Radical Network Study Paper

Jesus and the Destruction of Jerusalem

By Tim Lings (June 2005)
Introduction

For some reason, Evangelical and Charismatic churches in the UK tend to avoid the subject of the ‘end times’. There is a tacit acknowledgment of the doctrine of the Second Coming, but that’s usually as far as it goes: we don’t get a sermon series on the millennium, for example. This avoidance is probably a reaction against the excesses of eschatological speculation in the nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries, speculation that often resulted in bizarre interpretations of Scripture and many ugly church splits. However, this current neglect of the subject has left me in the dark regarding the details of the destiny for me, the church, Christ, or the world. It also results in some parts of the Bible being ignored and other parts not making much sense, and, possibly worse, leaving it up to LaHae and Jenkins with their *Left Behind* series to make up what is lacking in the church’s eschatology.

But as the saying goes, the answer to abuse is not disuse but right use. I therefore set out with this paper to examine what sort of things Jesus had to say about the end of the world; I wanted to develop a Christocentric eschatology, looking to Jesus “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 1:3). As I began to read through the Gospels I found Jesus had much to say about the future, about heaven and hell, rewards and judgement, resurrection and woes. However, I also discovered that there was also much about a coming destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, events which eventually took place in AD70. Jesus seemed to place emphasis on this coming time of trial, filling it with theological significance. As I knew very little about this area, I decided to investigate further and see what I found out.

In this study paper I therefore wish to examine what Jesus said about this destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD70. To do this, I will first sketch an overview of the historical context and the events surrounding the sacking of Jerusalem. I will then examine Jesus’ teaching and ministry in light of this historical understanding, looking at how Jesus predicted, interpreted and understood the coming judgement. I will then unpack and expand on some of the implications of this, both theologically and practically for the everyday Christian.

The Historical Context

History is the flow of consequences of human actions, never purely isolated events; getting a basic overview of the Intertestamental Period (the period of Jewish history between 400BC and AD70) will therefore be beneficial for understanding the situation and culture Jesus spoke into. As Baxter writes, “It gives a background against which we see with sharpened clearness the connections and relevances of the sayings and doings which occupy the earlier pages of our New Testament.” (1960: 11)

The Intertestamental Period can be bookended with the completion of the Old Testament cannon with Malachi on the one side, and the completion of the New Testament in AD 70 on the other. It has been argued that books such as Daniel have a much later date, and that some parts of the New Testament were not written until the end of the first Century. However, there is no necessary reason for this to be the case, unless one’s world-view cannot cope with accurate and specific prophecy as with Daniel or indeed Jesus’ predictions about Jerusalem. Regarding the New Testament, the cataclysmic events of AD70 are not referred to at all in it, apart from in prophecy. If those documents were written later, the fall of Jerusalem would have been mentioned, in the same way that the World Trade Centre attacks would be mentioned somewhere in American documents.

This Intertestamental Period then, similarly to the situation in contemporary Palestine, was characterized by “the struggle of the Jews in Palestine to attain political and religious autonomy from a series of dominant foreign powers.” (Bromiley, 1982: 874) This appears to have been the pattern throughout history, as Wright notes: “Every forty-four years out of the last four thousand, on average, an army has marched through it, whether to conquer it, to rescue it from someone else, to use it as a neutral battleground on which to fight a different enemy, or to take advantage of it as the natural route for getting somewhere else to fight there instead.” (1992: 3; originally observed by Revd David Praill) I will now briefly map out some of those struggles.

From the Babylonians to the Romans

Jerusalem was first destroyed in 587BC by the Babylonians, who then exiled the Jewish people to Babylon. However the Babylonian empire fell to the Medes and Persians in 559BC, with Cyrus becoming king. In the first year of his reign, Cyrus made a decree that all the exiled Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). They did, and eventually the temple was rebuilt by 516BC. Ezra came to Jerusalem in 457BC, some 80 years after the first returning exiles, and taught the people the Law. Nehemiah came down to Jerusalem from Susa, the Persian Empire’s capital, in 444BC and stayed for 12 years, helping lead the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls. This return from exile was only a shadow of the past however; the new temple lacked the glory of Solomon’s temple, the leaders of the people were neither kings nor in the line of David, and the limited political autonomy the people enjoyed wasn’t national independence.

The Persian empire fell to the Greeks and Alexander the Great in 333BC; although only king for a short time — he died of fever in 323BC — Alexander extended the Greek empire both far and fast. He did treat Jerusalem and the Jewish people well however, especially after reading himself prophesied about it Daniel. Indeed, he gave the Jews “marked preferment, according them full rights of citizenship with the Greeks in his new city, Alexandria, and in other cities.” (Baxter, 1960: 15) After Alexander’s death, the Greek empire split up between four of his generals: Ptolemy in Egypt, Lysimachus in Thrace (an area including modern-day Turkey), Cassander in Greece, and Seleucus in Mesopotamia (where modern-day Iraq is).

This unfortunately left the area of Palestine in the “role of a buffer state between the domains of Ptolemy and Antigonus as it had centuries earlier between Egypt and Assyria.” (Bromiley, 1982: 875) Palestine came under Ptolemaic rule between 320-198BC, and then under the Seleucids until 142BC. During this time, Alexander’s strategy of hellenisation spread across the empire, heavily influencing the Jewish Diaspora. The idea was to bring Greek culture into the newly conquered areas by colonizing them with Greeks. With them came “the Greek language, Greek standards of weights and measures, coinage, and the gymnasium... which was a public facility for sports that also provided instruction in philosophy, literature and music.” (Ibid. 875) Whilst some Jews happily adopted the Greek way of life, others were not so keen on these “un-Jewish innovations... relaxing orthodox observance of the Judaism with the national exclusiveness which it entailed, in favour of Greek liberty of thought and manners and forms of religion.” (Baxter, 1960: 17) A flash-point of this conflict came with Antiochus Epiphanes’ reign of terror — for the Jews at least — between 175 and 164BC.

