

# *Days Of Vengeance*

## *The Destruction of Jerusalem*



*“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. 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. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:20-22)*

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# Days Of Vengeance

## Introduction

- I. The 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew is one of the most abused passages in the Bible.
  - A. Premillennialists use this chapter as a springboard for all sorts of fanciful teaching and wild speculation concerning the return of our Lord.
  - B. In this booklet we want to examine the context of this chapter and see the application of it to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- II. On the Tuesday before His crucifixion, our Lord went into the temple for the last time and denounced its inhabitants as being the “sons of those who murdered the prophets,” a “brood of vipers,” and those destined for the “condemnation of hell” (Matt 23:31, 33).
  - A. They would fill up the measure of their father’s guilt (Matt 23:32).
    1. By crucifying of the Son of God and by their continual rejection of the gospel message and it’s messengers they would prove whose sons they were.
    2. Satan was truly their father and “like father, like son.”
    3. The measuring cup was filled (1 Thess 2:14-16).
  - B. Jesus called the destruction of Jerusalem the “the days of vengeance” (Luke 21:22).
    1. The destruction of Jerusalem was an act of God’s vengeance and judgment, not Rome’s—these would be the days when people were punished for their sins.
    2. “This refers not to Roman vengeance but to God’s. Luke wanted his readers to understand that Jerusalem’s desolation was not simply a tragedy or a wretched twist of fate. It is the result of God’s wrath. The Roman army under Vespasian and Titus, like the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar, was God’s instrument to bring his judgment upon official Israel.” (Stein, *Luke*, 522)
    3. “How can God do such things to the holy city, David’s city, Messiah’s city? God sees Jerusalem in a different light, Jesus pointed out. Jerusalem rejected and mistreated the prophets. Jerusalem will reject and kill the beloved Son. Jerusalem has turned temple worship into big business. Jerusalem’s religious leaders practice religion for show and personal gain. The prophets have warned you over and over again what will happen to a disobedient, sinful Jerusalem. Their Scripture is now being fulfilled. Jerusalem has called down God’s wrath in judgment. God will take out his vengeance on Jerusalem. The city faces imminent destruction.” (Butler, *Luke*, 353)
    4. The destruction of the holy city was not an accidental or arbitrary act, but the just recompense of reward for those who rejected God’s Son.

- C. In the seventh and final woe that Jesus pronounces on Jerusalem, He gives the death sentence for the city and said that generation of people would feel the wrath of God for their rejection and murder of the Son of God (Matt 23:34-39).
1. "This was truly the sentence of death. God would leave the Temple which once was His dwelling place. His departure would make the Temple only a sepulcher. It would be a blot upon the earth. It was only fit to be destroyed. Christ no longer calls it 'my house' as He did in Matthew 21:13; but He calls it 'your house left unto you desolate.' The Temple thus was forsaken by God. No longer would He dwell on the Holy of Holies of the earthly Temple. The House of God was now the House of Desolation. Its destruction was inevitable after its desolation." (Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four*, 25-26)
  2. The destruction of the temple would symbolize God's repudiation of it.
  3. After this scathing rebuke, Jesus leaves the temple never to return to it again.
- III. "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple" (Matt 24:1).
- A. The disciples were impressed by the massive stones of the temple (Mark 13:1) and by how beautifully it was decorated (Luke 21:5).
  - B. As Jesus and His disciples were walking away from Herod's Temple, He told them that the day was coming when "not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6).
  - C. Apparently the disciples were stunned into silence by our Lord's statement.
  - D. The temple was massive, beautiful and one of the greatest architectural wonders in the Middle East (Josephus, *Antiq.* 15:392-402, 410-420).
  - E. "Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over the plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays." (Josephus, *War* 5:222)
  - F. "The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white." (Wilkins, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, 2:147)
  - G. "The temple and its adjunct buildings stood on the top of a mount. A massive retaining wall on the south and west sides helped support the mount itself as well as the Temple. The Temple was awe-inspiring by any standards, but to a group of common men from rural Galilee it must have been a breathtaking marvel. They could not conceive how such an enormous structure could have been built or decorated so magnificently. The Roman historian Tacitus reported that it was a place of immense wealth, and the Babylonian Talmud said, 'He that never saw the temple of Herod never saw a fine building.' Some of the stones measured 40 feet by 12 by 12 and weighed up to a hundred tons, quarried as a single piece and transported many miles to the building site." (MacArthur, *Matthew* 24-28, 8)

- IV. Jesus and His disciples continued their journey to the Mount of Olives.
- A. After crossing the Kidron Valley, Jesus and His disciples sat upon the Mount of Olives (which is several hundred feet taller than the Temple Mount) and there had a marvelous view of the temple and the entire city of Jerusalem.
  - B. “They had left the Sanctuary and the City, had crossed black Kidron, and were slowly climbing the Mount of Olives. A sudden turn in the road, and the Sacred Building was once more in full view. Just then the western sun was pouring his golden beams on tops of marble cloister and on the terraced courts, and glittering on the golden spikes on the roof of the Holy Place. In the setting, even more than in the rising sun, must the vast proportions, the symmetry, and the sparkling sheen of this mass of snowy marble and gold have stood out gloriously. And across the black valley, and up the slopes of Olivet, lay the dark shadows of these gigantic walls built of massive stones, some of them nearly twenty-four feet long. ... It was probably as they now gazed on all this grandeur and strength, that they broke the silence imposed on them by gloomy thoughts of the near desolateness of that House, which the Lord had predicted (Matt. 23:37-39).” (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, n.p.)
  - C. As you picture Jesus on the Mount of Olives you are reminded of the words of Ezekiel that when the glory of the Lord left the temple it stood on a mountain on the east side of the city (Ezek 11:23).
- V. His disciples privately ask, “When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3; Mark 13:3-4; Luke 21:7).
- A. The destruction of the temple was such a remarkable event that the disciples could only think of it being accompanied by the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.
  - B. Jesus clears up their misunderstandings and answers their questions in order.
  - C. First, He tells them about the various signs which would be seen prior to the destruction of the temple.
  - D. Second, Jesus explains there will be no signs given prior to His return and the end of the world.
- VI. The destruction of Jerusalem is described in Matthew 24:2-35 and parallel accounts are recorded in Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36.
- A. “Basically the discourse is about God’s judgment on Jerusalem, on the temple, and on the Jewish leaders, and only after that (when the Son of Man returns), on the world. It is thus primarily not about the end of the world, but the end of a world—the world of early Judaism as a temple-centered faith.” (Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 340)
  - B. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus Flavius Vespasianus, commonly referred to as *Titus* (A.D. 39-81) in A.D. 70.
  - C. Titus was the elder son of Titus Flavius Vespasianus, commonly referred to *Vespasian*, who was the Emperor of Rome from A.D. 69 to A.D. 79.

