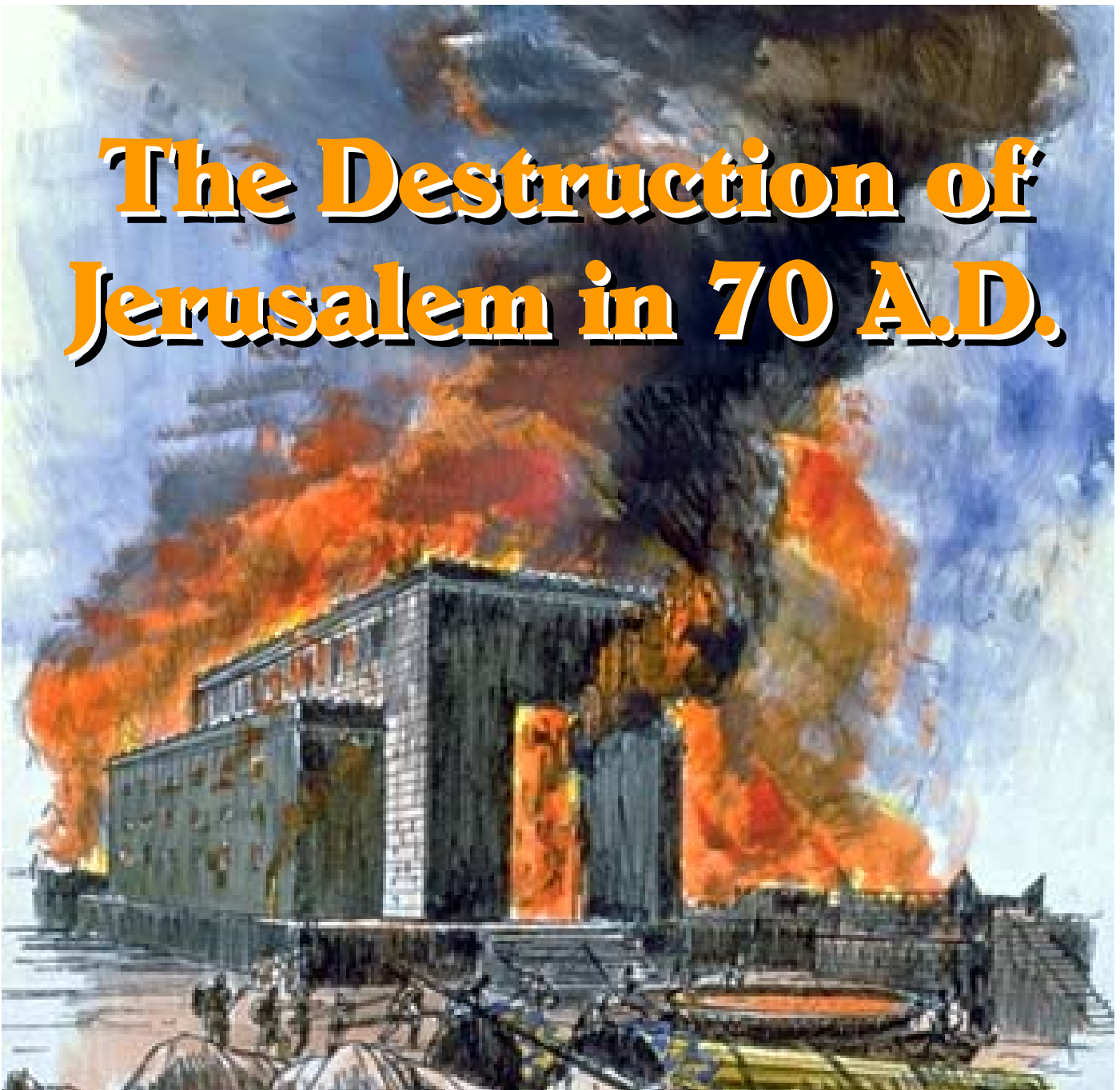


The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.



Just before the end of Jesus' life, he stood upon the Mount of Olives with his disciples and looked down upon the temple and the city of Jerusalem. His disciples remarked about the beauty of what lie before them and pointed it out to Jesus.

