

publishers and destroying them. The idea of a separate and secret coming of Christ is a vagary of prophetic interpretation without any Biblical basis whatsoever."<sup>44</sup>

In all due respect to those who still hold the secret rapture teaching—some dear friends and fellow ministers being among that number—it is our sincere conviction that it should be rejected, first, because it lacks solid scriptural support, and, secondly, because of its comparatively recent origin. Though the secret rapture position still receives a lot of publicity, there are many within the body of Christ who are taking a second look at the rapture question. There is a distinct turning back to the original, apostolic, historical position.

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In part one of this book, we have considered the question of whether the rapture will be *before* or *after* the tribulation. In the section that follows, we will go a step further and look at the tribulation itself. What does the Bible teach about the great tribulation? Will it take place during the last seven years of this age? These questions bring us to a study of Matthew 24.

## Part Two:

# THE GREAT TRIBULATION —Future or Fulfilled?

## Studies in Matthew Twenty-four

It was a shocking statement Jesus made to his disciples. As they left the temple in Jerusalem, certain ones remarked about what a magnificent temple it was and how splendid were its stones. But Jesus said the time would come when one stone would not be left upon another that would not be thrown down! This statement aroused questions from the disciples. As they sat upon the mount of Olives, they asked Jesus *when* these things would happen and *what sign* would be given when these things were about to be fulfilled. In answer to these questions, Jesus spoke about deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, the "abomination of desolation," and great tribulation.

Christians who hold the FUTURIST interpretation apply the verses about deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences to our time—as things leading up to the tribulation period which they believe will be the last seven years of this age (after the rapture). The abomination of desolation is regarded as an idol of the Antichrist (or the Antichrist himself) to be set up in the holy of holies of a rebuilt Jewish temple at Jerusalem. When this happens, according to this position, the Jews will flee into the mountains, for then shall be great tribulation.

The FULFILLED interpretation, on the other hand, holds that the deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences were things which Jesus said would soon happen—things that happened before the destruction of the temple. The abomination of desolation, by comparing the parallel accounts, was Gentile *armies* that surrounded Jerusalem to cause its desolation. Upon heeding the warn-

ing of Jesus, the disciples fled from Jerusalem and Judea. What Jesus called "great tribulation" referred to the judgment that fell upon the Jewish nation, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.

Obviously the two interpretations—the FUTURIST and the FULFILLED—are far apart. Doubtless, there are fine Christians on both sides. But we feel many have accepted the futurist view, only because they have not been fully aware of the historical fulfillment. The prophecy is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. In order to get the *full* picture, the careful student will read all three accounts. Sometimes a detail not fully explained in one, is explained in the other.

The statement Jesus made about the temple being destroyed is recorded in all three accounts (Matthew 24:1,2; Mark 13:1,2; Luke 21:5,6):

Verily I say unto you, *there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

"WHEN shall these things be?" the disciples asked, "and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" In addition to the questions about the destruction of the temple, Matthew (but only Matthew) recorded the question: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" We believe Jesus answered all of these questions. Nevertheless, the *primary* questioning—recorded by all the writers—was about the destruction of the temple: "When shall these things be?"

#### DECEIVERS

First, Jesus warned about deceivers (Matthew 24:4,5; Mark 13:5,6; Luke 21:8):

Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.

All three accounts warn about deceivers, but Luke's account explains *when* these things would happen: "And the time DRAWETH NEAR: go not therefore after them." This was not something that would take place hundreds or thousands of years later! Jesus was warning his disciples about something that was about to happen *in their time!*

Did "many" deceivers deceive "many" people in those days? Yes! According to the historian Josephus, twelve years after our Savior's death, a certain impostor named Theudas persuaded a multitude to follow him to the river Jordan which he claimed would divide for their passage. At the time of Felix (who is mentioned in the book of Acts), the country of the Jews was filled with impostors who Felix had put to death *every day*—a statement which indicates there were many of them! An Egyptian who "pretended to be a prophet" gathered 30,000 men, claiming he would show "how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down."

Another deceiver was Simon, the sorcerer, who led people to believe he was the great power of God (see Acts 8). According to Irenaeus, he claimed to be the Son of God and creator of angels. Justin tells how he went to Rome and was acclaimed as a god by his magical powers.

Origen mentions a certain wonder-worker, Dositheus, who claimed he was the Christ foretold by Moses. Another deceiver in those days was Barchochebas who claimed to vomit flames. Bar-jesus, mentioned in Acts 13:6, was a sorcerer and false prophet. These are examples of the deceivers of whom history says there were "a great number," and of whom Jesus had prophesied there would be "many."

#### WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

Next, Jesus said (24:6,7; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9,10):

And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but *the end is not yet*. For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

When Jesus gave this prophecy, it seems the Roman Empire was experiencing a general peace within its borders. But Jesus said they would be hearing of wars and commotions. And they did! Within a short time the Empire was filled with strife, insurrection, and wars.

Before the fall of Jerusalem, four emperors came to violent deaths within the space of 18 months. According to the historian Suetonius, Nero "drove a dagger into his

throat." Galba was run down by horsemen. A soldier cut off his head and "thrusting his thumb into the mouth," carried the horrid trophy about. Otho "stabbed himself" in the breast. Vitellius was killed by slow torture and then "dragged by a hook into the Tiber." Writing of this period, the Roman historian Tacitus used such expressions as: "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues among the Parthians," "the war in Britain," "war in Armenia."

Among the Jews, the times became turbulent. In Se-leucia, 50,000 Jews were killed. There was an uprising against them in Alexandria. In a battle between the Jews and Syrians in Caesarea, 20,000 were killed. During this period, Caligula ordered his statue placed in the temple at Jerusalem. The Jews refused and lived in constant fear that the emperor's armies would be sent into Palestine. The fear was so real that some of them did not even bother to till their fields.

But though there would be wars and commotions, Jesus told the disciples: "See that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the *end* is not yet." Sermons are sometimes preached about deceivers, wars, rumors of wars, and other things mentioned in the opening portion of Matthew 24, as though they were signs of the soon coming of Christ! As a young preacher, not knowing any better, I did the same. But instead of these things being signs of the end, Jesus said: "The end is *not* yet"! Wars and commotions are of a general nature and, as such, could provide no definite sign that the end was at hand.

Something else that should be noticed is this: the word "end" here is not the same Greek word used in the expression "end of the world." (See footnote on page 48). Considering the setting, Barnes is no doubt correct when he says the end here is "the end of the Jewish economy; the destruction of Jerusalem."

#### FAMINES, PESTILENCES, EARTHQUAKES

Next, all three of the gospel writers, record the words of Jesus regarding "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places" (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11).

The Bible tells about famine "throughout all the world...in the days of Claudius Caesar" (Acts 11:28). Judea was especially hard hit. "The disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea" (verse 29), taking up collections of food for the saints there (1 Corinthians 16:1-5; Romans 15:25-28). Historians such as Suetonius mention famine during those years. Tacitus speaks of a "failure in the crops, and a famine consequent thereupon." Eusebius mentions famines during this time in Rome, Judea, and Greece.

Along with famines, Jesus mentioned pestilence; that is, plagues, the spread of disease, epidemics. Famine and pestilence, of course, go hand in hand. Suetonius wrote of pestilence at Rome in the days of Nero which was so severe that "within the space of one autumn there died no less than 30,000 persons." Josephus records that pestilences raged in Babylonia in 40 A.D. Tacitus tells of pestilences in Italy in 66 A.D.

During this period, Jesus said there would also be earthquakes in many places. Tacitus mentions earthquakes at Rome, that "frequent earthquakes occurred, by which many houses were thrown down" and that "twelve populous cities of Asia fell in ruins from an earthquake." Seneca, writing in the year 58 A.D., said: "How often have cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one fatal shock! how many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! how many in Macedonia! how often has Cyprus been wasted by this calamity! how often has Paphos become a ruin! News has often been brought us of the demolition of whole cities at once." He mentions the earthquake at Campania during the reign of Nero. In 60 A.D., Hierapolis, Colosse, and Laodicea were overthrown. Pompeii was greatly damaged by earthquake in 63 A.D. There were earthquakes in Crete, Apamea, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, and Judea.

#### PERSECUTION AGAINST THE DISCIPLES

Jesus warned that for his name's sake, the disciples would be afflicted, hated, imprisoned, beaten, killed, brought before rulers and kings, but they would speak wisdom that their enemies could not gainsay or resist (Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17). That such

persecutions came upon the followers of Christ in those years is well known. They faced "great persecution" (Acts 8:1) and were "imprisoned and beat in every synagogue" (Acts 22:19). When called upon to answer charges, they were given wisdom that their persecutors could not resist (Acts 6:9,10). They were hated and some were put to death (Acts 7:59; 12:2).

Adding to the chaos, Jesus revealed that "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). Peter, who was one of the disciples present when Jesus gave this prophecy, later wrote about "false prophets" that had risen and of "many" that followed their pernicious ways (2 Peter 2). John, who also heard Jesus give this prophecy, recorded the fulfillment: "Many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Paul spoke of "false apostles, deceitful workers" (2 Corinthians 11:13). Hymenaeus and Philetus taught false doctrines and overthrew the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:17,18). By the time Paul wrote to Titus, there were "many...deceivers...who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not" (Titus 1:10,11).

The waters of truth were muddied by betrayals, false prophets, iniquity, and the love of many waxing cold. "But he that shall endure [such things] unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13)—both now and hereafter. We understand "end" here in a *general* sense, for unlike the use of this word in verses 6 and 14, this reference does not have the definite article in the Greek text.

#### GOSPEL TO BE PREACHED TO THE NATIONS

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then [not until then] shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). Unless we take this verse clear out of its setting, "the end" in view here is the end or destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> This was the

<sup>1</sup> When the disciples spoke of "the end of the world" (Matthew 24:3), the word is *sunteleia* (Strong's Concordance, 4930). But in verses 6 and 14, the word translated "end" is *telos* (Strong's Concordance, 5056). Not realizing this, some have taken "end" in verses 6 and 14 to mean the end of the world. But the primary end in these verses, understood in context, would be the destruction of Jerusalem. Later, when Jesus answered the question about the end of the world, he used the term "that day"—when "heaven and earth shall pass away."

question that Jesus was answering in the verses before, and the verses that follow are still speaking about Jerusalem and Judea. Jerusalem would be destroyed, but "first" the gospel would be preached unto all nations (Mark 13:10).

It was a tremendous prophecy. Picture the scene. Here on the mount of Olives, Jesus spoke these words to insignificant men. Who would have supposed that their names would become known around the world and that even in our day—almost 2,000 years later—the seeds of truth they planted would still be producing fruit? Who would have supposed their message would ever spread beyond that immediate area?

Such a vast preaching program unto all nations seemed almost impossible of fulfillment. But it was fulfilled, and in a very real sense the gospel did go to all nations before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.!

