

*For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in diverse places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. (Mark 13:8)*

*And great earthquakes shall be in diverse places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. (Luke 21:11)*

The book of Acts records the outbreak of famines in the days of Claudius Caesar (AD 44) (Acts 11:28). The saints at Antioch were moved to send relief to Judean Christians. Still, many died.

Besides the famine in Judea, there were other famines that appeared during the reign of Claudius. One was located in Greece and two in Rome as recorded by Dio Cassius and Tacitus. Suetonius also records famines during that period. During the reign of Nero, in one year, 30,000 people died of starvation.



During the reign of Claudius, earthquakes occurred in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios and Samos. Tacitus mentioned earthquakes at Rome, writing that, "Frequent earthquakes occurred, by which many houses were thrown down." (*Annals of Tacitus*)

In AD 54, on the day Nero assumed the toga, there was an earthquake. Another is recorded as occurring in AD 60, in the city of Laodicea that was devastated along with its neighbors, Hierapolis and Colossae. Seneca wrote in AD 50,

How often there have the cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one fatal shock!  
How many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! How many in Macedonia!  
How often has Paphos become a ruin! News has often brought to us word of the  
demolition of whole cities as one.

The city of Pompeii was destroyed in AD 63 by an earthquake. Josephus recorded a major quake in Judea (*Wars*, Book 4 Chapter 4:5).

... for there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thundering, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming.

### **ADDITIONAL WARNINGS**

In addition to famines, pestilences, and earthquakes Jesus warned His Disciples of persecution and the rise of false prophets.

*Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matt 24:9-14)*

*But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten; and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and the children shall rise up against their parents; and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my*

*name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*  
(Mark 13:9-13)

*But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls* (Luke 21:12-19).

## **PERSECUTION**

The two general dangers to the early church were the external danger of persecution and the internal threat of false prophets to deceive the people and to change the message of the gospel. External persecution would come from two sources: the hostile Jewish community and the official sanction of Roman oppression for political reasons.

At first the opposition to the Christian community was limited in nature and generated from local discontent (Acts 13:50-51; 14:18, 19; 16:19-23; 17:1-10; 19:23-41). Then came the persecution authorized under the auspices of the civil or religious authorities (Acts 7:54-60; 8:1; 9:1; 23). After the city of Rome was destroyed by fire the Neroian Persecution (AD 64-68) began in earnest.

Despite the hardship on the early church, Jesus limited the duration of the coming ordeal for His people to the period before AD 70. This fact is reflected in part by the reference the Lord made to the councils and to the synagogues (Mk 13:9; Lk 21:12). As a result of the great tribulation, the gospel was published among all nations (Mt 24:14; Mk 13:10; cp. 2 Tim 4:17; Rom 1:8; 16:26; and Col 1:6, 23).

## **THE RISE OF FALSE PROPHETS**

As the early church had to endure persecution, it had to combat heresies. Galatians, Colossians, 2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 John and Jude were specifically written to counter the corrupting influence of false teachers and false doctrines. Almost all the New Testament epistles contain some warning about the destructive impact of evil teachers who desired to infiltrate the church. (1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Tim 3:13; 4:3; 2 Pet 2:1-3, etc.)

With so much persecution so quickly, it seemed to many converts to Christ that the world was coming to an end. The signs of the times indicated that Christ was coming again soon, and that the earth was to perish in divine judgment.

### **SPECIAL NOTE**

It is at this point that it is extremely important to read again Matthew 24:6, Mark 13:7 and Luke 21:9 for in these verses we are reminded that Jesus cautioned His followers **NOT** to look at wars, the rise of false prophets, famines, pestilences or earthquakes as positive indications of the end of the world.

*And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (Matt 24:6)*

*And when ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled; for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. (Mark 13:7)*

*But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. (Luke 21:9)*

Despite this divine prohibition, even to the people of His day, Christians have pointed time and again to contemporary events as ultimate proof of the end of this world. “*But the end is not yet.*”

### **FEARFUL SIGHTS AND GREAT SIGNS**

God's people should not be encouraged to look for sensational events as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. God's people should not be taught to fear the future. God's people should be taught that between AD 30 and AD 70, when the days of God's vengeance fell upon the land of Israel there were then fearful sights and great signs. Jesus said there would be.

*And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. (Luke 2 1:11)*

By “great signs” Jesus was probably referring to the upheavals in nature that were catastrophic. Devastating storms, meteor showers, volcanic eruptions, and cyclones have always struck terror into the hearts of men. Josephus writes of several fearful sights that occurred prior to the destruction of Jerusalem (*Wars*, Book 6 Chapter 5:3, 4).

Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself-, while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see, or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Thus also, before the Jews rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war,

when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus (Nisan), and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which light lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskilled, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes, as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it.

At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high-priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple. Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner (court of the) temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now, those that kept watch in the temple, and told him of it: who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty, was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared, that this signal foreshowed the desolation that was coming upon them.

### **THE SPECIFIC SIGN**

As Jesus provided several general signs that would indicate the time of the coming judgment upon the generation to which He spoke (AD 30 - AD 70), He also provided a specific sign.

*When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. (Matt 24:15-16)*

*But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains. (Mark 13:14)*

*And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. (Luke 21: 20-21)*

Three times Jesus told His disciples that something could be SEEN as a specific sign of the nearness of the fall of Jerusalem in the generation to which He spoke. What could be seen was the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Luke 21:20 specifically calls the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the armies [of Roman]. When Jerusalem was encircled by the Roman legions the disciples of Christ would have a definite sign that was asked for as to the impending desolation of Jerusalem after which not one stone would be left on top of another.

When the Roman legions finally subdued the city of Jerusalem in AD 70, history records that the army brought their ensigns into the Temple, erected them over the Eastern Gate, and sacrificed to them proclaiming Titus as Emperor (*Wars*, Book 6 Chapter 6:1).

And now the Romans, upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus Emperor, with the greatest acclamations of joy.

The plain wording of Luke's account reveals that the sign the disciples asked for and the Lord gave was to be clearly observed by the people of Jerusalem and Judea. "*When ye shall SEE Jerusalem compassed with armies ... then let them which are in Judea flee,*" 34 (Luke 21:20-21) said Jesus. Historian Philip Schaff recounts the Roman invasion of Jerusalem and how the armies were so positioned as to encircle the city. When the eagle banners were raised the prophecy of Jesus on this part was fulfilled (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1. pp. 395-396).

