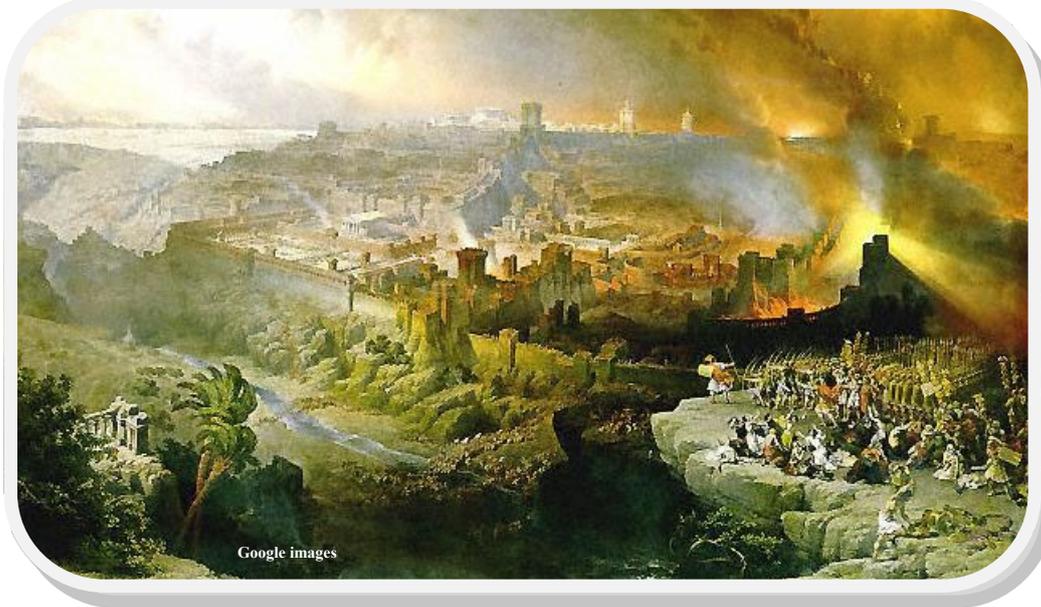


Eye-Opener Studies

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Ps. 119:18)

12: The Destruction of Jerusalem

There are four foundational, catastrophic and cataclysmic events in the Bible: three are denied as having any historical, literal reality by liberal biblical scholars and atheists, and the fourth is ignored at best and largely forgotten, even by conservative, serious Bible-believing Christians! The first three are: The Flood, The Exodus and The Resurrection, and the fourth is the subject of this study - The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This cannot be denied as having occurred because it is a matter of secular historical record as well as a biblical truth, but its spiritual reality is rarely considered. Again detractors of the Bible attack its presentation in the biblical record as being inserted into the accounts after the event, because of claims to its prophetic accuracy from the mouth of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels. After all, Jesus could not have foretold it in all of the details He did, for He was merely human, so the gospel writings must have been doctored by later apologists to make Him appear to be an accurate prophet, so the argument goes! They are *that* worried about the details presented in the Gospels as to clutch at straws like this in order to wriggle out of facing the truth about the Lordship and Divinity of Christ. They've lost the battle over claiming that a man called Jesus, who was crucified as a criminal in Jerusalem around 30 AD, never existed, so they swing on to denying any claims that



The Destruction of Jerusalem 70 AD

He was anything other than a charismatic Jewish revolutionary who paid the price for being so. (Let us remind you that we will be ignoring such assertions because of the bedrock of our faith found in the evidence of the empty tomb, which is why that topic was made foundational to this course of study.)

Our journey begins

Let us begin our journey into this crucially important topic and event in the Book of Hebrews - the underlying skeleton around which this course is based and built. In chapter 10, verses 23-25 we read the following: *'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.'* The major thrust of these verses

today is on the ‘Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some,’ and we almost forget the reason given as to why this is important, because they could see ‘the Day drawing near’. We note that the word ‘Day’ has an enigmatic capital letter, which draws our attention to it in a special way. This can also be found in Paul’s first Letter to Corinth where we read: *‘For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.’* (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

The Day

A thoughtless, or careless, reading of these passages can easily lead to the assumption that this ‘Day’ is Judgement Day when we stand before God’s throne in the heavens. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the Day when the prophecies Jesus made about Jerusalem and the temple had their fulfilment in the events we now know occurred in 68-70 AD when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans. How do we know it is not the final Judgement Day being referenced?

