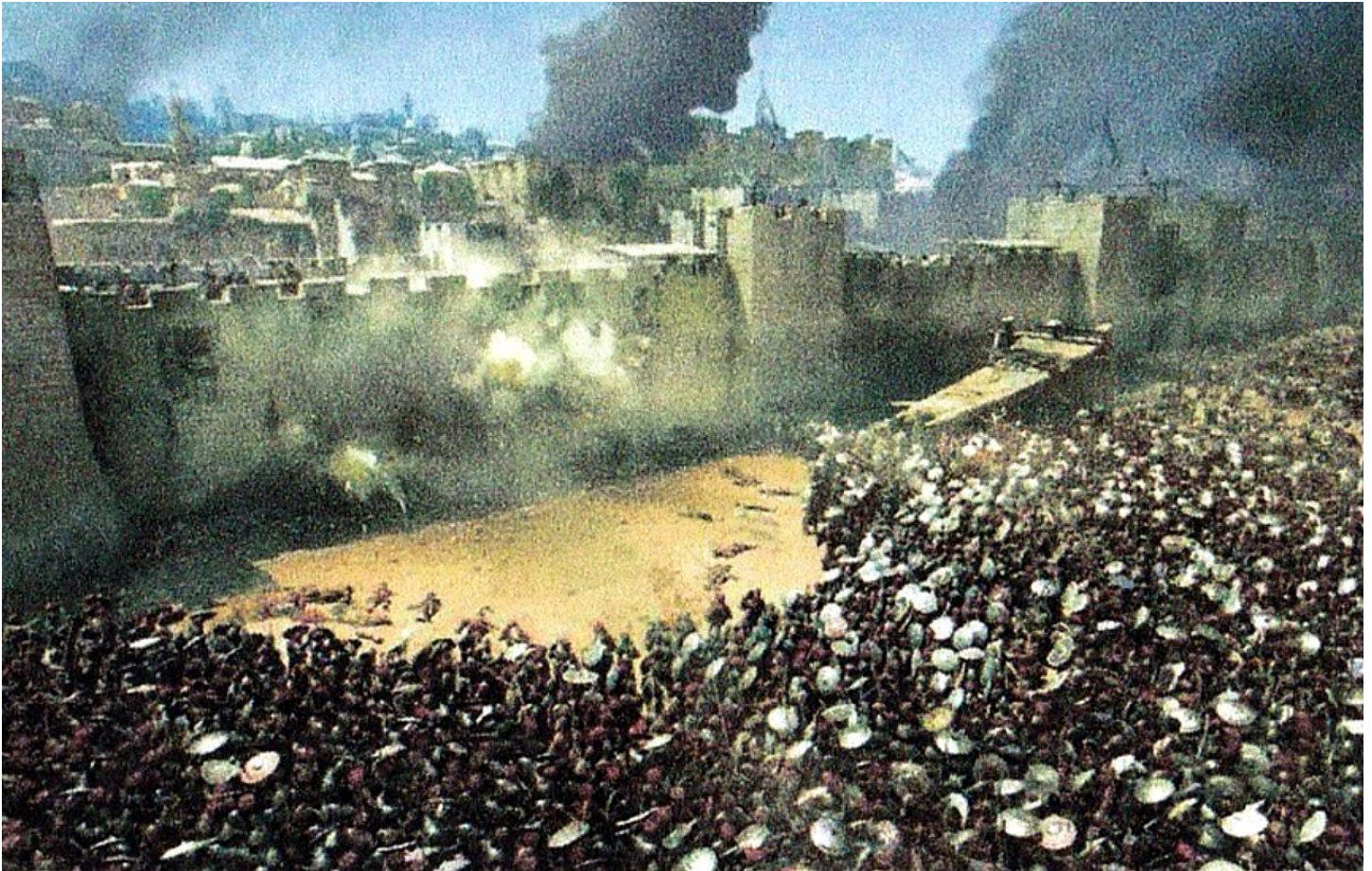


THE TEMPLE DESTROYED, 70 AD

By B. L. Cocherell



The fulfillment of Christ's prophecy concerning the destruction of the magnificent temple at Jerusalem not only reveals the year of Christ's crucifixion, but also ended one phase of God's plan for the salvation of humanity and ushered in the next phase—Christ's return to conquer and rule the earth.