### **THE ROMAN INVASION**

The emperor Nero, informed of the rebellion, sent his most famous general, Vespasian, with a large force to Palestine. Vespasian opened the campaign in the year AD 67 from the Syrian port-town, Ptolemais (Acco), and against a stout resistance over-ran Galilee with an army of sixty thousand men. But events in Rome hindered him from completing the victory, and required him to return thither. Nero had killed himself. The emperors, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius followed one another in rapid succession. The latter was taken out of a dog's kennel in Rome while drunk, dragged through the streets, and shamefully put to death. Vespasian, in the year 69, was universally proclaimed emperor, and restored order and prosperity. His son, Titus, who himself ten years after became emperor, and highly distinguished himself by his mildness and philanthropy, then undertook the prosecution of the Jewish war, and became the instrument in the hand of God of destroying the holy city and the temple. He had an army of not less than eighty thousand trained soldiers, and planted his camp on Mount Scopus and the adjoining Mount Olivet, in full view of the city and the temple, which from this height show to the best advantage.

The valley of the Kedron divided the besiegers from the besieged. In April, AD 70, immediately after the Passover, when Jerusalem was filled with strangers, the siege began. The zealots rejected, with sneering defiance, the repeated proposals of Titus and the prayers of Josephus, who accompanied him as interpreter and mediator; and they struck down every one who spoke of surrender. They made sorties down from the valley of the Kedron and up the mountain, and inflicted great loss on the Romans. As the difficulties multiplied their courage increased. The crucifixion of hundreds of prisoners (as many as five hundred a day) only enraged them the more. Even the famine which began to rage and sweep away thousands daily, and forced a woman to roast her own

child. The cries of mothers and babes, the most pitiable scenes of misery around them, could not move the crazy fanatics.

History records no other instance of such obstinate resistance, such desperate bravery and contempt of death. The Jews fought, not only for civil liberty, life, and their native land, but for that which constituted their national pride and glory, and gave their whole history its significance—for their religion, which, even in this state of horrible degeneracy, infused into them an almost superhuman power of endurance.

### **THE HISTORICAL RECORD**

Here then is the historical record. The armies of Rome advanced against Jerusalem. The army encircled the city as it encamped on Mt. Scopus. The Roman banners were unfurled and the eagle was shown. The army of abomination that was to make the city desolate was present. Then it was that the Christians remembered the words of the Lord that this would be the sign to make the great escape.

*Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day. (Matt 24:16-20)*

*... then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains: And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take anything out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And prey ye that your flight be not in the winter. (Mark 13:14-18)*

*Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. (Luke 21:21-23)*

### **A WAY OF ESCAPE**

In order to protect the Church the Lord provided practical instruction as well as a specific sign. The signal that destruction was about to come upon Jerusalem in which the Temple would be destroyed would be the gathering of the armies of Rome around the city. Once the signal was seen the Christian community was to flee into the mountains. The flight must be without any prior preparations or excessive baggage. Prayer was to be requested for favorable weather and proper timing lest zealous Jews accuse the Christians of violating the Sabbath (Acts 21:20).

History records that the Christian community actually escaped the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman armies. At first, it appeared that no one would escape for the events happened so suddenly. When the Jewish Revolt broke out in AD 66 the Roman general Cestius Gallus moved his army from Syria into Judea with rapid deployment.

The Roman assault was so swift that the Christians along with all others were trapped within the city walls. They saw the sign as Jesus predicated but felt hopeless to escape. Then, without any warning or reason General Cestius Gallus recalled his soldiers and withdrew from the city.

It then happened that Cestius was not conscious either how the besieged despaired of success, nor how courageous the people were for him; and so he recalled his soldiers from the place, and by despairing of any expectation of taking it, without having received any disgrace, he retired from the city, without any reason in the world. (*Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 19:7).

The surprise withdrawal provided the window of opportunity for the Christian community to escape according to the guidelines Christ provided. Eusebius, the Christian historian, stated that, “The whole body ... 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 a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, 111, 5:3)

### **THE GREAT TRIBULATION: A HISTORICAL REALITY**

*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.* (Matt 24:21)

*For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.* (Mark 13:19)

*For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of Gentiles be fulfilled.* (Luke 21: 22-24)

From AD 66-70, the stage was set for a period of great tribulation to engulf the Jewish nation as the cup of wrath of God was poured out on Israel for rejecting the Messiah (Mt. 23:32). These were “days of vengeance” (Lk 21:22-23). Of this period Josephus, who was an eyewitness says that... it appears to me that the misfortunes of all men from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to those of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were ... It is therefore impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly: That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world... (*Wars*, Book 5, Chapter 10:5).

Because of the horror of World War I and World War II it has been argued that the emphatic statement of Jesus in Matthew 24:21 and Mark 13:19, a statement confirmed by Josephus and others, have yet to be realized. Critics point to the numbers slain, the amount of property destroyed, the duration of time in suffering, and the extent of the geographical coverage of persecuted Jews in the 20th century and then declare that the words of Jesus have yet to be fulfilled. This commitment to simple numbers, how many bodies killed, how much money taken from the Jews in AD 70 compared to modern times misses the point of the words of Jesus to His generation. It is the KIND of the days of vengeance that must be considered for in the period of the great tribulation (AD 40 to AD 70) there was nothing less than Almighty God divorcing His ancient wife who had proved unfaithful to Him. It was the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer 30:7). It was the period of God concentrating His wrath upon His elect nation in particular. (Lk 21:22-23; Dan 12:1) Theologian Loraine Boettner comments on this fact.

There have been, of course, other periods of tribulation of suffering in which greater numbers of people were involved, and which continued for longer periods of time. But considering the physical, moral, and religious aspects, suffering never reached a greater degree of awfulness and intensity than the siege of Jerusalem. Nor have so many people ever perished in the fall of any other city.

We think of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima as causing the greatest mass horror of anything in modern times. Yet, only about one tenth as many people were killed in Hiroshima as in the fall of Jerusalem. Add to the slaughter of such a great number the bestiality of Jew to Jew and of Roman to Jew and the anguish of a people who knew they were forsaken of God, and we see the justification for Christ's words, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*)

It is instructive that Josephus viewed the divine judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70 as a literal fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel (*Antiquities*, Book 10, Chapter 11:7).

In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them. All these things did this man leave in writing, as God had showed them to him, insomuch, that such as read his prophecies, and see how they have been fulfilled, would wonder at the wherewith God honored Daniel...



## SHORTENED DAYS

Turning again to the parallel passages in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 there is found yet another prediction concerning the great tribulation Jesus envisioned for the people of His generation. So terrible would the time period be that God himself would have to intervene to shorten the days of divine discipline. Jesus promised that the Father would do just that.