It began on the day of Pentecost. There were present in Jerusalem "devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) who heard the gospel preached by Peter. Three thousand were converted and many of these, no doubt, returned to their various countries and shared the gospel. Later when persecution came against the church at Jerusalem, believers were scattered and "went every where preaching the word," throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1,4). Philip took the message to the city of Samaria with great results and was later directed to a high-ranking government official from Ethiopia who was gloriously converted. It is believed this man took the message to the continent of Africa and many others were converted because of his influential testimony.

Peter took the message to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, an event that was a turning point in the missionary activities of the church (Acts 10, 11). Missionary work advanced rapidly. The message spread to Rome. By the time of Nero, the Christians had grown so numerous that they aroused the jealousy of the government. The story of the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D.—for which the Christians were falsely blamed—is well known. In writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul opens his epistle by saying, "Your faith is spoken of throughout

the *whole world*" (Romans 1:8). His closing words of this epistle speak of the gospel as having been "made known to all nations" (Romans 16:26).

Apparently this included even far away England. Newton says: "There is absolute certainty that Christianity was planted in this country in the days of the apostles, before the destruction of Jerusalem." Eusebius and also Theodoret inform us that the apostles preached the gospel in all the world and some of them "passed beyond the ocean to the Britannic isles." By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he could say: "The gospel...is come unto you, as it is in *all the world*...the gospel which you have heard, and which was preached to *every creature* which is under heaven" (Colossians 1:6, 23). By 70 A.D., the gospel had gone forth to the world for a witness. No longer was God's message to man confined to one nation or race!

#### THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

When Jesus spoke of the temple being destroyed, the disciples asked: "WHEN shall these things be? and WHAT SIGN will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Luke 21:7). As we have seen, Jesus mentioned things of a general nature that would happen first. Now he gives a *specific* sign. When they would see "the abomination of desolation," they would know the destruction of the city was "nigh." Upon seeing this, they were to flee quickly into the mountains.

Matthew: "When you therefore shall see the *abomination of desolation*, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them that be in Judea flee into the mountains" (Matthew 24:15,16).

Mark: "When you shall see the *abomination of desolation*, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains" (Mark 13:14).

Luke: "When you shall see Jerusalem compassed with *armies*, then know that the *desolation* thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains...Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:20-24).

Notice now, step by step, the information contained in these parallel accounts.

1. Where Matthew and Mark record: "When you shall see the abomination of DESOLATION...then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains," Luke says: "When you see *Jerusalem* compassed with armies, then know that the DESOLATION thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." What was to become a desolation, then, was Jerusalem.

We notice also that this "desolation" was that "which was spoken by Daniel the prophet." Turning to Daniel 9, we find the passage in which Daniel spoke of this destruction: "And the people of the prince that shall come shall *destroy* the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26). A comparison of the parallel accounts, the reference to Daniel's prophecy, and the fact that Jesus was answering questions about the destruction of Jerusalem—all show that what was to become a desolation was Jerusalem.

2. Looking again at the parallel accounts, we see that what Matthew and Mark refer to as the "abomination" that would make Jerusalem desolate, Luke (using plain language) shows this would be accomplished by armies—Gentile armies: "And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed with *armies*, then know that the *desolation* thereof is nigh....Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:20-24).

"Abomination" is a word that refers to anything that is especially loathsome or detestable. Certainly this fits the feelings the Jewish people would have toward idol-worshipping Gentiles, intent on destruction, taking a stand against their city.

3. Matthew's account says the abomination (Gentile army) would "stand in the holy place" and adds the words: "Whoso readeth, let him understand." Mark's account, because it too is given in somewhat veiled language, includes the words: "Let him that readeth understand." But, Luke's account of the same passage is given in plain language: "When you see Jerusalem compassed with armies..." Luke gives the *explanation*; and so, it should be carefully noted, does not include the phrase: "Let him that readeth understand."

By comparing scripture with scripture, we see that the term "holy place" (Matthew 24:15) refers to Jerusalem. This word usage is not inappropriate, for this portion is based on what was spoken by Daniel, and Daniel referred to Jerusalem as the "holy mountain" and "holy city" that was to become "desolate" (Daniel 9:16,24-27). Even after Jesus was rejected there, Jerusalem was still commonly referred to as the holy city (Matthew 27:53).

The word translated "place" in the expression "holy place" in Matthew's account is *topos* (Strong's Concordance, number 5117). It means simply a locality—words such as topical and topography are derived from it. It is used in such scriptural expressions as "a desert place," "dry places," etc. It is *not* the same term as used to describe the holy of holies of the temple.

What is called the holy place is explained by Luke as the area that would be occupied by armies surrounding Jerusalem. The *Matthew Henry Commentary* has well put it: "Jerusalem was the holy city, Canaan the holy land, the Mt. Moriah, which lay about Jerusalem, for its nearness to the temple was, they thought, in a particular manner holy ground; on the country lying round about Jerusalem the Roman army was encamped, that was the abomination that made desolate."<sup>1</sup>

These Gentile armies were to "compass" the city (Luke); they would take a "stand" there (Matthew). The word *stand* indicates rebellion or hostility, as the following examples show: "A king of fierce countenance...shall *stand up*" (Daniel 8:23,25). "A mighty king shall *stand up*, that shall rule with great dominion" (11:3). Another will "*stand up* in his estate, and shall come with an army" (verse 7). "Then shall *stand up*...a raiser of taxes...and in his estate shall *stand up* a vile person" (verses 20,21). A king "shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not *stand*" (verse 25). This wording from the book of Daniel is weighty since Matthew 24:15 is clearly rooted in that which was "spoken by Daniel the prophet."

According to Jesus, Jerusalem was marked for destruction. But a few days after Jesus mentioned these things, he commissioned his disciples to wait in *this very city*—to be endued with power from on high. They were to

be witnesses unto him throughout the world, including Jerusalem, where their work would begin (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49). But if the city was to be destroyed, what about those disciples who would be there for a witness? Were they to perish with the others—with those who rejected Christ and cried, "Crucify him, crucify him"? Or would there be a way of escape? According to the scriptures, their witness in that city was to continue up to a certain point—only until they saw a certain sign—and then they were to flee!

As is well known, the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Roman armies in 70 A.D. But before this happened, in obedience to the warning Jesus had given, *every Christian fled* and thus escaped that disaster. The account of what happened is truly amazing!

In 65 A.D., Florus, the worse of Caesar's procurators, assumed control of Judea and aggravated the Jews to the point of rebellion—a rebellion too great for him to handle. Consequently, another man, Cestius Gallus, took over. Marching his armies into Palestine, he subdued a number of towns and advanced toward Jerusalem. After camping for three days near the city, he began the assault.<sup>2</sup>

Seeing Jerusalem compassed with armies, the disciples now knew its desolation was near—according to the words of Christ. This was their sign to flee! But *how* could they flee when the city was surrounded? This had not been explained in the prophecy. But notice what happened.

#### A WAY OF ESCAPE

When Cestius would have almost taken the city, suddenly, as Josephus says, "without any reason in the world," he withdrew his troops and departed! The Jews, who were about to open the gates in surrender, were now filled with courage as they pursued the retreating army, inflicting on it a major disaster.<sup>3</sup> With this retreat, there was a brief interval before the armies would return with reinforcements and destroy the city. In this interval, there was time for those who believed in Christ to flee. What happened is well summed up in the words of Thomas Newton:

We learn from ecclesiastical histories, that at this juncture *all* who believed in Christ departed Jerusalem, and removed to Pella and other places beyond the river Jordan; so that they all marvelously escaped the general shipwreck of their countrymen; and we do not read anywhere that so much as one of them perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

Adam Clarke wrote: "It is very remarkable that not a single Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem though there were many there when Cestius Gallus invested the city."<sup>5</sup> Truly it was a marvelous escape! What confirmation of our Lord's words! What an amazing fulfillment of prophecy!

After Cestius Gallus had retreated with his troops, Nero ordered Vespasian to take over. He, in turn, ordered his son, Titus, to go to Alexandria and bring the fifth and tenth legions from Egypt to subdue Judea. But a crisis in Rome caused Vespasian to return there (where he was hailed as the new Emperor in 70 A.D.). Meanwhile the job of capturing Jerusalem was left in the hands of Titus who brought about its destruction.<sup>6</sup>

In the place where Matthew and Mark use the somewhat veiled expression "abomination of desolation," Luke (using plain language) shows this would be Gentile armies compassing Jerusalem to bring it to desolation. This interpretation is solidly built on the Bible. With it, the gospel accounts are complimentary, not contradictory. It is confirmed by history. It glorifies Christ, for it plainly demonstrates how his words were fulfilled and his warning heeded—thus providing a great deliverance and blessing for the Christians of that time!

#### THE FUTURIST INTERPRETATION

Having set forth what we believe to be the exact and only fulfillment of our Lord's words, we will consider the now-popular FUTURIST interpretation—that the "abomination of desolation" will be an idol placed in the holy of holies of a rebuilt Jewish temple. As one book expresses it: "The Jews—who will have...restored Herod's Temple, and be in league with Antichrist—will have a visit by the False Prophet who shall bring an image of the Antichrist into Jerusalem and wheel it into the temple....When this image

of the Antichrist is taken into the Jewish temple, that will be the sign Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24, the Abomination of Desolation."<sup>7</sup> Another says: "This image will be placed in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and is the 'abomination of desolation' to which the Lord made reference in his Olivet discourse"<sup>8</sup>—"an idol placed in the holy of holies of the temple during the reign of Antichrist."<sup>9</sup>

Though there are fine men of God who believe this way—and we do not want to treat lightly their ministries—we will point out what we feel are serious objections to this view.

1. The setting up of an idol in the holy of holies is something the enemy could not do until such a time as the temple would be in the enemies' possession. Since the magnificent temple would be the last thing yielded to an enemy in battle, by this time the city would have *already* been captured. It would probably be too late for Christians to flee then! An effective sign to warn Christians to flee would need to come *before* the capture of the city, not afterward!

2. The prophecy indicates that the "abomination" would destroy Jerusalem and the temple—would make desolate. This is exactly what the Roman armies did. But with the teaching that the "abomination" will be an idol set up in the temple, there is contradiction. How could the abomination be an idol set up in the temple, when the temple was to be destroyed *by* the abomination? Idols are abominable, of course, but they are not desolators!

3. The "abomination" that would make desolate was to be something that could be seen by the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem. "When you see the abomination"; that is, "when you see Jerusalem compassed with armies," then, "let them that are in Judea flee into the mountains." It is evident that Jesus was not talking about an idol in the holy of holies, for such could not be seen by the population of Jerusalem and Judea. Only the high priest entered the holy of holies. None of the ordinary Jews would dare enter there.

The futurist interpretation regarding the abomination of desolation requires a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Some, in fact, even offer this as proof that the temple *will* be re-

built. The reasoning goes something like this: Since the "abomination of desolation" will involve the inner sanctum of the temple, "it is certain that the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it."<sup>10</sup> We see no demand for such, for what temple was the subject of Matthew 24 and the parallel accounts? Was Jesus talking about *that* temple of his day or a *rebuilt* temple 2,000 years later?