In 40 B.C., the Roman senate appointed Herod, later known as Herod The Great, as the ruler of Judea. Herod had previously served as the governor of Galilee and was a personal friend of Mark Antony before Antony was defeated by Octavian. Later Herod became a friend of Octavian who became the first Roman emperor as Caesar Augustus.

Herod the Great ruled Judea for the next 36 years, during which time he began many huge building projects including the building of a new Temple in Jerusalem for the worship of God. From the beginning of the Temple project in 19 B.C., it took 46 years to complete the main building and another 36 years to finish the entire Temple complex. This was a huge undertaking which required a tremendous amount of labor and money. This new temple was said to be a larger and a more beautiful temple than the one that Solomon built.

The historian Josephus said that much of the exterior of the Temple was covered with gold that reflected the fiery rays of the sun. Moreover, he said that, from a distance, the Temple appeared like a mountain covered with snow. This was probably because those parts that were not covered with gold were made of white stone.

From what is said in many writings about Herod's Temple, it was indeed a magnificent structure of awesome proportions. However, four years after its completion, it was totally destroyed and wiped from the face of the earth.

During Jesus' time, many of the Jews were so awe struck and impressed with the grandeur of the Temple that they replaced the worship of God with respect and reverence for the Temple complex itself. However, Jesus was not impressed with the Temple's physical structure, because he knew that the Sovereign God was greater than any building that man could construct, no matter how grand and beautiful it was.

THE PROPHECIES

Jesus prophesied both the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem; therefore, it is necessary to discuss both prophecies in order to clearly understand the events that happened 40 years later.

The Temple

"Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down'"(Matt.24:1-8 NIV). See also Lk.21:5-6.

In his well-known prophecy about the end of the age recorded by Matthew and Luke, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem which came to pass 40 years after his death and resurrection. Because the disciples as most of the Jews of their day (especially the Essenes and the Pharisees) were looking for a Messiah to come who would restore national Israel, set up an earthly kingdom, and destroy the existing Temple and build a new one in its place (See Ezekiel chapters 40 to 47), they were anxious to know when this would happen. They asked, *"When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* (Matt.24:3 NIV).

Many today believe that the answer that Jesus gave to his disciples referred to the time that they were living in. Although in a general sense, some of what he said would apply to their age, Jesus did not answer the first part of their question: "when will this happen?" Instead he began to answer their other two questions—"what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"—with a general overview of the things that would happen at the end of this age just prior to his return:

"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matt.24:4-8 NIV).

After Jesus' resurrection from the dead the disciples asked a similar question to the one that they had asked him after their Temple visit, during which he told them about world events at the end of this age:

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said to them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power"(Acts 1:6-7 KJV).

Looking back on the task that Jesus gave to the disciples after his resurrection (Matt.28:19-20) and the ensuing history of the early church, not allowing these men to know the date of the destruction of the Temple, his coming to power, and the end of the age of human rule on earth helped keep them focused on their task and from being discouraged, because these events were not to happen as soon as they expected.

Jerusalem

There were two occasions on which Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem that would occur in 70 AD. The first was when he entered the city and the people laid their clothes on the ground before him, which was the custom to honor someone of great importance such as a king:

"Then the crowds spread out their robes along the road ahead of him, and as they reached the place where the road started down from the Mount of Olives, the whole procession began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles Jesus had done. 'God has given us a King!' they exulted. 'Long live the King! Let all heaven rejoice! Glory to God in the highest heavens!' But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, 'Sir, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!' He replied, 'If they keep quiet, the stones along the road will burst into cheers.' But as they came closer to Jerusalem and he saw the city ahead, he began to cry. 'Eternal peace was within your reach and you turned it down,' he wept, 'and now it is too late. Your enemies will pile up earth against your walls and encircle you and close in on you, and crush you to the ground, and your children within you; your enemies will not leave one stone upon another- for you have rejected the opportunity God offered you.' Then he entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants from their stalls, saying to them, 'The Scriptures declare, My Temple is a place of prayer; but you have turned it into a den of thieves'" (Lk.19:36-46 TLB).