## I. Key To The Discourse

- A. It is my understanding that everything spoken of in Matthew 24:4–35 relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the remainder of the chapter deals with the second coming of Christ.
1. In the parable of the fig tree Jesus warned His disciples to be on guard and when they saw the signs mentioned in this chapter they should know the end of Jerusalem was near (Matt 24:32–33).
  2. After describing the signs that would appear before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled” (Matt 24:34).
  3. Jesus warned His followers that Jerusalem would be destroyed within their own generation.
  4. The word *generation* (Gr. γενεα) is defined as “the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time and freq. defined in terms of specific characteristics, *generation, contemporaries*” (BDAG).
  5. “The attempt to explain η γενεα αυτη, ‘this generation,’ as the generation alive at the time of the parousia or more generally as the human race or people of God goes against the natural meaning of the phrase and makes the words irrelevant both to Jesus’ listeners and to Matthew’s readers.” (Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 715)
  6. A generation is a period of time somewhere between thirty to forty years.
    - a) Jesus gave the Olivet discourse in about A.D. 30.
    - b) Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70.
  7. “And there were some Rabbins alive at the time when Christ spoke these things, that lived till the city was destroyed, viz. Rabban Simeon, who perished with the city, R. Jochanan Ben Zaccai, who outlived it, R. Zadoch, R. Ismael, and others.” (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the Gospels From the Talmud and Hebraica*, n.p.)
- B. In this booklet we will be quoting at length from the first century historian Flavius Josephus (c. A.D. 37–100), a Jewish priest who led a revolt against Roman oppression in Galilee and later became an eyewitness to the siege of Jerusalem.
1. His name at birth was Joseph ben Mattathias, but many years later (and after becoming a Roman citizen) he adopted the Roman name of Flavius Josephus.
  2. He was captured by the Romans at the fall of Yotapata in A.D. 67, and held as a prisoner in Caesarea Maritima till A.D. 69.
  3. He returned to Jerusalem with Titus in A.D. 70 and had a “ringside seat” at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.
  4. “The Jewish historian Josephus is our primary source of information about the fall of Jerusalem. During the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66–70 Josephus began as a rebel leader, but midway he switched his allegiance to the Roman side of the conflict. He accompanied the Roman general Titus to the siege of Jerusalem and was thus an eyewitness of the harrowing events of the city’s fall.” (*Archaeological Study Bible*, n.p.)

5. “The revolution started in A.D. 66; Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70. In those years the Romans worked their wrath by ravaging the land, destroying the cities, and slaughtering the Jews. Josephus, the Roman-bred Jewish historian, devoted five chapters to the destruction of Jerusalem. Much of what the Gospels contain as prediction, he confirms as history.” (Summers, *Commentary on Luke*, 259)
  6. Steve Mason wrote an excellent biography of Josephus in a 1997 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Steve Mason, “Will the Real Josephus Please Stand Up?,” *BAR* 23, no. 6. [September/October 1997]: 58–65, 67–69).
- C. Besides Josephus we will also make use of several other primary sources.
1. Cornelius Tacitus (c. A.D. 56–118) wrote two main works that deal with the lives of the Roman emperors: the *Annals* (from the accession of Tiberius through the emperorship of Nero) and the *Histories* (from the death of Nero to the death of Domitian).
  2. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. A.D. 69–140) was a Roman lawyer and former secretary to Hadrian—he is a primary source of the history of the Roman Empire during New Testament times.
  3. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. A.D. 263–339) was the “Bishop of Caesarea” around A.D. 314 and is one of the best known of the “Early Church Fathers.”
  4. There are also books in Pseudepigrapha of which it is said: “Four major works survive from the time of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.: 2 *Baruch*, 2 *Ezra*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Book of Biblical Antiquities* (Pseudo-Philo).” (Nickelsburg, “Early Jewish Literature,” n.p.)
- D. Now, let us examine the various signs Jesus said would appear prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

## II. False Christs

- A. Jesus warned His disciples that, “Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matt 24:4–5, 11, 23–25; Mark 13:5–6; Luke 21:8).
- B. As predicted by Jesus, many false prophets did arise between the time of His ascension into heaven and the destruction of Jerusalem.
- C. Simon the sorcerer was worshipped as a god in Rome (Acts 8:9–10).
  1. “Several of the early Christian writers refer to Simon Magus. Justin relates that, in the time of Claudius Caesar, Simon was worshiped as a god at Rome on account of his magical powers. Jerome quotes Simon Magus as saying, ‘I am the Word of God, I am the Comforter, I am Almighty, I am all there is of God’ (Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies*, p. 82). And Irenaeus tells us how Simon claimed to be the Son of God and the creator of angels.” (Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 92)
  2. “In the second century, Justin Martyr, himself a Samaritan, claimed that his countrymen revered Simon as a high god. Other second-century sources describe a Simon Magus whose heresy reached as far as Rome and whose teachings Peter was often required to refute. In the late second century, Tertullian talked about Simon, honored with a statue in Rome carrying the inscription ‘To Simon the holy god,’ though some scholars believe that was merely the misreading of another well-known statue to an ancient Sabine deity.” (Gangel, *Acts*, 131)

- D. “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 were 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.” (Josephus, *War* 2:261–262)
- E. “Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem.” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 20:97–98)

### III. Wars And Rumors Of Wars

- A. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem the disciples would “hear of wars and rumors of wars,” and yet Jesus told them, “See that you are not troubled” (Matt 24:6–7a; Mark 13:7–8a; Luke 21:10).
1. Today, every time a firecracker goes off in Jerusalem some preacher will tell his congregation that the end of the world is at hand—you would think the Middle East had never experienced conflict before.
  2. It is hard to picture a more trying time in human history than the few years before the destruction of Jerusalem.
  3. Tacitus said of this period: “The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time.” (Tacitus, *Histories*, 1:2)
  4. “It is recorded in the history of Rome, that the most violent agitations prevailed in the Roman empire previous to the destruction of Jerusalem. Four emperors, Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, suffered violent deaths, in the short space of eighteen months. In consequence of these changes in the government, there were commotions throughout the empire, parties were formed; and bloody and violent wars were the consequence of attachment to the particular emperors. This is the more remarkable, as at the time that the prophecy was made the empire was in a state of peace.” (Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, n.p.)
- B. A Jewish rebellion against Rome began in Judea began in A.D. 66.
1. “Gessius Florus, the last of the Roman prefects for Judea, provoked a Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66 C.E. by stealing funds from the Temple treasury. The Jews withstood the Romans temporarily; at that time the Christian community abandoned Jerusalem and fled to Pella.” (King, “Jerusalem,” n.p.)