In 170 BC, Antiochus plundered Jerusalem, tearing down her walls, stealing costly items from the temple, and then in 167 BC, desecrating the Holy of Holies by sacrificing a pig on the altar. Many Jews were killed or sold into slavery. Antiochus also banned the Jewish religion: temple sacrifices were stopped, circumcision was outlawed, sabbath-keeping was forbidden, and copies of
the Law were either burned or defaced, with their owners executed. Pagan worship was enforced instead, with the temple at Jerusalem rededicated to Jupiter and the Samaritan sanctuary on Gerizim rededicated to Jupiter Xenius.

This understandably incensed Jews who feared the Lord, so in 165BC Mattathias, an old priest, began a revolt. He soon formed a small army, which “attacked town after town, striking down the traitorous Jews, overthrowing the idol altars, and restoring the true religion.” (Ibid. 19) Mattathias died a year later and so his son Judas, nicknamed ‘Maccabees’ (Hebrew for ‘the hammer’) took over. In 164BC the rebels recaptured Jerusalem, rededicating the temple in December of that year, which became marked in the Jewish calendar by the Feast of Dedication (as in John 10:22).

Antiochus died a raving madman and was succeeded by his son Lysias, who eventually revoked the anti-Jewish laws and gave the Jewish people freedom to worship. Judas Maccabees wasn’t satisfied with this though and so kept fighting for independence. After dying in battle, his younger brother Jonathan took over the cause, winning Jewish independence in 142BC from the Seleucid king Demetrius II. This began what became known as the Hasmonean Dynasty, a line of kings and high priests from Jonathan’s line. Jewish rule, however, soon descended into in-fighting, political murders, and even civil war. This brief period of self-rule ended in 63 BC with the Roman invasion of Jerusalem by Pompey. Thus began the Roman period in the area.

Roman Rule in the Time of Jesus

Herod the Great became governor of Galilee in 46BC and was crowned King of Judea in 40BC. He did much building work in Jerusalem, including rebuilding the temple; however, Herod was “fundamentally a Hellenistic pagan ruler...far more interested in the building of large-scale cities in the Hellenistic-Roman style and the erection of places of worship for his imperial master Augustus than in the concerns of the Jerusalem religious community and the law recognised in it as valid.” (Noth, 1960: 418) Herod died in 4 BC, “despised by all” (Parkes, 1964: 23); that “history has given him the title of ‘Great’ owes nothing to moral approbation.” (Ibid. 23-24) Upon his death, Judea was divided up between his sons into different kingdoms, tetrarchies and toparchies, all still under Roman rule.

During this first century AD, Jewish unrest grew in the area of Judea. As Parkes writes, “the ordinary Roman despised the Jews for their scruples...and the Jews for their part found that Roman rule involved continuous insults to their religion.” (1964: 35) There were the Zealots, who “drew concrete political conclusions from the demands that the one God should be worshipped exclusively, and interpreted the traditional promises in a nationalistic sense.” (Noth, 1960: 432) They refused to pay taxes to Rome, wanting instead to fight for national freedom for the Jews, and even managed to make a raid on Jerusalem in AD50. Successive governors either found the task of managing the area too difficult, or were negligent or corrupt. Gessius Florus, governing between AD64-66, “plundered the land quite openly and without restraint, and wherever there was a chance of deriving personal advantage from it he gave full scope to disorder and robbery.” (Ibid. 435)

A flash-point in this volatile area came when in May of AD66, Florus took 17 talents from the temple treasury. The people of Jerusalem publicly mocked Florus about this, and so he responded by sending in Roman soldiers to pillage part of the city. He then required the city to welcome ceremonially two cohorts of Roman soldiers who were passing through. The people of Jerusalem refused and instead took control of the city by force. Eleazar, a son of the high priest, took leadership of the rebels and decided to stop the daily sacrifices for the emperor. As Noth writes, this was “a complete break with the Roman power, going far beyond the various lesser or more serious conflicts in the country, and all that remained now was a struggle to the death.” (Ibid. 436)
Florus failed to crush the uprising, and the rebellion spread to the region of Galilee. The emperor Nero instead sent Vespasian down to Judea to quash the Jews. He managed to take back all of Galilee by AD67, and the areas surrounding Jerusalem by AD68. However, Nero died in June of that year, and so Vespasian waited to see who would be the next emperor. By the beginning of AD70, Vespasian had been declared emperor of Rome, following the successive deaths of three other emperors in the space of a year: Galba, murdered; Otho, committed suicide; Vitellius, murdered. He went up to Rome in AD70 to secure his rule and instead sent Titus to deal with the Jewish rebellion. Titus gathered together a vast army of men — 4 legions according to Noth (1960), 65,000 according to Parkes (1964), and almost 80,000 according to Keller (1956) — and then began a siege on Jerusalem.

The Siege of Jerusalem

A Jewish defector to the Romans, Josephus, wrote a detailed historical account of the event in *The War of the Jews*, and it’s from there we get most of our information about the events of AD 70. The attack came from the north at first, beginning in the April of that year. Titus tried to get the Jerusalemites to surrender, but his call “was met with derisive laughter.” (Ibid. 399) The Romans then moved in to attack, and with their powerful siege engines, they breached the outer wall on 25th May and captured the New City. Titus paused at this point “to see whether the demolishing of their second wall would not make them a little more compliant.” (Josephus, 1886: 725) He then paraded all of his soldiers before the city in all of their finery in hope that they city might change its mind. As Josephus writes, “I cannot but think that the seditious would have changed their minds at that sight...but as they believed death with torments must be their punishment, if they did not go on in the defense of the city, they thought it much better to die in war.” (Ibid. 726) Titus even got Josephus to plea and reason with the Jerusalemites to surrender, but they refused to listen.