*And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. (Matt 24:22)*

*And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days. (Mark 13:20)*

The word *elect* signifies those precious souls who have been selected or chosen of God to be the heirs of salvation and the objects of special grace. The *elect* is a reference to the people of God and not to national Israel according to the flesh. The whole purpose of the divine judgment upon Israel was because of the wickedness of the Jews in rejecting the Messiah. Only those who did not reject the Messiah would know a special deliverance out of the great tribulation period of AD 40-70.

The application of the word *elect* to the Christian community is manifested in the fact that the warning was given about false Christs and false Prophets who would attempt to deceive the very elect if possible. History records that the days Christ referred to were shortened by the divisions and fratricidal slaughter that took place within the city as well as the famines. Josephus notes that, “for barbarity and iniquity those of the same nation did in no way differ from the Romans; nay it seemed to be a much lighter thing to be ruined by the Romans than by themselves” (*Wars*, Book 4, Chapter 3:2).

William Kimball observes that, several other pertinent factors contributed to shortening the duration of the siege: Titus was personally disposed to clemency and moderation towards the Jews, being in love with Agrippa's sister Bernice, as well as possessing great esteem towards Josephus the historian; Vespasian's attention had increasingly turned to Rome as the prospects of emperorship brightened; an outbreak of revolts on the northern frontiers of the Empire demanded immediate attention; and Titus, who had been left in charge of the Roman forces in Judea by Vespasian, was eager to return to Rome to share in the inaugural festivities of his father. The total duration of the final siege on Jerusalem lasted less than five months, from April to September of AD 70 (*The Great Tribulation*, William R. Kimball, p. 138).

God's intervention in those days is evidenced in that in an unexpected manner the Jewish strongholds were suddenly abandoned. Had the zealots maintained their position, they could have delayed the siege of Jerusalem indefinitely as the historian Josephus records:

And here one may chiefly reflect on the power of God exercised upon these wicked wretches, and on the good fortune of the Romans; for these tyrants did now wholly deprive themselves of the security they had in their own power, and came down from those very towers of their own accord, wherein they could have never been taken by force, nor indeed by any other way than by famine ... So they now left these towers of themselves, or rather they were ejected out of them by God himself.. (*Wars*, Book 6, Chapter 8:4, 5)

Josephus contends that had General Gallus not withdrawn his troops he would have captured Jerusalem and spared the Temple. But then he concludes, “It was, I suppose, owing to the aversion God had already towards the city and the sanctuary, that he (Cestius) was hindered from putting an end to the war that very day.” (*Wars*, Book 2, Chapter 19:6)

Christ's warning was literally fulfilled by the church, allowing it to be delivered from most of the great tribulation that came to Jerusalem in AD 70. This prediction and its fulfillment exalts Christ in His prophetic role. The Lord is our wonderful King, Priest, and Prophet.

### **MORE WARNINGS OF FALSE DECEIVERS**

In order to confirm that the elect would be protected, not by removal, but by the power of God, Jesus again warned about false prophets who would deceive the church by teaching of a secret, silent return of Christ.

Then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there believe him not: For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders: insomuch that, if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I, have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chamber; believe it or not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Mt 24:23-27)

And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: For false Christs and False prophets shall arise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things. (Mark 13:21-23)

### **THE VISIBLE COMING OF CHRIST**

The destruction of Jerusalem with the far-reaching implications of that event was so monumental that Jesus repeated His words of warning to the disciples time and again. “*Behold, I have told you before*” (Matt 24:25). There would be false prophets and false teaching said Jesus. In particular the Lord warned that there would come those who presented a concept that His appearance would be cloaked in secrecy. Jesus asserted that His coming would be very conspicuous. (Matt 24:27; Luke 17:24)

One of the more popular teaching in Christendom today is the concept of a secret coming of Christ. In light of the plain teaching of the Lord such a concept has to be reconsidered. The Lord will not return in secret though He will come again suddenly like a thief in the night for the second time for all who believe. (Heb 9:28)

In Luke 21:24, Jesus continued to tell about the great tribulation that history records happened in AD 70. The proper understanding of this verse necessitates some specific points being made concerning the times of the Gentiles.

*And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* (Luke 21:24)

### **THE TIME OF THE GENTILES**

1. The expression "*the times of the Gentiles*" is found only in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse. (21:24)
2. This phase immediately follows the Lord's announcement of the divine judgment which was to befall Jerusalem and did in AD 60-70. The remark should not be divorced from the context of the outpouring of God's wrath upon the Jews.
3. Though God would use the Gentile nations to judge His people, there would be a time limit to the act of discipline.
4. Jesus had warned that such an event would take place. God would reject Israel and turn to the Gentiles. (Matt 8:11, 12; Luke 13:28-29; Matt 21:33-43; 22:2-7)
5. The Apostle Paul declared that indeed God did shift the focus of His attention towards the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46, 47; 28:25-28)
6. How long shall the Gentiles "*trodden down*" Jerusalem is an open ended question and no one has the answer. There are no signs to indicate how long this period will continue. Many people with prophetic interests were excited that Israel became a nation again in the eyes of the world community in 1948. The concept began to be taught that within a generation, Jesus would return.
7. The prophetic teachers of the 1960's, '70's and even early '80's contended that since a biblical generation was 40 years the Lord had to return by 1988. Some went further and said that since there was to be THE great tribulation, seven years had to be subtracted and the secret coming of Christ would be in 1981. (So much for secrecy.)
8. Only one thing has been constant throughout history: ALL of the prophetic teachers have been wrong in their predictions. Modern day prophetic teachers have also generally succumbed to the temptation to support their theories with general date setting based upon the "signs" of the times, or personal "feelings" that the end is near. There is also the constant focus upon contemporary events in the Middle East instead of the eternal Word of God.
9. The Lord has stated that there would come a time when the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled and we must wait upon God's timing.

Despite the severity of the great tribulation period, despite the long duration whereby Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles, the church of the generation of Jesus could at least be made aware when these things were about to be to happen.

*For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. (Matt 24:28)*

### **THE CARCASS AND THE EAGLE**

In very pictorial language Jesus used a familiar proverb of His day to emphasize that an event was coming which spoke of death and destruction. The picture of a carcass for national spiritual Israel was an appropriate description. Matthew Henry commented on this verse saying:

The Jews were so corrupt and degenerate, so vile and vicious, that they were become a carcass, obnoxious to the righteous judgment of God; they were also so factious and seditious, and every way so provoking to the Romans, that they had made themselves obnoxious to their resentments, and an inviting prey to them ... When a people (Jews) do by their sin make themselves carcasses, putrid and loathsome, nothing can be expected but that God should send eagles among them to devour and destroy them.