It is important to understand that Jesus was no ordinary man, he was the Creator God who voluntarily gave up his immortal existence to become human and die for the sins of humanity. Jesus understood that, although the plan for the salvation of humanity required certain events to take place, if people would repent of their evil ways, these events could be modified and worked out in other ways that would allow for less pain and suffering in order to fulfill God's plan for humanity.

Although Jesus understood that his heavenly Father was merciful, he also understood the heart of the vast majority of the Jews and their leadership and that they would not repent of their evil ways. This is one of the reasons he wept over Jerusalem as he foretold its destruction.

The second time that Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem was as he was being led to the place of his execution. The streets along the way were packed with his enemies as well as with those who enthusiastically followed his teaching and were hopeful that he was indeed the prophesied Messiah:

"And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us" (Lk.23:27-30 KJV).

What Jesus said to those who were showing their concern for him and the injustice that was about to befall him foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the horrible starvation, sickness, and death that would come upon them before and after the Romans destroyed the city and its Temple. It is also possible that what he said to these women may also have some application during the end of this age just before his return. See Hos.10:1-10; Rev.6:12-17.

PASSOVER, 30 AD

The Passover season of 30 AD began much as it had in previous years. Thousands of pilgrims from all over the world crowded into Jerusalem. Because they were concerned with preparing for the Passover, they did not realize that this particular Passover would be the most important event in all of human history. It was on this Passover that the Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of humanity.

THE TEMPLE DESTROYED, 70 AD

Jesus died about 3 p.m. on Friday afternoon of 30 AD on the first of two authorized Passover ceremonies (see our study about this specific Passover season). His death set into motion a series of events and warnings to the Jews which were meant to show that indeed the Jews had murdered the Messiah and that his prophecy concerning the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem would come to pass.

The Earthquake

There were three simultaneous events that happened during the earthquake at Jesus' death that are of major importance to the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem:

- The veil of separation torn from top to bottom
- The tombs opened and the dead raised to life
- Jesus acknowledged as the Son of God

The Curtain of Separation

History seems to indicate that there were two curtains in Herod's Temple: One at the huge gated entry into the Temple and the other separating the Holy of Holies and the main sanctuary. These curtains were said to be 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and as thick as the palm of a man's hand. We are told that these curtains were so heavy that 300 priests were needed to manipulate each one. The curtain being torn from top to bottom was a foreboding omen indicating that God's hand had torn it in two and that his presence was leaving that holy place. (See the Jewish Talmud, Yoma 39b).

The curtain separated the Holy Place from everyone but the high priest. The Holy Place was where the presence of God dwelled on the mercy seat. The curtain was a constant reminder to the Israelites that their access to God depended on another physical human, and that this access was only granted through the physical works of the sacrificial system.

"And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the spirit. And the veil of the temple was torn in half from the top to the bottom" (Mk.15:37-38 KJV).

"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life" (Matt.27:50-52 NIV).

Consider the enormous significance of this monumental historical event. Picture Jesus' loud and painful cry *"it is finished"* (Jn.19:30), as the Roman soldier plunges a spear deep into his side and his life blood drains to the ground. At the same instant, the Temple veil tears apart as a powerful earthquake shakes Jerusalem. Furthermore, picture the high priest who having just condemned Jesus to death the night before was splashing the blood of Passover lambs against the altar of God.

When Jesus cried out *"it is finished"* and the curtain tore, the relationship between God and humanity was altered forever. The tearing of the curtain of separation from top to bottom forever opens the way for all humanity to eventually fellowship directly with God the Father.

This is the moment in time that Jesus spoke of to the woman of Samaria when he foretold that the existing worship system would be abolished, and that those who wanted to worship God would no longer need to travel to a specific location to worship:

"The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship. Jesus said to her, Woman believe me that an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem... But the

hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (Jn.4:19-23 Para.). See our study paper about the new creation for more details about worshiping God in spirit.