Titus then had an earth wall built around the whole of the city, which, with “a certain divine fury” (Ibid. 734), was completed within three days. The city was now surrounded and facing epidemics and starvation. Up to this point, any deserters from the city, escaping through the “many secret tunnels and exits through the limestone cliffs on which the city is built” (Parkes, 1964: 37), the Romans would catch and then crucify: “Mercenaries nailed 500 of them every day to crosses just outside the city.  Gradually a whole forest of crosses sprang up on the hillsides til the lack of wood called a halt to the frightful practice.” (Keller, 1956: 402) But now, Roman soldiers would just rip open these people, hoping to find gold that Jews may have swallowed to keep safe. Titus tried to stop this happening, but with little success.

The suffering of the Jews during the siege was truly terrible. Many thousands died from starvation and disease, with the dead bodies just thrown from the city walls. Josephus records of how Titus, “in going his rounds along those valleys, saw them full of dead bodies, and their thick putrefaction running about them, he gave a loud groan; and, spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to witness that this was not his doing.” (1886: 735) Josephus records that 115,880 dead bodies were carried out of the city, and no doubt the final death toll was much higher.

On July 22, Fortress Antonia fell to the Romans. This was a strong tower to the north of the city, guarding the entrance to the temple mount. Josephus them made another speech to the Jerusalemites, pleading for them to surrender. They did not, but soon afterwards news began circulating of a certain mother who had killed her child, roasted it and then eaten it. The city of Jerusalem was shocked by this, as were the Roman army. Josephus tells us that Titus “excused himself before God as to this matter, and said, that he had proposed peace and liberty to the Jews...but that they, instead of concord, had chosen sedition; instead of peace, war; and before satiety and abundance, a famine.” (Ibid. 749)
Titus tried battering down the gates to the temple, but when that didn’t work, he commanded his soldiers to set it alight. Three days later, he ordered them to put out the fire, but the fire spread to the temple. Titus wanted to save the temple as it was such a glorious building, but he was unable to stop his soldiers from burning it to the ground. So on August 10th AD 70, the second temple, which “God had for certain long ago doomed...to the fire” (Ibid. 751), was destroyed, on the same day that Babylon had destroyed Solomon’s temple in 587 BC.

Resistance in the city was finally quashed on September 26th AD 70. The city was razed to the ground, with only a few buildings and towers left standing. The very stones of the temple were prised apart by Roman soldiers after melted gold that had run between them. Towns and cities in Galilee were also destroyed as the Romans crushed the rest of the rebellion. Jerusalem was then renamed ‘Colonia Aelia Capitolina’ and Judea renamed to Palestine. Where the Holy Place stood, a temple of Jupiter Capitulinus was built, and a temple of Venus was built nearby. Jews were forbidden from coming into Jerusalem on pain of death, as were Christians. As Noth concludes in his book, “the descendants of the Israel of old had become strangers in their own former homeland just as they were in the Diaspora; and their holy city was prohibited to them. Thus ended the ghastly epilogue of Israel’s history.” (1960: 454)

Jesus’ Teaching and Ministry

In light of this history, I now wish to turn to Jesus’ teaching and ministry, as found in the Gospels, in respect to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. As I have mentioned earlier, Jesus had a lot more to say about this area than we often realise. Wright observes that it “has commonly been assumed...that Jesus and many of his contemporaries expected the imminent end of the present space-time order altogether, the winding up of history and the ushering in of a new age in radical discontinuity with the present one.” (1996: 95) Because we read the Gospels in this way, we therefore thrust all of Jesus’ eschatological sayings into the — what has turned out to be — distant future. However Wright proposes that “Jesus and some of his contemporaries expected the end of the present world order, i.e. the end of the period when the Gentiles were lording it over the people of the true god, and the inauguration of the time when this god would take his power and reign and, in the process, restore the fortunes of his suffering people.” (Ibid. 95) Therefore “Jesus’ warnings about imminent judgement were intended to be taken as denoting (what we would call) socio-political events, seen as the climatic movements in Israel’s history, and, in consequence, as constituting a summons to national repentance.” (Ibid. 97)

If we bear this in mind, that Jesus’ eschatological sayings were largely about an impending national disaster for Israel, and that Jesus came to warn the Jewish people about it in a similar way to the Old Testament prophets, it sheds much new light on Jesus’ life and sayings. I therefore wish to examine 7 different aspects of Jesus’ teaching and ministry in regard to this: firstly, with John the Baptist, secondly with Jesus’ understanding of his mission, thirdly in Jesus’ ‘general’ teaching, fourthly in Jesus’ parables, fifthly in Jesus’ prophetic actions/signs, sixthly in Jesus ‘apocalyptic’ sayings, and seventhly in Jesus’ passion and death.

To do this, I could just pick out different passages from each of the different Gospels; this may not be the best approach however. Firstly, it may flatten some of the key differences between the Gospels. As Baxter writes, “the ‘harmony’ of the four Gospels is best appreciated not by destroying but by preserving their diversities.” (1960: 119) Secondly, each Gospels has different amounts to say about the coming judgement on Jerusalem. John’s Gospel, which was probably written with the church in mind, contains mostly realized eschatology where the coming future is here already. Mark’s Gospel, written for the Roman mind, has more action than teaching and so
only mentions the judgement in chapter 13. Luke’s Gospel was written for the Greek mind, which would have included hellenistic Jews, and so does talk about eschatological things a lot. However Matthew’s Gospel, written for the Hebrew mind, is understandably more concerned with the future plight of the Jews and Jerusalem etc. I will therefore focus on this Gospel.

John the Baptist

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

(Matthew 3:1-2)

John the Baptist heralded the start Jesus’ ministry, fulfilling the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!’” (Matthew 3:3) John sets the stage for the revealing of Jesus to the people, declaring that it’s the Lord God who is coming to his people. When John preaches that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2), as with Jesus’ preaching on the subject, the people “must have known, roughly speaking, what he was talking about. Some may have got it wrong. But the Kingdom of Heaven must have been understandable in some way or other.” (Forster, 2002b: 17) What the Jews were hoping for was finally here.