It is interesting that the great emblem on the Roman banners was the eagle. As the Roman soldiers surrounded the city, as the banners were unfurled, it must have looked as if the eagles of the earth had gathered together to feed on a carcass.

### **A TURBULENCE IN NATURE**

In addition to the terrible carnage that would take place on earth, Jesus also foresaw turbulence in the sphere of nature.

*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. (Matt 24:29)*

*But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. (Mark 13:24-25)*

*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring: Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after these things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (Luke 21:25-26)*

## AFTER THE DESTRUCTION

Not only did Jesus predict the events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem, but His prophetic eye saw those events that would follow in the immediate aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction.

As the Great Prophet, the Lord Jesus stressed that Jerusalem would know a period of great tribulation but that its duration would be shortened. Then, “*immediately*” (Greek, *eutheos*, meaning forthwith, straightway, shortly, immediately) after those days there would be cataclysmic changes in the sun, moon, and stars.

The question arises whether or not these verses are to be taken literally or figuratively. There are some compelling reasons to attach a more figurative meaning to these verses.

1. Jesus strictly discouraged the use of literal, cosmic events to be taken as signs proceeding His Second Advent. (Matt 24:6; Mk 13:7)
2. No other section of the prophetic discourse is so indebted to scriptural imagery and language. “And there shall be signs” is language that goes beyond the limited period of the great tribulation period of AD 30-70 to describe the conditions of earth until the times of the Gentiles are complete. There really is no time since our Lord spoke these words that the thought would not be true. Therefore, these verses symbolically set forth the unsettled and turbulent state of the powers of the world. Henry Swete comments:

“In all these cases, physical phenomena are used to describe the upheaval of dynasties, or great moral and spiritual changes, and it is unnecessary to exact any other meaning from the words when they are adopted by Christ.”  
(*Commentary on Revelation*, Henry B. Swete, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 19).

3. In the Old Testament the prophets often used figurative language when depicting tumultuous times as the following passages teach.
  - Eccl 12:1 uses symbolic language to characterize the good times of life.
  - Ps 37:6 describes in figurative language the spiritual blessings that belong to those who trust in the Lord (compare Isa 58; 60:20).
  - Negative symbolic language is also used (Isa 59:9,10; Amos:18-20; 8:2-9; Ezek 34:12; Zeph 1:4, 15; Isa 5:30; Jer 4:23-28; 13:16).
  - Similar symbolic language used to describe the destruction of Jerusalem was also used by the prophetic Joel (2:28-31). On the day of Pentecost, Peter informed his audience that they were witnessing the FULFILLMENT of prophecy by Joel concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:10; 2:28-31 compare to Acts 2:28-32).
  - When describing the turbulence among the Gentile nations the prophets used symbolic language (Ezek 30; 32:7-15; Isa 34:4-10; 13:9-20 compare to Dan 5: 21-31).
  - Concerning the phrase that “the powers of heaven shall be shaken” perhaps the best commentary is found in Ephesians 6:12, 13.

- Apocalyptic language is used to describe God's judgment on Edom. (Ob 1-21)
- It was used to describe God's judgment on Moab. (Jer 48: 1-47)
- It was used to describe God's judgment on Ammon. (Jer 9:26; 25:21; 49:6; Dan 11:41; Amos 1:13; Zeph 2:8, 9)

*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt 24: 30-31)*

*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. (Mark 13: 26-27)*

*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Luke 21:27)*

### **THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN**

The phrase the “*sign of the Son of man in heaven*” simply suggests that when Jesus comes, when Christ appears, there will be nothing subtle or mysterious about it. Men will know. The Greek word *appears* is *phaino*, and means “*to be brought forth unto light,*” “*to become evident,*” “*to appear.*”

### **DIFFERENCE OF OPINION**

Up to this point in the gospel narrative of the Olivet Discourse, conservative Bible scholars who embrace the historical understanding of The Great Tribulation period are united. At this turning point they divide into two positions. One position believes that these verses are a figurative reference to the coming judgment of Christ in power and judgment upon the nation of Israel in AD 70. The second position contends that Jesus now begins to speak of His Second Advent proper, whereby He returns in personal glory and power.

The arguments in favor of applying these passages to the judgment of Christ upon the nation of Israel in AD 70 may be listed.

1. Christ warned the Sanhedrin on the eve of His crucifixion: “Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven,” (Mt 26:64). If Christ came in the judgment upon national Israel in AD 70 then some of the Sanhedrin would indeed have seen the words of Christ fulfilled.
2. There is much Old Testament symbolism that speaks of the Lord as “coming” to a place. Genesis 11:5, “The Lord came down to see the city.” The scriptures speak of the Lord coming to men in their dreams (Gen 20:3). In Exodus 3:8 we read, “*I am come down to deliver them.*” The psalmist wrote, “*He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass*” (Ps 72:6). David spoke of the Lord's assistance in battle saying, “*the Lord... bowed the heavens ... and came down ... he delivered me*” (Ps 18:6-17). The prophet Isaiah stated, “*So shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof*” (Isa 31:4). In the context of Israel's restoration to their homeland after the Babylonian captivity, God said, “*I am returned unto Jerusalem*” (Zech 1:16; 8:3). There is a sense in which the Lord came to Israel in great judgment in AD 70.
3. Matthew Henry wrote what many Christians believe: “*The destruction of Jerusalem was in a particular manner an act of Christ's judgment, the judgment committed to the Son of man... it might justly be looked upon as a coming of the Son of man, in power and great glory, yet not visible in the clouds.*”
4. Select passages to support the concept of a judgment upon national Israel in AD 70 would include Exodus 19:9; 34:5; Isaiah 19:1; Psalms 18:10; 104:3, 97:2.

Despite these arguments, there are conservative, godly scholars who prefer to understand the verses in Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27, and Luke 21:27 as a direct reference to the Second Advent of Christ. The angels, the gathering of the elect, the coming in clouds argues for an understanding of the Second Advent proper. Parallel New Testament passages are offered for consideration in support of this view. (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52; 2 Thess 1:7)

### **A POSSIBLE SOLUTION**

If there is a solution as to which position may be more correct in its interpretation, the solution might be found in the word *then* of Matthew 24:30, Mark 13:26, and Luke 21:27. The word used in these verses is derived from the Greek word, *tote*. Matthew uses this word often, about 90 times, for something that happened next in time. Therefore, the completion of this passage would be found in the events of AD 70. However, the word *tote* is flexible in that it can either indicate something that is to happen at a specific time, or it can be used in a far more general sense to indicate an event or series of events that will happen.

