



THE LAST DAYS

16

RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

'Eschatology' is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological 'system' scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular "Left Behind" system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM



BY **FREDERIC W. FARRAR**
(c.1831-1903) ; D.D., F.R.S.

Head master of Marlborough College, Canon of Westminster,
Archdeacon of Westminster, Chaplain to the House of Commons,
Dean of Canterbury.

VOLUME II, CHAPTER VII
From The Early Days of Christianity 1882 - London

"The Lord, whose fire is in Zion,
and His furnace in Jerusalem" (Isa. xxxi. 9).

"What was the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple, seeing that the age was distinguished for the study of the laws? ... It was groundless hatred" (Yoma, f. 9, b).

There is no need to dwell upon the last days of Jerusalem. Very little can be added to the horrible story beyond what is to be read by every one in the pages of Josephus.

It is true that Josephus has effectually blackened his own memory. It would have been well for him if he had only written *Antiquities* and the *Dialogue against Apion*. In his *Jewish War*, and, above all, in his autobiography, he stands confessed as a false, heartless, and designing renegade. The man who, standing in sight of the ruins of Zion and the blackened area on which had stood the Holy of Holies, complacently tells us how Titus gave him other lands in Judæa, because those which he had possessed near Jerusalem had become useless; the man who gloatingly recounts the honours heaped upon him by the conquerors who flung thousands of his brave countrymen to the wild beasts, and sold tens of thousands more into brutal misery; the man who, in the sumptuous palace which he owed to his conqueror, could detail without a sob the extermination of his people; the man who could gaze with complacent infamy on the triumph which told of the destruction of his nation's liberty, and could look on while the hallowed vessels of the Sanctuary were held aloft before a Pagan populace by bloodstained hands; the man who in youth haunted the boudoir of Poppæa, and in old age hung about the antechambers of Domitian; the man who pursued with the posthumous hatred of successful treachery the brave though misguided patriots who had held it a glory to die for Jerusalem—must stand forth till the end of time in the immortal infamy which his own writings have heaped upon himself. We cannot be surprised that all the patriots of his nation hated him, and tried to disturb his base prosperity and “guilted servitude.” No one trusts the word of Josephus where he has the least interest in palming off upon us a deception. But he has no particular reason to misrepresent the general facts of the awful and heroic struggle in which for a few months he bore a part. And since the writings of Justus of Tiberias, and Antonius Primus have perished, as well as the later part of the *History of Tacitus*, Josephus becomes our sole guide. The Talmud has almost nothing to tell us. In it we look in vain for the names of John, or Simon, or Eleazar. We only see a dim glimpse of flames and assassination, and ruin, mixed up with curious legends and tales of individual agony.

In April, A.D.70, Titus, with a force of 80,000 legionaries and auxiliaries, pitched his camp on Scopus, to the

north of the city. Besides the 2,400 trained Jewish warriors who defended the walls, the city was thronged with an incredible number of Passover pilgrims, and of fugitives from other parts of Judæa. Feats of heroic valour were performed on both sides, and the skill of the besiegers was often checked by the almost insane fury of the besieged. Fanatically relying on the visible manifestation of Jehovah, while they were infamously violating all His laws, the Zealots rejected with insult every offer of terms. At last Titus drew a line of circumvallation around the doomed city, and began to crucify all the deserters who fled to him. The incidents of the famine which then fell on the besieged are among the most horrible in human literature. The corpses bred a pestilence. Whole houses were filled with unburied families of the dead. Mothers slew and devoured their own children. Hunger, rage, despair, and madness seized the city. It became a cage of furious madmen, a city of howling wild beasts, and of cannibals—a hell!

For the first time for five centuries, on July 17, A.D.70, the daily sacrifices of the Temple ceased for want of priests to offer them. Disease and slaughter ruthlessly accomplished their work. At last, amid shrieks and flames, and suicide and massacre, the Temple was taken and reduced to ashes. The great altar of sacrifice was heaped with the slain. The courts of the Temple swam deep in blood. Six thousand miserable women and children sank with a wild cry of terror amid the blazing ruins of the cloisters. Romans adored the insignia of their legions on the place where the Holiest had stood. As soon as they became masters of the Upper City they only ceased to slay when they were too weary to slay any longer. According to Josephus, it had been the earnest desire of Titus to preserve the Temple, but his commands were disobeyed by his soldiers in the fury of the struggle. According to Sulpicius Severus, on the other hand, who is probably quoting the very words of Tacitus, Titus formed the deliberate purpose to destroy Christianity and Judaism in one blow, believing that if the Jewish root were torn up the Christian branch would soon perish. The tallest and most beautiful youths were reserved for the conqueror's triumph. Of those above seventeen years of age multitudes were doomed to work in chains in the Egyptian mines. Others were sent as presents to various

towns to be slain by wild beasts or gladiators, or by each other's swords in the provincial amphitheatres. The young of both sexes were sold as slaves. Even during the days on which these arrangements were being made, 11,000 perished for want of food; some because their guards would not give it to them, others because they would not accept it. Josephus reckons the number of captives taken during the war at 97,000, and the number of those who perished during the siege at 1,100,000. The numbers who perished in the whole war are reckoned at the awful total of 1,337,490, and the number of prisoners at 101,700; but even these estimates do not include all the items of many skirmishes and battles, nor do they take into account the multitude who, throughout the whole country, perished of misery, famine, and disease. It may well be said that the nation seemed to have given itself “a rendezvous of extermination.” Two thousand putrefying bodies were found even in the subterranean vaults of the city. During the siege all the trees of the environs had been cut down, and hence the whole appearance of the place, with its charred and bloodstained ruins, was so completely altered, that one who was suddenly brought to it would not (we are told) have recognized where he was. And yet the site had been so apparently impregnable, with its massive and unequalled fortifications, that Titus freely declared that he saw in his victory the hand of God.