But what was the Jewish hope? For what were they expecting? One of the aspects was the coming of a promised Messiah, “the descendant of David who would act as the eschatological agent of God.” (Richardson & Bowden, 1983: 358) It is clear that Jesus’ understanding of this title was often very different to that of that people. Jesus tried to keep his identity as Messiah pretty secret, warning people he met to “See that you say nothing to anyone” (Mark 1:44). He would withdraw from from crowds if he thought they were getting the wrong idea, such as after the feeding of the 5000 where Jesus perceived “that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king” (John 6:15). This is one reason why Jesus called himself ‘Son of Man’, “so that people would understand the Messiah his way, rather than according to popular conception” (Forster, 2002b: 50).

The Messiah was not the only feature of this hope though. Wright argues: “(a) that popular Judaism in the first century was eagerly expecting Israel’s god to act decisively to get rid of the Roman overlord, (b) that this expectation regularly expressed itself in terms of Israel’s god becoming king, and (c) that the apocalyptic language of some of its favourite writings, not least the book of Daniel, had nothing to do with the supposed end to the space-time order, and everything to do with the climax of Israel’s history, the final liberation of Israel from her pagan enemies” (1996: 40). The Jewish hope was a very political one.

However, John seems to put a shocking spin on it all. Firstly, he preaches that the people have to repent to be part of this coming kingdom (Matthew 3:2). It’s not automatic; the people can’t rely on their Jewish ethnicity for salvation and say, “We have Abraham for our father” (Matthew 3:9). Secondly, he warns about a future judgement. When the Pharisees and Sadducees come to John to be baptized, he asks them “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matthew 3:7) This isn’t a warning about a hell in the next life, a judgement after death; if we bear in mind the coming judgement upon Jerusalem, there is a much sooner ‘wrath to come’. As it says in Romans, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness” (1:18) — it’s already happening. John is acting as the other Old Testament prophets in terms of prophesying judgement upon the nation of Israel. If people respond in repentance, then they can escape the judgement, but if they don’t repent then they won’t. As John
warns them, “The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear
good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:10) The coming judgement is far more
serious than just a pruning; it is more akin rather to what happened to the Northern Kingdom of
Israel by the Assyrians.

Thirdly, John breaks the people’s expectations of what coming Messiah will be like. He
won’t ‘beat up the Romans’, but instead “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will
thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn
up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:12) The word for ‘winnowing fork’ is πτύον
(ptúon), which is “A fan or winnowing shovel with which grain is thrown up against the wind in
order to cleanse it and separate it from the chaff” (Zodhiates, 1992: 1252). The Messiah will
separate the good from the evil within Israel, as wheat and chaff are separated. The burning of fire
isn’t just the hell-fire after the final judgement, but also refers to the burning to destruction of
Jerusalem in AD70.

Jesus’ Mission

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

(Matthew 15:24)

If John framed Jesus mission as having a purifying role, how did Jesus understand his
mission? This is a huge topic, so I can only hope to scratch the surface here. There were also many
facets to Jesus’ work, with each Gospel having a different emphasis, so it depends which account
you look at. For example, Mark tells us that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to
serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), emphasizing that Jesus is for
everyone. In John, Jesus says that he came “that they may have life, and have it more
abundantly” (John 10:10), encouraging his readers that we can have the life of Jesus in us right now.
In Luke, Jesus takes Isaiah 61 as his mission statement: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18). Luke is emphasizing that
Jesus came for the marginalized, dispossession and despised, not just for the ‘special’ people (i.e. the
Jews).

When we turn to Matthew’s Gospel, the emphasis is different again. In Matthew 15:21-28,
Jesus heals a Canaanite woman’s daughter, showing Jesus’ heart for anyone who was needy.
However, Jesus’ initial response at the woman’s request was to say, “I was only sent to the lost
sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24) The woman still displays great faith, pleading for
just a ‘crumb’ of healing, and so gets what she wanted; Jesus is always drawn to faith wherever it
comes from. This passage does seem to say however that Jesus was sent first to the Jews.

What does Jesus’ startling assertion mean, that he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house
of Israel? According to Hagner, this phrase, which is also used in Matthew 10:6, refers “not to a
portion of Israel...but to all of Israel.” (1993: 270) Earlier on, Matthew describes how Jesus,
“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like
sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). The Jews lacked godly leaders, instead languishing
under the heavy yoke of the Pharisees’ teaching and the corrupt rule of the Sadducees and the
priesthood, as well as under the oppression of the enemy. That Jesus came first to the people of
Israel underlines “the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises” (Hagner, 1993: 271); God
didn’t abandon his special people but instead came to dwell with them personally.

However, Jesus’ coming initially to the Jews was not just eschatological ‘first-dibs’ for the
messianic blessings; there was a greater consequence to come if they then rejected Jesus. When
Jesus sent out his twelve disciples on a ‘mini-mission’ by themselves (Matthew 10:1-42), he
instructs them, amongst other things, to only go to the “lost sheep of the house Israel” (Matthew 10:6). They were not to go to the Gentiles nor the Samaritans but to the Jews, preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. If cities or villages welcomed them, they were to leave them their peace there, but if they didn’t, they were to leave that place and shake the dust off their feet (Matthew 10:14). According to Tasker, “To ‘shake the dust from the feet’ is an indication that they had been treading on what was virtually heathen soil, which must not be carried back to ‘holy’ land” (1961: 108). By doing this, the disciples were declaring that God had rejected that city, because they had rejected him. As Jesus put it, it will be “more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement” (Matthew 10:15) than for those cities who didn’t listen.

