

Great Controversy Series

02 The Destruction of Jerusalem

Matthew 23:38 See, your house is left unto you desolate.

Jesus was in the temple speaking to the multitudes and His disciples were shocked when they heard His words. The temple was the pride and glory of the Jews. And why shouldn't it be? Besides the Jews, to which nation did God ever say, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them"? No one else. After the Israelites left Egypt, under God's direction they built a tent temple. God's manifestation appeared there. What could be more honorable?

After God brought the Israelites to the promised land, Solomon made the world's greatest temple with the materials that his father David had collected. Again God showed His acceptance by dwelling there.

Despite all their privileges, the Israelites turned their back on God and fell into idolatry. God removed His protection and Babylon came and leveled the temple and some of the Jews that remained alive were carried as prisoner into banishment.

After the Israelites were in Babylon for 70 years God brought them again to their homeland. The temple was rebuilt. God said to the Israelites: Isaiah 56:7 "For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

The Lord had said concerning His temple: My house. Now Jesus says, "See, your house is left unto you desolate." Your house! Not mine! The Messiah came to His people and was rejected. Since you don't want Me, the temple is yours. But Jesus wept. Because by rejecting the Messiah, Israel rejected the protection of God and the results would be catastrophic.

In Jesus' day Israel was under Roman occupation. But the Roman King Herod had for forty years worked to renew and embellish the temple. In the whole world there was no building like it. It was without peer. White marble had been brought from Rome. The huge stones appeared like one piece because the workmanship was so good.

Matthew 24:1-2 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. ² And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

His disciples were shocked. How could the temple be destroyed? If that would happen it would mean the end of the world!

Matthew 24:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

When would the temple be destroyed? When would the world end? When are You coming back? In the mind of the disciples, these three events must happen at the same time. But it would not be like that. First, Jerusalem would be destroyed.

Sometimes people ask me, "Why do you believe in the Old and New Testaments?" The answer is simple. The Old and New Testaments predict events that have not yet happened. We call this prophecy. Jesus was crucified in AD 31. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Jesus' disciples Matthew and Luke recorded Jesus' words. Jerusalem would be destroyed. Jesus said, (Matthew 24:35) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Those are pretty big words for a Jewish carpenter are they not? But Jesus was not a regular person. He was the Word of God who could predict the future.

Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem's destruction was not an exception. The Old and New Testaments do not have just one or two prophecies. There are many. The predictions are not suspect, made-up predictions that you have to strain your imagination to believe. The predicted events are not unimportant events in salvation history. They are big events. Besides the Old and New Testaments there is not another book in the world that possesses these qualities.

More than 500 years before Christ, the prophet Daniel wrote:

Daniel 9:26 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

The prophet Daniel said that the Messiah would be killed hundreds of years before Jesus was crucified. He said, "but not for Himself." Daniel said that the Messiah would die for others. 500 years beforehand! The city and the sanctuary would be destroyed he said. There would be war and desolations. Everything was predicted beforehand. The Old and New Testaments are reliable! And Daniel added this:

Daniel 11:31 "And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation."

What is this abomination of desolation? Jesus gave the following warning concerning the fall of Jerusalem.

Matthew 24:15-16 " Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), ¹⁶ "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Jesus delineated a sign for His disciples. Not everyone would understand but the believers would understand. When the abomination of desolation should be set up it was a sign for Jesus' disciples to escape from Israel. But what is this abomination of desolation? We get some details in the book of Luke.

Luke 21:20-22 " But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²² "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Luke and Matthew are talking about the same event but Luke adds this detail: the abomination of desolation would come when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. The Roman army surrounded Jerusalem in the fall of 69 AD at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Romans had their standards. These were poles with the symbols of animals on them. The standards were used to direct the army during battle. The soldiers worshiped these standards. When the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem they set their standards up just outside the temple walls which was still considered a part of the holy places. This would be the sign that the Christians should flee.

Jesus gave this warning:

Luke 21:22-24 "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³ "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. ²⁴ "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations.

In Matthew recorded these words of Jesus:

Matthew 24:17-20 "Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁹ "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

The Roman general Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem but for some reason that is still unknown, he lifted the siege and retreated. The Jews followed them in pursuit. When the Christians saw this sign they knew it was from God. According to Jesus words, they left Jerusalem and crossed the Jordan river and went to Pella. In the coming destruction of Jerusalem no Christian would lose their life.

Between 31 and 70 AD, as Jesus said, false Christs and false prophets would appear. Wars, famines and pestilences would occur. But Jesus had said: (Matthew 24:8) "All these *are* the beginning of sorrows." Despite Cestius' retreat, Jerusalem was doomed to destruction. Why?