We can't imagine what their eyes beheld or why the disciples seemed so enthralled by the spectacle. We can only guess at it as many of us have never been to Jerusalem and the temple they beheld has long since been destroyed.

It was Passover time. The city and the surrounding hills would have been covered with the tents of pilgrims who had come up to Jerusalem for the feast. It was a time

of peace. The temple was the glory and pride of the whole Jewish nation. All were experiencing the joy and celebration of the season, with their beloved capital city teeming with people and bustling with activity in preparation for the Passover.

Jesus looked down on the scene, but instead of the joy and exultation that it inspired in his disciples, he began to cry (Luke 19:41). He saw what they could not see and became overwhelmed with a sudden and mysterious sorrow. Even though he knew well what lie ahead for him, his tears were not for himself. He wept for the doomed thousands of Jerusalem because of their blindness and impenitent attitude when he had only come to bless them.

Jesus looked upon Jerusalem and what he saw was the history of a thousand years of privilege and blessing. The Lord had made Jerusalem his holy habitation where he had dwelt in visible glory above the mercy seat. Jesus knew that had the nation of Israel kept her allegiance to the Creator, Jerusalem would have stood forever, the elect city of God.

But the history of that favored people was a record of backsliding and rebellion. They had resisted the grace God offered them, abused their privileges and slighted their God and their great opportunity.

Jesus' Ministry

For three years the Son of God had been knocking at their gate. For three years he had gone in and out among the people, healing the sick, comforting the sorrowful, raising the dead, speaking words of pardon and of peace. He gathered about himself the weak and weary, the helpless and desponding, and he offered them, without respect of age or character, the invitation of mercy.

Despite their indifference and contempt, he had steadfastly maintained his ministry of love. While he was subjected to privation and reproach, he continued to scatter blessings in his path and to plead with men to accept the gift of life. But Israel had turned away from their protector and friend to pursue their own way. Amid their apostasy, God had always dealt with Israel as a loving father, admonishing, warning and correcting. But the hour of their grace was fast passing.

As Jesus stood and looked down on the city before him, he knew that the long-deferred cup of God's wrath was about to descend on them. He knew that he alone could save them from their doom, but he had been slighted, abused, rejected, and was soon to be crucified. He knew that on the day that he would hang on the stake, Israel's day as a favored nation, protected by God, would come to an end . . . that God would remove his protection and allow his people to enter their punishment.

Jesus wept with great sorrow for his people just as prophets before him had wept over the apostasy of Israel. Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of a world hardened in unbelief and rebellion.

His prophetic vision looked not on the scene spread out at his feet preparing for just one Passover, but his eyes saw the ages and the destruction of this ancient city of patriarchs and prophets. Jesus stood on the very spot

where later Titus and his army would stand. Through tear-blinded eyes, Jesus saw the walls surrounded by alien armies and heard the cries of mothers and children starved for bread in the besieged city. Jesus saw the beloved holy temple go up in flames and where the once stately marble walls reflected the bright light of day all that would remain would be a smoldering ruin.

Christ saw the fruits of a fallen people and he wept in deep sorrow. He saw the fruits of sin in human misery, in tears and in blood. His heart was moved and he yearned to relieve all of the misery to come. He was willing to suffer and die to bring salvation within their reach, but he also knew that few would come to him that they might have life.

The scene reveals to us the power of sin. Even infinite power can't remove the consequences of breaking the law of God. Only repentance and accepting Christ's atoning death can do that.

The great sin of the Jews was their long history of rebellion and the final rejection of the Son of God, their very own promised Messiah. As Jesus looked forward through the ages, he saw the consequences of the world's pathway of following Satan's deception. He saw the great sin of the Christian world in the future would be their rejection of the law of God and the great apostasy that would rule until he came again to put an end to Satan's time on earth.

Jesus' Prophecy

Jesus briefly expressed his vision to the disciples when he said:

"Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the



Jesus and the disciples stood on the Mount of Olives looking down on the temple.

truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another” (Matt. 24:2, NLT).

The disciples were filled with awe and wonder that Christ would predict the destruction of the temple. They sought for more understanding and to know when this would happen. The famous Olivet Discourse followed as Jesus gave them the signs to watch for, which are recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

The future was mercifully veiled from the disciples. If they had truly understood the awful facts of Jesus’ suffering and death and the destruction of their beloved city and temple, they would have been paralyzed with fear. Jesus gave them an outline of what was to transpire, but he presented it in a way that they would not fully understand until it began to unfold.