It is evident Jesus spoke of the temple of his day; he talked about the stones which it contained, had the disciples look at it, and answered questions about it! Are we to assume that he was not actually speaking of that temple at all, but of a rebuilt temple—a different temple, a temple made of different stones, a temple to be built 2,000 years later? We believe the answer is evident.

Whether the Jewish people will build another temple in Jerusalem is not the issue. The point is that Jesus was speaking of the temple of his day and it was that temple which was to be destroyed by heathen armies—a prophecy which was fulfilled in 70 A.D.

The disciples asked when the temple would be destroyed and what sign would be given in warning. "And Jesus answered..."—he told them *when*, he gave them a *sign*—as we have seen. But those who think the prophecy of Matthew 24 refers to a *future* temple are at a complete loss to show one verse in this chapter where Jesus ever answered these questions!

The teaching that the abomination of desolation is something yet future, not only requires a future and different temple, but such a temple—instead of being destroyed—is pictured as a place where the Antichrist will set up an idol for worship. If so, this would be a *preserved* temple—a shrine of false religion—not a *destroyed* temple. The prophecy of Matthew 24 and the parallel accounts never mention a future temple.

#### FLEE TO THE MOUNTAINS

There was an urgency in the message of Jesus about fleeing: "Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains; let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of the house; neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And

woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day" (Matthew 24:16-20). The parallel accounts say the same.

Those who would heed the warning of Jesus were to flee without delay. They were not to try to take their possessions with them. Such actions might have been questioned and their escape hindered. They were told to pray their flight would not be in winter lest the elements delay and hinder; neither on the sabbath. Making their escape on the sabbath, could have easily brought them into suspicion by those who held that only a short distance (at a slow pace) could be traveled on that day. Naturally, there would also be problems for those with small children.

The area from which they were to flee was Judea and especially Jerusalem. They were to flee into the mountains. The setting is definitely Palestine, and the time—as indicated by the prophecy itself, as well as the historical fulfillment—was back in the *first century!*

But popular prophecy books like *The Late Great Planet Earth*, make statements like: "The residents of Israel who believe in Jesus will flee to the mountains and canyons of Petra for divine protection,"<sup>11</sup>—as though what Jesus mentioned is still in the future! And why to *Petra*? The Bible does not say this. William Blackstone, in 1935, even sent workers to Petra where they placed Hebrew Bibles (encased in copper boxes) in some of the caves in that area. He believed the Jews would flee there during the tribulation period and read his Bibles!

Futurism commonly takes verses that were fulfilled long ago, and applies them to some current event. I recall a sensational sermon title of the 1950s: "The A-BOMBINATION of Desolation," supposedly linking the words of Jesus with the desolation caused by atomic bombs!

A booklet in my possession says that Matthew 24 refers to "atomic warfare," that safety will only be found in the mountains for those in Judea, and that when they flee to the mountains, they should not take their clothing because it will be "dangerously radio active." The "woe" to those with child and that give suck, is taken to mean



atomic explosions will make mothers' milk "harmfully radio active." The verse that says, "Pray that your flight be not in winter, neither on the sabbath day," is interpreted to mean that weekends, especially in winter, will be times of the greatest danger. It is pointed out that Hitler chose weekends for his big surprises and that the Japanese did so at Pearl Harbor. Finally, the writer says: "If a surprise attack comes, therefore, it is most likely to be on a weekend. It would be good insurance to be particularly well prepared at such times, especially in winter!"<sup>12</sup>

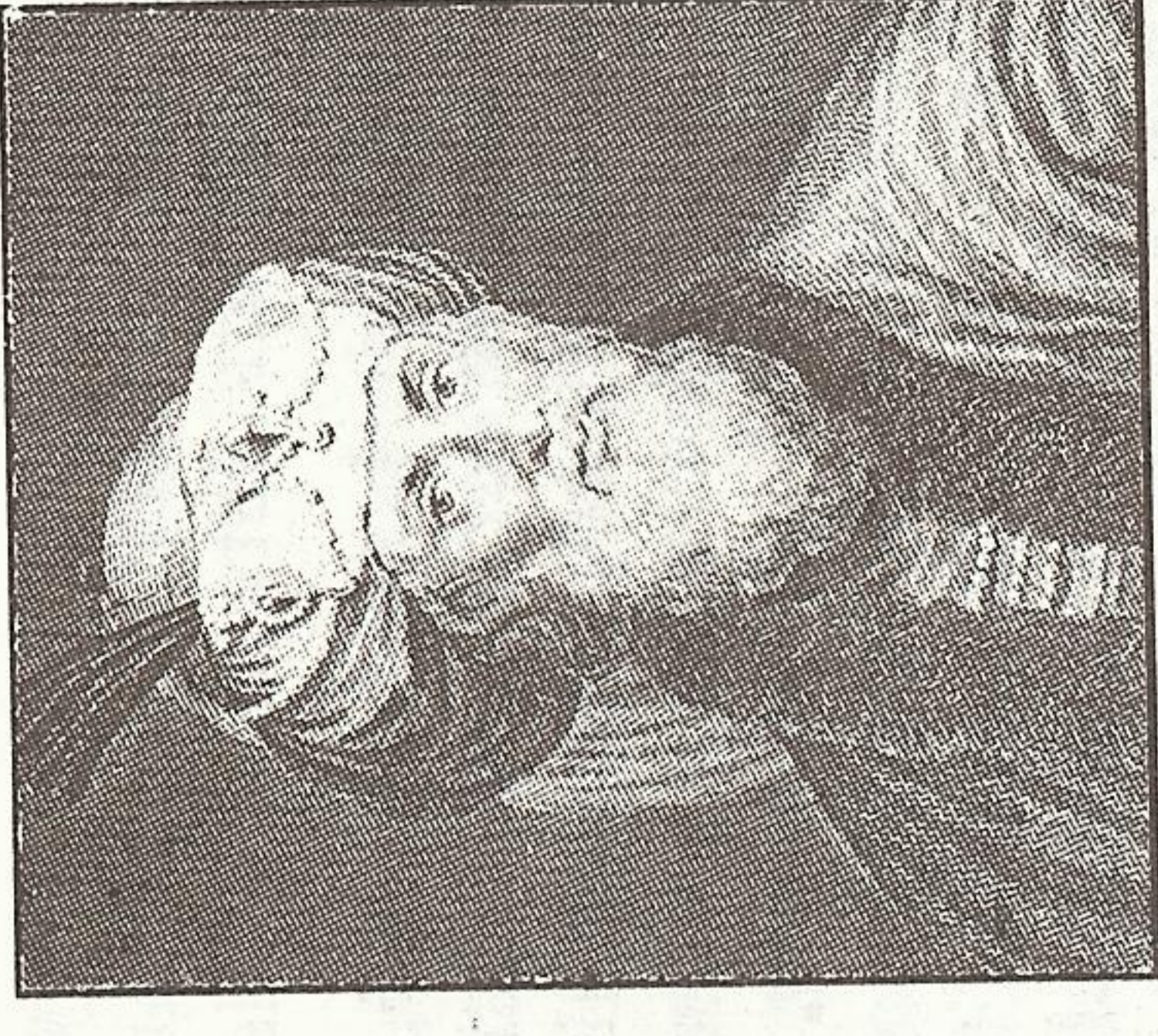
In all due respect to fine men who have taught such things, we must say that only by taking this passage out of its context and by minimizing (or ignoring) the historical fulfillment, can these words be thus applied. Why were the disciples given a sign to flee into the mountains prior to 70 A.D.? The passage goes on to explain.

#### THEN SHALL BE GREAT TRIBULATION

For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matt. 24:21,22; Mk. 13:19,20).

Luke's account says: "For these be the days of *vengeance*, that all things which are written may be fulfilled...for there shall be *great distress* in the land [Judea], and *wrath* upon this people [the Jews]. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of Gentiles..." (Luke 21:22-24).

Unless we completely ignore the setting, it is evident that the tribulation mentioned here is that which was to come upon the people of Jerusalem and Judea—tribulation that would result in the destruction of their city and temple. General things such as wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes would occur, none of which would be the specific sign of the impending desolation. But when they would see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then they would know the desolation was near. This would be the sign to flee into the mountains. "For then shall be *great tribulation*."



JOSEPHUS

Josephus, the Jewish historian, was an eye-witness to the unparalleled tribulation that ended in the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. His detailed and scholarly account, *Wars of the Jews*, was published about 75 A.D., while the events of which he wrote were still fresh in the memory of thousands. His history provides a marvellous confirmation of the prophecy Jesus gave, even to fine details. Since he was not a Christian, no one can accuse him of slanting his material to match the prophecy. The references we will give in the account that follows are from Josephus.

The trouble in Jerusalem began over differences between the Jews and the Romans. There were also differences between Jews—some favored a revolt against Roman rule, others hoped for a peaceful agreement. Those who favored revolt became very violent and began to kill those who disagreed with them. Troops were sent in to control the mob. War was on! Not only at Jerusalem, but throughout the land there was unrest.

"Every city was divided into two armies," Josephus says, "and the preservation of the one part was in the destruction of the other; so the daytime was spent in shedding blood, and the night in fear—which was of the two the more terrible....It was then common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied; those of old men mixed with infants, all dead and scattered about together; women also lay amongst them, without any covering for their nakedness: You might then see the whole province full of *inexpressible calamities* while the dread of still more barbarous practices which were threatened, was everywhere greater than what had been already perpetrated."<sup>13</sup>

The Jews in Alexandria that revolted against the Romans "were destroyed *unmercifully*"; and this, their destruction, was complete...houses were first plundered of what was in them, and then set on fire by the Romans; wherein no mercy was shown to the infants, and no regard

had to the aged; but they went on in the slaughter of persons of every age, till all the place was overflowed with blood, and fifty thousands of them lay dead upon heaps."<sup>14</sup>

In one hour, over 20,000 were killed in Caesarea and the battle continued until "all Caesarea was emptied of its Jewish inhabitants....Galilee was all over filled with fire and blood, nor was it exempted from any kind of misery or calamity."<sup>15</sup> Such horror was in the land that one prominent man, in order to save his family from a worse fate, took a sword and killed first his aged father and mother, his wife and children—all submitting to it willingly—and then took his own life.<sup>16</sup>

In Jerusalem, those of the revolting party were known as Zealots. They "fell upon the people [who disagreed with them] as upon a flock of profane animals, and cut their throats." In this way, 12,000 of the more eminent inhabitants perished. "The terror that was upon all the people was so great, that no one had courage enough either to weep openly for the dead man that was related to him, or bury him...those that mourned for others soon underwent the same death with those whom they mourned for."<sup>17</sup>