## SUMMARY

Advocates for a now historical fulfillment of Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27, and Luke 21:27 argue for the following order of events:

1. A period of general hardship was to come upon the nation of Israel according to Jesus.
2. This general turbulent period was to be followed by a span of time (40 years) characterized by increasing unrest and instability among the nations of the earth until “*the times of the Gentiles*” were complete.
3. When the times of the Gentiles were completed national Israel would mourn as the people viewed the Son of Man coming in great tribulation judgment, which He did in AD 70. The elect, consisting of the Christian community, would largely be spared. And they were spared most of the great, final judgment upon Jerusalem.

Advocates of the position that applies Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27, and Luke 21:27 to the Second Advent of Christ would argue for the following order of events:

- Tribulation is to come upon the nation of Israel.
- This tribulation period is to be followed by an extended period of time characterized by unrest and instability among the nations of the earth which will end in great tribulation upon Israel.
- The great tribulation period will be brought to a close with the Second Advent of Christ in power and glory as the Lord is accompanied with trumpets, angels and the gathering of the elect.

The discussion continues as to the exact meaning and the proper place in history to apply the events of Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27, and Luke 21:27.

## THE DRAWING NEAR OF REDEMPTION!

Luke 21:28 returns to a more historical understanding because Jesus told the disciples that when all the things He had just spoken of came to pass, they were to lift up their heads because their redemption was drawing near.

*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. (Luke 21:28)*



## **“LIFT UP YOUR HEADS”**

The reference to “*these things*” (Luke 21:28) have led to speculation that a linkage should be made with the catastrophic upheavals and cosmic events which will supposedly accompany the final events at the close of this age. There are two major problems with such a linkage. First, there are NO signs for the Second Advent of Christ (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:33). Jesus said pointedly that no man would know (the word for *know* in Greek is *eido* and means to know, to be sure of, aware of, perceive, see, understand, tell, or to know from observation) the nearness of His return. He meant it. No man will be able to clearly distinguish, perceive, be sure of, be aware of, or be able to know for certain when the end of this age is about to begin, has begun, or will end. The words, “*And when these things begin to come to pass,*” must be linked to those things Christ taught referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or the words would have had no meaning to the disciples question concerning the destruction of the Temple which began the Olivet Discourse.

For the rest of the Christian community after AD 70, the church has always lived in the consciousness that “the end of all things is at hand.” (Phil 4:5; Jas 5:9; 1 Pet 4:7a) To us Jesus says, “*Be not afraid.*” (Luke 21:9) While we travel through life we have a hopeful expectancy, “*in the present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and Our Savior Jesus Christ.*” (Titus 2:12,13)

## **THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE**

There is one more issue that should be addressed relating to the Olivet Discourse and that is the matter of Israel and the fig tree. Jesus ends his teaching with these words.

*Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matt 24:32-35)*

*Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (Mark 13:28-31)*

*And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (Luke 21:29-33)*

## ISRAEL AND THE FIG TREE

It is often taught that “*the budding of the fig tree*” passage has a distinct and direct prophetic link to the re-establishment of Israel as a Jewish statehood among the community of modern nations in 1948 and the end of the world. The belief is propagated that since Israel became a nation, the end of time is near and we must be in the generation that shall certainly see the return of Christ.

In spite of the widespread popularity of this opinion, there is absolutely no biblical support to teach modern man that the end of the twentieth century is the terminal generation. All Christians want the Lord to return but a holy longing does not mean a divine certainty. A Biblical generation of 40 years has already passed and the church is still on earth. To the people of His day, the Lord taught a very simple truth using the fig tree and ALL THE TREES (Lk 21:29) as an object lesson. When trees put forth their leaves people know that summer is near. Likewise, when the disciples of the first generation witnessed all “*these things*” of the Olivet Discourse then they would know that the Lord's prophetic utterances were about to be fulfilled. Alfred Edersheim recaptures impact of that moment in history.

From the fig tree, under which, on that spring afternoon they may have rested on the Mount Of Olives, they were to 'learn a parable.' We can picture Christ taking one of its twigs, just as its softening tips were bursting into young leaf. Surely, this meant that summer was nigh—not that it had actually come. The distinction is important. For it seems to prove that ‘all these things’ which were to indicate to them that it was near, even at the doors, and which were to be fulfilled when this generation had passed away, could not have referred to the last signs connected with the immediate Advent of Christ, but must apply to the previous predication of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish commonwealth (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim, P- 650).

The single, penetrating, Powerful thought that should crystallize all the discussion concerning the great tribulation is that Jesus said to those who were listening to Him speak that,

*this generation would not pass till  
ALL these things be fulfilled.*

The disciples had asked when ALL the things would come to pass that the Lord had mentioned and Jesus said that ALL these things would happen in “this generation,” the generation to which He lived in and the generation that rejected Him as Lord. The disciples understood and so can we.

By AD 70, the old city of Jerusalem and the second Temple were destroyed so that the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God could be made manifest. A new Temple was created. This new Temple of God is the church. The kingdom of God that is spiritual and eternal replaced the Jewish concept of a natural and temporal kingdom of God.

Because of this great work of judgment of God upon national Israel in AD 70, it would be proper for the Christian community not to encourage Jewish materialistic expectations. The Lord has disciplined national Israel, (Rom 9, 10, 11) The Bible teaches that Christ loves the Church and died for her, (Eph 5:25) It is the Church, the true spiritual Israel of God (Gal 3:29), which has a glorious destiny for He has made Christians kings and priests. Christ has made us kings and priests now! (Rev 1:6) Christians are citizens of the kingdom of Christ and of that kingdom there shall be no end. Here is comfort for the people who have been taught to fear the future. Do not be afraid. The King has come. Come to the kingdom. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31)