The prophecy Christ gave was twofold in its meaning. While it foreshadowed the destruction of Jerusalem, it also gave a glimpse into the terrors of the last days just before he would come the second time.

Jesus declared the judgments that were to fall on Israel for their final apostasy. Unmistakable signs would precede the awful climax. He warned that the hour would come suddenly when they were not looking.

Jesus had seen the alien armies surround the city and the terrible outcome of their siege. He told his disciples that when they saw the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel standing in the holy place (Matt. 24:15-16), they were to flee into the mountains. Those who were on the housetop were to not even go down into the house but to flee from roof to roof, over the city walls and to safety in the mountains. Those in the fields were not to take time to retrieve garments they may have laid aside, but to flee without hesitation.

At the time Jesus spoke these words, the disciples could not understand. During the reign of Herod, Jerusalem had been not only beautified, but strengthened as well. It was considered impregnable with its towers, walls and fortresses. How could Jesus be saying that it was to be destroyed? It made little sense to his listeners when he spoke these words, but they faithfully recorded them. Many of them did not even live long enough to see the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. But for those who did, they must have remembered Jesus’ words and the great grief that he had experienced over the city that night.

God’s Mercy

God’s judgment on Israel was not immediate. Even in spite of their rejection of the Son, they were given 40 more years to repent and turn things around. God could have cut Israel off at the moment of Jesus’s death, but his love and long-suffering allowed them time to hear the message that would be spread by the early church. Much

like the 40 years Israel had spent in the wilderness at the beginning of their history as a nation, God allowed another generation to grow up who would hopefully turn back to God.

The parable of the unproductive fig tree represents God’s dealings with the Jewish nation (Luke 13:6-9). When the keeper of the vineyard would have cut the unfruitful tree down, the owner of the vineyard said to give it one more year. During that year he would dig around it and fertilize it—for 40 years the Jewish nation would be witness to and hear the message of the good news from the early church. The parable ends that if the tree was still not fruitful after that time, then it was to be cut down.

At the end of the 40 years, the Jewish nation had not changed. The next generation grew up and followed the

Even infinite power can’t remove the consequences of breaking the law of God.

ways of their parents. While they claimed to observe the laws of God, they transgressed all of the principles underlying the law. They hated Christ because he exposed their iniquity. In their hatred and cruelty toward the disciples of Jesus, they rejected their last offer of mercy.