Clear statements about the end of the world

We will be looking at this subject in more detail in Study 14, but let’s dip an initial toe into its waters here. Every time Christ’s return at the end of time is prophesied the interesting, clearly stated thing about it is that it will come suddenly, like a thief in the night (Mt. 24:43, 1 Thess. 5:2, 2 Pt. 3:10), without warning or signs to accompany it and alert the unwatchful of their imminent and impending doom, thereby allowing them to take quick measures to put things right, as it were. The faithful will be ready, with their lamps trimmed, anticipating the unexpected, sudden arrival of the bridegroom, while the spiritually slovenly and lazy will be caught out (Mt. 25:1-13). **There will be absolutely no signs at all,** apart from the preaching of the faithful as Noah did in his day (Mt. 24:37-39). This is definitely not the ‘Day’ the Hebrews could ‘see drawing near’. They were obviously fully aware of something momentous approaching which they could see coming their

way. Stupidly some were ignoring it, and this was their warning.

What they could see

Jesus had very clearly told His disciples that there would be great times of testing to come on the church. He graphically described what faced them in Matthew 24:1-14 (cf. Mark 13): *‘Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”’*

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 close of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be



Traditional martyrdom of the apostle Peter

famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to

the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Jesus immediately outlined, in detail, what would happen as the climax drew close until it was literally occurring. He told them: *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* (Mt 24:34, Luke 23:45). This verse is critical to the points being made. They expected these prophecies to be fulfilled within the lifetime of the generation who heard them, not thousands of years later as some commentators would have us believe! The Temple was going to be destroyed after a period of testing and trial for the early believers, and enduring to the end was a vital necessity. The Hebrew Letter, or was it really a sermon transcribed into a Letter for others to read(?), addressed the problem that some Jewish Christians were thinking of returning to Judaism because the Jews were not being persecuted and tested as were the Christians, and they needed to be told how superior Christ was to Moses, and what they would be doing if they backslid to where they had come from. Hebrews was intended to keep Christians faithful, as were almost all of the Letters. They were not addressed to non-believers telling them how to be saved; they were necessary to help keep the saved, saved.

Now, over in 1 Corinthians 3, the Day is the same Day the Hebrews were being pointed to. As times of testing occurred, people could see how well they had built their faith and the faith of those they had influenced. The refining fire would sift their works. Those who had built well would see them survive but others would suffer the loss of knowing that they did not do as good a job of teaching and sustaining contacts and converts as they should. They will see their works burn up as the weakly-founded converts fell away. They would suffer that loss of disappointment though they themselves would not be lost. This sense of loss, failure and success has been the underlying story of Christian evangelism down the millennia ever since. How many have we seen come and go, and how many have we seen stay faithful and loyal to the end? Most congregations can all talk of members they once had but now no longer meet, as the parable of the Sower bites into our best efforts. If none had

ever fallen away, most established congregations would be full to overflowing, but they're not, as indifference and worldly cares and philosophies take their toll. The Day we are considering in these scriptures is the Day which saw the fulfilment of Christ's prophecies in the lives of those early Christians.

The importance of the Day

It is just about impossible for us in our time to catch the flavour and excitement of living in the First-Century. There were many and varied political and religious dangers involved in following Jesus in those days. All sorts of groups saw them as a threat to their own positions of power and authority. Nevertheless to Jewish Christians they had the wonderful knowledge that they were actually witnessing the fulfilment of prophecy and the promises God had made to their forefathers from Abraham forward. We do not have this privilege, save that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church (Mt. 16:18). We know that the only prophecies still to be fulfilled are those surrounding the end of the world and the second appearance of Christ, when right will conquer, true justice prevail, and evil will be crushed for ever. We long to see murderers, terrorists, thieves, perverts, blasphemers, and even those sometimes 'nice' God-denying atheists who consistently mock our faith and try to turn believers against Him, finally bowing the knee to Jesus and being forced to acknowledge that 'Jesus is Lord'. They wouldn't do it in this life but they'll have to in the next. (I sometimes daydream about witnessing Richard Dawkins, David Attenborough, Brian Cox, Stephen Hawking and, of course the 'daddy of them all', Charles Darwin bowing the knee to Jesus and being introduced specifically to two men, one called Adam and the other Noah! Well we are allowed to dream at times, aren't we?)