From that time all Jews on seeing Jerusalem rend their garments, and exclaim, “Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste.”

It was to this event, the most awful in history—“one of the most awful eras in God's economy of grace, and the most awful revolution in all God's religious dispensations”—that we must apply those prophecies of Christ's coming in which every one of the Apostles and Evangelists describe it as near at hand. To those prophecies our Lord Himself fixed these three most definite limitations—the one, that before that generation passed away all these things would be fulfilled; another that some standing there should not taste death till they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom; the third, that the Apostles should not

have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come. It is strange that these distinct limitations should not be regarded as a decisive proof that the Fall of Jerusalem was, in the fullest sense, the Second Advent of the Son of Man, which was primarily contemplated by the earliest voices of prophecy.

And, indeed, the Fall of Jerusalem and all the events which accompanied and followed it in the Roman world and in the Christian Church, had a significance which it is hardly possible to over estimate. They were the final end of the old Dispensation. They were the full inaugu-

ration of the New Covenant. They were God's own overwhelming judgment on that form of Judaic Christianity which threatened to crush the work of St. Paul, to lay on the Gentiles the yoke of an abrogated Mosaism, to establish itself by threats and anathemas as the only orthodoxy. Many of the early Christians—and those especially who lived at Jerusalem—were at the same time rigid Jews. So long as they continued to walk in the ordinances of their fathers as a national and customary duty, such observances were harmless; but it is the inevitable tendency of this external rig-

orism to usurp in many minds the place of true religion. No event less awful than the desolation of Judæa, the destruction of Judaism, the annihilation of all possibility of observing the precepts of Moses, could have opened the eyes of the Judaisers from their dream of imagined infallibility. Nothing but God's own unmistakable interposition—nothing but the manifest coming of Christ—could have persuaded Jewish Christians that the Law of the Wilderness was annulled; that the idolised minutiae of Levitism could no longer claim to be divinely obligatory.

There will be no future “End Times”, Rapture, Great Tribulation or Antichrist

BY BRIAN GODAWA

Why the Destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 is so Important

If you've been taught like 90% of the rest of us, you'll probably react scandalously to [the Preterist interpretation] at first. I know I did. We've been taught only one view over the years as if it were the only Biblical view of the End Times and so we tend to think it is orthodoxy, when in fact it is modern western revisionism at its worst: Reinterpreting ancient documents through contemporary thought patterns.

[In Matthew 24] Jesus describes the “end of the age” or the end of the old covenant and the ushering in of a “new age” or new covenant (Not “New Age” as in One World Globalism). This “End of the Age” is a Hebrew reference to this termination of the old covenant, not to the end of the universe and the Second Coming of Christ (these are in other passages). The destruction of the Jewish Temple that occurred in AD 70 by Titus and his Roman armies is God's final act to mark this transition from Old to New Covenant. Between Christ's resurrection and AD 70, Christianity was still considered a Jewish sect, and many of the Christians were still going to Temple and intermingling with their Jewish brethren, trying to bring the gospel first to the lost sheep of Israel before the

Apostles began spreading it to the Gentiles. There was a “fading glory” of the “old ministry” and an increasing glory of the new (2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 8:13). A hybrid mixture of believing Christian and unbelieving Jew that God was ready to separate for good, a transference from the national to the international people of God. This “process” of change of the covenants was the 40 year period between the ascension of Christ and the destruction of the Temple, God's final separation—all this within the generation of those who knew Jesus and the Apostles.

The Temple was the Old Covenant physical reference of God's presence on earth amidst his people. It was the very reference point of Judaism because it was the focus of priestly sacrifice for sins. But it was only a shadow of the true temple or tabernacle of God, not made by hands, which is in the heavens (Hebrews 9). By destroying the physical Temple, God literally abolished the ability of the Jews to offer sacrifices and therefore finalized his inauguration of the New Covenant and Christ's once for all sacrifice in the true Temple of God replacing the old sacrificial system focused in the old Temple. Now God's Temple is the body of Christ which consists of all believers in Christ worldwide, Jew and Gentile

believer alike (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This is why the Destruction of the Temple is so important in God's covenantal plan for his people. It marks the end of the Old Covenant sacrificial system (which has not ever been re-established), and the new once-for-all sacrifice of Christ that supplants the old. It marks the replacing of the “shadow” Temple with the True Temple, Christ's Body. It marks the final break of Christianity from the apostate Jews who refused to accept Messiah. It marks the final establishment of Christianity as a separate faith from this apostate religion. It marks God's final divorce decree upon unfaithful Israel, and the creation of his new “bride,” his remnant of “true Israel” (Romans 2:28-29) as those who worship Jesus Christ as Messiah.