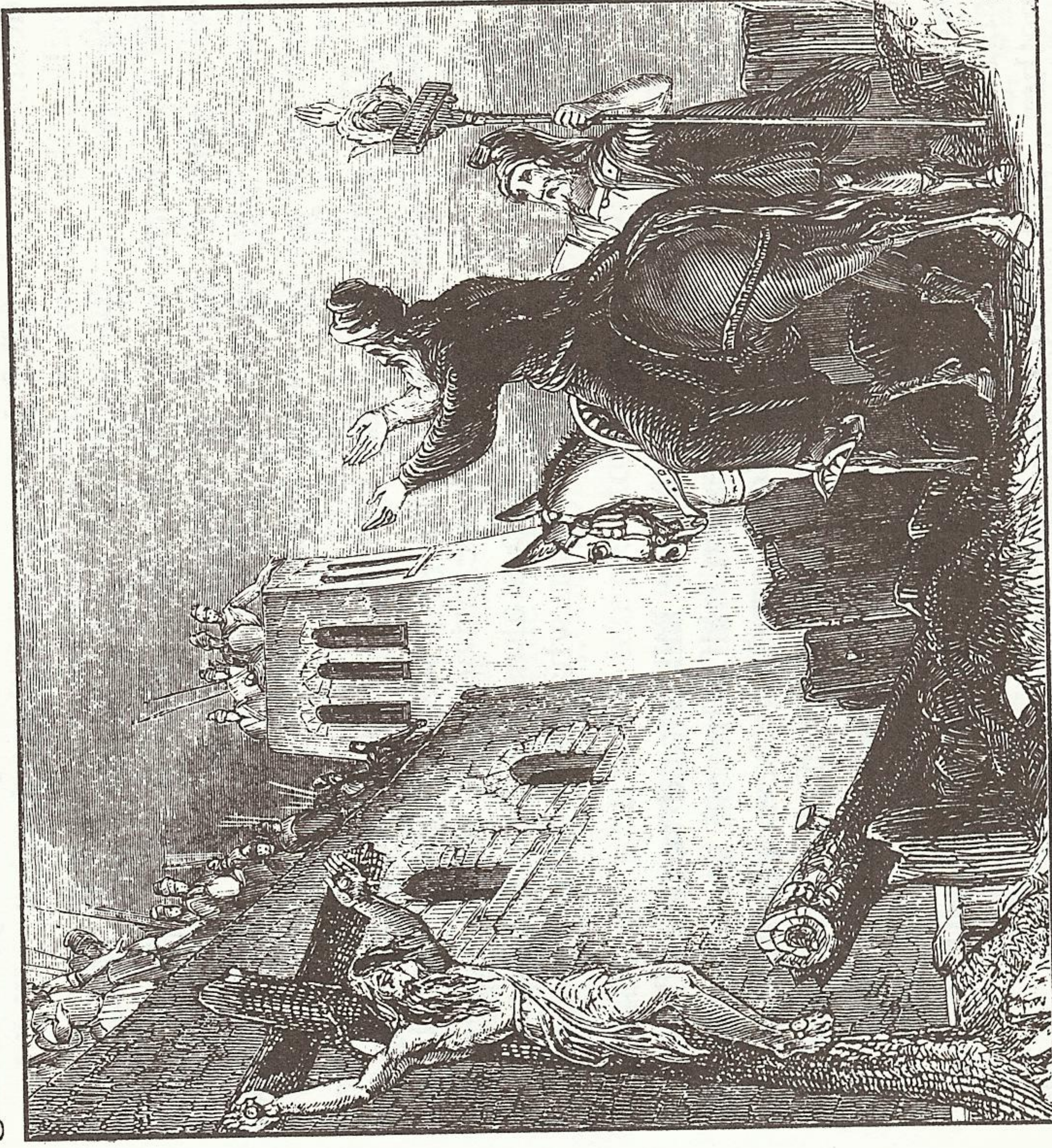
Slaughter continued until "the outer temple was all of it overflowed with blood, and that day they saw 8,500 dead bodies there." Included in this number were "those that a little before had worn the sacred garments and presided over the public worship, which were cast out naked to be the food of dogs and wild beasts." Even those who came with sacrifices were slain, "and sprinkled that altar...with their own blood; till the dead bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves."<sup>18</sup>

"The noise also of those that were fighting was incessant, both by day and by night; but the lamentations of those that mourned exceeded the other...their calamities came perpetually, one upon another....But for the seditions themselves, they fought against each other, while they trod upon the dead bodies as they lay heaped one upon another, and taking up a mad rage from those dead bodies that were under the feet, became the fiercer

thereupon...and when they had resolved upon anything, they executed it without mercy, and omitted no method of torment or of barbarity."<sup>19</sup>

No wonder Jesus said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke 23:28)—knowing that all these things would come upon that generation! Many Jews were killed by Jews, not by the enemy outside the walls. Josephus says the Jews "never suffered from the Romans anything worse than they made each other suffer." Such madness shows the validity of Jesus' words when he likened that generation to a man possessed of demons (Matthew 12:43-45).

Food became scarce within the walls of the city. Many of the Jews, venturing out by night to search for food, were caught, "tormented with all sorts of torture," and then crucified in the sight of those on the walls. About 500 every day were thus killed until the number finally became so great that there was not room enough for the crosses, nor



JOSEPHUS PLEADS WITH THE JEWS TO SURRENDER.

enough crosses for the victims. Often several were nailed to the same torture stake. Imagine the torment of those who would see or hear of their loved ones being thus tortured a short distance from the walls. Many had their hands cut off.<sup>20</sup>

"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 dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; a kind of deadly night, had seized upon the city.... Thus did the miseries of Jerusalem grow worse and worse every day...the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench."<sup>21</sup>

"The number of those that perished by famine in the city was prodigious, and their miseries were unspeakable. For if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently, and the dearest friends fell fighting one another about it.... Children pulled the very morsel that their fathers were eating, out of their very mouths, and what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do to their infants: and when those that were almost dead were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives...."

"The seditious...also invented terrible methods of torment to discover where any food was, and they were these: to stop up the passage of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundaments! and a man was forced to bear what it is terrible even to hear."<sup>22</sup>

One woman of prominence killed and roasted her infant son. When she had eaten half, she hid the other half. When certain seditious Jews smelled the scent of roasted flesh, they threatened to cut her throat if she did not show them where it was. She then uncovered the remaining half of the little body, saying: "Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself! Do not you pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother." But even those hardened men, horrified at the sight, left the house trembling.<sup>23</sup>

Surely these things fulfilled the prophetic warning given years before: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far...which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young.... And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters.... The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward...her young one...and toward her children...for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, where with thine enemy shall distress thee" (Deuteronomy 28:49-57).

Some, attempting to escape from the city, swallowed pieces of gold in order to take them unnoticed. Once this was known, soldiers cut them open searching for gold. "Nor does it seem to me that any misery befell the Jews that was more terrible than this, since in one night about 2,000 of these deserters were thus dissected."<sup>24</sup>

#### BURNING OF THE TEMPLE

Finally the Roman armies broke through the wall and an enraged soldier caught the temple on fire. "While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner.... The flame was also carried a long way and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain...nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise...one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething-hot, as full of fire on every part of it."<sup>25</sup> As the temple burned, the Jews knew all hope for deliverance was gone. The aqueducts and city sewers were crowded as the last place of refuge for the hopeless. When these were searched, two thousand people were found dead there, and those still alive were dragged out and killed.

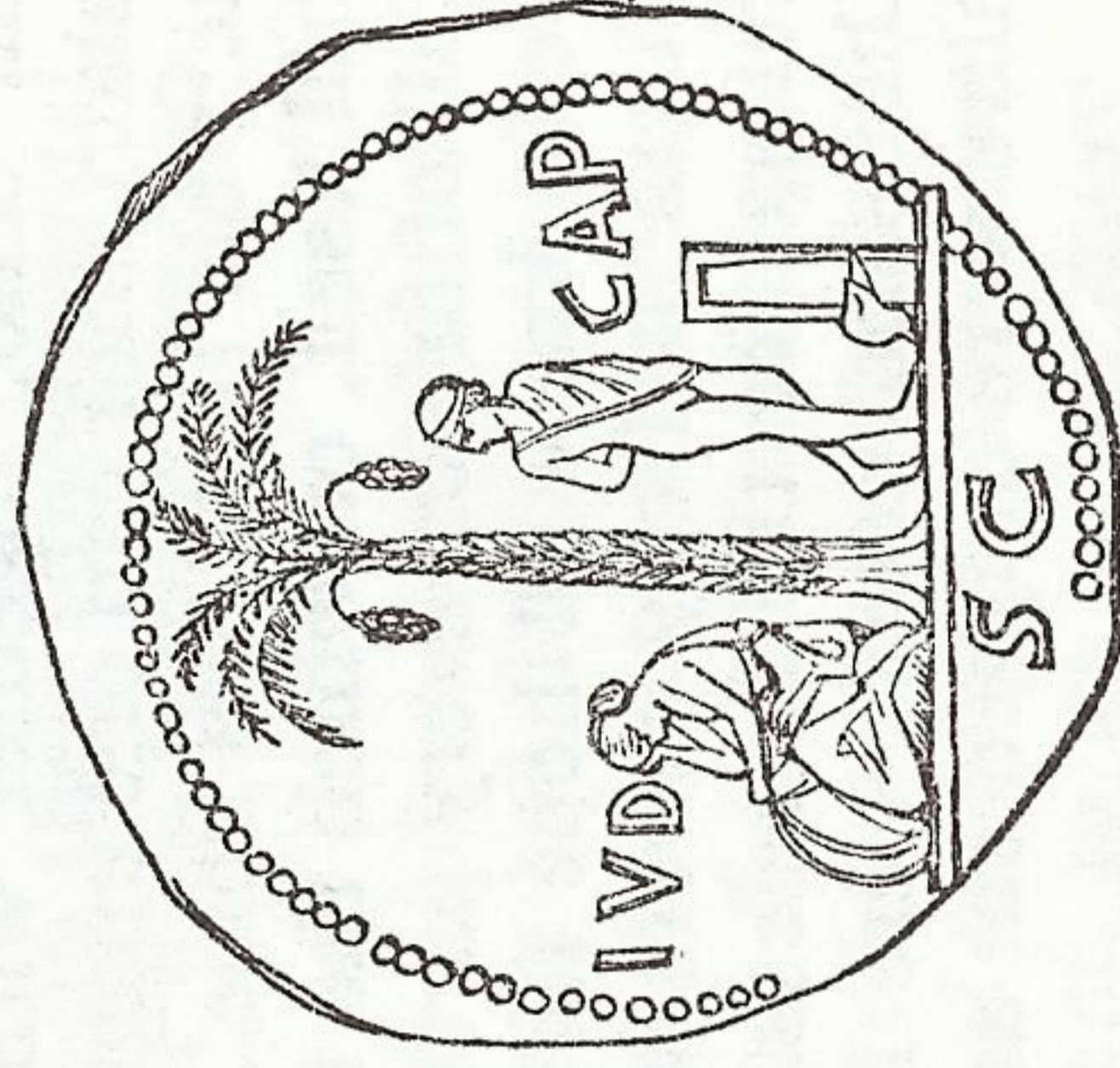
Highly significant is the fact that the very date on which the temple was burned by the armies of Titus, was the same date that Nebuchadnezzar had burned it centuries before! "But, as for that house, God had for certain

long ago doomed it to the fire, and now that fatal day was come, according to the revolution of the ages; it was the tenth day of the month Ab, upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon!"<sup>26</sup>

The scriptures had warned: "And the Lord shall bring you into *Egypt* again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there you shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you" (Deuteronomy 28:68). Josephus tells how those that survived were led away captives, some being taken into *Egypt*! "As for the rest of the multitude that were above 17 years old, he put them into bonds, and sent them to the Egyptian mines...and sold the rest of the multitude with their wives and children, and every one of them at a low price, and that because such were sold were very many, and the buyers few."<sup>27</sup>

The accompanying illustration is of a Roman medal which was struck to commemorate the capture of Jerusalem. The side shown at the top, pictures Titus and gives his titles in abbreviated Latin. The reverse side has letters which mean "Captive Judea." By a palm tree, a Jewish woman is weeping and a man stands with hands tied behind his back.