No longer would a physical man be required to offer animal sacrifices for sins. Any who truly worship the Father can now stand before him and present their own cause to him, knowing that he will hear and consider their prayer because of the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ.

The apostle Paul explains this improved relationship between God and non-Israelites to the elect in the city of Ephesus:

"Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at the time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in the ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph.2:11-16 KJV).

With the tearing of the curtain, all who worship God, whether Jew or Gentile, have access to the throne of mercy by the one and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. See Heb.4:15-16; 6:18-19; 9:1-15; 10:19-22.

"For through him we both have access by one spirit to the Father. Now therefore you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph.2:18-19 KJV).

The Dead Raised

The earthquake and resurrection of the righteous dead at the death of Jesus pertains to a number of prophetic events for that time and the future.

This event was evidence that God had fulfilled his promise contained in the many prophecies about the redemption of humanity. A way was now open for all who would truly worship God to have victory over sin and death. This event also pointed toward the future when a great earthquake will shake the entire earth before the return of Christ to gather the righteous dead of all ages to meet him in the air. See 1.Thes.4:16-17.

This resurrection of the dead shows the following:

- Christ's blood is life-giving (pictured in the blood of the Passover lamb) and has now wiped away the penalty of sin (Rom.6:23) for all those who only had their sins covered by the sacrifice of animals.
- There will be a time when all those who have or will have lived a righteous life will be given eternal and immortal life at the return of Christ. See our study papers on the return of Christ and the resurrections.
- The great enemy death has lost its power over humanity through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ.

The Son of God

"Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt.27:54 Para.). See also Lk.23:47.

The Jews had rejected Christ as the Messiah and murdered him as their fathers had murdered many others whom God had sent to them to teach his laws and ways of life. To their shame, it was a Roman centurion, not

an Israelite, who recognized and acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. See Psa.118:22-24; Jer.8:9; Matt.13:57; 21:42.

Because of their rejection of the Messiah and his message the Jews would now pay a heavy price. The magnificent structure which symbolized God's presence and on which the Jews lavished much praise and showed great reverence would be destroyed along with their beloved city.

The Temple Gates

The Jewish Talmud says that 40 years before the Temple was destroyed the gates of the temple opened by themselves, until Rabbi Yohanan B. Zakkai rebuked them (i.e., the gates) saying, "Hekel, Hekel, why do you alarm us? We know that you are destined to be destroyed" (Yoma 39b).

The priests understood that, for Ezekiel's prophecy to be fulfilled, the existing temple would have to be destroyed and a new one built; however, because they did not understand the prophecies concerning the Messiah for their time, they did not understand the supernatural opening of the gates to mean that the old system of atonement was being replaced with a new one.

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin officiated from the Chamber of Hewn Stones which was about 120 feet southeast of the Temple and its enormous stone lintel, which was at least 30 feet long, weighed some 30 tons and had cracked during the earthquake at the Messiah's death.

History tells us that the Sanhedrin moved from their opulent surroundings in the Chamber of Hewn Stones to lesser accommodations shortly after the earthquake. Because there is no record of the Sanhedrin being forced by the Romans to move from the Temple (which would have caused a major political crisis), one can assume that the Sanhedrin moved because the earthquake had so damaged the building that it was unsafe for them to continue to meet there.

It is interesting that, prior to the Messiah's crucifixion in 30 AD, the Romans had taken away the Sanhedrin's authority to execute criminals (See Jn.18:31; Talmud Sanh.1:1, 7:2). The last judgement that the Sanhedrin made from the Temple was to sentence the Messiah and Creator of humanity to death. From 30 AD to the time of this writing no Sanhedrin has officiated from a Temple in Jerusalem. With the departure of the Sanhedrin from the Chamber of Hewn Stones, the law no longer went forth from the Temple.

Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the Sanhedrin was banished from their official residence to the trading station on the Temple Mount (Shabbat 15a), and eventually off the Mount altogether.