### **DOCTRINE OF THE COMING OF CHRIST**

1. Jesus said that there would be some standing before Him who would not taste of death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Mt 16:28; Lk 21:27)
2. On the Mount of Olives the disciples asked the Lord for the sign of His coming. (Mt 24:3)
3. Jesus likened His coming (*parousia*, advent, physical aspect or presence) to the lightning which cometh out of the east and shineth unto the east. (Mt 24:27)
4. Jesus said there would be days of tribulation in which the sun would be darkened and the moon would not give her light and the powers of the heavens would be shaken and people would see the Son of Man coming (*kataggeleus*, a proclaimer, setter forth) in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:26, 27)
5. The coming of the Son of Man would be like the days of Noah. (Mt 24:37, 39; Mk 13:36)
6. Only evil servants would say, "My lord delayeth his coming." (Mt 24:37,39; Mk 13:36)
7. Faithful servants are rewarded when the Lord cometh. (Mt 24:26)
8. In a parable Jesus told what He would expect at His coming. (Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62)
9. Jesus told the high priest that he would see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. (Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62)
10. Peter referred to the coming of the Just One (Acts 7:52), associating the prophetic reference to the First Advent.
11. Paul speaks of the saints waiting for the coming (*apokalupsis*, revelation, manifestation) of the Lord. (1 Cor 1: 7)
12. At the coming, *parousia* of Christ there will be the resurrection from the dead. (1 Cor 15:23)
13. Paul wanted others to be present at the coming of Christ so he could rejoice. (1 Thess 2:19)
14. When Christ comes the saints will be sanctified. (1 Thess 3:13)
15. At the coming of Christ there will be a generation of saints who will meet Him in the air. (1 Thess 4:15)
16. Sanctification must characterize the life of every Christian until the coming of Christ. (1 Thess 5:23)

17. The hope of the coming of Christ becomes a motivating force for faithful service. (2 Thess 2:1)
18. At the coming of Christ the Wicked One will be destroyed. (2 Thess 2:8)
19. Christians are to be patient in the hardships of life until the coming of the Lord. (Jas 5:7)
20. The coming, *parousia* is near. (Jas 5:8)
21. Skeptics mock that Jesus is coming again. (2 Pet 3:4)
22. When Jesus comes the heavens shall be set on fire and dissolved and the elements shall melt. (2 Pet 3:12)
23. The Christian is to live in such a manner as not to be ashamed before Christ at His coming. (1 Jn 2:28)
24. Of the sixty six times that the word *coming* is used in the New Testament, fourteen times the word is directly associated without question to the Second Advent of Christ (Heb 9:28 cp. 1 Cor 1:7; 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1; 2:8; Jas 5:7; 5:8; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4; 3:12; 1 Jn 2:28). In four other passages there is a parabolic application. (Mt 24:48; 25:27; Lk 12:45; 19:23)
25. The passages in Matthew (16:28; 24:27; 24:30; 24:37, 38, 39; 25:27) Mark (13:26, 36; 14:62), and Luke (21:27) may better refer to the coming of Christ in special judgment upon national Israel in AD 70.
26. In the Old Testament the word *coming* is used 33 times.
27. Only in Malachi 3:2 and 4:5 is the word *coming* associated with the Messiah.
28. Malachi 3:2, which speaks of the Lord coming suddenly to His Temple, is fulfilled in Matthew 3:1, 3. (Rev 6:17 cp. Heb 12:29)
29. Malachi 4:5 refers to the prophet Elijah coming before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. This coming is associated with the First Advent. Matthew 11:14 plainly teaches the fulfillment of this prophetic utterance in the life of John the Baptist.

### **WHAT ABOUT ESCAPING TRIBULATION?**

Since so much has been made within the Christian community about the possibility of God's people escaping some future great tribulation period by removal, it would be good to remember that God has never promised that the church as a whole would ever be excluded from the trials of life. Consider the Doctrine of Tribulation under several points.

## DOCTRINE OF TRIBULATION

1. The word *tribulation* is found 22 times in the Authorized Version. The word *tribulations* is found 4 times.
2. To suffer tribulation (Greek, *thlipsis*) is to suffer affliction, to be troubled, to suffer due to the pressure of circumstances, or the antagonism of persons.
3. In examining the passages that speak of tribulation it becomes evident that all God's people in all ages have known emotional, spiritual, and physical affliction. (Deut 4:30; Judg 10:14; 1 Sam 26:24; 1 Sam 10:19; Mt 13:21)
4. Tribulation also comes to those who are not God's people in the form of Divine discipline. (Mt 24:21, 29; Mk 13:24; 2 Thess 1:6; Rom 2:9, 22)
5. Of particular concern is the Christian and tribulation. The Bible clearly makes the following statements:
  - The disciples of Christ, for as long as they are in the world shall have tribulation. (Jn 16:33)
  - Only through much tribulation will the saints enter into the kingdom. (Acts 14:22)
  - The value of tribulation is that it works patience. (Rom 5:3; 12:12)
  - To endure tribulation is not to be loved less by Christ (Rom 8:35) for nothing shall separate us from His faithful love.
  - God finds a special way to comfort the saints who suffer. (2 Cor 1:4)
  - Paul could find reasons to rejoice in the very midst of tribulation (2 Cor 7:4; Rom 5:3; 2 Thess 1:4) and therefore did not want anyone else to worry on his behalf. (Eph 3:13)
  - When believers at Thessalonica were surprised at the suffering they had to endure, Paul reminded them he had taught that Christians must suffer. (1 Thess 3:4)
  - John on the isle of Patmos does not divorce himself from tribulation nor does he ever say of himself that he represents those who shall not suffer tribulation. On the contrary, John considers himself at the moment of his writing to be a companion in suffering. (Rev 1:9)
  - The tribulation of the saints is well known to the Lord (Rev 2:9, 10) and is for a stated purpose.
  - Always, God's people emerge victorious out of tribulation no matter how great. (Rev 7:14)
6. In all the Biblical passages there is not a single word that God will spare His people from the purifying effects of tribulation. Just the opposite is stated and demonstrated time and again.
7. The story of the Old Testament, the writing of the New Testament, the documentation of 2,000 years of history testify to the blood of the saints in the church.
8. Any teaching which seeks to exempt God's people from tribulation during any period of human history will not find support from the 26 passages which uses this word.

## IS THE CHURCH IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION?

Unfortunately, a large part of the Christian community is being taught that the church will not go through the great tribulation period which is believed by many to still be in the future. In contrast, history records that the great tribulation period Jesus predicted did find the Christian community caught up in the turmoil of the times. The Lord made a way of escape, not by removal, but by the revelation of His word remembered. The Word of God plainly teaches tribulation for the saints until the second Advent of Christ. (Heb 9:28) The testimony of the church down to the present hour confirms that the saints are often killed for the cause of Christ.

A popular method is used to try to prove that the church is not going to go through a great tribulation period. First, there is the teaching that the events of Revelation 4-19 are future not historical. Second, it is argued that the church could not have part in any tribulation period because the word *church* is not found in the text of Revelation 4-19. It is then concluded that since the church is not mentioned in Revelation 4-19 the church is not part of the tribulation period.