There were 97,000 that were sold as slaves and 1,100,000 people that perished during the tribulation of those days, "the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation, but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were suddenly shut up by an army....The multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destruction that either men or God ever brought upon the world."<sup>28</sup>



Josephus wrote: "I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly:—that neither did any other city suffer such miseries, or did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world."<sup>29</sup> The calamities which befell the Jews were "the greatest of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities, or nations against nations...it appears to me that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were."

In a footnote, the Christian translator of Josephus' works adds this comment: "That these calamities of the Jews, who were our Savior's murderers, were to be the greatest that had ever been since the beginning of the world, our Savior had directly foretold (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19; Luke 21:23,24) and that they proved to be such accordingly, Josephus is here a most authentic witness."<sup>30</sup>

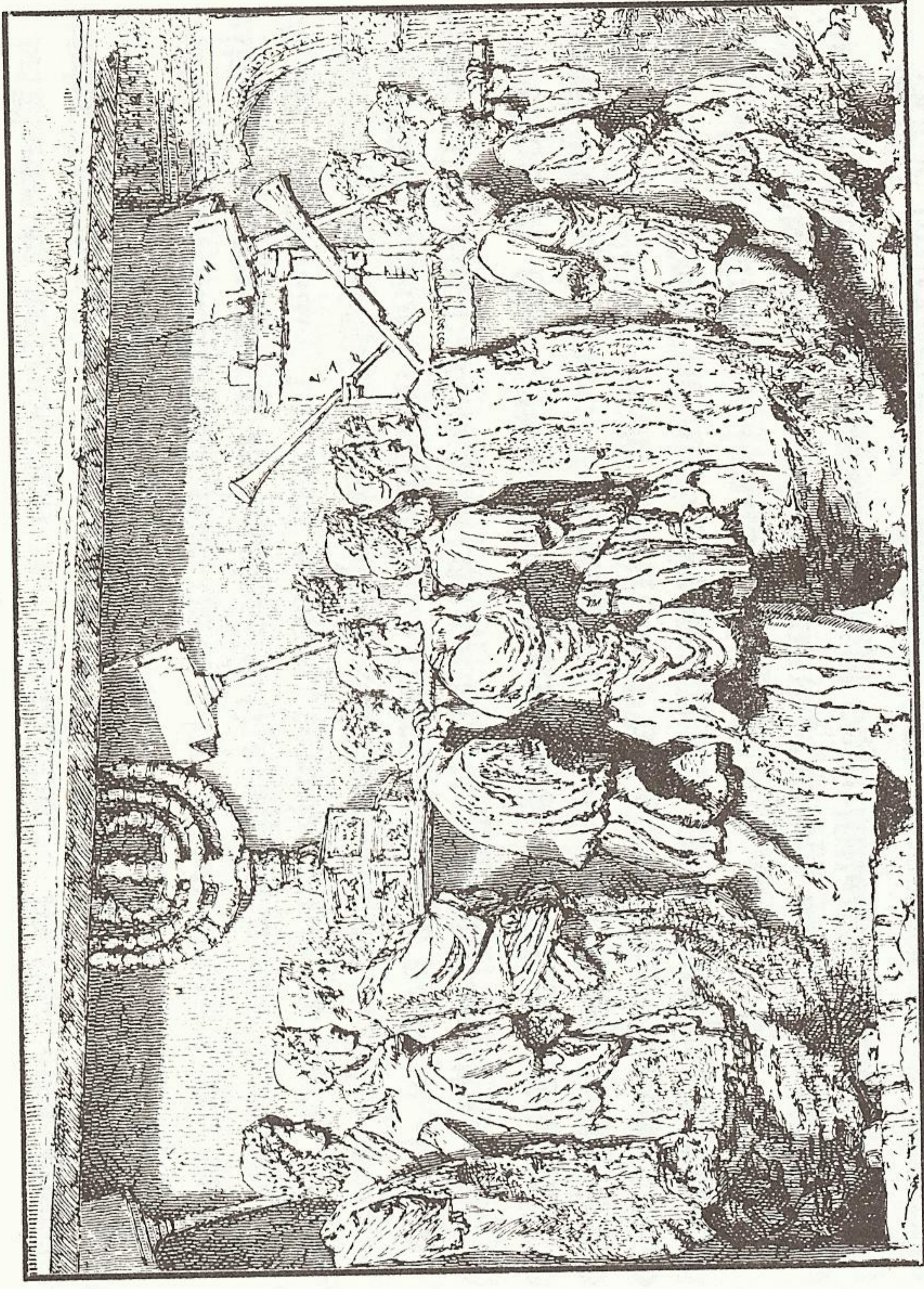
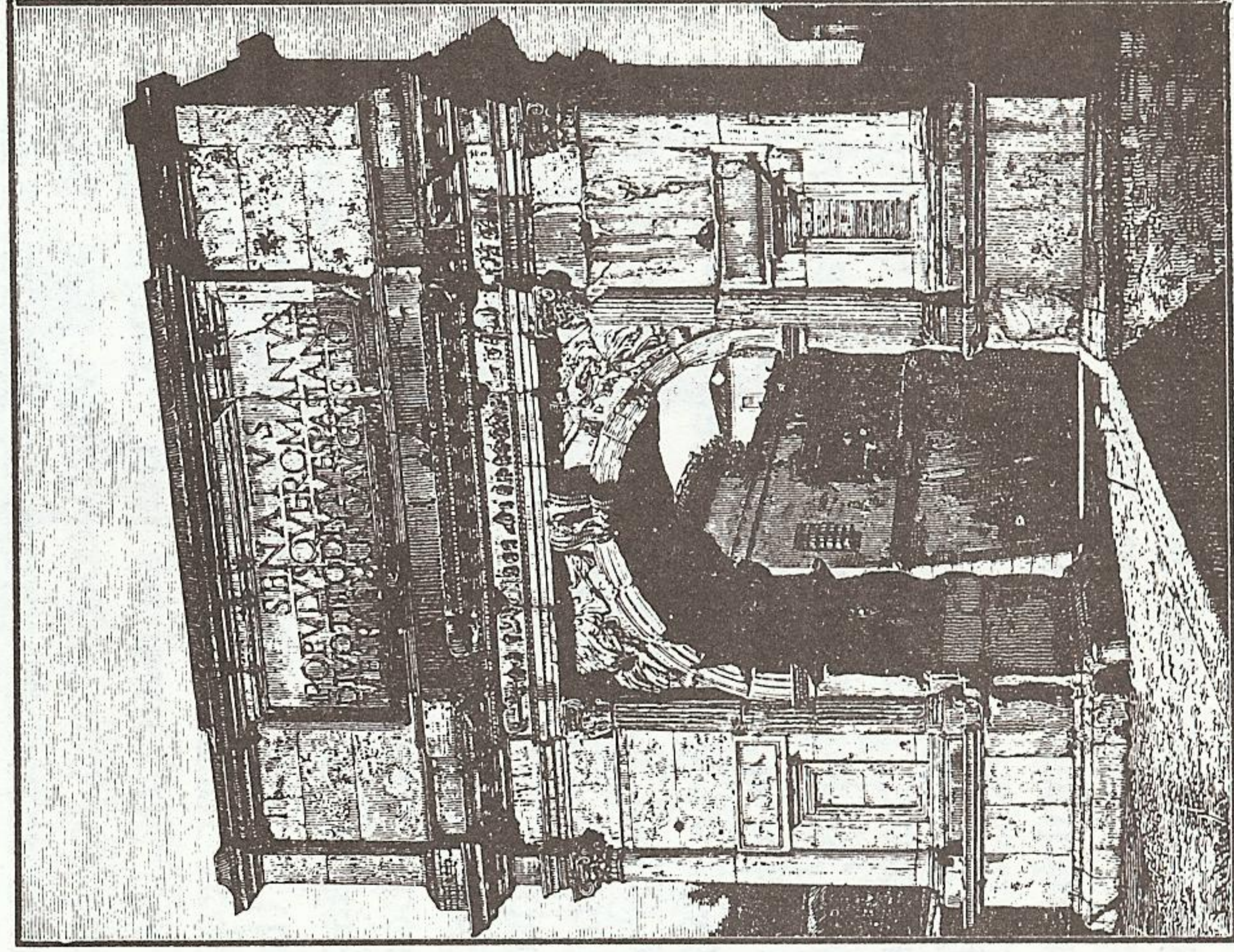
"There have been, of course, other periods of tribulation or suffering in which greater numbers of people were involved, and which continued for longer periods of time," writes Boettner. "But considering the physical, moral, and religious aspects, suffering never reached a greater degree of awfulness and intensity than in the siege of Jerusalem. Nor have so many people ever perished in the fall of any other city. We think of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima as causing the greatest mass horror of anything in modern time. Yet only about one-tenth as many people were killed in Hiroshima as in the fall of Jerusalem. Add to the slaughter of such a great number the bestiality of Jews to Jews and of Roman to Jews and the anguish of a people who knew they were forsaken of God, and we see the justification for Christ's words, 'For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be!'"<sup>31</sup>

When Jesus spoke of tribulation "such as was not since the beginning of the world...nor ever shall be," he was using a *proverbial* form of expression. Similar expressions are found in various ways in the scriptures: "...before

them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such" (Exodus 10:14). "I will give thee [Solomon] riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like" (2 Chronicles 1:12). "...there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee" (1 Kings 3:12). "I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like" (Ezekiel 5:8,9). "...a great people...there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations" (Joel 2:2). "A time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Daniel 12:1).

Some might argue there have been greater times of tribulation since 70 A.D. They could also argue that there have been kings who have had more wealth and honor than Solomon. But seeing how this expression was used in the scriptures, we should not attempt to press it beyond its intended meaning. We believe the historical fulfillment fully meets the requirements of the prophecy about great tribulation and wrath upon that land and people.