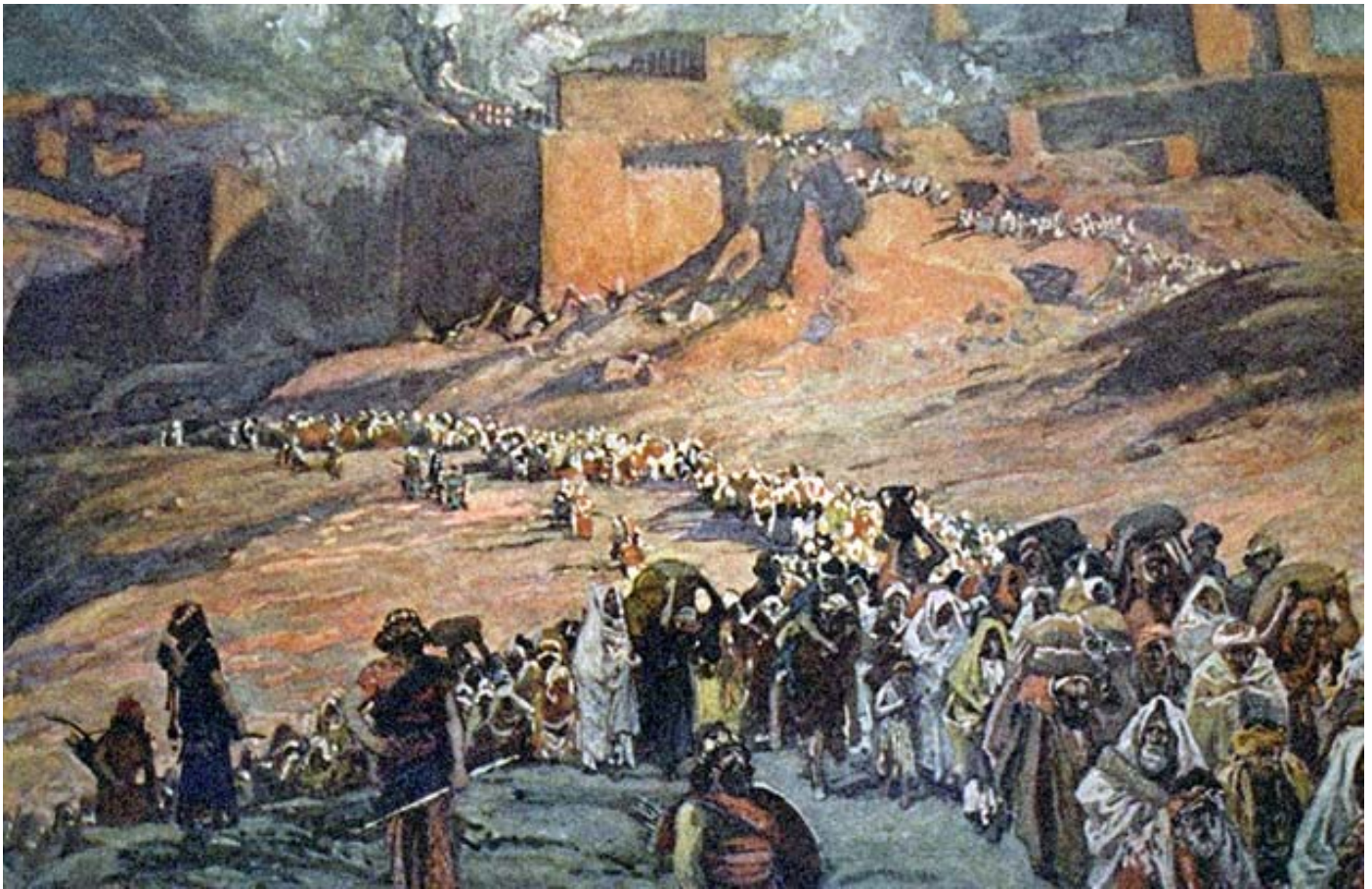
God had no choice left. He withdrew and removed his restraining power from Satan and his angels and left the nation to the control of the leader they had chosen. By their actions they were fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 30:10-11:

“They tell the seers,
‘Stop seeing visions!’
They tell the prophets,
‘Don’t tell us what is right.
Tell us nice things,
Tell us lies.
Forget all this gloom.
Get off your narrow path.
Stop telling us about your
Holy One of Israel.’” (NLT)

In spite of their unspoken message for God to leave them alone, they still considered themselves to be his chosen people and expected the Lord to deliver them from their enemies. In spite of their rejection of God, when the Roman armies besieged the city, every man to the last held fast to the belief that God would deliver them.

The Destruction

All the predictions given by Jesus 40 years earlier



Unlike the earlier destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar when thousands from the nation of Judah were transported to Babylon, the destruction of 70 A.D. killed the larger percentage of the people. Those left were taken as slaves to Rome or were dispersed throughout the nations. A small remnant remained in Jerusalem until 135 A.D. when the Bar Kocha rebellion caused all Jews to be outlawed from Jerusalem until 1948 when Israel became a nation once again.

concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were fulfilled to the letter. All of the signs that Jesus gave them to watch for transpired and yet they went to their destruction because they would not listen.

There were rumors and warnings of the war to come. There were signs in the heavens through a comet that appeared over the city and an unnatural light that hung over the temple. Prophets spoke words of warning, but the arrogance of the Jewish leadership and their refusal to see that they had brought on their own destruction caused the death of many thousands.

Christians who believed the words that Jesus had spoken fled the city and surrounding area, escaping to find refuge in the city of Pella in the land of Perea across the Jordan River.

The calamity that fell upon Jerusalem was terrible. Thousands perished from famine and pestilence. The different factions among the Jews fought against each other. Betrayal and deceit invaded the city. Inhuman tortures were inflicted by those in power to force the stricken people to give up their last scant supplies of food. Natural affection was destroyed as children were seen snatching food from the mouths of their parents and mothers from the mouths of their children.