2. “On the other hand, in response to Florus’s activities, the Jews laid the ‘foundation for the war’ by stopping sacrifices for Gentiles and thus the twice-daily sacrifices for the emperor’s welfare (Josephus *J.W.* 2.17.2 §409). This was an act of rebellion. The sacrifices represented a special concession from the Romans to the Jews in lieu of their participating in the rituals of emperor worship.” (Evans and Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, n.p.)
3. “The Jewish revolt was no small matter for Rome. If the Jews could revolt, the allegiance of no province could be counted on. The Romans sent some of their best legions to Palestine to quell the rebellion. Leading the Roman troops were Vespasian and his son Titus, both of whom would later become emperors—in large part on the basis of their victories over the Jews.” (Syon, “Gamla: Portrait of a Rebellion.” *BAR* 18, no. 1 [January/February 1992]: n.p.).
4. During the time of the Jewish rebellion, Josephus tells of one day in which “the people of Caesarea had slain the Jews that were among them on the very same day and hour [when the soldiers were slain], which one would think must have come to pass by the direction of Providence; insomuch that in one hour’s time above twenty thousand Jews were killed, and all Caesarea was emptied of its Jewish inhabitants.” (Josephus, *War* 2:457)

#### **IV. Famines And Pestilences**

- A. The destruction of Jerusalem was to be preceded by a time of “famines and pestilences” (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11).
- B. Luke, writing by inspiration, records that, “In these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:27–28).
  1. Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, usually referred to as Claudius, was the emperor of Rome from A.D. 41 to 54.



2. “There is abundant ancient evidence attesting food shortages and greatly inflated food prices during the reign of Claudius. The word translated ‘famine’ in this verse (*limos*) can also mean ‘death’ or ‘severe shortage.’ Obviously Antioch is not affected as badly as Jerusalem and Judea, otherwise they would not have been able to provide substantial help. Rome began to experience a scarcity of food in the winter of A.D. 40–41, the beginning of Claudius’s reign. This general disruption in the food supply is attributed to declines in the production of grain in Egypt, the principal grain supplier for Rome and much of the Mediterranean region. Crop failures in Egypt grew particularly severe in the period of A.D. 45–47. One writer indicates that the crisis was felt in all of Syria in A.D. 44. But Jerusalem and Judea were the hardest hit of all during this time. This was exacerbated by still other factors. When the emperor Gaius Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the Jerusalem temple in late A.D. 39, the Jews refused to plant their crops. Indeed, they were ready to die rather than allow their temple to be profaned. The next year was a sabbatical year, which kept their ground out of production and intensified the food shortage. Just three years later, in A.D. 44–45, Judea strongly felt the adverse effects of the more general food shortage and the resultant exorbitant prices for grain that was in short supply and in high demand.” (Arnold, “Acts,” 218–504)
- C. In Jerusalem, at the north of the Old City, is a large tomb complex which is known as the Tomb of Queen Helena of Adiabene (northern Mesopotamia).
1. Queen Helena and her son were converted to Judaism by Jewish merchants in her homeland (Josephus, *Antiq.* 20:17–96).
  2. When Queen Helena visited Jerusalem between A.D. 46–48 she found it suffering from famine, so she set out to gather food as far as Egypt and Cyprus.
  3. “Now her coming was of very great advantage to the people of Jerusalem; for whereas a famine did oppress them at that time, and many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food withal, queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of corn, and others of them to Cyprus, to bring a cargo of dried figs.” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 20:51)
- D. Tacitus wrote about the conditions in Rome in A.D. 51: “This year witnessed many prodigies. Ill-omened birds settled on the Capitol. Houses were flattened by repeated earthquakes, and as terror spread the weak were trampled to death by the panic-stricken crowd. Further portents were seen in a shortage of corn, resulting in famine. The consequent alarm found open expression when Claudius, administering justice, was surrounded by a frenzied mob; driven to the far corner of the Forum, he was hard pressed until a detachment of troops forced a way for him through the hostile crowd. It was established that there was no more than fifteen days’ supply of food in the city. Only heaven’s special favor and a mild winter prevented catastrophe.” (Tacitus, *Annals*, 271)

## V. Earthquakes

- A. Along with the misery brought by famine and pestilences, Jesus said great earthquakes would shake the region prior to the siege (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8).
- B. “And as to earthquakes, many are mentioned by writers during a period just previous to 70 A.D. There were earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Campania, Rome, and Judea. It is interesting to note that the city of Pompeii was much damaged by an earthquake occurring on February 5, 63 A.D.” (Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 93)

## VI. Great Signs From Heaven

- A. In Luke’s account of the Olivet discourse he records the warning of Christ that, “there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11).
- B. During the Jewish rebellion, Josephus said that one night “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 thunderings, 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.” (Josephus, *War* 4:286–287)
- C. On another occasion Josephus wrote: “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 unskillful, 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.” (Josephus, *War* 6:289–293)
- D. These unusual signs were also felt in Rome itself: “Various portents had occurred at this time, but so sunk in superstition are the Jews and so opposed to all religious practices that they think it wicked to expiate them by sacrifices or vows. Embattled armies were seen to clash in the sky with flashing arms, and the Temple shone with sudden fire from heaven. The doors of the shrine suddenly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to proclaim that the gods were leaving, and at once there came a mighty movement of their departure. Few took alarm at all this.” (Tacitus, *Histories*, 5:13)

## VII. Stand Before Kings And Rulers

- A. Jesus told the apostles, “Watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them” (Mark 13:9; Matt 24:9-10; Luke 21:12-9).
- B. Peter and John were brought up before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4).
- C. Stephen was stoned to death by an angry Jewish mob (Acts 7:54-60).
- D. Herod Agrippa “killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also” (Acts 12:2).
- E. Paul stood before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12), Felix, a Roman governor (Acts 24), and King Agrippa (Acts 25).
- F. After the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, the Emperor Nero made Christians the “scapegoat” and accused them of starting the fire.
  1. “First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned—not so much for incendiaryism as for their anti-social tendencies. Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals’ skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. Nero provided his Gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited displays in the Circus, at which he mingled with the crowd—or stood in a chariot, dressed as a charioteer. Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.” (Tacitus, *Annals*, 365-366)
  2. Suetonius, while discussing the reign of Nero, said, “Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief” (Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 220).
- G. Because of this terrible persecution, Jesus had warned His disciples that, “the love of many will grow cold” (Matt 24:12).
- H. “The unavoidable time of tribulation and persecution that must come will have several effects: the commitment of many will grow cold; others will fall away and betray those with whom they formerly stood; and iniquity will abound. It will be a time that calls for great endurance from the faithful. At the same time, however, the period before the end will be marked by the proclamation of the good news that Jesus has been announcing in his ministry—the good news of the kingdom. But now that proclamation will go not just to the Jews but to ‘all the nations.’” (Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 696)