An arch was erected in Rome to commemorate the victory of Titus and the Roman armies in the destruction of Jerusalem. Seven hundred of the Jewish captives were reserved by Titus to follow the carriage in which he made his triumphal entry into Rome. Carried in the procession were the spoils taken from the temple—the golden table, the seven-



branched candlestick, the veils of the sanctuary, and the book of the law. Over the centuries, this monument that portrays these things has been a witness to the fulfillment of Jesus' words concerning the tribulation that came upon Jerusalem and Judea.

Knowing the intensity of that tribulation, Jesus had prophesied:

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matt. 24:22; Mark 13:20).

We must bear in mind that the reference here is to the area upon which the tribulation of those days fell—Judea and Jerusalem. It should not be wrested from its proper setting.

Concerning judgment that fell upon this same land in the Old Testament, we read: "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate....Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:1,7,9). In the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, of course, no flesh was saved alive. It was total destruction.

There is an obvious *similarity* here. In the Old Testament, "except the Lord" had left a remnant, no flesh would have been saved alive. In the New Testament, "except the Lord" had shortened the days, no flesh would be saved alive. The meaning is basically the same in both cases. It is not necessary to read atomic bombs and modern times into this passage. Josephus informs us that "the populace was *almost annihilated*...there was no part of Judea, which did not partake of the calamities of the capital city."

Though the Christians had escaped into the mountains, living without housing or provisions, they too could have eventually been destroyed by sword or famine. For their sake those days were shortened. God had placed definite, foreordained limits: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles [the Roman armies] until the times of the Gentiles [the Roman armies] be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Some pull these five words, "The times of the Gentiles," out of their setting and attempt to stretch them far into the *future*. Ironside has written that this is "the entire period during which the nation of the Jews, the city of Jerusalem, and the land of Palestine are under Gentile domination. This began with Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Palestine and will end at the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven at the close of the Great Tribulation."<sup>32</sup> This is Scofield dispensationalism.<sup>33</sup> We see no scriptural basis for this. Figuring from the time Vespaasian received his commission from Nero and declared war on Jerusalem (February, 67 A.D.) until the end of the siege and destruction of the city and temple (August, 70 A.D.), this treading down of Jerusalem—in actual time—was three and a half years.

#### SUN, MOON, AND STARS DARKENED

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

Luke's account says: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking

after those things which are coming on the earth [the *land*\*]; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25,26).

We have before us now a description of the condition of things after the tribulation.\*\* Are we to understand these expressions about the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars literally or figuratively? We believe Jesus used these expressions the same way the Old Testament prophets did: figuratively. They commonly used these expressions to describe various disasters: the sun shall go down, sun darkened, light darkened in the heavens, no light in the heavens, the moon shall not give her light, stars shall fall, stars darkened, cloudy day, darkness at noon day, etc.

While such language was more common to the eastern world and ancient times, yet even today we might describe the future as "bright" or "dark," depending on circumstances. We commonly speak of the "Dark Ages." When a person sees a truth or fact clearly, we say he saw the "light." An intelligent person is "bright." People who are outstanding in the entertainment field are called "stars."

In Joseph's dream, his father, mother, and brothers were symbolized by the sun, moon, and stars (Genesis 37:9-11). Wording about falling stars was used to describe the calamities that fell upon the Jews in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes (Daniel 8:10). Stars symbolized the messengers of the seven churches (Revelation 1:16,20). In hieroglyphic writing, the sun, moon, and stars were used as symbols—representing empires, states, kings—and the darkening of the heavenly bodies symbolized the overthrow of empires, states, and rulers.

The nation of Israel, when obedient, was promised *bright* days (blessings): "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the LIGHT, and thy judgment as the NOON DAY" (Psalms 37:6). "Then shall thy LIGHT break forth as the morning...then shall thy LIGHT RISE in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the NOON DAY" (Isaiah 58:8-10). "Thy SUN

\* Strong's Concordance, 3625.

\*\* That the tribulation referred to is the same as the one mentioned previously, there is no doubt. Jesus said there would be great tribulation and except "those days" were shortened no flesh would be saved alive. And then we read: "...immediately after the tribulation of those days." Mark's account says: "But in those days, after that tribulation..."

shall no more go down; neither shall thy MOON withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting LIGHT, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isaiah 60:20).

On the other hand, when disobedient, Israel was warned of dark days (trouble, judgment): "We wait for light, but behold OBSCURITY; for brightness, but we walk in DARKNESS...we stumble at noon day as in the night" (Isaiah 59:9,10), a day of "DARKNESS, and not light...even very DARK, and no brightness in it" (Amos 5:18-20). "The end is come upon my people of Israel...I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will DARKEN the earth in the clear day" (Amos 8:2,9).

This same type of wording was used to describe the destruction that came upon Egypt: "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He and his people...shall be brought to destroy the land...the day shall be DARKENED...a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity" (Ezekiel 30:6-18). "And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the SUN with a cloud, and the MOON shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make DARK over thee, and set DARKNESS upon thy land...I shall bring thy destruction...I shall make the land of Egypt desolate" (Ezekiel 32:2-15).

The same type of wording was used to describe the destruction that came upon Idumea. "And all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their hosts shall fall down...for my sword shall come down upon Idumea...from generation to generation it shall lie waste" (Isaiah 34:4-10).

In the prophecy regarding the fall of Babylon, which was to come "as destruction from the Almighty," we read: "He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the STARS of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the SUN shall be darkened in his going forth, and the MOON shall not cause her light to shine....Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them...and Babylon...shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah 13:9-21). The fulfillment of this prophecy is evident. The kingdom was given to that ancient people known as the Medes (Daniel 5:28-31). This was not

an end-of-the-world-prophecy, even though it was described in language about the sun, moon, and stars being darkened.

The same type of wording was used concerning the Old Testament destruction of Jerusalem: "I will also stretch out my hand upon Judah, and...Jerusalem...a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of DARKNESS and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick DARKNESS" (Zephaniah 1:4,15). "And if one look unto the land, behold DARKNESS and sorrow, and the LIGHT is darkened in the heavens thereof" (Isaiah 5:3,30). "I beheld...the heavens, and they had no LIGHT...the heavens above were BLACK" (Jeremiah 4:3,23,28). Jeremiah warned them to turn to God in repentance "before he cause DARKNESS, and...while you look for LIGHT, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross DARKNESS" (Jeremiah 13:9,10,16-19). "Therefore NIGHT shall be unto you...it shall be DARK...the SUN shall go down...the day shall be DARK over them...Jerusalem shall become heaps" (Micah 3:6,12).

When Babylon was overthrown by the Medes and others, it was not the *literal* sun, moon, and stars that were darkened. When Idumea became a desolation, it was not the *literal* stars of heaven that were dissolved. When Egypt and Jerusalem were overthrown and became desolate under the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, it was not the *literal* sun, moon, or stars that were darkened. These expressions symbolized *very dark times* for these various places. Now, if the Lord saw fit to use these symbols in the Old Testament, why should we suppose he would use different terms when he became flesh and dwelt among us?

As we have seen, the prophecy of Jesus about the tribulation pertained to a certain city—Jerusalem; to a certain land—Judea; to a certain people—the Jewish nation. What would be the condition of things for that city, nation, and people "immediately after the tribulation of those days"? Would they experience only a passing tribulation after which things would return to normal? No! Transferring the expression about the darkened sun, moon, and stars from symbol to fact, the picture is that of a complete overthrow, destruction, desolation! This interpretation is solidly built upon the scriptures and its accuracy is confirmed by history.

### THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30,31; Mark 13:26,27; Luke 21:27,28).

It would seem we have before us now a description of the second coming of Christ. For this reason, futurists start here and work backward through Matthew 24. By this method they place the tribulation, abomination of desolation, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and wars as end-time events. But in so doing, the very foundational theme of the prophecy—the destruction of the temple—must be ignored.

The arguments for the fulfillment of everything in Matthew 24 up to this point are so sound, some believe, and argue at length, that the coming of the Lord *did* occur at this time—resurrection, rapture, and all—in 70 A.D.<sup>34</sup> The weakness of this position is the lack of any history to confirm it. It tends to leave us hanging.

Others feel the Lord came figuratively or spiritually in 70 A.D.—to judge Jerusalem. In a sense this is true, for the Father has given Christ all authority to execute judgment (John 5:22-27), which would have included his judgment upon Jerusalem, when he “sent forth his armies and destroyed those murders, and burned up their city” (Matthew 22:7). According to Josephus, a strange omen appeared at that time: “I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sunset, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds.”<sup>35</sup> Were these angels? Was this a sign of Christ coming in judgment upon Jerusalem?

Even though there will be the final great and glorious coming of Christ, it is certainly true he sometimes comes in other ways for blessing or judgment: “Return O Lord,

unto the many thousands of Israel” were words of a prayer when the ark was set up and rested (Numbers 10:36). After the captivity at Babylon, God said, “I am returned unto Jerusalem” (Zechariah 1:16; 8:3). The Lord came to men in dreams (Genesis 20:3). He came down to see the city (Genesis 11:5). “I am come down to deliver thee” out of Egypt (Exodus 3:8). “Lo I come unto thee in a thick cloud” (Exodus 19:9). The Lord “riding upon a swift cloud,” came into Egypt (Isaiah 19:1). “The Lord...bowed the heavens...and came down...he delivered me” (Psalms 18:6-17). No one understands these verses as references to the second coming of Christ.

Being so closely associated with the apocalyptic language about darkened sun, moon, and stars, it is not impossible that the coming of the Son of man in the clouds (in Matthew 24:30,31) could be understood in the same way. But this is not without problems of interpretation. With this view, the sending forth of angels with the sound of a trumpet to gather the elect, is taken to mean sending the apostles to preach the gospel whereby people could be gathered into the church. But even granting that the word translated “angels” can be translated “messengers,” we would normally think of the apostles being sent forth at the ascension of Jesus, not his return. By 70 A.D. these men had *already* gone forth into all the world with the gospel.

Because of many second coming verses about angels coming with Christ, believers being gathered unto him, the sound of the trumpet, etc., we favor the interpretation which applies Matthew 24:30,31 to the return of Christ in power and glory at the end of this age. Of course this raises an objection. In verse 29, we read about the condition of things “immediately after the tribulation of those days.” And this next verse says: “And then...they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Would this not indicate that the second coming was to occur right then? It would seem so. However, the word “then” (used by Matthew more than all other New Testament writers put together) can mean an event will happen right away, or it can indicate the order in which events will happen. Applied in this latter sense, we could understand Matthew 24 in this way: Jesus spoke of



general events that were to occur before the overthrow of Jerusalem and then the specific sign of that destruction: Gentile armies surrounding Jerusalem. The invading armies would bring about great tribulation for the people left in Jerusalem and Judea. The condition of things immediately after that tribulation would be that of desolation. All of these things would happen first, "and then"—in the order of events mentioned—"shall appear...the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Our explanation will not satisfy everyone, but an appeal to other verses seems to justify this position.

1. The second coming was not to be at the fall of Jerusalem, for Jesus expressly warned about any who would say that Christ had come in those days—and was in the desert or in some secret place (Matthew 24:23-27).