40 YEARS OF WARNINGS

Many wonder why God waited 40 years after Jesus' death and resurrection to fulfill his prophecy about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. First, the number 40 in the Bible is symbolic of trial, testing, and punishment. Second, waiting 40 years shows God's patience in allowing the Jews time to repent and turn back to him with proper behavior and worship so that he could bless them instead of punishing them.

Although the Temple and city were not destroyed until 70 AD, the supernatural events that occurred on the day the Messiah was murdered were only a few of the many warnings given to the Jewish people prior to the destruction of their beloved Temple and city. On the Day of Atonement in 30 AD a series of two consecutive warnings that were repeated on this day for another 39 years began.

A Black Stone and A Scarlet Thread

“And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat” (Lev.16:8 KJV).

There is much debate over exactly what kind of objects the lots were. However, the information found in the Babylonian Talmud and the Mishnah indicates that the lots were two stones—one white and one black. The white stone had the words “For the Lord” written on it, and the black stone had the words “For Azazel” (i.e., the goat that is sent away or banished) written on it.

These two stones were placed into a container and it was shaken; then, without looking into the container, the high priest would put his right hand into the container and draw out one of the lots.

The Babylonian Talmud shows that, for two hundred years before 30 AD, the first stone to appear in the right hand of the high priest randomly fluctuated each year between the white and black stone. One would expect this type of randomness, because God selected the more perfect goat to be slain for the sins of the people. But, beginning with the Day of Atonement in 30 AD (the year of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), the black stone appeared in the right hand of the high priest for the next 39 years.

The chances of the black stone (For Azazel) appearing 40 consecutive times in the right hand of the high priest is over a trillion to one according to Pascal's table of numerical odds.

The continual appearance of the black stone in the right hand of the high priest was surely a sign of God's displeasure with the House of Judah and a warning for them to repent.

The fulfillment of the prophetic black stone came after forty years of continuous warning when the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in 70 AD. by the Roman Empire.

The Scarlet Thread

On the Day of Atonement, a scarlet wool thread was placed on the door of the sanctuary. It was said that this thread turned white when the live goat was set free. But, beginning on the Day of Atonement in 30 AD, this thread never turned white again. See Yoma 39b, Babylonian Talmud and pages 166, 170 Mishnah, by Danby.

Clearly, the failure of the scarlet thread to turn white was another sign of God's disapproval of Israel's worship of him and their impending punishment if they did not repent. See Isa.1:18.

THE REBELLION

Shortly after the beginning of 63 AD and while Jerusalem was still a peaceful and thriving city, Jesus the son of Ananus began proclaiming and warning of the coming destruction to Jerusalem. For his continued effort to warn of the impending disaster (which lasted seven years and five months according to Josephus) he was ridiculed and beaten.

Three years after Jesus the son of Ananus began his prophetic warnings, and in the Spring of 66 AD, the Jews of Judea began a full scale rebellion against Rome.

Besides the continual warnings of the son of Ananus, the Jews also received a number of supernatural warnings of the coming destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.

THE TEMPLE DESTROYED, 70 AD

The Jewish historian Josephus recorded several dramatic events and warnings that concerned the Temple worship system at Jerusalem (War, Book 6. ch.5.) and foretold the end of the Temple worship system at Jerusalem. The following are just a few of the many warnings of impending disaster to come upon Jerusalem.

1. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 66 AD, at about 3 in the morning, a light as bright as daylight appeared around the altar for half an hour. Although some thought it was a good sign, the scribes understood it to be a precursor to the supernatural events that followed during the Feast:

A heifer being led for sacrifice was said to have given birth to a lamb in the midst of the Temple.

Around midnight, during the Feast, the huge eastern gate of the inner court of the temple, which was made of brass and normally took twenty men to shut, opened on its own. Josephus says that this was understood by knowledgeable men to mean that the Temple's protection had vanished and that the gate was opened for the benefit of their enemies. These enlightened men publicly declared that this sign foreshadowed the disaster that was coming on them (Wars IV, 5,3).