## VIII. The Gospel Preached To All Nations

- A. Jesus said that before the siege of Jerusalem the “gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10).
  1. The word *world* (Gr. οἰκουμένη) is defined as, “*the inhabited earth*; a. in Greek writings often the *portion of the earth inhabited by the Greeks*, in distinction from the lands of the barbarians” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).
  2. “The *world* is *oikoumenē*, lit. ‘the inhabited area’, a standard term originally for the Greek world (as opposed to barbarians), then for the Roman Empire, and subsequently for the whole of the then known world; it is thus not so much a geographical term which must include every area and community now known to be on earth, but rather an indication of the universal offer of the gospel *to all nations*, i.e. outside the confines of the Jewish community.” (France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 342)
- B. Jesus did not say that the gospel would be preached to every single man and woman, but rather “in all the world as a witness to all nations” (Matt 24:14).
- C. This promise was partially fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when “Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven” heard the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:5).
- D. Paul wrote to the saints at Colosse around A.D. 63 (seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem) and spoke of the gospel “which was preached to every creature under heaven” (Col 1:23).
- E. “Tradition assigns the following fields to the various apostles and evangelists: Andrew is said to have labored in Scythia; hence the Russians worship him as their apostle. Philip spent his last years in Hierapolis in Phrygia. Bartholomew is said to have brought the gospel according to Matthew into India. Thomas is said to have been the apostle to Parthia, and also to India. The tradition concerning Matthew is rather confused. He is said to have preached to his own people, and afterward in foreign lands. James Alphaeus is said to have worked in Egypt. Thaddeus is said to have been the missionary to Persia. Simon Zelotes is said to have worked in Egypt and in Britain; while another report connects him with Persia and Babylonia. The evangelist John Mark is said to have founded the Church in Alexandria.” (Qualben, *A History of the Christian Church*, 48)

## IX. The Abomination Of Desolation

- A. Jesus warned His disciples that, “When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matt 24:15–20; Mark 13:14–19).
  1. “The ‘abomination that causes desolation’ might also be translated as a *desolating sacrilege*. In the days of the Maccabees, the Jews wondered if this prophecy had been fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes slaughtered a pig on the temple altar and subsequently destroyed much of the temple precincts, the city of Jerusalem, and thousands of its inhabitants (167 B.C.; cf. 1 Macc 1:54 and 6:7).” (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 358)

2. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the ruler of the Seleucid Empire.
  3. “Daniel 11:31 clearly refers to the desecration under Antiochus Epiphanes (168 B.C.; cf. 1 Macc 1:54–61), who erected an altar to Zeus over the altar of burned offering, sacrificed a swine on it, and made the practice of Judaism a capital offense.” (Carson, *Matthew*, n.p.)
  4. Jesus looked for a repetition of an act of abomination similar to this.
- B. Adam Clarke (and others) suggested that the “abomination of desolation” was when the Roman Army “brought their ensigns into the temple, and placed them over against the eastern gate, and sacrificed to them there” (Clarke, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, n.p.).
1. However, by the time the Romans were inside the city it would have been far too late for anyone to flee!
  2. The “abomination of desolation” had to take place *before* the Romans laid siege the city.
- C. The Jewish Zealots desecrated the temple in the winter of A.D. 67/8 by coming “into the sanctuary with polluted feet” and “the sanctuary was now become a refuge, and a shop of tyranny” (Josephus, *War* 4:150–157).
1. “The first-century Jewish historian Josephus felt that Daniel was fulfilled when Zealots slaughtered the priests in the temple in A.D. 66, committing a sacrilege for which God brought about the desolation of the temple (human bloodshed in the temple desecrated it; cf. comment on Mt 23:35). This sacrilege would have been the signal for Christians to flee Jerusalem (24:16); early Christian historians tell us that Christian prophets warned the Jewish Christians to flee Jerusalem at this time.” (Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, n.p.)
  2. “And now, when the multitude were gotten together to an assembly, and every one was in indignation at these men’s seizing upon the sanctuary, at their rapine and murders but had not yet begun their attacks upon them (the reason of which was this, that they imagined it to be a difficult thing to suppress these zealots, as indeed the case was), Ananus stood in the midst of them, and casting his eyes frequently at the temple, and having a flood of tears in his eyes he said,—‘Certainly, it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places that ought not to be trodden upon at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains.’” (Josephus, *War* 4:162–163)

## **X. Flee To The Mountains**

- A. Jesus instructed His disciples that when they saw the “abomination of desolation” they were to “flee to the mountains” (Matt 24:16–20; Mark 13:14–19).
1. “When the sacrilege takes place, then it is time to flee the city, for its destruction is imminent. This advice is in fact the opposite of usual Jewish and ancient Near Eastern advice, which thought of safety within the city walls, not least because Jews often thought that God would not allow his dwelling place to be destroyed.” (Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 346)

2. “When that time came, Jerusalem would be a place to flee rather than to enter for shelter. All the people of Judea—not just the city—should flee to the hills to hide from the enemy. Those who were inside the city should go out and seek safety. Those who were outside the city should not go in to seek shelter or possessions. History indicates that when the Romans approached, the Jews generally took the very opposite action. Those inside the city stayed. Those out in the country thought they would be safer within the walls. The result was murder on an almost inconceivable scale. A large company of the Christians fled Jerusalem as the war developed and established a new center at Pella, east of the Jordan.” (Summers, *Commentary on Luke*, 258)
  3. “Jesus goes on to underline the urgency of flight in that trying time. He speaks of anyone who is on the housetop, a place that was important in family life in first-century Palestine. Houses had flat roofs, and these were used as part of the living quarters of a house. While doubtless they would be uncomfortable during the hottest hours of the day, they would form a cool living room on hot evenings. If a man was taking his ease on his housetop and there received the signal that the dangerous time had come and that he should lose no time in escaping, it would be natural for him to think of some of his valued and easily portable possessions and to go down into the interior of his house to fetch them. Jesus tells them not to do it. The danger he prophesies is great; the need for flight is urgent. No time should be lost. Better to lose one’s portable possessions than one’s life.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 604)
  4. “But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.3)
    - a) Pella, one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, was a mainly Gentile town east of the Jordan in northern of Perea.
    - b) Pella was also within the dominions of Herod Agrippa II.
- B. As the Roman army approached Jerusalem the Jews did not want to leave the city for they thought the temple walls were impregnable and would keep them safe.
1. The so-called *Letter of Aristeas* is a Hellenistic work of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and a part of the Pseudepigrapha and it describes the seemingly invincible nature of the Temple.
  2. “It is situated in a very lofty spot, and is fortified with many towers, which have been built up to the very top of immense stones, with the object, as we were informed, of guarding the temple precincts, so that if there were an attack, or an insurrection or an onslaught of the enemy, no one would be able to force an entrance within the walls that surround the temple.” (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Aristeas 100–101)