I used to wonder why I was never taught any of this time period of history in my Christian education. I now know why. Because what happened to me will probably happen to you if you study it thoroughly. I gave up the bizarre 19th/20th century western interpretation of Bible prophecy called Premillennialism, with its Rapture, Great Tribulation and Antichrist, in favor of understanding the Scriptures in their own context, that of a 1st century Middle Eastern Jew with a background in Old Testament imagery.

The Importance of the Destruction of Jerusalem

from "The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation" by Philip Mauro 1921

It is greatly to be regretted that those who, in our day, give themselves to the study and exposition of prophecy, seem not to be aware of the immense significance of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which was accompanied by the extinction of Jewish national existence, and the dispersion of the Jewish people among all the nations. The failure to recognize the significance of that event, and the vast amount of prophecy which it fulfilled, has been the cause of great confusion, for the necessary consequence of missing the past fulfillment of predicted events is to leave on our hands a mass of prophecies for which we must needs contrive fulfilment in the future. The harmful results are two fold; for first, we are thus deprived of the evidential value, and the support to the faith, of those remarkable fulfillments of prophecy which are so clearly presented to us in authentic contemporary histories; and second, our vision of things to come is greatly obscured and confused by the transference to the future of predicted events which, in fact, have already happened, and whereof complete records have been preserved for our information.

Obviously we cannot with profit enter upon the study of unfulfilled prophecy until we have settled our minds as to the predicted things which have already come to pass.

A striking instance of the dislocation of great historic events which happened in accordance with, and in fulfillment of, prophecy, lies before us in the case of that unparalleled affliction which is called in (Matthew 24:21) the "great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world," and which is doubtless the same as that spoken of in (Jeremiah 30:7) as "the time of Jacob's trouble," and in (Daniel 12:1) as "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." From the clear indications given in the three prophecies just mentioned, and from the detailed records that have been preserved for us in trustworthy contemporary history, it should be an easy matter to identify the period thus referred to with the destruc-

tion of Jerusalem by Titus. The Lord's own predictions and warnings concerning that event, which was then close at hand, were most explicit. And not only so, but He plainly said that "all these things shall come upon this generation." Besides all that, He specified the very sins for which that generation was to be thus punished beyond anything known before, or that should be thereafter, thus making it a simple impossibility that the "tribulation" and "vengeance" which He predicted could fall upon any subsequent generation.

Yet, in the face of all this, we have today a widely held scheme of prophetic interpretation, which has for its very cornerstone the idea that, when God's time to remember His promised mercies to Israel shall at last have come, He will gather them into their ancient land again, only to pour upon them calamities and distresses far exceeding even the horrors which attended the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. This is, we are convinced, an error of such magnitude as to derange the whole program of unfulfilled prophecy. Hence our present purpose is to set forth with all possible fullness and care the available proofs, from Scripture and from secular history, whereby it will be clearly established that the "great tribulation" of Matthew 24:21 is now a matter of the distant past.

First then, we direct attention to the fact that, according to the words of Christ, spoken to the leaders of that generation of Jews (Matthew 23:32-39), the punishment, which was then about to fall upon the city and people, was to be of an exhaustive character. His words utterly forbid the idea of another and more severe national calamity reserved for a future day. Nobody (so far as we are aware) questions that the Lord's lament over Jerusalem, recorded in (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34), was wrung from His lips in view of her approaching devastation by the Romans. But if so, then clearly His words to His own disciples, which immediately follow (Matthew 24), and which include the reference to the "great tribulation," refer to the same matter.

But before taking up His discourse to His four disciples, on Mount Olivet, we would call attention to some additional passages of Scripture which tend to show what a tremendous event in the history of God's dealings with the Jews, and in the carrying out of His purposes for the whole world, was the destruction

of Jerusalem by the Romans.

We have referred already to our Lord's lamentation on leaving the city, as recorded by Matthew. From the Gospel by Luke we learn that, upon approaching Jerusalem on that last visit, He was so distressed in His heart at the realization of the awful calamities soon to overtake the beloved city, that He wept over it (Luke 19:41). Although His own Personal sufferings, His shame and agony, were much closer at hand; yet it was not for Himself, but for the city, that His heart was torn with grief, and His eyes flowed with tears. This is the record: "And when He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round (cf. Luke 21:20), and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

Here is a wonderfully vivid, accurate and detailed prediction of what was about to befall the beloved city. But we cite the passage at this time for the special purpose of showing how great a matter, in the Lord's view, was the approaching destruction of Jerusalem great in its historical relation to the Jewish nation, great in the completeness of the overthrow, and great in the unspeakable sufferings that were to attend it.

Once more, when our Lord was being led forth to be crucified, and there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, who bewailed and lamented Him, He turned to them and 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 upon us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a (the) green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:28-31).

Thus we perceive that, even in that hour, the sufferings which were to come upon Jerusalem were more to the Lord Jesus than were His own.