2. On the twenty first of the month of Iyar, just before sunset, chariots and soldiers in armor were seen running about in the clouds around the city. See Lk.21:20.
3. During the night portion of the day of Pentecost in 66 AD, as the priests were entering the inner court of the Temple, they felt a quaking and heard a great noise and a sound like a great multitude of voices saying, "Let us remove hence".
4. Jewish historical records state that the Shekinah glory departed the Temple at that time and remained over the Mount of Olives for three and a half years, during which time, a voice could sometimes be heard coming from the mount pleading for the Jews to repent. See Midrash Lamentations 2:11. It is said that, just before the Roman's final siege of Jerusalem, that this light which appeared over the Mount of Olives disappeared into the heavens.

The Jews failed to heed these and many other warnings to repent of their sins and return to their God in humble obedience. If indeed the nation of Israel began its covenant relationship with the Creator God on the day of Pentecost at the foot of Mount Sinai, it ended this relationship on the day of Pentecost in 66 AD.

Destroyed in 70 AD

By the summer of 68 AD, Jews were nearing defeat by the Roman legions and in 69 AD, Vespasian was made emperor of Rome and gave his son Titus the honor of delivering the final death blows to the rebellious Jews and their capital city.

In The Wars of the Jews, Book 6, Josephus notes that, on the eighth day of the of the Roman month Lous (Jewish month Ab), the ramps were finished and Titus ordered the battering-rams brought up and made ready for an assault on the Temple. With the battering-rams in place the Roman siege of Jerusalem, which began at Passover that year, would come to an end.

As soon as the walls were breached on the 9th of Ab in 70 AD, a Roman military force of about 30,000 troops under the command of Titus marched into Jerusalem and began a systematic slaughter of the Jews and the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem—exactly as Jesus foretold 40 years earlier.

The Romans brutally slaughtered an estimated 600,000 people in Jerusalem including many of the Passover visitors who had been trapped there for the 143 days during the Roman siege. Many of the people who were not killed by Roman soldiers were shipped off to the gladiatorial games, Roman mines, and otherwise exiled from

Judea and scattered throughout the Roman Empire and other nations. By the year 73 AD, all traces of a self-ruling Jewish nation had completely disappeared.

Josephus records that the Romans put the city and the Temple to the torch and that these fires were still burning a month later on the eighth day of the Roman month Gorpieus (Jewish month Elul).

The magnificent Temple that Herod had built was completely destroyed as the fires raged inside and out. These fires were so hot that the gold fittings, and the gold gilding inside and on its outside walls melted and ran into the cracks between and in the stones. During the pillaging of the Temple these stones were broken up to get at the gold. Therefore, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy that no stone would be left on another—the destruction was total, just as Jesus foretold.

SUMMARY

The Temple Solomon built was destroyed by fire on the 9th of Ab in 585 or 586 BC (depending on which biblical scholar is doing the research). Just 656 or 657 years later on the 9th of Ab in 70 AD, the Temple that Herod built was also destroyed.

The destruction of both Solomon's Temple and Herod's Temple on the 9th of Ab seems to indicate that, when God's patience comes to an end with his chosen people, he removes his presence and the physical symbolism of his presence from among them to be a witness to future generations that there is a price to pay for disobedience to him.

Although the events shortly before and after the Roman destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem were horrible in terms of human suffering, there have been events in Jewish history since then that have been even more horrible, such as the extermination of millions of Jews during World War Two.

Many Bible prophecies concerning the next temple to be built at Jerusalem for the worship of the Creator God clearly show that God will only allow sacrifices to be performed there for 1,150 days after which great trouble will befall the Jews. During this time of trouble, the atrocities committed against the Jews during World War Two will seem minor in comparison. This period of trouble is to last 3 ½ years and will come not only upon the Jews, but upon other Israelites from the ten tribes and the entire world as the forces of evil become more and more aware that their rule of earth is drawing to an end. It is during this time that the Sovereign God begins in earnest the final preparation for his Son's return to set up his kingdom over the earth.

The fulfillment of prophecy is a major proof that the Sovereign God does exist and that he has the power and authority to control the destiny of humanity. Moreover, the fulfillment of prophecy tells us that God's plan for humanity is right on schedule.

Source: <http://www.bibleresearch.org/articles/a11pws.htm>