- C. Life on the run would be difficult in the summer, but in the winter the roads in Palestine were practically impassable with mud.
1. “Winter restricted conditions for travel, immobilizing even most armies. In the winter, the otherwise dry creek beds (wadis) were flooded with water and became difficult to cross. Some fugitives from Jerusalem did try to escape the Roman siege in winter and, delayed by these flooded creek beds, were slaughtered. Jewish law prohibited riding horses, mules and other means of transportation on the sabbath; even one’s walking distance was regulated. Transportation and passage would thus be difficult to obtain on the sabbath, especially if residents of Jerusalem wished to flee secretly without being challenged by the patriotic Zealots. The sabbath could be violated to save life, but those who did not recognize the situation’s urgency would not cooperate.” (Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, n.p.)
  2. On a sabbath day the city gates would be shut and provisions unobtainable.
  3. “Jewish tradition limited travel on the Sabbath day to a distance of seven furlongs. The early training of many Christians led them to have scruples about breaking the Sabbath. It is possible that Jesus had these scruples in view, but by no means conclusive, for in fleeing they would need the support and friendship of their Jewish brethren, who would be apt, not only to hinder, but even in those troublous and turbulent days, to show violence to any who openly disregarded the Sabbath. For it must be remembered that the Jews, not being guided by the admonitions of Christ, would regard the sudden flight of the Christians as unnecessarily hasty.” (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*, n.p.)
  4. “Matthew alone included the phrase ‘on the Sabbath’ because he was writing to Jews, who were forbidden to travel more than about .75 miles (.81 km) on the Sabbath.” (*Archaeological Study Bible*, n.p.)
- D. It is amazing how many people today try to apply these words to a future return of our Lord!
1. What possible difference would it make if Jesus returns on Saturday or Sunday?
  2. What difference could it make if He comes in winter or summer?
  3. However, if you were trying to flee from an invading army it would make a great deal of difference, for the gates of the city would be closed on a sabbath day and there would be no way for you to escape.
  4. Fleeing from an invading army would be a lot easier if you did not have a nursing child to tend to.
  5. This passage does not refer in any way to some future return of our Lord.
  6. When the “abomination of desolation” took place those in *Judea* were to flee to the mountains—not people living in America today!

## **XI. Jerusalem Surrounded By Armies**

- A. In Luke's account of the discourse, Jesus also told the disciples that, "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those 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." (Luke 21:20-21)
1. Here the disciples were warned that when the Roman army was approaching Jerusalem they were to flee for their lives.
  2. Christians received ample warning about the approaching invasion.
  3. "The army which Titus had at his disposal consisted of four legions. Besides the three legions of his father, the 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup>, he also had the 12<sup>th</sup>, which had already been in Syria under Cestius. ... In addition to these, he had also the numerous auxiliary troops of the confederate kings." (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, 2:235-236)
- B. "And now Vespasian had fortified all the places round about Jerusalem, and erected citadels at Jericho and Adida, and placed garrisons in them both, partly out of his own Romans, partly out of the body of his auxiliaries. ... And now the war having gone through all the mountainous country, and all the plain country also, those that were at Jerusalem were deprived of the liberty of going out of the city; for as to such as had a mind to desert, they were watched by the zealots; and as to such as were not yet on the side of the Romans, their army kept them in, by encompassing the city round about on all sides. Now as Vespasian was returned to Caesarea, and was getting ready, with all his army to march directly to Jerusalem, he was informed that Nero was dead ... Wherefore Vespasian put off at first his expedition against Jerusalem, and stood waiting whither the empire would be transferred after the death of Nero." (Josephus, *War* 4:486, 490-491, 497)
1. When the legions of Rome finally got to Jerusalem they camped on Mount Scopus (Josephus, *War* 5:67).
  2. Immediately after the arrival of Titus a five-mile long (forty furlongs) stone wall was erected around Jerusalem in just three days that totally enclosed the city (Josephus, *War* 5:508-509).
- C. After the city was surrounded and escape was impossible, a famine of unimaginable proportions descended upon the Holy City.
1. "Children and youths, swollen with the famine, wandered about the market-places like shadows, and fell down wherever the death agony overtook them. The sick were not strong enough to bury even their own relatives, and those who had the strength hesitated because of the multitude of the dead and the uncertainty as to their own fate. Many, indeed, died while they were burying others, and many betook themselves to their graves before death came upon them." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.6.14)



2. “So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city. Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the marketplaces like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. As for burying them, those that were sick themselves were not able to do it; and those that were hearty and well were deterred from doing it by the great multitude of those dead bodies, and by the uncertainty there was how soon they should die themselves, for many died as they were burying others, and many went to their coffins before that fatal hour was come! Nor was there any lamentation made under these calamities, nor were heard any mournful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were just going to die, looked upon those that were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths. A deep silence also, a kind of deadly night, had seized upon the city; while yet the robbers were still more terrible than these miseries were themselves; for they brake open those houses which were no other than graves of dead bodies, and plundered them of what they had; and carrying off the coverings of their bodies, went out laughing, and tried the points of their swords on their dead bodies; and, in order to prove what mettle they were made of, they thrust some of those through that still lay alive upon the ground; but for those that entreated them to lend them their right hand, and their sword to dispatch them, they were too proud to grant their requests, and left them to be consumed by the famine. Now every one of these died with their eyes fixed upon the temple, and left the seditious alive behind them. Now the seditious at first gave orders that the dead should be buried out of the public treasury, as not enduring the stench of their dead bodies. But afterwards, when they could not do that, they had them cast down from the walls into the valleys beneath.” (Josephus, *War* 5:512–518)

D. By the time the famine hit the hardest, it was nearly impossible for anyone to safely flee from the city of Jerusalem.

1. Jews who were caught escaping were first whipped, then tortured and finally crucified near the walls of the city.
2. “This miserable procedure made Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more; yet did it not appear to be safe for him to let those that were taken by force go their way; and to set a guard over so many, he saw would be to make such as guarded them useless to him. The main reason why he did not forbid that cruelty was this, that he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they might themselves afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment. So the soldiers out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest; when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies.” (Josephus, *War* 5:450–451)

## XII. Days Of Vengeance

- A. The destruction of Jerusalem would bring “great tribulation” and “days of vengeance” (Matt 24:21–22; Mark 13:19–20; Luke 21:22–24).
- B. On His way to the cross Jesus explained the severity of these days to the “daughters of Jerusalem” (Luke 23:28–30).
- C. “In the spring of A.D. 70 Titus took command of the Roman forces. During Passover of A.D. 70 he moved his troops closer to the city walls and began his assault from the north. In May he breached Agrippa’s wall after nearly two weeks of attack.” (Evans and Porter, “Destruction of Jerusalem,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, n.p.)
  1. After the walls of Jerusalem were breached, Roman soldiers “went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses wither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching anything. But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men’s blood.” (Josephus, *War* 6:404–406)
  2. “The victors gave no quarter, but slew all Jews upon whom they could lay their hands; 97,000 fugitives were caught and sold as slaves; many of them died as unwilling gladiators in the triumphal games that were celebrated at Berytus, Caesarea Philippi, and Rome. Josephus numbered at 1,197,000 the Jews killed in this siege and its aftermath; Tacitus calculated them at 600,000 (A.D. 70).” (Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 545)
  3. “The number of the besieged, men and women of every age, is stated to have been 600,000. There were arms for all who could carry them, and far more were ready to fight than would be expected from their total numbers. The women were as determined as the men: if they were forced to leave their homes they feared more in life than in death.” (Tacitus, *Histories*, 5:13)
  4. “Although weakened by famine, the Jews still continued to put up a savage resistance, but the final capture of Jerusalem was only a question of time. First the Lower and then the Upper City were taken—and the last days of Jerusalem were even more harrowing than those that had gone before. When the nationalists still refused to surrender, Titus allowed his troops to massacre, loot and burn. The Temple treasurer and another priest saved their lives by handing over the most holy objects of Jewish cult, including the Menorah (seven-branch candlestick) itself. Finally, before the end of September, all resistance had been brought to an end.” (Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World*, 201)

