

The Destruction of Jerusalem Compared and Contrasted with the Tribulation at the End of the Age

Luke 21:20-24

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Luke 21; etc.) answers two basic questions which were asked by the disciples:

1. **“When shall these things be?”** (Matthew 24:3). This refers to the destruction of Jerusalem mentioned in Matthew 23:38 and Matthew 24:2.
2. **“What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?”** (Matthew 24:3). [Note that the Granville-Sharp rule groups together Christ’s coming with the end of the age. The Greek article appears before “coming” but not before “end of the age” (though in some manuscripts this is not the case). The Granville-Sharp rule means that the coming referred to in this question is a coming associated with the end of the age].

We should thus expect the Olivet Discourse to discuss two things: 1) The destruction of Jerusalem; 2) The Lord’s coming at the end of the age.

Antiochus Epiphanes brought about abominable desolations of the Jewish temple, even sacrificing a pig therein (Dan. 8:9, etc.), and this foreshadowed a future desecration of the temple that will take place during the time of the Antichrist at the end of the age, specifically in the middle of Daniel’s 70th week. Likewise the siege of Jerusalem and the terrible time of trouble in 70 A.D. foreshadowed a future siege of Jerusalem at the end of the age. It is not uncommon for the Lord to use a historical event to foreshadow a future event which shares with it certain similarities.

Years ago, J.C.Ryle, who was certainly not a dispensationalist, made the following observation (*Expository Thoughts in the Gospels*, in his comments under Matthew 24): “But we must not suppose that this part of our Lord’s prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord’s words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a second siege of Jerusalem, which is yet to take place, when Israel has returned to their own land, and to a second tribulation on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a view of this passage may sound startling to some. But those who doubt its correctness would do well to study the last chapter of the prophet Zechariah and the last chapter of Daniel.”

The key passage that speaks of the siege of 70 A.D. is found in Luke 21:20-24. As we consider these verses we will note some remarkable similarities between this siege and what will happen at the end of the age. We shall also note some significant differences.

Luke 21:20. “When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know the its desolation is near.”

SIMILARITIES: The destruction of Jerusalem involved “desolation” even as there will be “desolation” at the end of the age (Matthew 24:15).

DIFFERENCES: The sign the Lord gave for the destruction of Jerusalem was this: You will see Jerusalem compassed (surrounded) with armies. The sign the Lord gave for His second coming at the end of the age was very specific: You will see the abomination of desolation referred to in Daniel 9:27 standing in the holy place (the temple). See Matthew 24:15. In 70 A.D. the temple was destroyed without one stone standing; at the end of the age the temple will be standing with the image of the beast standing therein (Rev. 13; 2 Thess. 2).

Luke 21:21. “Then let them who are in Judea flee to the mountains, etc.”

SIMILARITIES: At the time of the abomination of desolation at the end of the age there will be FLEEING as well (Matt. 24:16). In 70 A.D. and at the middle of Daniel’s 70th week, Jerusalem was not the place where you, as a Jew, would want to be! Get out of there as fast as you can! The same urgent need to flee the holy city will be true three and a half years before the Lord’s second coming.

Luke 21:22. “For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.”

SIMILARITIES: God will keep His Word concerning His promised judgment in 70 A.D. (as predicted in Luke 21:6 etc.) just as God will keep His word concerning all His predictions that relate to the end of the age (Matt. 24:34-35).

DIFFERENCES: The destruction of Jerusalem involves “vengeance” and severe judgment upon the Jews. In contrast, the coming of Christ at the end of the age will bring deliverance to the Jews. Notice Jeremiah 30:7 and the hope of deliverance, quite unlike 70 A.D. when there was no deliverance but only destruction.

Luke 21:23. “But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that nurse children in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.”

SIMILARITIES: Notice the identical language in Matthew 24:19, “Woe unto those that are with child, etc.” Also the similarity between “great distress” and “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). [Note: the word “distress” used in Luke is a different word, though similar in meaning to “tribulation.” It means “distress, calamity, straits”—Thayer]. Also we know that God’s wrath and judgment will characterize the tribulation period at the end of the age.

DIFFERENCES: Luke does not say that this “great distress” will be the greatest time of distress the world has ever known, but the tribulation which is associated with the Lord’s coming and the end of the age is so described (Matthew 24:21). Though the horrors of 70 A.D. should not be minimized (one million Jews died and many thousands were enslaved), we should not forget the millions of Jews who

already have been murdered in the 20th century and we should remember that a time of even greater trouble is yet future (Zechariah foretold that two thirds of the nation would be cut off or die in a future time of trouble—Zech 13:8). In 70 A.D. the distress was centered “in the land”, in Judea, whereas the great tribulation will be experienced on a worldwide scale (Rev. 3:10). In 70 A.D. God’s wrath will be poured out on “this people” (the Jews) whereas in the final tribulation God’s wrath will be poured out on all nations (Rev. 6:15—“kings of the earth” etc.).

Luke 21:24. “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 by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

SIMILARITIES: As Jerusalem was under Roman domination in 70 A.D. so also Jerusalem will be under the domination of “the beast” (Rev. 13) at the end of the age.

DIFFERENCES: The Jews in 70 A.D. were led away captive into all nations but at the end of the age they will be regathered from all nations and restored to their land (Matthew 24:31 and many verses in the Old Testament prophets such as Jeremiah 16:14-15; Isaiah 43:5-7; Jeremiah 23:7-8; Jeremiah 31:7-10; Ezekiel 11:14-18; Ezekiel 36:24; Isaiah 11:11 and following). In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles, a situation that has lasted and continued for many centuries, but when Christ comes at the end of the tribulation, the times of the Gentiles will come to an end (Daniel 2:44-45).

Note: There are many today who teach that Christ’s coming referred to in Matthew 24 does not refer to His coming at the end of the age, but rather it refers to His coming in judgment in 70 A.D. (even though no one actually saw Him coming at that time!) They accuse us of teaching a “secret rapture” but they teach a “secret coming” in judgment that was seen by no one! Here are but two of numerous problems that such a view creates:

1) If the “great tribulation” of Matthew 24 is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, then how can the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. be equated with our Lord’s coming? Matthew 24:29-30 specifically teaches that our Lord’s coming will take place AFTER the great tribulation of those days.

Great Tribulation = the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. (So they say)
Christ’s coming = the 70 A.D. destruction (Christ’s coming in judgment). (So they say)

But Matthew 24:29-30 teaches that His coming takes place after the great tribulation. To say that the 70 A.D. destruction comes after the 70 A.D. destruction does not make any sense. How can a historical event be followed by the identical event?

2) In Matthew 23:39 the Lord Jesus made it clear that the Jewish nation would not see the Lord Jesus again until they would say, “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” This means that He will not come until the nation is repentant. Since the nation was not repentant in 70 A.D. this must mean that Christ did not come at that time. Notice that Matthew 24:30 specifically says that they would SEE the Son of man coming.

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