As the dead bodies began to pile higher and higher,

Titus wanted to put a stop to it all. His desire was to spare the destruction of the city and especially of the temple, but it was not to be. God had withdrawn his protection over the people and allowed Satan to have complete reign. His evil influence over the minds of all involved led to the dissolution and carnage.

The blind obstinacy of the Jewish leaders led to the final attack on the temple. When Titus offered terms of peace, they became more determined to resist. Titus gave instructions that the temple buildings were not to be destroyed, but he was not listened to. A power greater than himself was in command.

Thousands who had sought sanctuary in the temple were slaughtered by the sword. The blood flowed down the temple steps like water. Lighted torches were hurled into the chambers and the sanctuary itself. The lofty and massive structure sent up columns of fire and smoke and the fire spread until the entire summit of the hill blazed like a volcano.

After the destruction of the temple, the whole city soon fell into the hands of the Romans. When it was over Titus gazed in wonder upon the city and declared that God must have given it into his hands, for under normal circumstances nothing could have prevailed against Jerusalem's walls and battlements. It had been built im-

pregnable and had it still been under God's protection, nothing could have prevailed against it. But one greater than Titus had declared that not one stone was to be left upon another.

Consequences

The Jews had reaped what they had sown. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, they had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. What happened with the destruction of Jerusalem is a demonstration of what happens when Satan is allowed to have control.

The cruel power of the evil one is only held in check by the restraining hand of God. Left to his own devices, Satan would have completely destroyed all of mankind centuries ago. He does not want God's plan for mankind to come to fruition and is always ready to bring his destructive power to any who allow him to have complete reign.

We can't know how much we owe to Christ for the protection that we enjoy. But the history of the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah is there to show us what happens when we push it to the point that God's loving kindness is stretched to the limit. God does not punish. He merely withdraws, leaving the rejector of his grace and mercy to reap their own rewards. Left by ourselves, without God's loving protection, we have no power to control the evil malice and enmity of Satan.

The future

The destruction of Jerusalem is only one example and serves as a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with God's offer of divine grace today. The world is no more ready to heed the warnings today than the Jewish nation was in the days following Christ's death.

Christ's prophecy concerning the visitation of judgments on Jerusalem is to have another fulfillment, of which that terrible scene was but a faint shadow. He also spoke of the time when he would come again.

"And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with the

mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven" (Matt. 24: 30-31, NLT).

Christ did not return in 70 A.D. While his prophecies spoke of what was to happen to the Jewish nation, his words were also a warning for the end times, when the same conditions, signs, and events will repeat themselves—when once again God's forbearance will be stretched to the breaking point.

Today we need to beware lest we neglect the lesson shown us. Christ has declared that he will come a second time to gather his faithful to himself and to take vengeance on those who reject God's mercy. As he gave his disciples signs of the approaching ruin of Jerusalem, so he warns people of today with signs of the final destruction. He spelled out what to watch for so that we too could flee and escape the wrath to come. Those who pay attention and heed the signs will be spared. Those who do not will be caught up in the conflagration.

Come what may, the end will come unawares to the ungodly. When life is going on in its unvarying rounds of men absorbed in pleasure, business, and money-making—when religious leaders are teaching peace and security and the people are all lulled in a false security—destruction will fall.

Jesus wept over the vision he saw 2,000 years ago and he grieved deeply for the people who would not hear. He spoke of what he saw from lips that do not lie. Everything he declared for Jerusalem came to pass. Do you think we can escape today? If God did not spare the nation that he had formed and guarded for a thousand years, the very people that he had chosen as his own, do you think he will spare an ungodly world today?

It's time to wake up. It's time to repent and turn to the only source of protection. Those who watch and pay attention will reap the rewards of their faithfulness. The ungodly will be met with destruction and none will escape.

*** (Above article loosely based on the work of nineteenth century writers E.G. White, et. al., and the writings of Josephus, first century historian. White borrowed heavily from contemporary writers of her day, but failed to give them proper credit. She was later charged with plagiarism. This fact, however, takes nothing away from the message of her, and her sources', words.)* ○