5. “And as Titus went around and saw the trenches filled with the dead, and the thick blood oozing out of the putrid bodies, he groaned aloud, and, raising his hands, called God to witness that this was not his doing.” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.6.18)
- D. “For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered” (Matt 24:28).
1. Some commentators, such as Adam Clarke, have suggested the *eagles* represented the brass ensigns of the Roman armies, but they ignore the fact that eagles do not feast on carrion (the carcasses of a dead animal).
  2. “The term *aetos* can be used to refer to an ‘eagle’ (Rev. 4:7; 8:13), but where a carcass is mentioned, it is best to render it as ‘vultures’ (NIV; contra RSV, KJV) since eagles do not gather as a group and do not normally feed on dead meat.” (Wilkins, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, 1:150)
  3. “αετος is often translated ‘eagle’, but it must be ‘vulture’ here since the corpse is clearly carrion for the birds” (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 981).
  4. Nearly all modern translations of the Bible render the word *aetos* (*eagle* in KJV) as “vultures” (e.g., ESV, NIV, NAS, NRSV, HCSB, CJB).
  5. “It seems best not to ‘over-interpret’ this striking proverbial expression. It probably means simply that, just as people from far away can see vultures circling high in the air, Christ’s return in judgment will be visible and predictable. A similar view is that the vultures suggest the widespread death that will accompany the return of Christ to judge those who have rejected his kingdom. In either case, it will be impossible for people not to see and recognize the return of Christ.” (Dennis and Grudem, *ESV Study Bible*, n.p.)
- E. “Unless the Lord had shortened those days” (Mark 13:20).
1. Our God is the God of history and will not permit its wicked men to exceed the bounds He has set.
  2. “There have been greater numbers of deaths—six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin—but never so high a percentage of a great city’s population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the fall of Jerusalem.” (Carson, *Matthew*, n.p.)
  3. “And it was also hard enough with those elect who fled to the mountains, being driven out of house, living in the open air, and wanting necessaries for food: their merciful God and Father, therefore, took care of them, shortening the time of their misery, and cutting off the reprobates with a speedier destruction; lest, if their stroke had been longer continued, the elect should too far have partaken of their misery.” (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the Gospels From the Talmud and Hebraica*, n.p.)
- F. “Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).
1. It is my understanding that the “times of the Gentiles” is the same as the “fullness of the Gentiles” mentioned in Romans 11:25.

2. “By comparing this passage with Romans 11, we find that the times of the Gentiles signify that period wherein the church is made up of Gentiles to the almost exclusion of the Jews. The same chapter shows that this period is to be followed by one wherein the Jew and the Gentile unite together in proclaiming the gospel. This prophecy, therefore, declares that until this union of the Jew and the Gentile takes place, the city of Jerusalem shall not only be controlled by the Gentiles, but shall be trodden under foot—i. e., oppressed—by them. The history of Jerusalem, to this day, is a striking fulfillment of this prophecy.” (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*, n.p.)
3. *Pseudo-Constantius* is the name given to the author of a fifth-century commentary, and on the phrase “the fullness of the Gentiles” which is used in Romans 11:25, he wrote: “Here Paul shows that, as the complement of the Gentiles comes into faith in Christ, the rest of the Jewish people will be stirred by jealousy and a desire to follow suit, and believing in Christ they will be saved. But in the meantime the apostle ranks the Gentiles ahead of the Jews in the faith for the reason that even if some of the Jews believed in Christ, they still followed the precepts of the law of Moses. But afterward they too, following the example of the Gentiles, began to maintain the Christian faith in its fullness.” (Bray and Oden, *Romans*, 297–298)
4. “As the church became more and more made up of Gentile members, hardness among the Jews increased until the church became almost, if not entirely, Gentile in membership—until the fulness of the Gentiles came in; then the hardness among the Jews apparently became complete. If this is not what Paul meant, it is, at least, what really occurred. And aside from inspired interpretations, are not developments the best commentary on a prophecy?” (Whiteside, *A New Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Saints at Rome*, 240)

### **XIII. The Stars Will Fall From Heaven**

- A. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24–25; Luke 21:25–26).
- B. Premillennialists will often use this passage to “prove” that Matthew 24 is talking about the return of Christ instead of the destruction of Jerusalem.
  1. They will often say, “Just look outside at night—the stars are still in the heavens right now.”
  2. Noted commentator John MacArthur wrote about the stars falling from the heavens and said, “Those supernatural events obviously have not yet transpired” (MacArthur, *Matthew 24–28*, 16).
- C. A short trip through the Old Testament will show how similar language was used to describe God’s righteous judgment and the fall of monarchs and nations.
  1. The fall of Babylon is represented by the stars and heavenly constellations losing their light, and the sun and moon being darkened (Isa 13:10, 13).
  2. God’s judgment upon Edom and the nations is described with a picture of the mountains melting and heaven being dissolved (Isa 34:3–6).

3. Isaiah pictures God's judgment upon "the peoples" as a time when "heavens will vanish away like smoke" (Isa 51:5-6).
4. God's judgment upon Judah is described as a time when the "heavens above be black" (Jer 4:1-6, 23-28).
5. God's judgment upon Egypt is pictured as a time when He would "cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light" (Ezek 32:7-8).
6. The destruction of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes is represented by God casting "the stars to the ground" (Dan 8:10).
7. Joel's picture of God's judgment upon the Nations is said to be a time when, "The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness" (Joel 3:15-16).
8. The judgment upon Nineveh was described as a time when the hills melted and the earth heaved (Nah 1:1-5).
9. In the days of Amos, the judgment upon Israel was described as a time when God made "the sun go down at noon" and darkened "the earth in broad daylight" (Amos 8:1-2, 9).

#### **XIV. The Sign Of The Son Of Man**

- A. After the fall of Jerusalem, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26-27; Luke 21:27-28).
- B. Please note that Jesus did not say, "And then shall appear the Son of Man in heaven" or "then shall appear the sign in the heaven(s) of the Son of Man."
  1. Literally translated, the phrase is, "then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven" (*Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*).
  2. The phrase "in heaven" denotes the locality of the Son of Man, not the locality of the sign.
- C. The destruction of Jerusalem itself served as a sign that the Son of Man was ruling in heaven, because it was the fulfillment of His prediction (cf. Deut 18:20-22).
- D. "Then shall the Son of man give a proof of himself, whom they would not before acknowledge: as proof, indeed, not in any visible figure, but in vengeance and judgment so visible, that all the tribes of the earth shall be forced to acknowledge him the avenger. The Jews would not know him: now they shall know him, whether they will or no, Isaiah 26:11. Many times they asked of him a sign: now a sign shall appear, that he is the true Messiah, whom they despised, derided, and crucified, namely, his signal vengeance and fury, such as never any nation felt from the first foundations of the world." (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the Gospels From the Talmud and Hebraica*, n.p.)

