

The Destruction of Jerusalem: A Local Event or of Universal/Eternal Consequence?

By William H. Bell, Jr. © March 2003

The second and “final” return of Christ, known as the Parousia, occurred in A.D. 70. This event is historically known as the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus promised that he would return before some who then lived and stood in his very presence died. *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Matthew 16:27-28)*

Jesus later said that the first century generation would by no means pass away until all things, including his return, were fulfilled. *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come...Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory...Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:14, 30, 34.*

Many preachers and bible students agree that Christ returned in A.D. 70. However, many do not understand or believe that this coming was his second coming. They believe the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was only a *local* event, involving the demise of a city. We plan to demonstrate in this writing that the A.D. 70 event is *not* local, rather, it centers on *worldwide eternal* events which extend far beyond the borders and demise of the local city.

For the task at hand, we need only to demonstrate that just one single consequence or impact that the fall of Jerusalem had/has outside the local city. Performing this task proves the destruction of Jerusalem cannot be restricted as local. For any consequence to have an impact on us today further demonstrates that those consequences are of an eternal nature.

Evidence That Jerusalem’s Destruction Was of Universal and Eternal Consequence

Is the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 an event of little significance? Is it merely God’s judgment on the Jews of the first century? Are there any indications in Scripture that possibly more than just Jews then living were involved or affected by it? Quite often, the answer hastily returned is No! The reason many reply in the negative is because they believe the fall of Jerusalem is the mere demise of a local city.

We do not believe those who hastily reply as above have carefully examined and considered all the evidence pertaining to the A.D. 70 event. For this reason, the following thoughts are suggested. Consider:

First, almost all agree that all the verses, (Matthew 24:4-34) refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It is in this section that Jesus says, *“For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be,” (Matthew 24:27).* This verse comes before verse 34. It is therefore included as one referring to the A.D. 70 coming

within the first century generation. (See verse 34). It is affirmed that this verse teaches, not the locality, but the universality of the coming of Christ. Jesus speaks of the false teachers (v. 26) who would say that his coming would be secret, local or confined to some dark place. Rather, it would be known and seen by all as expressed in the lightning shining from east to the west.

Secondly, who in the first century did not know about the destruction of Jerusalem? All the Jews knew for Jesus said *'all the tribes shall mourn'* because of it. (Matthew 24:30). Did all Jews live in Jerusalem? All the Romans and Greeks knew of it. Did they all live in Jerusalem? Inasmuch as they knew of Jerusalem's fall they knew of the return of Christ. Titus, the Roman general admitted that only with God's help could the city be taken. (See Josephus' account of the siege of Jerusalem). We conclude that the fall of Jerusalem was published worldwide as the sign of the coming of the Son of man. In other words, God revealed Jesus' coming in that historical event.

Then You Shall Know That I Am the Lord

In the Old Covenant, when God's people or the nations rebelled against Him he would bring judgments or punishments against them to reveal His Divine power. Many examples of this exist throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. The pattern is God would perform an event that unquestionably was beyond the power of man. This event would be witnessed by man and through the event man would perceive or come to know and understand that the thing done was of God. In this manner, God sought to bring about a change of heart and behavior in those who rebelled against him. Consider two examples.

The first is found in Exodus, during the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses demanded that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, let the enslaved people of Israel go free. Pharaoh refused, openly defying the God of Israel. God proposed to perform an act which would get Pharaoh's attention. *"...Tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land...But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them."* (Exodus 7:2-5)

Note that God would lay his "hand" on Egypt through judgments. These judgments were known as the "ten plagues." When God performed these judgments, **the Egyptians would know that God was the Lord**, Master and Ruler of the Universe. In other words, God revealed His Deity and power through the events or judgments He brought upon the Egyptians. The Egyptians would then come to know of God's power.

During one of these judgments, particularly the judgment of "lice infestation" Pharaoh's magicians tried to imitate this judgment as a magic trick. They could not. They reported their disappointment and terror back to Pharaoh saying, "This is the finger (power) of God."

A second time was when God withdrew the plague of thunder and hail storms. Pharaoh became so terrified that he confessed that he had sinned against God. This was his acknowledgement of God's power through the judgment of hail. He acknowledged the wickedness of himself and his people, Exodus 9:22-27. Next, Pharaoh acknowledged the God of heaven, asking Moses to pray to God and make supplications that God would remove the hail.