The Gentile Christians were also excited to be living in those early days. They may not have been thrilled at fulfilled prophecies, because the Jewish Scriptures were not a part of their heritage, but they were definitely thrilled to find a pure, loving, caring religion which turned the evil ways of their traditional, lustful, vengeful gods upside down and brought peace and harmony into their lives. Many non-Jews admired the Jewish faith for its high moral standards which set it apart from normal Gentile beliefs and practices. But in Christ they found

something even better for it proclaimed a high personal morality based on personal integrity and not on keeping restricting laws and regulations. It gave freedom, love and joy to its adherents and was wonderfully liberating. Jesus had said that He came to give life, and give it in abundance (John 10:10). And He did. In these exciting early days too we must definitely not forget the amazing impact the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit must have had upon all Christian believers. The early chapters of Acts are full of them and their impact, but they were still working their influence on Gentile Christians too in these formative years - look at the problems they posed for Paul in the church in Corinth, for example.

But!

But there's always a 'but', isn't there? Jesus made predictions, and we have already considered them. Jerusalem was to be destroyed, the temple trampled under foot and into the ground, great devastation and calamities would occur, AND it would happen within the lifetime of the generation of the people who heard Him. He did not specify exactly when but He did specify some of the things which would happen. Luke describes it thus in chapter 19: *"...the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."* (19:43-44). This all came to pass. The armies of Rome did come and surround Jerusalem and erected a barricade around it, preparing for a long, drawn-out siege. Initially their supply lines were stretched so the advanced guard was withdrawn temporarily until proper communications could be established. This gave a short lull in proceedings. Local rural Jews fled into the city for safety but Christians in the city remembered Jesus's prophecies and fled out as fast as they could, and many relocated in the Decapolis city of Pella (Transjordan) (see photograph), thus being spared the horrors to follow. 'According to Eusebius of Caesarea, Pella was a refuge for Jerusalem Christians in the 1st century AD who were fleeing the Jewish-Roman wars. The fighting finally



Pella (Transjordan)

stopped when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.' (quoted from Wikipedia).

All this was still to come when Hebrews and 1 Corinthians were written, and indeed when the Gospels were written too. Fulfilled prophecy it may be to us but it was still predictive prophecy for those pioneer brethren. And there was Deuteronomy with which to contend! Here useful guidelines were being laid down for judging the merits of a prophet. Over the millennia there have been many men, and a few women, who have claimed prophetic powers. From their musings have sprung what are usually aberrations of truly orthodox religions. In our day these include Jehovah's Witnesses (Charles Taze Russell), Mormons (Joseph Smith), Christian Science (Mary Baker Eddy), Seventh Day Adventism (Ellen G. White, after failed prophet William Miller), etc. There were plenty of such 'prophets' in biblical times, and some came claiming to be the messiah. The great Jewish teacher, Gamaliel, faced down some angry leaders who wanted to stone Peter and John, by reminding them about false claimants. *"Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow*

them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice.’ (Acts 5:35-39).

Thus in Deuteronomy Moses is telling the people directly what the Lord has to say on this subject: “...if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.” (Dt 18:21-22). That’s quite clear. Admittedly sometimes a person can make a claim and guess right. That could fool some of the people some of the time. But if a prophecy is made and fails, we know such a ‘prophet’ is not from God (we will be mentioning the failed modern ‘prophet’, Hal Lindsey, in connection with ‘The Myth of the Millennium’ in our next study). Jesus had made very specific predictions regarding Jerusalem and the temple. These had to hold up or He could, would and should lose His credibility-rating as Christ, Lord, Messiah and Saviour. It was **THAT** serious.