- E. “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31; cf. Mark 13:27).
1. The word *angels* in Matthew 24:31 is translated as *messengers* in *Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*.
  2. The Son of Man’s *elect* are not just members of the Jewish nation, but converts from throughout the world.
  3. The *four winds* represent the four points of the compass (Ezek 37:9; Dan 8:8), and shows how far the message of the kingdom has been preached.
  4. “*Angeloi* might be translated ‘messengers’ (as it is in 11:10), and referred to human preaching of the gospel throughout the world, or taken in its normal sense of *angels* (as the roughly parallel language of 13:14; 16:27 may suggest), in which case it refers to the supernatural power which lies behind such preaching. But whereas in 13:41 the ‘angels of the Son of man’ *gather* the evil *out* of his kingdom, here they *gather* the chosen *into* it. The reference is not, therefore, as in 13:41, to the final judgment, but to the world-wide growth of the church, which is consequent on the ending of Israel’s special status, symbolized in the destruction of the temple.” (France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 348–349)
  5. “When Jerusalem shall be reduced to ashes, and that wicked nation cut off and rejected, then shall the Son of man send His ministers with the trumpet of the Gospel, and they shall gather His elect of the several nations, from the four corners of heaven: so that God shall not want a Church, although that ancient people of His be rejected and cast off: but that ancient Jewish Church being destroyed, a new Church shall be called out of the Gentiles.” (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the Gospels From the Talmud and Hebraica*, n.p.)

## **XV. One Stone Not Left Upon Another**

- A. At the beginning of the Olivet discourse Jesus said, “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” (Matt 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6).
1. Josephus claimed that Titus did not want to destroy the temple.
  2. In a speech to the Jewish defenders of the city Titus said, “I also appeal to my own army, and to those Jews that are now with me, and even to you yourselves, that I do not force you to defile this your sanctuary; and if you will but change the place whereon you will fight, no Roman shall either come near your sanctuary, or offer any affront to it; nay, I will endeavor to preserve you your holy house, whether you will or not.” (Josephus, *War* 6:127–128)
  3. However, after the city was taken, Titus “gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple ... This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison; as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited.” (Josephus, *War* 7:1–3)

4. “In short, both the literary and the archaeological evidence indicate that the city was totally destroyed in 70 C.E. Not a single building remained standing.” (Geva, “Searching For the Roman Jerusalem,” *BAR* 23, no. 6 [November/December 1997]: 37)
5. After the battle, as Titus viewed the massive walls of Jerusalem, he said, “We have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no other than God who ejected the Jews out of these fortifications; for what could the hands of men, or any machines, do towards overthrowing these towers!” (Josephus, *War* 6:411).
6. “And, truly, the very view itself of the country was a melancholy thing; for those places which were before adorned with trees and pleasant gardens were now become a desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down: nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change; for the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste; nor, if anyone that had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again; but though he were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it notwithstanding.” (Josephus, *War* 6:6–8)

## **XVI. After The Victory**

- A. After the destruction of Jerusalem and while on his way back to Rome, Titus stopped at Zeugma on the Euphrates where “envoys from King Vologases I of Parthia brought Titus a golden crown” (Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World*, 202).
- B. Titus returned to Rome and was honored with a Roman Triumph.
  1. “By the time of the NT, the spectacular parades that entered through the *Porta Triumphalis* (‘triumphal gate’) of Rome had become perhaps the most important and well-known political-religious institution of the period. Images of the emperor in a triumphal chariot were even frequently used on imperial coins. These lavish pageants or triumphal processions, known as the Roman triumph (Gk *thriambos*; Lat *triumphus*), were carried out by special decree of the city of Rome in order to celebrate great victories, to honor the general, consul or emperor who had achieved them and to render thanksgiving to the deity who had granted them.” (Evans and Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, n.p.)

2. “As the focal point of the procession, the triumphator rode the triumph in a chariot. He was dressed in a purple toga, wore a tunic stitched with gold palm motifs and had a crown upon his head. His face was painted red and he carried an eagle-crowned scepter in his hand, all of which were elements taken from the depiction of Jupiter in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. The victor was surrounded by his soldiers and by leading exhibits of the spoils of war, graphic representations of the significant battle(s) on billboards and placards announcing the peoples conquered. Most significantly, the victor led in his triumph representative samples of the vanquished foes and leaders, the former being paraded through the streets as slaves, the latter in mockery of their former royalty. The parade route ended at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, where the people offered sacrifices of thanksgiving and petitions for the future health of Rome. At the climax of the pageant, those prisoners and royalty who had been led in triumph and were not destined to be sold into slavery were executed in honor to the victor as the ultimate sign of his conquest and in homage to Rome’s deity.” (Evans and Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, n.p.)
  3. “And so in June 71 Vespaian and Titus celebrated a Triumph over the Jews; and their Roman procession, with the sacred objects of the defeated people carried along in the parade, can be seen to this day on the reliefs of the Arch of Titus beside the Form.” (Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World*, 203)
  4. Josephus claims that Vespaian deposited the menorah in the Peace Temple he erected after the destruction of Jerusalem (Josephus, *War* 7:148–150, 158–161).
  5. Titus ruled for less than three years after Vespaian’s death (A.D. 79–81).
  6. Upon his death in A.D. 81, the Senate immediately deified Titus.
- C. One of the most impressive monuments in Rome is the Arch of Titus.
1. The Arch of Titus was erected by Titus Flavius Domitianus, better known as *Domitian* (A.D. 51–96), the brother of Titus, in front of the Flavian Palace at the top of the *Via Sacra*.
  2. The monument was erected in c. A.D. 81 shortly after the death of Titus.
  3. Interior reliefs which depict Titus’s triumphal processions which was celebrated in A.D. 71.
  4. One relief shows Roman soldiers carrying the most valued of the Jewish spoils—the golden table for the shewbread, a pair of long silver trumpets, and the golden candlestick (menorah) with its seven branches.
  5. The signs carried by some soldiers displayed the names of the conquered cities and people.
  6. Another relief shows Titus himself in his chariot, accompanied by the Goddess Victoria and the Goddess Roma, drawn by four white horses, on his way to deposit in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol the symbols of his victory.
  7. The Arch of Titus bears this inscription: “The Senate and People of Rome, to the Divine Titus, son of the Divine Vespaian; and to Vespaian the Emperor” (translations vary).



D. The *Judaea Capta* coin.

1. "To celebrate their triumph, the Romans issued a huge issue of commemorative coins, the well-known 'Judaea Capta' series, struck in Rome in gold, silver and various denominations of bronze. The coins depict the Emperor Vespasian, as a victorious soldier, standing beside a mourning Jewess, the personification of Judaea, accompanied by the Latin inscription: 'Judaea Capta.' Many other Roman coins of this type were also minted, showing captive Jews, spoils of war, trophies, palm trees and symbols of victory. In addition, several provincial Roman issues celebrated the conquest of Judaea. Especially notable is a series of bronze coins from Caesarea using the Greek equivalent of 'Judaea Capta,' since Latin was generally unknown in the eastern Mediterranean." (Meshorer, "The Holy Land in Coins," *BAR* 4, no. 1 [March 1978]: n.p.)
2. "On the obverse are represented a palm tree, the emblem of the land of Judaea; the emperor with a trophy standing on the left; Judea, under the figure of a distressed woman, sitting at the foot of the tree weeping, with her head bowed down, supported by her left hand, with the legend JUDAEA CAPTA. ... This is not only an extraordinary fulfillment of our Lord's prediction, but a literal accomplishment of a prophecy delivered about 800 years before, Isa. iii. 26, And she, desolate, shall sit upon the ground." (Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, n.p.)