Pharaoh's request acknowledged that the power to calm the storm could only be of God. Moses told Pharaoh that when the thunder and hail ceased, *"that you may know that the earth is the Lord's."* (v. 29) However, once Pharaoh received respite, he sinned even more. This continued until God destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, even Pharaoh's own son.

Ezekiel, prophesying to the rebellious Jews of his day, pronounces imminent doom upon Jerusalem. *"And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel: An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end has come upon you, And I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways, And I will repay you for all your abominations. My eye will not spare you, Nor will I have pity; but I will repay your ways, and your abominations will be in your midst; Then you shall know that I am the Lord."* (Ezekiel 7:1-4, 6-9)

These events are important in demonstrating the impact that local, historical judgments and punishment have as Divine revelatory events. They reveal God's *Deity* and *Omnipotence*, in other words, that He is God, the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe! The ultimate result is to influence righteous behavior in the subjects.

George Eldon Ladd's *"A Theology of the New Testament," pp. 30, 31* speaks of the importance of what he styles, the revelatory nature of historical events. "The historical events are revelatory only when they are accompanied by the revelatory word." Ladd concurs in that it is what God says about the events of history that make them word revelations. In this manner, **they have a direct impact upon the inspiration of Scripture.** We feel that understanding these points helps the reader to understand the impact the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 has as a revelatory event and how that revelatory event affects the divine inspiration of Scripture.

The Sign of the Son of Man in Heaven

Third, was the destruction of Jerusalem only a local event with no impact or consequences beyond the limits of the local city? Why then is it called the *sign* of the Son of Man in heaven?, (Matthew 24:30). **Was heaven located in the local city of Jerusalem?** What need was there to show by Jerusalem's fall that Christ was seated on God's throne?

In Direct response to Caiaphas' interrogation of Jesus under oath, he asked the Jesus whether he was the Messiah. *"But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God! Jesus said to him, It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."* Matthew 26:63-64).

In other words, Caiaphas says Jesus, do not perjure yourself. I place you under oath before the living God. Tell me whether you are the Messiah, the Divine Son of God? Jesus responded by saying that at some time in the future, Caiaphas would live to see him seated at the right hand of God in the heavens and coming as the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven. Jesus, referred to himself as the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven. He applies the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 to himself. The high priest knew that this was Jesus' claim of divinity. Hearing it, he charged that the Lord blasphemed! Nevertheless, Jesus would vindicate himself at the fall of Jerusalem when the city fell.

If all that had occurred before A.D. 70 was sufficient and conclusive, does Jesus lie when he says Jerusalem would be the final sign of His Deity to the nation? Plainly, is the kingship of Christ of local or universal consequence? Is Christ's reign as King of kings limited only to the local city of Jerusalem? Is it not an *eternal* reign which has *no end*, Isaiah 9:6,7; Luke 1:31,32? Is not then Jerusalem's fall demonstrating that which is of *eternal* and *universal* consequence to *all men*?

Does the enthronement of Christ at God's right hand have significance for those only of the local city? Was it only for the first century, or is Christ's reign of great consequence to *all* for *all times*, even for us today? Since his enthronement and reign is for us today, and who can deny it, then does not Jerusalem's fall have impact on today's generation and beyond as it did in the first century generation?

Does the mere fact that an event occurred in history at a certain locality confine its impact to that locality? Was the event of 9/11 (the fall of the twin towers) only of consequence in New York, or did it affect lives and events worldwide? Even that event could not be confined to the local city of New York and God spoke nothing of it in the word of God. Are we not yet being affected by it? Some will be affected by it through all eternity, particularly those who both suffered death and permanent physical and mental injury even including those who were responsible for the crime. Their lives changed *forever*.

What about the crucifixion of Christ? Why not argue it is a local event of concern only to those who lived in Jerusalem? As in the cross event, we must look not only to where an event occurs, but also to what is revealed about that event. It is the revelatory word of God that moves an event from the locality of its occurrence to its proper place in the scheme of redemption.

The Impact of the Destruction of Jerusalem on the *Hadean* World

Fourth, the fall of Jerusalem affected souls in the unseen world of *Hades*, the realm of the dead. "*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you,' But he answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah,'*" (Matthew 12:39,40).

In the above text, there can be no doubt of the generation under discussion. It is that of the Pharisees in Jesus' day who say, "*We want to see a sign from you.*" It is to *that generation* that Jesus says no sign will be given but that of Jonah in reference to his resurrection.