2. Jesus said Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jews who were not killed in the tribulation would be led captive into all nations (Luke 21:24). This could not be the same time as the second coming of Christ at the end of the age, for Jews will not be led away captive into all nations then. It was following the events of 70 A.D. that they were led away captive. The one event was the end that came upon Jerusalem; the other will be the end of the age.

3. In a later part of Matthew 24, Jesus expressly said that no man knows the time of the second coming, the end of the age (Matthew 24:35,36). But concerning the overthrow of Jerusalem, Jesus knew the time and stated it would be *before* that generation then living would pass away. They had asked *when* this destruction would be, and he told them. But the time of the second coming was *not* revealed. There is a distinct contrast here. The possibility that a long period of time might pass before the coming of Christ is suggested by the story of the bridegroom that did not appear until the midnight hour or the master who "after a long time" returned (Matthew 25:5,6,19).

4. The destruction of Jerusalem was preceded by a specific sign—Jerusalem compassed with Gentile armies. But the second coming will be "as a thief in the night"; we are exhorted to be ready at all times; there will be no specific sign (such as a huge cross in the sky) to warn people a few minutes before Christ returns. People will be eating

and drinking and getting married—the routine things, just as in Noah's day—and will not be expecting anything unusual to happen. Suddenly Christ will come! The sign preceding the fall of Jerusalem was specific; the signs or warnings about the second coming are general—nothing to reveal the day or hour!

5. At the time of the fall of Jerusalem, the disciples were to escape into the mountains. Then, there was time to flee; but when Christ comes there will be no time to flee or make preparations to meet him. At the second coming, believers will not flee into the mountains, but will be caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds. In the first century, they *scattered*; at the second coming they will be *gathered*. It is contrast all the way through.

### THE FIG TREE

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh: so likewise, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, *This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled* (Matthew 24:32-34; Mark 13:28-30).

Futurists, seeking to place Matthew 24 in modern times, teach that the blossoming fig tree refers to Israel becoming a nation in 1948. "When the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the 'fig tree' put forth its first leaves,"<sup>36</sup> writes Hal Lindsey in 1970. He goes on to suggest, figuring a generation as 40 years, that all would be fulfilled by 1988. But subtract from this seven years—according to the dispensational view—and the rap-ture would have taken place in 1981! The passing of time has now shown both dates to be erroneous.

It is commonly assumed there are numerous Biblical references about the fig tree being a symbol of Israel. But looking into the Old Testament, there is little—if any—evidence for this.

In the New Testament, there are two references about fig trees that are sometimes regarded as symbolizing Israel. In the one, a parable, the owner of the fig tree came for

"three years" seeking fruit on the tree and found none. When he ordered that the tree be cut down, the gardener suggested that they let it remain another year, and—if it remained unfruitful—to then cut it down (Luke 13:6-9). If the fig tree here symbolizes Israel, this would show how Israel lacked the fruits of repentance, even after Christ had come to them and ministered for over three years.

The other fig tree reference is Matthew 21:19. But here, again, the reference is not to a fruitful tree, but to an unfruitful tree, a tree that Jesus cursed: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." There are no other verses that indicate the fig tree is a symbol of Israel. On the other hand, there are verses that refer to Israel as an OLIVE tree (Romans 11:17,24).

#### ALL THE TREES!

But returning to Jesus' statement about the fig tree, we need look no further than the text itself to find full proof that he was *not* talking about the nation of Israel! Matthew's account says: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh...." But Luke's account shows that Jesus did not single out only *one* tree in this illustration. "Behold the fig tree, AND ALL THE TREES: when they now shoot forth, you see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand" (Luke 21:29). If the fig tree represents the nation of Israel, then "all the trees" would have to represent all the nations. With this, the passage would have no point at all! In view of this, Dake (though a dispensationalist) has well said: "The fig tree...is universally interpreted to mean the Jewish nation, but this could not possibly be the meaning."<sup>37</sup>

Jesus was merely drawing an illustration from nature. He said that when the fig tree and all the trees put forth leaves, people recognize that summer is near. It was a comparative statement, not unlike saying that when the sun is in the west, we know that night is at hand; when snow is on the ground, we know it is winter time; when the leaves turn color, we know it is autumn; when we see dark clouds gathering, we know it is going to rain. Jesus used a simple, comparative illustration—something they

could know of themselves. It was human knowledge that when trees put forth leaves, men know that summer is at hand; so likewise, when they would see "all these things" come to pass, such would be a sign to them.

What did Jesus mean by "all these things"? He had just spoken of the second coming. Was this a continuation of what he had just spoken, or was he here returning to the original line of thought? If we take it to refer to everything that Jesus had just said, the passage would have to read something like this: "When you see the sun darkened, the moon not giving her light, the stars falling, the powers of heaven shaken, the sign of the Son of man in heaven, all tribes mourning, the Son of man coming in the clouds, the trumpet sounding, the angels gathering the elect from around the world: when you see all these things you will know the coming of the Lord is near, even at the doors." This could not be what he meant.

We believe he was returning to the *original* line of thought—the things that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem: deceivers, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and finally the specific sign—Jerusalem compassed with Gentile armies. When they would see all *these things*—they would know the destruction of Jerusalem was near. The proof that it was to "these things" that Jesus referred, is found in the statement that follows:

Verily I say unto you, *This generation* shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

Jesus had said one stone would not be left upon another that would not be thrown down—Jerusalem and its temple were marked for destruction. The disciples asked: "When shall these things be?" Here, then, was his answer! These things would happen before the generation then living would pass away. Living on this side of the fulfillment, we know that these things did happen within the time specified. It is an amazing fulfillment of prophecy!

Just before Matthew 24, in chapter 23, Jesus had warned that generation of Jews: "Fill up then the measure of your fathers....Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men...some of them you shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues, and

persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, *all these things* shall come upon THIS GENERATION. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem....Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:32-38).

In commenting on this passage, Scofield very correctly says: "It is the way also of history: judgment falls upon one generation for the sins of centuries. The prediction was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70."<sup>38</sup> But, a few verses later, in Matthew 24, when Jesus said: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled"—a statement which would place the great tribulation back then—Scofield tries to make "generation" mean "race, kind, family, stock, breed"! Then, based on this definition, concludes: "The promise is, therefore, that the generation—nation, or family of Israel—will be preserved unto 'these things'."<sup>39</sup>

#### MEANING OF "GENERATION"

But as we go through the book of Matthew, we can see by context how Jesus used the word generation. First, there is Matthew 1:17: "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations...." This reference is not to 14 different races, but to fourteen different generations of that race—each generation following the other in logical sequence. Jesus asked: "Whereunto shall I liken this generation?"—a reference to that generation then living. Jesus called it "an evil and adulterous generation," and likened it to a man possessed of demons whose latter end was worse than the first. The people of Nineveh "shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it" (Matthew 12:38-45). It was a "faithless and perverse generation" (Matthew 17:17).

Then in Matthew 23, Jesus reproved the hypocrisy of that generation and said they were no better than their fathers (former generations) that had killed the prophets; judgment upon Jerusalem was certain; their house would be left desolate—"all these things shall come upon this generation" (Matthew 23:36). Finally, Matthew 24:34: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

We feel it is arbitrary to take "generation" in all these other places in Matthew to mean the generation living at one time, and then in Matthew 24 try to make it mean the whole race of Jews over a period of 2,000 years or more! Only to uphold a theory would anyone do this.

Strangely enough, those who say "generation" means the Jewish people as a race in Matthew 24, also say the Jewish race will never pass away. So if Jesus meant the Jewish race will not pass away until these things are fulfilled, and if the Jewish race will never pass away, his words were meaningless. But taking the word "generation" in its normal and primary meaning—the generation of people living at one time—Jesus did indeed answer the question: "WHEN shall these things be?"

#### THE END OF THE AGE

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of *that day* and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only (Matthew 24:35,36; Mark 13:31,32).

To this, Luke's account adds:

And take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so *that day* come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come (Luke 21:33-35).

Up to this point, Jesus spoke of things leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem. Two times he briefly left his original line of speech to contrast those events with the second coming (Matthew 24:27,30-31). After telling of things that would happen in that generation, the whole discourse now shifts to the question about the second coming and the end of the world. Jesus said that heaven and earth shall pass away—the end of the age—and that the time of "that day" is not revealed.

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you know not what hour your Lord doth come (Matthew 24:40-42).

Dispensationalists who suppose these verses describe a pre-tribulation rapture, face serious difficulties of inter-

pretation. We are clear down at verse 40. To harmonize with the dispensational outline, these verses should have been back in the early part of Matthew 24—before the tribulation, before the abomination of desolation, before the flight into the mountains! But no hint of a secret rapture is found anywhere in those early verses. Not until "after the tribulation"—regardless of how we understand the tribulation of Matthew 24—do we read of the Lord's coming when one will be taken and the other left!

#### BIBLICAL REFERENCES FOR "TRIBULATION"

The word that is translated "tribulation" in Matthew 24 is *thlipsis* (Strong's Concordance, 2347). This Greek word is sometimes translated affliction, anguish, persecution, burdened, and trouble. A study of all references in which this word appears may be summed up in the following categories:

First, *tribulation upon the Jews*. As we have seen, Jesus spoke of "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). Luke's account says: "There shall be great distress in the land"—Judea—"and wrath upon this people"—the Jews—"and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:23,24). We know this tribulation came to its end in 70 A.D.

Second, *tribulation against Christians*. "In the world you shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom" (Acts 14:22). "Tribulation worketh patience" (Romans 5:3). Tribulation shall not separate us from Christ (Romans 8:35-37). We are to be "patient in tribulation" (Romans 12:12), "joyful in all our tribulations" (2 Corinthians 7:4), and faint not at tribulation (Ephesians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:4). In the book of Revelation, the church at Smyrna suffered tribulation (Revelation 2:9,10). John, the writer of Revelation, refers to himself as "your brother and companion in tribulation" (Revelation 1:9). This type of tribulation spans the entire gospel age.

One portion of Revelation describes a vision of the redeemed—multitudes out of all nations—who "came out of great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14). Some point out that

the Greek text has "the" in front of the words "great tribulation" in this verse—"the great tribulation." Immediately some suppose this is an end-time tribulation period of seven years. But this is faulty reasoning, for the Greek text also has "the" in Revelation 1:9: "I John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation." John was suffering tribulation back in the *first century*—the tribulation—and the whole gospel era has been marked with tribulation for Christians in one place or another, in one way or another.

When John saw the vision of the "great multitude which no man could number," he was told they came out of the great tribulation, or, as some translate it, they came out *through* great tribulation. It does not say they came out *before* the tribulation. Even dispensationalists, though they believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, do not see the rapture here. They believe these are *tribulation* saints, "the greatest number of converts in all history" (as Hal Lindsey says), who will be converted *after* the rapture! Why some believe that people who "miss the rapture" will win more souls in seven years, than faithful and obedient Christians who were ready for the rapture, is difficult to figure out.