E. Hadrian's Jerusalem.

1. "In 130 C.E., Emperor Hadrian celebrated the transformation of Jerusalem into a Roman colony by plowing a traditional furrow, called a *pomerium*, around the city to mark its new boundaries. Jews were barred, on penalty of death, from entering the city. The name *Aelia* memorialized the family of the emperor, whose full name was Publius Aelius Hadrianus; *Capitolina* recalled the Capitoline Hill in Rome, the location of a temple of Jupiter. As a new colony, Aelia Capitolina was given the right to erect a similar monument dedicated to the most powerful Roman deity." (Geva, "Searching For the Roman Jerusalem," *BAR* 23, no. 6 [November/December 1997]: 37)

F. The *Mishnah* claims that on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Ab (sometimes spelled Av) five terrible events took place in Jewish history.

1. "On the 9th of Ab it was decreed against our fathers that they should not enter into the Land {of Israel}, and the Temple was destroyed the first and second time, and Beth-Tor was captured and the City was ploughed up. When Ab comes in, gladness must be diminished." (Danby, *The Mishnah*, Taanith 4:6)
2. "You might call this day the Pearl Harbor of Jewry. The Babylonians on the Ninth of Ab, 586 B.C., broke into the Temple of Solomon and sacked it. Six hundred and fifty-five years later, on the same date, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. This fatal coincidence linking the nation's two greatest disasters has left an ineradicable scar on the memory of the Jews." (Wouk, *This Is My God*, 94-95)

3. Around A.D. 113 the city of Beth-Tor (Betar, Beiter) was the site of the defeat of a massive Jewish army under the leadership of Bar Kochba (also known as Bar Koziva).
4. A preeminent medieval Jewish scholar, Moses ben-Maimon (also known as Maimonides or Rambam) wrote that the capture of Beth-Tor and slaughter of its inhabitants was a tragedy as great as the destruction of the temple itself.
5. One year after the slaughter at Beth-Tor, a Roman officer, Turnus Rufus, plowed the site of the temple and the surrounding area.
6. The Roman emperor Hadrian then rebuilt Jerusalem as a pagan city, renamed it *Aelia Capitolina*, and prohibited Jews from entering the city.
7. Today, devout Jews still fast on the 9th day of Ab (*Tisha B'Av*), the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, in memory of these historic events.
8. Truly, the words of the prophet came to pass, "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" (Mic 3:12).

#### *Conclusion*

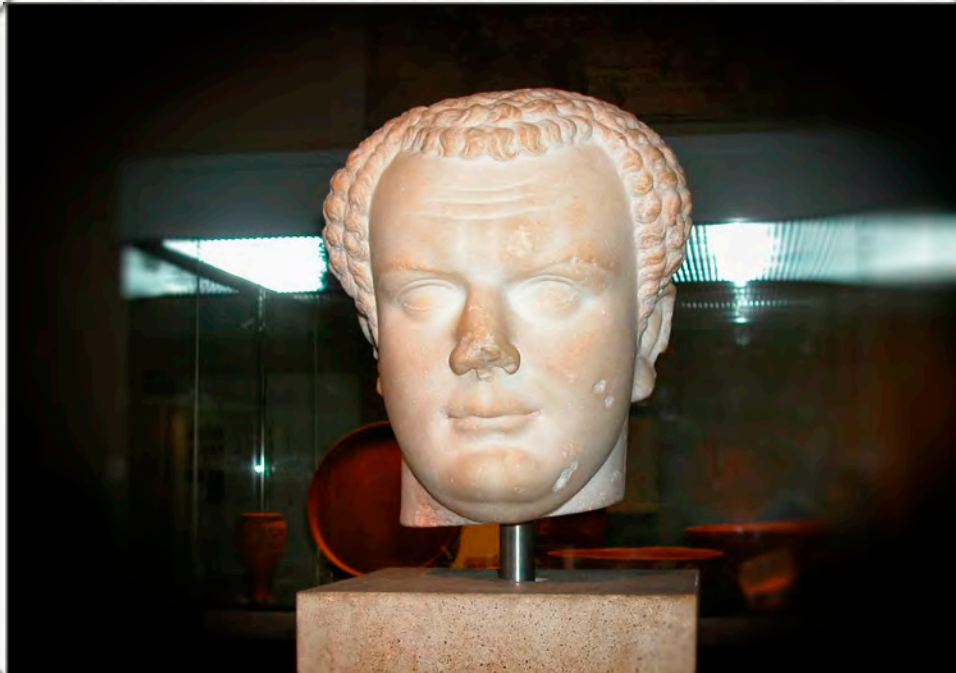
- I. Sign after sign was given so the disciples would know in advance about the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:32-35; Luke 21:28-33; Mark 13:28-29).
- II. Warnings were given so men could flee during those abnormal times when a limited judgment of God was meted out on Jerusalem.
- III. We look for the return of Jesus, "but of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36).
- IV. Jesus will return during normal times and without warning (Matt 24:36-44).
- V. "He made this world. He came to dwell in it. He will return at the end of history to wind it all up. That is the Christian hope. History is moving steadily towards that grand day. We shall not go out like a light. We shall not be blown sky-high in a nuclear holocaust. We shall not destroy the Earth by our environmental vandalism. This world will not, however, go on for ever." (Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, 250)

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*Titus*



*Vespasian*



*Hadrian*



*Domitian*



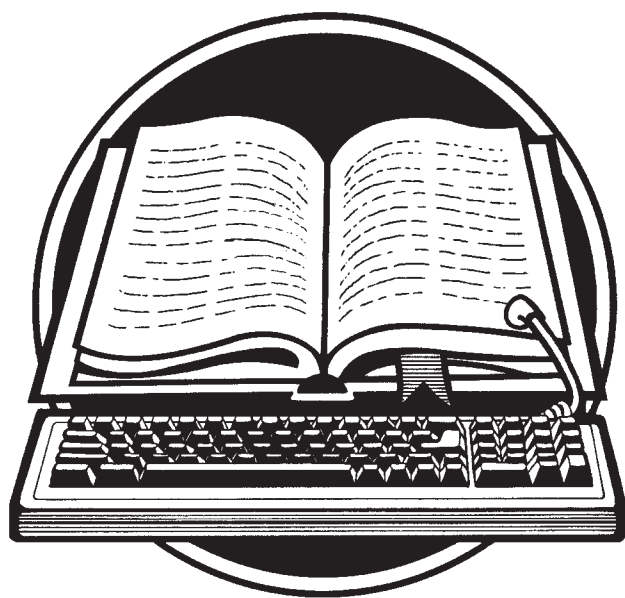


*The Arch of Titus in Rome*



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