But when will this judgement be? When Jesus later denounces the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for not repenting, he says their judgement will be worse than for Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 11:22). Will this day of judgement happen after Jesus’ return, with Jesus picking out the former residents of those cities and giving them a particular punishment? Tyre and Sidon, powerful and proud cities in their days, were both completely destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332BC. Although they were rebuilt in Jesus’ time, they were only shadows of their former might and so it is fair to say that their day of judgement had already come. Jesus is warning that a day of judgment is coming and, because of their lack of repentance, they will fare badly. In AD70, when the Galilean revolt was crushed by the Romans, this did indeed happen. With Capernaum, Jesus’ “prophecy was so completely fulfilled that the town has disappeared and its very site is a matter of debate” (Zodhiates, 1992: 819).

Jesus’ Teaching

“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

(Matthew 7:26-27)

If Jesus was sent, in part, to warn the Jewish people of a soon-coming national judgement, this should be apparent in much of his ‘general’ teaching. I have often been guilty of reading Jesus’ teaching in a historical and political vacuum, applying them to my own life without really investigating what they would have meant to the original hearers. However, once they put in context, it is interesting how Jesus’ teaching takes on a different dimension and depth, and this judgement element becomes clearer. One example of this is with the ending of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7: 24-27, where Jesus warns his listeners to hear his words and to act on them. He then compares two types of people: the wise man and the foolish man. The first builds on the rock, as in obeys Jesus’ teaching, and the second builds on the sand, as in failing to obey Jesus’ teaching. Both experience the same pressures, i.e. rain, floods, winds blowing and slamming against the their house, but only the wise man’s house survives. If we look at Daniel 9:26, we see a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple:

“That after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.”

Some people think that this verse refers to Antiochus Epiphanes’ actions in 167BC. However it doesn’t really fit the prophecy, especially as it refers to events after the Messiah had come. According to Rickard, there is “no credible evidence that the Jews themselves ever saw a connection between Daniel 9 and their sufferings under Antiochus” (2003). Indeed, Josephus, applies this prophecy to his situation during the siege of Jerusalem: “for there was a certain ancient
oracle of those men, that the city should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of a war, when a sedition should invade the Jews, and their own hand should pollute the temple of God.” (1886: 694) As Rickard demonstrates, Daniel’s prophecy can be applied to “the war which engulfed the Jews in A.D. 66-73” (2003): there was an invasion by the Romans; the end came with a flood, in terms of the speed and ruthlessness of the attack; the city and the sanctuary were completely destroyed and razed to the ground; and wars and desolations continued throughout the area, as the Romans dealt with the remaining pockets of rebellion. As the rains fell and the flood of destruction rose up in AD70, the fall of the house of Israel was indeed great.

There are a couple of other interesting teachings of Jesus I wish to look at. The first one is in Matthew 12:43-45, where Jesus compares “this evil generation” (Matthew 12:45) to a man who has been set free from an unclean spirit. After a while the unclean spirit goes back to the man, and finding the place nice and clean, brings seven others with him, making “the last state of that man...worse than the first.” (Matthew 12:45). Because the people of Israel did not accept Jesus, the benefits of Jesus’ cleansing and life were lost as the enemy took back even more ground than he had in the first place. For example, Noth writes about the groups of dagger-carrying ‘Sicarii’ who were throughout mid-first century Judah, and who “filled the land with murders.” (1960: 434) After Jesus had come, the nation of Israel accelerated their slide to destruction, culminating in the events of AD70.

The second teaching I want to look at is when Jesus says that “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matthew 16:25) This was the problem with the Jewish nation and what eventually led to their downfall; they were so desperate to preserve everything to do with Israel, and try and capture back what was lost centuries before, that they ended up losing everything. During the siege of Jerusalem, Josephus implored with the inhabitants to surrender as the main aim of the Romans wasn’t to destroy the city or the temple. However, because the people insisted on a path of idolatrous nationalism, they perished.

Jesus’ Parables

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come...the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.”

(Matthew 22:2-3, 7)

Jesus’ warnings of a terrible and imminent judgement can be seen in many of Jesus parables too, as Jesus’ parables were as politically charged as any of Jesus’ teaching. However, we often miss this and instead think that they just speak of a final judgement. As Wright puts it, “The ‘normal’ way of reading these passages [about judgement] within the Christian tradition has been to see them as references to a general post mortem judgement in hell; but this betrays a fairly thorough lack of historical understanding.” (1996:323) Now with a historical understanding in mind, I will look at a couple of Jesus’ parables and see what we find.

The first one I want to to look at is the parable of the landowner from Matthew 21:33-46, which is also told in Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-18. Jesus begins by quoting from a very similar parable in Isaiah 5 about how the Lord looked after and tended Israel like cultivating a vineyard, but how “He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.” (Isaiah 5:2) However, in Jesus’ parable, the fault lies not with the vineyard itself, but the vine-growers who have rented the vineyard from the landowner. When the landowner wants his produce from his land, he sends out his slaves to the vine-growers. However, these slaves get beaten, killed or stoned by the vine-growers, the same thing that Jerusalem does to “those who are sent to her” (Matthew 23:37).
The landowner tries again, and then decides to send his son, reasoning that “they will respect my son.” (Matthew 21:37) But they don’t, instead scheming to murder the son and grab his inheritance.

Jesus asks those gathered what will be done to the vine-growers when the landowner comes, and the answer given: “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds in the proper seasons.” (Matthew 21:41) This is indeed what happened, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the kingdom of God was given “to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matthew 21:43), i.e. the church. Jesus is warning the people of God’s coming judgement upon the unfruitful nation of Israel, their apostasy demonstrated by their plotting to kill even the son of the landowner who was standing before them. This parable revealed the hearts of the chief priests and the Pharisees, who “understood that He was speaking about them” (Matthew 21:45) and yet were still considering seizing Jesus there and then.