When a country or a nation's sins reach a certain point, –only God knows– our merciful God leaves them to their sins. Because they have abandoned God and His law and righteousness, God leaves them to themselves. This is the most fearful judgment. When God removes His protection, Satan enters and takes control. Under Satan's control only the basest sins and horrible events can be expected. In the destruction of Jerusalem we see the results of abandoning God.

Hundreds of years before Christ the prophet Micah related the following:

Micah 3:9-12 Now hear this, You heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And pervert all equity, ¹⁰ Who build up Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with iniquity: ¹¹ Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us." ¹² Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed *like* a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest.

As in those days, so in ours, people who look very religious use their religiosity to cover the grossest of sins. And these are the leaders. The surprising thing is that these shameless people think they are righteous and good. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us." They believe their own lies. But nothing is hidden from the righteous God. He sees it.

In His mercy God was giving opportunity for repentance to the people for 39 years after Jesus was murdered. God is not one who is looking to punish.

Ezekiel 33:11 "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"

But the children of those that killed Jesus rejected the message of the apostles and continued in the way of their fathers. In 70 AD in the spring during Passover, the Roman army guided by Titus came again to Jerusalem. To celebrate the festival millions of Jews were in Jerusalem. Under normal conditions there were in Jerusalem enough provisions to supply the food and water requirements of the people for many years. But Jewish factions through envy and revenge killed one another and destroyed the supply of food. In the siege, thousands of people died from hunger and disease. It seemed that natural love was gone. Husbands stole from their wives and wives from their husbands. Children would try to snatch the food from the mouths of their aged parents. The words of the prophets were fulfilled:

Lamentations 4:10 The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people.

Deuteronomy 28:56-57 "The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter, ⁵⁷ "her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates.

The Roman leaders tried to force the Jews to surrender by frightening them. Anyone caught and showing any resistance was flogged and tortured and crucified before the city walls. Every day hundreds of people were killed and the horrible work continued such that in the

valley of Jehoshaphat and at Calvary there were so many crosses that one could hardly pass through.

Titus and the Jewish historian Josephus begged the Jews to surrender. But the Jews showing a determined resistance only threw spears at the ones entreating them. Titus wanted to save the temple and he commanded his soldiers not to touch it. The attack began and his soldiers entered Jerusalem with a fiery anger against those who had shown so much resistance.

"The slaughter within was even more dreadful than the spectacle from without. Men and women, old and young, insurgents and priests, those who fought and those who entreated mercy, were hewn down in indiscriminate carnage. The number of the slain exceeded that of the slayers. The legionaries had to clamber over heaps of dead to carry on the work of extermination."--Milman, *The History of the Jews*, book 16.

Blood ran like water down the stairs of the temple. Finally the temple was given to the flames. I have heard that the soldiers took the whole building apart as they sought to take the melted gold from between the cracks. As Jesus said, one stone was not left on another. In the siege more than one million Jews lost their lives and hundreds of thousands were taken into captivity. Some became slaves, some were thrown to the lions in the amphitheater. Some remained wanderers in the world with no house or home.

When Titus looked at the fortifications of Jerusalem he said that God must have delivered the city into his hands because his army could not have surmounted them.

Sometimes people say to me, "America itself demolished the twin towers. America is so big, if there was not a conspiracy the event could not have happened." Anything is possible but for this business a conspiracy is not necessary. When a famous American preacher was bold enough to say, "America is being punished for her sins" the whole country called him a traitor. But as we see in the destruction of Jerusalem and in the book of Job, if God removes His protection Satan enters and begins his work of horror. Things thought impossible, happen.

The wicked do not know how much they owe to believers for their safety. But if a person or a nation should reject completely God's way of salvation and continue in wickedness, God's worst punishment can happen to them: God can leave them to themselves and Satan.

The destruction of Jerusalem is an example of the destruction of the world. At the end of the world as people reject Jesus and the law of God in the Ten Commandments, God will leave the world to them. Satan will take control and the results will be horrendous. But God will provide a way of escape for His people. In the same way that the abomination of desolation was a sign to the Christians in the end of time a sign will be given to the believers and what they should do has already been communicated. To understand this you need to continue.

What is the best thing you can do for your country? It is to be someone who prays, and I don't mean just as a show, to be honest and to keep God's Ten Commandments from the heart. If God had found 10 righteous people in Sodom He would not have destroyed it.

The world is coming to an end friends. Get ready!