The response to this teaching is that the church is found in the questionable chapters of Revelation 4-19. This is easily proved by observing the terminology used for the church in Matthew through Jude and then noting the same terminology is found in Revelation.

<b>MATTHEW - JUDE</b>	<b>REVELATION 4 - 19</b>
<b>Saints</b> Romans 1:7 1 Cor. 1:2 Eph. 1:1	<b>Saints</b> Rev. 14:12 Rev. 15:3 Rev. 17:6
<b>Fellowservants</b> Col. 4:11 Col. 1:7	<b>Fellowservants</b> Rev. 6:11
<b>Brethren</b> 1 Thess. 1:4 Col. 1:2 2 Thess. 1:3	<b>Brethren</b> Rev. 6:11
<b>People washed in the blood</b> Cor. 6:11	<b>People washed in the blood</b> Rev. 17:14
<b>Called, chosen by God, faithful</b> Eph. 1:4 2 Thess. 2:13	<b>Called, chosen by God, faithful</b> Rev. 17:14
<b>The servant of Jesus</b> Eph. 6:6 Phil. 1:1	<b>His servants</b> Rev. 19: 2, 5
<b>Those who sleep in the Lord</b> 1 Thess. 4:14	<b>The dead who died in the Lord</b> Rev. 14:13
<b>Prophets</b> 1 Cor. 12:28	<b>Prophets</b> Rev. 16:6

1 Cor. 14:29 1 Cor. 14:32 Eph. 2:20	
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It would not be consistent to use the same terminology for the church in Revelation 4-19 that is found in the rest of the New Testament and then deny that the church exists on earth during The Great Tribulation period Jesus spoke of and John saw visualized. Too much has been made over the absence of a specific term for the church, *ekklesia*, while ignoring the many other references to the church in Revelation 4-19.

If the absence of the specific term for the church, *ekklesia*, means that the Word of God does not speak of or to the church directly then the following books of the Bible must also be for someone other than the present people of God because the specific terminology, *ekklesia*, is not found in them either. The word *church* is not found in Mark, Luke, John, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, or Jude!

No one would suggest that these books be discarded as not speaking directly to the church simply because a specific term is not found. The great tribulation Jesus referred to is today a historical fulfillment. Once it was future, from AD 30 - AD 70, but fulfillment came as Jesus predicted.

# **The Great Tribulation: A Historical Reality**

## **Leader's Study Guide**

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**Name of Mentor**



## The Great Tribulation: A Historical Reality

### Leader's Study Guide

#### *Review*

1. According to William R. Kimball what two factors have united in recent years to present Christianity with a potentially volatile acre of disagreement and confrontation?

*Answer.* The highly speculative nature of prophetic interpretation, coupled with a myriad [multitude] of conflicting viewpoints breed disagreement and confrontation.

2. What three parallel chapters teach the great tribulation?

*Answer.* Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 set forth the great tribulation.

3. List four ways a passage of *Scripture* should initially be considered.

*Answer.* Any passage of Scripture should initially be considered in a normal, literal, grammatical and historical context.

4. Who was an important eye witness to Jewish history during the first century?

*Answer.* Josephus (AD 37/8 – AD 100) was an important eyewitness to history.

5. In what year did the Jewish revolt break out leading to the destruction of Jerusalem?

*Answer.* In the summer of AD 66 the Jews revolted against Rome.

6. What does *Pax Romana* mean?

*Answer.* *Pax Romana* refers to the “*peace of Rome*” which the government tried desperately to enforce domestically and in foreign affairs.

7. Name two men identified with the two basic temples which have stood on Mt. Zion.

*Answer.* The first temple was built by Solomon and the second was restored by Zerubbabel.

8. What happened to the first temple built by Solomon?

**Answer.** As a result of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC the first temple built by Solomon was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Many Jews were taken into captivity.

9. When was the second temple rebuilt?

**Answer.** Following the Babylonian Captivity (BC 606-538) and under the efforts of Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel the temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt.

10. Write out the promise of the Lord given to Israel through Haggai regarding the second temple.

**Answer.** *Haggai 2:6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.*

11. Who expanded the second temple restored by Zerubbabel?

**Answer.** In order to appease the Jews, in AD 19 king Herod began to expand the second temple restored by Zerubbabel. The work was completed in AD 64.

12. What did Haggai the prophet foretell concerning the second temple? Was it fulfilled?

**Answer.** Haggai predicted the Messiah would come to the temple. Christ fulfilled this prophecy according to Peter on the day of Pentecost.

*Haggai 2:6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*Acts 2:19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: 21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

13. Many people believe that Ezekiel's Temple vision anticipates a future third temple being constructed. Is such a temple necessary? Why or why not?

**Answer.** A third temple is not necessary because the reality of all spiritual truths has been found in the reality of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that the prophets spoke has been fulfilled in the Lord. *Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

14. What did Jesus predict would happen to the second temple?

**Answer.** In AD 30 Jesus predicted the destruction of the second temple.

15. What was the first sign Jesus gave the disciples that the Jewish age [Greek, *aion*, not *kosmos* [world]] was coming to an end?

**Answer.** Jesus predicted there would be false messianic claims and deceivers. *Matthew 24:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*

16. Besides deceivers what else did Jesus warn of?

**Answer.** In addition to deceivers Jesus warned of wars and rumors of war. *Matthew 24:6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*

17. Following the prediction of wars and rumors of wars what three signs did Jesus foretell?

**Answer.** Jesus said there would be famines, pestilence and earthquakes. *Matthew 24:7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*

18. What additional warning did Jesus give His disciples?

**Answer.** Jesus said there would be persecution. *Matthew 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

19. Read the following biblical passages and answer this question: “Do these passages validate the prophetic ministry of Christ and prove He was speaking to the generation in which His disciples and their immediate descendants lived”?

- **Jesus spoke of the coming of false messiahs and deceivers—and prophecy was fulfilled.**

**Judas** Acts 5:37 *After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.*

**Simon Magnus.** Acts 8:9 *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.*

**Bar-jesus.** Acts 13:6 *And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:*

- **Jesus spoke of famine—and prophecy was fulfilled.**

Acts 11:28 *And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.*

- **Jesus spoke of persecution for His disciples—and prophecy was fulfilled.**

Acts 13:50 *But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.*

- **Jesus spoke of the manifestation of the abomination of desolation—and prophecy was fulfilled.** Note. What Matthew recorded Luke explains in the parallel passage as the army of Rome.