Jesus tells another parable, the parable of the Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:1-14), which is even more shocking. The highly charged political meaning is hardly veiled at all in the story of a king giving a wedding feast for his son but with the invited guests refusing to come. Tan, in writing about the similar parable in Luke 14, explains why not coming to the feast would be such an insult: “If he sends out invitations to rich, influential business and community leaders and landowners in the area to come to a banquet, their presence at the function is an indication of the respect they have for him. Refusal to come indicates their scorn of him.” (1998:75) Not only did the invited guests scorn the invitation though, some seized, mistreated and killed the king’s slaves (Matthew 22:6). Enraged by their response, the king sends out his armies, destroys those murderers and sets their city on fire. Jesus is again warning the people of Israel not to reject him and his offer of God’s kingdom; if they do, then they can only expect destruction by the sword and by fire.

**Jesus’ Prophetic Action**

Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, “No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered.

(Matthew 21:19)

All of the Gospels have in common Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem and then the story of his passion. However, there are a couple of events during that time that have particular significance regarding Jesus’ judgement of Jerusalem. First of all there is the clearing of the temple in Matthew 21:13-13, where Jesus drives out “all those who were buying and selling in the temple”, overturning the “tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.” (Matthew 21:12) He then quotes from Jeremiah 7:11, with the Lord’s challenge to Israel: “Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight?” Jesus is judging the corruption of the temple, where true spirituality and worship of the Lord has become a money-making scheme.

To emphasize this, Matthew goes on to tell us the account about Jesus cursing the fig tree. In Mark’s Gospel the meaning of this is even more clear as the account of the clearing of the temple is put between the cursing of the tree and its withering (Mark 11:12-14; 20-21). Jesus has come to the temple to see if he can find any fruit of righteousness, but he could find none. Therefore, in light of Jesus’ teaching that “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10), the temple is cursed and cut off. The Lord is slow to anger, but barrenness eventually does have to be dealt with. As Luke records in a different parable, “Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?” (13:7) And within 40 years, that is what happened.
Jesus’ Apocalyptic Sayings

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”

(Matthew 24:1-2)

In all of the synoptic Gospels, the last block of teaching Jesus gives before his last Passover meal is about the destruction of the temple (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21), predicting that it will be completely torn down. The passage in Matthew and Mark begins with a parallel with Exekiel 10-11, which is about the glory of the Lord leaving the temple: “The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.” (Ezekiel 11:23) Jesus leaves the temple and then sits on the Mount of Olives, which was directly east of the temple. He then describes what will soon take place, pronouncing judgement upon the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. The disciples want a bit more explanation, so ask “...when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3) Jesus then goes on to describe in detail what it going to happen in the future.

There is much debate however as to what Jesus’ discourse refers to. There are some who take a ‘futurist’ approach, denying “any reference here to events of the first century, including the fall of Jerusalem” (Hagner, 1995: 685). Other however, such as Wright, take the approach that it is Jesus warning about events to come very soon. He writes about the parallel passage in Mark 13, that “It is thoroughly believable as a first-century Jewish prophecy, based on clear passages of scripture, warning of a coming time of national distress, seen as the beginning of the great tribulation that must come upon Israel.” (1996: 348) Upon Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem, the disciples were expecting him to be crowned as king. “The disciples now ‘heard’ his prophetic announcement of the destruction of the Temple as the announcement, also, of his own vindication; in other words, of his own ‘coming’ - not floating around on a cloud, of course, but of his ‘coming’ to Jerusalem as the vindicated, rightful king.” (Ibid. 342)

There is a third view that people take regarding this text, which is more of a middle road. This approach reads most of Matthew 24 as referring to the fall of Jerusalem, up until Jesus says that “this generation will not pass until all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34). Verse 36 until the end of chapter 25 then refers to Jesus’ return. Contextually this makes sense, as the direction of the passages changes halfway through chapter 24: Jesus has just given his disciples lots of pointers for knowing when the fall of Jerusalem will happen, including a warning to flee from the city (which the early church heeded in AD66), but he then tells them that “of the day and hour no one knows.” (Matthew 24:36) This makes sense if this is now talking about Jesus’ bodily return. The doctrine of the second coming may not have been part of the disciples’ expectations at that time, but it was a part of the apostolic teaching in the early church so it must have come from Jesus in some form. Jesus often confounded the expectations of his disciples, and for Jesus not to talk about his return seems rather implausible.

A concept that is quite key in this debate is when Jesus talks about “the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:27), which is taken from Daniel 7:13-14. That passage talks about the Son of Man coming up to the Ancient of Days, surrounded with the clouds of heaven, to receive a kingdom. When Jesus quotes this and applies it to himself, it sometimes refers to Jesus’ second coming, when he will indeed be “given dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him.” (Daniel 7:13-14) However, at other times in the Gospels, it makes more sense for it to refer to the destruction of the temple, such as in Matthew 24:30. As Jesus dies, rises again and then ascends to the Father’s right hand, he is vindicated as the Lord’s Christ, his chosen servant. And as a way of proving that this has happened, everything that...
was against Jesus, i.e. Jerusalem and the temple, get destroyed. As Wright puts it, “When the ‘son of man’ was vindicated, there would be no question, no room for doubt... It would be like lightening shining from the east to the west. The eagles - the Roman eagles, presumably - would gather round the carcass and pick it clean. The great city that had rejected Jesus’ message, his way of peace, would be destroyed.” (1996: 360)

Jesus’ Death

“This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’ ”

(Matthew 26:61)

Turning to look at Jesus’ trial and execution, these also shed further light on the events of AD70, and a helpful place to start is with the question, “Why did Jesus die?” There are different levels to the answer here: Jesus died from crucifixion; Jesus died for the sins of the world. However, I wish to briefly look at the historical and political meaning: for what reason did Jesus get sentenced to death?