The two systems

To add confusion to the situation, both the Jewish and the Christian systems were running together, sort of in parallel. The temple was still there, though



The veil of the temple torn in two at the crucifixion

the veil guarding entry into the Holy of Holies had been rent asunder at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:51, Mk 15:38, Lk. 23:45) - we are never told if it was repaired or not. It was only officially declared finished as a building in 64 AD so did not stand complete for very long. Sacrifices and an Aaronic high

priesthood were still in place and many early Jewish Christians found all this confusing. Paul had to address some of the problems this brought into the church particularly in his Galatian Letter. Should a male Gentile convert have to be circumcised before being baptized into Christ - in other words first become a Jew before he could be a Christian? Paul won that battle at the Jerusalem conference, as recorded in Acts 15, but the problem rumbled on for years. The Hebrew Letter also confronts the two systems and shows conclusively how superior Christ was/is to Moses.

In Chapter 8 of the Hebrew Letter we read of a climactic conclusion to some of the arguments where the Old and New Covenants are contrasted.

‘When Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

‘For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.’

‘In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.’ (Heb 8:5-13, emphasis ours).

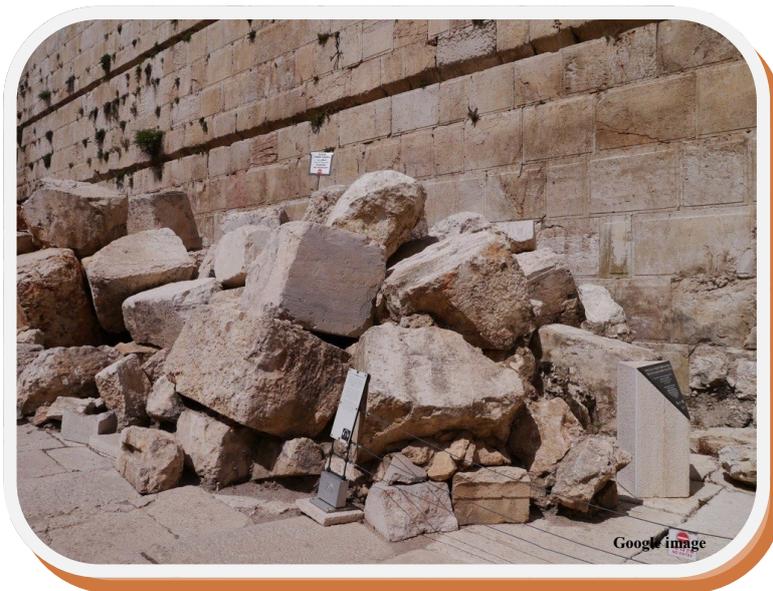
The giveaway is the last part as underlined above. The Old was still up-and-running when the

Hebrew Letter was written, or preached, but it was coming to the end of its time. It was obsolete, old, and ready to pass away. This wasn't to be a gentle handing over of the baton, so to speak, or even allowing the older Newtonian physics to exist and be used alongside Einsteinian relativity, this was to be a religiously cataclysmic change, which we will look into more closely in our next study, and it would be effected violently in the physical world as well as in the spiritual. The Jews were to be left in no doubt that their long run as God's chosen people, under the Law of Moses, had finally come to an end. And if you ask the obvious question as to what it is then that we see as the Jewish religion today, it is nothing at all like the Judaism of Jesus's day. They have no temple, no Levitical priesthood or Aaronic high priesthood - indeed no Jew today even knows his or her tribe - therefore there can be no sacrifices to atone for sin. Their religion today is more of a unifying way of life and a cultural heritage which richly underpins their lives. It's a horizontal relationship with their fellow Jews as opposed to a vertical relationship with Jehovah. Of course many still hope for a restoration and that Messiah will come, and many evangelical Christians sort of join with them in that eschatological hope with their premillennial doctrines, but salvation is found today in none other than Jesus. If they want to be saved it will not be through modern Judaism but by grace through faith in Jesus. They can still retain their cultural heritage if they wish but it won't bring them salvation.