Matthew 24:15 *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Luke 21:20 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies [of Rome], then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. 21 Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.*

**Answer.** These passages and more prove conclusively Jesus was a prophet.

20. In what way was the tribulation Jesus predicted so great it has no equal in the past, present or future history of the world let alone the nation of Israel?

**Answer.** Loraine Boettner explains the words of Jesus. *“There have been, of course, other periods of tribulation of suffering in which greater numbers of people were involved, and which continued for longer periods of time. But considering the physical, moral, and religious aspects, suffering never reached a greater degree of awfulness and intensity than the siege of Jerusalem. Nor have so many people ever perished in the fall of any other city.”*

Remember that God was judging His once chosen people with judicial blindness (Romans 11:25). The usefulness of the nation of Israel within the plan of God has always been conditional upon gospel obedience. It was *because* Abraham obeyed God that blessing came to others. To Isaac the Lord said, *“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my law”* (Genesis 26:4, 5). Once gospel obedience ceased and the people cried out for the blood of Christ to be upon them and their children, the fate and usefulness of national Israel was sealed.

21. Define the term “*elect*” as used by Jesus in Matthew 24:22. *“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”*

**Answer.** The elect is a reference to the people of God and not to national Israel according to the flesh. It must be kept in mind the Bible presents the religious Jew, the racial Jew and the regenerate Jew. The religious Jew refers to anyone who tried to keep the law for salvation such as the Pharisees. The racial Jew has reference to those who were both religious but took pride in their race (Matthew 3:9). The regenerate Jew refers to anyone, Jew or Gentile that had the faith of Abraham as per Galatians 3:7. *“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham”*.

22. Explain the meaning of the phrase, “*the times of the gentles.*” Luke 21:24 *And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

**Answer.** The phrase has reference to the oppression and suppression of the Jews by Gentile powers. The Lord has stated that there would come a time when the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled and we must wait upon God's timing.

23. How does Matthew Henry understand the concept of “*the sign of the son of man in heaven*”? Matthew 24:30 *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

**Answer.** The judgment of God upon Israel in AD 70 confirms the prophet’s words of the Lord in AD 30. This terrible military judgment in the form of the destruction of Jerusalem was the singular sign of the end of the age asked for by the disciples and given by the Son of Man who is in heaven, even Jesus Christ the ascended Savior who rules the world with all power and authority (Matthew 28:19-20).

24. Does the parable of the fig tree refer to the birth of Israel as a new nation in 1948?

**Answer.** The temptation has come and has been embraced by many to believe that the re-emergence of Israel as a modern nation in 1948 is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus when He said, “Behold the fig tree.” What is forgotten when this is done is the historical context in which the words were given and a more immediate fulfillment of the words of Christ. Keep in mind Jesus did not talk about a singular fig tree [Israel] but said, “Behold the fig tree, and all the trees”. Why “all the trees”? Because judgment was soon going to come upon Israel when all the Lord’s prophetic signs were fulfilled. In other words Jesus was saying, “Behold my prophetic word and all that I have said!” Why? Because the words of Jesus spoken in AD 30 found ultimate fulfillment in AD 70.

25. How many passages in the Bible use the word “tribulation” and promise a generation will escape great tribulation?

**Answer.** None. Just the opposite is promised. *Acts 14:22 [Paul went about] Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

26. What proof is there the church is found in the book of the Revelation especially in chapters 4-19? Create a chart to confirm your answer.

**Answer.**

<b>MATTHEW - JUDE</b>	<b>REVELATION 4 - 19</b>
<b>Saints</b> Romans 1:7 1 Cor. 1:2 Eph. 1:1	<b>Saints</b> Rev. 14:12 Rev. 15:3 Rev. 17:6
<b>Fellow servants</b> Col. 4:11 Col. 1:7	<b>Fellow servants</b> Rev. 6:11
<b>Brethren</b> 1 Thess. 1:4 Col. 1:2 2 Thess. 1:3	<b>Brethren</b> Rev. 6:11
<b>People washed in the blood</b> Cor. 6:11	<b>People washed in the blood</b> Rev. 17:14
<b>Called, chosen by God, faithful</b>	<b>Called, chosen by God, faithful</b> Rev. 17:14

Eph. 1:4 2 Thess. 2:13	
<b>The servant of Jesus</b> Eph. 6:6 Phil. 1:1	<b>His servants</b> Rev. 19: 2, 5
<b>Those who sleep in the Lord</b> 1 Thess. 4:14	<b>The dead who died in the Lord</b> Rev. 14:13
<b>Prophets</b> 1 Cor. 12:28 1 Cor. 14:29 1 Cor. 14:32 Eph. 2:20	<b>Prophets</b> Rev. 16:6

## ***Reflection***

1. What would be a proper Christian response to the angry accusation that someone who does not believe the great tribulation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 is still future is not fundamental in their faith?
2. Are you satisfied the biblical phrase “*this generation*” in context consistently refers to the generation of Christ and the apostles and not to a generation 2,000 years or more into the future?
3. Have you been surprised to learn there are no passages in the *Bible* using the word “*tribulation*” promising an escape from the same and that just the opposite is true?
4. Many people today are convinced a third temple is going to be built some day in Jerusalem. What will be the theological consequences if a third temple is not constructed in the City of Peace? What will be the theological consequences if a third temple is constructed?
5. After reading the material are you now satisfied there is enough historical evidence from creditable sources to prove Jesus Christ was a prophet whose predictions came to pass on time and in the manner in which He foretold events? If you are not satisfied, what else needs to happen?
6. What would be a proper biblical response to the Dual Fulfillment theory which argues that what Jesus predicted did indeed happen in AD 70 but the same signs and events will happen again and perhaps in the near future at that?
7. Should proven modern day failed prophets and prophetess have their names called out in public by local pastors and their errors denounced before the people? Why or why not?
8. Why do you think people today who prophesy failed events in the name of the Lord are not held to high level of accountability? Death was the level of accountability for a false prophet according to the Law of Moses. *Deuteronomy 18:20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.* What would be an appropriate penalty for a proven false prophet today?
9. Why do multitudes follow false prophetic teachers and their teachings? Consider the following reasons people are deceived and add to the list.
  - Ignorance of the *Word of God*.
  - The dogmatism of the speaker.
  - An apparent coalition [similarity] between biblical passages and current events.
  - An allusion [appeal] to many *Scriptures*.
  - The fact that so many believe the same way.



- The judgment of God. *2 Thessalonians 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:*

10. How has this study of the great tribulation personally affected and impacted your life and understanding? Please share your testimony.

***Memory Work***

*Matthew 24:34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*