Further, speaking of that same generation, Jesus says, "*The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it...The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it...So shall it also be with this wicked generation,* (vv 41-45). Can these events be removed from the first century? Can Jesus death, (the sign of Jonah) be removed from the first century? Of course, the answer is no. Therefore, these events would happen within that first century generation. Neither the men of Nineveh, or the Queen of Sheba were in Jerusalem when it fell.

The Righteous Vindicated in Jerusalem's Fall in A.D. 70

Fifth, the blood of all the righteous is avenged on Jerusalem. Jesus said this would clearly come upon that generation then alive. *"Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation."* (Matthew 23:34-36) No one can successfully deny that the first century generation is intended.

The Lord says that blood of all those murdered, even all the righteous blood would be avenged on that generation. These dead ones were in *Hades*, within the spiritual realm of departed spirits. They were not living in the local city of Jerusalem, unless *Hades* is located there! Nevertheless, at the fall of Jerusalem, the righteous in *Hades* would be avenged or vindicated. Therefore, the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem affected the souls of men in *Hades*, i.e., men in another world, way beyond the local boundaries of the city. This affected both the righteous dead of the Old Covenant era as well as those sent by Jesus after Pentecost of Acts 2, who would sleep in Jesus.

Those persecuted (the living) would know by reading the gospel of Matthew and by the fulfillment (actual occurrence of the event) in A.D. 70, that God had avenged or vindicated them. By the way, all saints were told to flee from the city before it fell to the Romans in 70 A.D., (Matthew 24:15-20; Revelation 18:4). Not a single Christian was in the local city but all Christians living throughout the world were vindicated at its fall. Is the vindication of the righteous a local event? To limit this vindication locally would impugn the Scriptures. It would make Jesus a liar, for he testified that all would be vindicated when the city fell. However, if the event is limited to a local occurrence and impact, then not a *single* Christian was vindicated, dead or alive, because all were outside the local city of Jerusalem.

Those who were vindicated are told to, *"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"* (Revelation 18:20) See also 19:2. Not all those to be vindicated were living. Many as we noted were dead, --in *Hades*. Others were asleep in Jesus. Even God and Christ had to be vindicated for Israel's rejection and crucifixion of the Savior and persecution of the saints. "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19). *"For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' Says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will Judge his people.'"* (Hebrews 10:30).

Did God and Jesus reside in the local city of Jerusalem? On what street did they live? Were they sitting comfortably in their two-bedroom apartment when the Romans arrived to destroy the city? Did we not read that Jesus was in heaven, at God's right hand, --that Jerusalem's fall was proof that Jesus was on the throne of God *in heaven*? Yet, they were vindicated in Jerusalem's fall, for Vengeance (vindication) belonged to God.

The Impact of the Fall of Jerusalem on the Integrity of Jesus and the Inspiration of Scripture

Jesus, speaking of Jerusalem's fall as a *then* future event, speaks as a prophet. God had a litmus test for all prophets as recorded in Deuteronomy. *But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken? --when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).*

The reason the Jews did not heed Jesus' words is that they believed he was a false prophet. They did not believe that Jerusalem would be overthrown. They thought it was impregnable. And from all outside appearances it was. However, Jesus' credibility, inspiration, Divinity and integrity was on the line. If his words did not come true, He is an impostor. (God forbid).

As these words are recorded in Scripture, the inspiration of Scripture would be manifestly a hoax. The word of God, the Bible could not be trusted. However, when Jerusalem fell, his words were fulfilled and he passed the test of a true prophet with flying colors. That is why he told the High Priest that when Jerusalem fell, he would know that Jesus was Divine, for only a Divine Being could bring to pass the events as described.

Summary

It has been clearly demonstrated that Jerusalem's fall had far reaching eternal and universal consequences. In this manner, it was a universal and eternal judgment. The impact of the fall of the city cannot as proved above, be relegated to a mere moment of history. It is divine revelatory history.

Jerusalem's fall effected rejoicing for all the righteous saints, the dead who were raised from Hades, the living and God and Christ. None were in the local city. All involved knew they were avenged. As well say that God, Christ and the living did not know as to say the righteous dead did not know what transpired in A.D. 70.

God's judgment on Jerusalem was a vindication of Christ and His cause, i.e., Christianity and the gospel of Christ. Is the gospel a local, physical and temporal or is it eternal, universal, spiritual? *"But the word of the Lord endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you." (1 Peter 1:25)*