In the trial narrative of Matthew, Jesus, after being betrayed by Judas and then seized by the chief priests and elders, stands in court before the high priest, Caiaphas. The chief priests and Council try find false testimony against Jesus, but all they find are two people who accuse Jesus of claiming he could “destroy the temple of God and...rebuild it in three days.” (Matthew 26:61) Jesus did speak judgement against the temple and so the charges may have reflected some part of Jesus’ teaching. After all, it was about this subject that the crowds mocked Jesus when he was on the cross (Matthew 27:40) But Jesus makes no reply and so is instead asked if he is “the Christ, the Son of God.” (Matthew 26:63) Jesus then goes on to quote from Daniel 7:13 again, referring to the coming destruction of the temple. As Forster explains, Jesus “was looking forward to when Jerusalem would be destroyed and all the things that were opposing Jesus, the Law, the Temple, the high priesthood and all the authorities in Israel, were all demonstrated by God to be finished.” (2002b: 65-66)

This is enough for the high priest, and so Jesus is condemned to death for blasphemy. The was because “To claim that one has the right to overthrow the temple is to make a Messianic claim” (Wright, 1985: 13). Jesus is then taken to the ‘political’ court of the Romans to be tried. After much pressure from the the chief priests and the elders of the people, Pilate hands him over to be crucified, under the charge “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” (Matthew 27:37) As Wright puts it, “For Jesus to claim the status of Messiah...was to make at the same time a statement of the greatest possible political and religious significance. It was to claim that God’s plans, and Israel’s national destiny, revolved around him and his fate. There were only two courses open to his hearers: either believe him and accept the consequences, or get rid of him...” (1985: 14)

As Jesus dies, the veil of the temple is torn in two (Matthew 27:51). This is usually interpreted to mean that we can now have clear access to the Father through the death of the Son, and that meaning can indeed still be brought out. However, if the flow of the passage is followed, it makes more sense to be a divine judgement on the temple: Jesus has just been crucified for claiming authority to destroy the temple to himself, and so God vindicates his servant by this supernatural event. The veil covering the Holy of Holies is torn because the Lord is pronouncing that it isn’t a holy place any more. The events of AD70 just finish off what was already accomplished on the cross.
Implications

I now want to look at some of the implications of my study, focusing on what it means to us theologically and then practically in our daily lives. I will start by looking at four different theological implications we can draw from looking at Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem, and will then look at four practical implications.

Theological Outworkings

(1) It affects our view of Jesus. Even though I live 2000 years after Jesus’ time in a geographically, culturally, technologically, religiously and politically different situation to him, it’s very easy for me to forget that when I read the Gospels. Instead I apply everything to my life in the 21st century without properly thinking through what it would have meant to the original hearers. Just researching the history of the period, both before and after Jesus, helps properly ground Jesus into a concrete time and place, and clarifies a lot of Jesus’ teachings and action. The judgement passages particularly take on a new light and make more sense. Jesus was a Jew and was sent first to the Jews, and so to understand him and his mission, we need to have a certain understanding of their history and culture. In particular, we see just how political Jesus was. He was not afraid to tackle the issues of the day, such as the corruption of the temple, but always on his own terms. He refused to be drawn into taking sides, either with the Roman sympathizers nor the nationalistic Zealots, instead offering a true ‘third-way’, a path through the dark times ahead. The political side of Jesus does need to be looked at more in our theology.

(2) It affects our view on judgement. There is a part of all humans that would rather shy away from judgement, which is probably why in Proverbs we are told to “not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof” (Proverbs 3:11). God always has good for us and always wants us to repent and be saved, so when Jesus preached judgement to the house of Israel, this was so that they could change and instead enter into God’s blessing. Some people did and so escaped the wrath that was to come; after all, Jesus came to show Israel, and Jerusalem in particular, the “things which make for peace” (Luke 19:42). Many didn’t accept Jesus though, and so the Lord’s judgement came upon them, but not without the heart of God deeply grieving. God judges us because he values us as significant beings, but his warnings are always so that we might “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

(3) It affects our view of hell. As I have tried to show, some passages that we often take to be talking about judgement after death are actually talking about a more immediate judgement, for example with John the Baptist warning a coming wrath. I don’t think these passages are only talking about AD70 however, because that leaves out of the picture everyone who isn’t a first century Jew living in Palestine; there is a wrath to come for everyone who has lived upon the earth. However, there are a few things we can draw out of the initial meaning.

Firstly, ending up in hell is a destiny which is entirely self-chosen. Titus offered the people of Jerusalem many chances to surrender and so let the city be saved, but they refused every one. Titus then had no option but to completely destroy the city. If people refuse to chose life, then God will have to give them their choice of death, which is hell. As Wright puts it, “When people continually and consistently refuse to worship this God [in whose image they are made], they progressively reflect this image less and less. Instead, they reflect the images of what they are worshipping. Since all else other than the true creator God is heading for death, this means that they buy into a system of death. Thus failure to worship God revealed in Jesus leads, by one’s own choice, to an eventual erasing of that which makes us truly human.” (2005)
Secondly, hell is going to be a truly awful place. Reading the account of the destruction of Jerusalem, it seems unbearably terrible, with mothers eating their children, rotting bodies everywhere, deserters torn open by Roman soldiers hunting after gold etc. This makes sense of why Jesus warned his hearers that “it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” (Matthew 5:29)

(4) It affects our understanding of prophecy. Knowing history is very important for interpreting prophecy, as we can only spot fulfillments if we know what’s gone on in the past. It also helps prevent our interpretations becoming fanciful, as can easily happen. Passages such as Matthew 24 would make obvious sense to us if we were first century Jews, as hinted at by phrases such as “let the reader understand” (Matthew 24:15). Researching history and culture helps us get into the head of a first century Jew.