Unwittingly, our dispensational brothers have come up with a new formula for success in the ministry! Assuming the rapture will take place *soon*, a man who desires a successful, soul-winning ministry could make certain he is *not* ready for the rapture. By missing the rapture, he could then repent, preach during the tribulation period, and be numbered among the greatest soul winners of all time!

Third, *tribulation upon the wicked*. To the Thessalonian believers who were enduring "persecutions and tribulations" (2 Thessalonians 1:4), Paul wrote: "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (verse 6). *When?* "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God...when he shall come to be glorified in his saints" (verses 7-10). Here Christ comes with the angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on the wicked. This is also when he comes to be glorified in his saints. There is no *secret* rapture here!

Even if there were two stages to the second coming, this could not be the first stage.

Dispensational writers commonly argue that the rapture will occur before the "Tribulation Period," because God has not appointed Christians to wrath: "The church of Jesus Christ has never been destined to suffer the pangs of the Tribulation Period....Scripture: 'For God hath not appointed us [who are born again] to wrath' (1 Thessalonians 5:9)."<sup>40</sup> But what "wrath" is this verse talking about? Notice the context.

When Christ descends from heaven, believers will be caught up to meet him in the air, and "sudden destruction" will fall upon the wicked "and they shall not escape." It is concerning *this wrath*—not a seven year tribulation period—that we read: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (See 1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:9). Christians are not appointed to wrath, but only a few verses before Paul *did* say they are appointed to tribulation! "No man should be moved by these afflictions [*thlipsis*—tribulations]: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily...we told you before that we should suffer tribulation" (1 Thessalonians 3:3,4).

#### JACOB'S TROUBLE

One prophecy remains to be considered here—the time of Jacob's trouble. "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of *Jacob's trouble*, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:7). Because this description uses the terms "great" and mentions trouble "so that none is like it," dispensationalists assume this refers to a final seven year tribulation period. And since this "is the time of Jacob's trouble, *not the church's*," it is further assumed the church will be raptured *before* this time!<sup>41</sup> But such conclusions can hardly be justified when taken in context.

Because the book of Jeremiah is a long book—the second longest in the Bible—many are not familiar with the setting in which this prophecy was given. Jeremiah repeatedly warned the Israelites that enemy armies would come against them; they would be taken into captivity; they

would be punished by God—if they did not repent. They did not repent, and the time of trouble came upon them. They were taken into captivity by the king of Babylon. However, the prophecy said: "But he [Jacob—Israel] shall be saved out of it." This happened when God allowed the people to return from the Babylonian captivity.

We have heard a voice of *trembling*, of *fear*, and not of *peace*. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth *travail* with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in *travail*, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that *none is like it*: it is even THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE; but he shall be *saved* out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his *yoke* from off thy neck...I will *save* thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their *captivity*; and *Jacob shall return*...I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents...and the city shall be builded upon her own heap (Jeremiah 30).

1. The prophecy about Jacob's trouble mentioned "a voice of *trembling*" (verse 5). Was this the case when the king of Babylon came against them? Yes. "We have sinned against the Lord. We looked for peace...and for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard...the whole land *trembled*" (Jeremiah 8:14-16).

2. Jacob's trouble would be a time of *fear* (verse 5). Did fear come upon the people in those days? Yes. "Behold, a people cometh from the north country...they ride upon horses....We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble...*fear* is on every side" (Jeremiah 6:22-26). "*Fear* and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction" (Lamentations 3:47).

3. The prophecy said *peace* would be taken from them (verse 5). Was their peace taken away in those days? Yes. "I have taken away my *peace* from this people...We looked for peace...and behold trouble" (Jeremiah 8:15; 16:5).

4. The prophecy likened Jacob's trouble to the *travail* of a woman with child. This also happened. "What will thou say when he shall punish thee?...sorrows shall take thee as a woman in *travail*" (Jeremiah 13:21). "Pangs have taken thee as a woman in *travail*...for now shalt thou go forth out of the city...even to Babylon" (Micah 4:9,10).

5. It would be a time of trouble so "that none is like it" (verse 7). Does this properly describe the trouble that came upon that people? Yes! Ezekiel, using language very similar to that of Jeremiah, said: "Thus saith the Lord...I am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee...I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations" (Ezekiel 5:8,9). When this punishment came upon them, Jeremiah said it was "greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment" (Lamentations 4:6). Daniel wrote of that time of trouble in these words: "All Israel have transgressed thy law...therefore the curse is poured upon them...God hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us...by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:11,12). Such proverbial wording was used by the prophets to describe times of trouble that were uniquely severe (see pp. 65, 66).

6. Though this time of trouble would come upon Jacob, the prophecy said: "He shall be saved out of it...I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return" (Jeremiah 30:7,10). They had the promise that "after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you...in causing you to return...I will turn away your captivity...I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive" (Jeremiah 29:10-14). "I am with you to save you" (Jeremiah 42:11). "Fear not thou, O my servant Jacob...I will save thee from afar...Jacob shall return" (Jeremiah 46:27).

The details of the return from the seventy year captivity at Babylon are spelled out in the book of Ezra.

Here, then, we have the prophecy about Jacob's trouble and deliverance, complete with other scriptures that record the fulfillment, often in precisely the same wording. It all fits together. But some have set all of this aside, supposing this prophecy is still future, because of the closing words: "...in the latter days you shall consider it" (Jeremiah 30:24). Reading the expression "the latter days" it is easy to assume the very end of *this* age is intended. But the word *latter* (which is used several times in

Jeremiah) simply expressed an undefined future—"in the future" or "later on you will consider it."

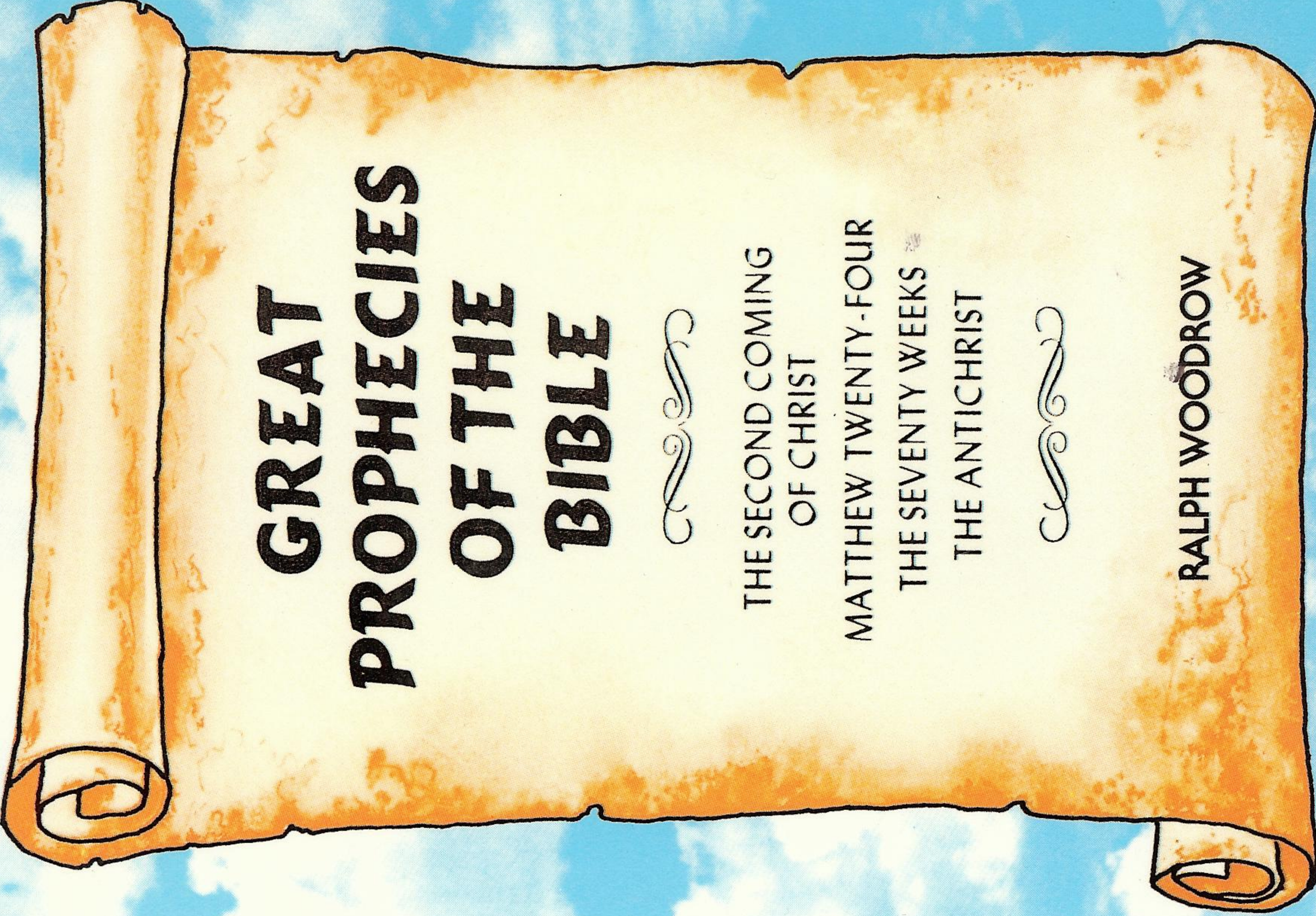
When these things had all happened, they were able to "consider" or understand the fulfillment of what had been prophesied. In this case, the "latter" days were those days *after their captivity*. The house of God that they built upon their return was the "latter house" as compared to the "former" house before the captivity (Haggai 2:9). After their return, the prophets that had warned them before the captivity were referred to as "the former prophets" (Zechariah 1:4; 7:7,12) which would mark the days after the captivity—in comparison—as the *later* or *latter* days. It is in this sense that the expression is used in Jeremiah 30. What Jeremiah called "the time of Jacob's trouble" is now ancient history—not an end-time tribulation period!

#### SEVEN YEAR TRIBULATION PERIOD?

With so much talk in some Christian circles about a future seven year Tribulation Period—and all the discussion as to whether the rapture will be pre-trib or post-trib—it is amazing that one simple fact has been commonly overlooked: There is *not one verse* anywhere in the entire New Testament that mentions a seven year tribulation period!

Are we implying there will be no tribulation at the end of the age? All through the centuries there have been times of tribulation experienced by Christians—to one degree or another. We have no guarantee that the last days will be any exception. But we do not believe there will be the type of tribulation period that is commonly presented in dispensational circles.

The Bible teaches that at the time of the second coming, the end of the age, people will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building, buying and selling (Luke 17:26-30). Accordingly, things will be continuing in what will be considered a normal, routine pattern. People will be saying, "Peace and safety" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). But if "all hell will break loose" upon the earth in the way some have proclaimed, surely after undergoing this for seven years, people would not be saying, "Peace and safety."



**GREAT  
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BIBLE**

THE SECOND COMING  
OF CHRIST

MATTHEW TWENTY-FOUR  
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THE ANTICHRIST

RALPH WOODROW