So, if the two 'systems' were operating in a kind of parallelism for the years between the resurrection and the destruction of Jerusalem, were both 'systems' equally efficacious in the salvation stakes? We could take the positive position of arguing that the last saved person we know about under the Mosaic system was the repentant thief on the

cross, who died looking forward to the sacrifice of the Messiah and His coming Kingdom, whatever he understood by that, for he was dying as that very sacrifice was literally being made, but before the resurrection when Christ burst back into heaven taking His blood with Him as payment for the sins of those who believe; or we could admit that we simply do not know and have to leave such matters to God. In the final analysis we are all sinners who do not deserve to be saved, but who are saved by the great grace of God, and He can deal in mercy and grace just as He thinks fit. Not a single one of us can argue otherwise with any decision He makes in this, or any other, regard. One thing we can say is that having heard the preaching of the Gospel and of the salvation offered through Christ, all who heard it had a duty to respond to it in belief, repentance and baptism as the Gospel proclaimed. But unlike many hard-line preachers down the two thousand years since, there is no biblical record of any apostle, or New Testament preacher, haranguing

his audience with fingers wagging and pointing at them, declaring that if they don't believe what he believes or do what he has told them to do, they are going to burn and rot in hell! They preached the Gospel of persuasive love and forgiveness to win hearts, and win the argument rather than emotionally trying to frighten them into the baptismal



Huge stones still extant from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem

mal waters by verbal force.

Interpretive confusion

This prophecy by Jesus against Jerusalem was so powerful that it underpinned the forward thinking of many, both Jews and Greeks. That it seemed like a prophecy of the end of the world to many has to be recognized. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple would have seemed like the end of the world to most Jews. Well it was the end of their world, or rather the world they had known for over 1,500 years since Moses. What else could it be?

That the Greeks, or Gentiles, were aware of the prophecy, which would finally authenticate the credentials of Jesus, is obvious from the Scriptures. They could readily see the lead-up events coming true as time went on, and the reality of 'the Day' Jesus predicted was obviously drawing near. At Thessalonica some had so strongly embraced it, and the notion that the world was to end too, that they gave up working. Well, why not? If the world is coming to an end soon there's little need to lay up for a future which isn't going to happen. Here's what he wrote: '*... when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*' (2 Th 3:10-12). They had been very interested and concerned about what will happen when the Lord finally does return at the end of time (see study 14). It bothered them. O yes, they were very interested in these prophecies of Jesus. Like most people they had a profound and maybe morbid interest in the momentous, cataclysmic events of the future.

So when Jerusalem was finally destroyed and the words of Jesus literally came true, there was absolutely no shadow of a doubt that He was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. This very physical and dreadful happening was not just an exalted teaching, or a useful thought, or a penetrating insight into the mind of the Divine, this was real, cold, hard, fact and could not be denied or argued away.

But it also did much more than finally authenti-

cate the credentials of Jesus once and for all, it also destroyed the Jewish religion into irrevocable pieces which could never be put back again. Their genealogies were destroyed so, as we said earlier, no Jew can prove or know his/her tribe. Thus their priesthood has gone, and with it their means of salvation under the Law. Messiah comes from David's line and the tribe of Judah. Since they do not know who is of the tribe of Judah they could not identify 'him' now, assuming He hadn't actually come in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, so why they still hope is a mystery. They must believe that somehow, by some miracle or other, God will reveal their tribes to them once again, or they wait in vain. Once the Jewish religion was abolished there was no longer a confusion about the need for circumcision and keeping Jewish customs. There was now only one claimant to being the right and true religion. Christ had finally and utterly replaced Moses.

This destruction of Jerusalem was also stark evidence that the people involved were indeed being judged for the cumulative sins of their forefathers. God is patient beyond our understanding but there have come times when His patience has run out and judgement has come on nations, and sometimes on individuals as well. God is a God of love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16) but the arrival of this awesome Day prods us into remembering that He is also a God of justice, and that '*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*' (Heb. 10:31).

Maybe this is why this event, which cannot be denied as having happened, is usually ignored and largely forgotten, and its spiritual reality rarely considered even by conservative, Bible-believing Christians.

Tasks

1. What lessons do you think are sent down the years to us by the destruction of Jerusalem?
2. How can we reconcile our notions of a God of love with one of fierce, awesome justice?