There are no doubt further meanings to the prophetic words that Jesus gave, as otherwise they wouldn’t have lasting relevance throughout history. Forster proposes that there can be four levels of fulfillment of a prophecy, corresponding to the stages of gestation (2002a): there can be an immediate fulfillment — the conception of a child; prophecy can map out the whole swathes of history — the full nine months of a pregnancy; it can refer to the ‘end of the age’ — the birthing of a child; and prophecy can give us timeless spiritual truths — the unchanging DNA of a child throughout the whole process. This is similar to the theological concept of a sensus plenior, “by which an ‘inspired’ text actually says more than the author realized at the time, with the Holy Spirit filling in the blank of authorial ignorance.” (Wright, 1992: 57) It has been very helpful to try and understand the ‘conception’ meaning of some of Jesus’ prophecies, as “if we don’t get the first level of meaning right, it’s dangerous to guess at second ones.” (Wright, 2005)

Looking at Jesus’ prophecies also makes us better trust what Jesus says about the future. If Jesus was right about the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, he’ll be right about his other predictions, including things about his return. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people to make sure that they listen to the prophet that “The Lord God will raise up for you.” (Deuteronomy 18:15) However, the test for a prophet is whether what they say actually happens: “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken.” (Deuteronomy 18:22) The events of AD70 vindicated Jesus and showed that he was the Lord’s rightful king, and so we can trust his words.

Practical Outworkings

There are four warnings/encouragements that I think we can take from this study.

(1) Jesus is still judging his people. The winnowing fork of Jesus was initially for the house of Israel, but there is no reason why Jesus isn’t continuing it with the church. As Peter writes, “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17). Jesus wants a pure and holy church, and so is continually testing and purifying her, separating out the dross. One way this happens is through the persecutions that come upon the church. This is why Peter exhorts his beloved readers to “not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing” (1 Peter 4:12). For those not in Christ, the judgement of God destroys them, but for those in Christ, it brings purity, like gold refined in a fire. If we are staying true to Jesus in our hearts and lives then whatever situations we find ourselves, God will use it to bring about more of Christ’s likeness in us. As Paul writes, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

(2) The kingdom of God can be taken from the church too. Jesus pronounced over Israel that “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of
it.” (Matthew 21:43) However, if the church is unfruitful, then God can take the kingdom from her as well. As Forster writes, “It is quite a biblical concept that the Kingdom can be taken away from us. The Kingdom is not something which is statutorily or irremovably given.” (2002b: 75) Just as Israel didn’t have automatic blessings by virtue of their birth status, neither does the church. In Revelation, Jesus dictates letters to seven of his churches, encouraging them but also warning them that they need to stay true to him. To the church in Ephesus, which had lost its first love, he warns them to “repent and do the deeds you did at first” or else he will “remove your lampstand out of its place.” (Revelation 2:5) To the church in Laodicea, he warns them that “because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” (Revelation 3:16) We need to makes sure we are walking worthy of Jesus, pleasing him in all respects, “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10)

(3) We can know both freedom and urgency in evangelism. If our understanding about hell is not, “God is really mad at you and will throw you into hell if you’re not careful”, but rather, “God really loves you and wants to rescue you from hell”, I think it really releases us in evangelism: we have some good news to bring to people! Our gospel is about telling people that God is good and Jesus came to bring life, and if we’re filled with the Spirit of Jesus, even preaching about hell can be life-giving. But at the same time, hell is still going to be a terrible place and so we need to get as many people off the broad road “that leads to destruction.” (Matthew 7:13) Jesus wept when he saw Jerusalem, knowing where they were headed (Luke 19:41). We need to get hold of God’s heart for the lost more and more, asking for more of a revelation of just how dire their situation is and how lost they really are without the life of Jesus.

(4) We must keep listening to Jesus through the evil times. Jesus is the smartest guy in the universe, and knows how to make life work. When he came to Israel, the nation was in the process of rushing headlong into oblivion and destruction. However Jesus offered a way through the political and social maze of the time, a path of peace through repentance and faith in him that would see them the coming darkness, if only they would listen to him. The same is true for us, if we will be like the “wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24) As Willard writes, “Jesus offers himself as God’s doorway into the life that is truly life. Confidence in him leads us today, as in other times, to become his apprentices in eternal living. ‘Those who come through me will be safe,’ he said. ‘They will go in and out and fine all they need. I have come into their world that they may have life, and life to the limit.’” (1998: 19)

Part of this is in heeding the prophetic voice in the church. One example of this is Joyner, who has an incredible prophetic gifting and has written many books which warn and equip the church about the coming times. This is Jesus specifically showing his church the way through difficulties. Joyner exhorts us that “We must learn to hear and properly respond to proven prophetic voices in the times ahead... I have witnessed a number of critical situations, even to the point of life and death, which depended on hearing and responding properly to words from those the Lord is establishing with trustworthy prophetic ministries.” (1997: 17) Just like the early church heeded Jesus’ warning to flee to the mountains “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Luke 21:20), we must too be carefully listening to the Lord.

**Conclusion**

There are several things we can conclude from looking at Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. Firstly, we can see that it was historically a cataclysmic event. In surveying the account of the sacking in AD70, it truly was a terrible time that put a firm underline beneath Jewish religion
as it stood in those days. This wasn’t just a blip on the seismograph, but was more of a 8 or 9 on the Richter scale, especially as Jerusalem had been the centre of the Lord’s saving activities for centuries and the temple was meant to be the dwelling place of God himself. The shock of the destruction of Jerusalem would have been acutely felt at the time, but it’s impact is mostly lost to us in the 21st century, hence why studying the history has been helpful.

Secondly, it is clear that this event needs to be interpreted regarding its significance, which Jesus does, decades before it happens. Jesus frames it as a judgment of God upon an apostate Israel who had been rejecting the Lord’s purposes for generations and now had rejected his son. By choosing a path of nationalistic idolatry, Israel chose death and destruction at the hands of the Romans. Jesus also explains the event as the coming of the Son of Man, where Jesus will be vindicated as God’s chosen servant and the true King of Israel.

Thirdly, gaining a better historical perspective on Jesus’ teaching helps clarify and shed light on doctrines such as hell and judgement. It also shows us how passionate committed the Lord is about having a pure and holy people, and about establishing his Christ as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” (Revelation 19:16)

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