

~Destruction of Jerusalem~

Various Historians on the Witnessing of a Literal "Coming in the Clouds of Heaven"

The account of the siege and destruction of the city is left to us by **Josephus, a historian of undoubted veracity and singular fidelity**. He was a Jewish priest. In the wars of which he gives an account, he fell into the hands of the Romans and remained with them during the siege and destruction of the city. Being a Jew, he would of course say nothing designed to confirm the prophecies of Jesus Christ; yet his whole history appears almost like a running commentary on these predictions respecting the destruction of the temple.

(from Barnes' Notes)

Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-95) The Wars of The Jews -The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem--
Written - A.D. 75 *"Valuable as are the remains of classical antiquity, the Works of Josephus may be placed, at least, on a level with the most esteemed monuments of ancient learning. Josephus was esteemed in the first ages of Christianity as an author deserving a high degree of respect for research and integrity. Pious and learned men of later ages have continued to view him in the same light."* -
(Henry Stebbing in "Introduction to Josephus' Works")

Josephus, a Jewish general present at the destruction of Jerusalem, wrote of the coming in the clouds as such: *"Besides these [signs], a few days after that feast, on the one-and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius, [Jyar,] a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; 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 sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence"*
(Wars, VI-V-3).

Here is another quotation from the Jewish historian, **Josephus**, which he wrote about the Jewish War in his generation. When the Jews revolted against Rome, he wrote, *"It is, therefore, impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall, therefore, speak my mind here at once briefly, that neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world"* (**Josephus' War V:X:5 c.f. V:XIII:6; Matt. 24:21; Dan. 12:1**).

What Josephus saw after the destruction of Jerusalem, he wrote, *"...and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood. And truly so it happened, that though the slayers left off at the evening, yet did the fire greatly prevail in the night; and as all was burning, came that eighth day of the month Gorpheus [Elul], upon Jerusalem, a city that had been liable to so many miseries during this siege, that had it always enjoyed as much happiness from its first foundation, it would certainly have been the envy of the world. Nor did it on*

any other account so much deserve these sore misfortunes, as by producing such a generation of men as were the occasion of this its overthrow" (Josephus' Wars VII.IX.5)

It is worth noting some more of **Josephus'** statements in regard to the tremendous significance of this disruption in the affairs of the world:

- *"This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city other wise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind."*
- *"...it had so come to pass, that our city Jerusalem had arrived at a higher degree of felicity than any other city under the Roman government, and yet at last fell into the sorest of calamities again. Accordingly 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."*
- *"Where as the war which the Jews made with the Romans hath been 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."*
- *"That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world." (Matt. 24:21; and Mk. 13:19).*

Tacitus, the famous Roman historian, relating the same events, wrote:

"In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour. A sudden lightening flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure" (Histories, v. 13).

Eusebius, quoting from the Latin **Josephus**, in the fourth century:

"For before the setting of the sun chariots and armed troops were seen throughout the whole region in mid-air, wheeling through the clouds and encircling the cities" (Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Ch. 8).

I hope that now you can "understand how someone could think the mountain burning with fire, the star burning with fire, and the visible return of Christ that will be seen by every eye, has already happened." We have temporal evidence of events that took place within one generation of Christ's having said that the generation would not pass away until all was fulfilled. Preterists also have more than just the "how". The Lord has also shown us the "why." A flawed Futurist hermeneutic (method of interpretation) will be blind to them, though, as it is contrary to the "literal method". All I am asking is that you do some more study about the first century before writing preterism off.

Scholars acknowledge that the exodus of the Jerusalem Church foretold by Christ in Matthew 24:15-20 and Luke 21:20-22 was historically fulfilled around AD 66/67 when the armies of Cestius Gallus (and later Vespasian) surrounded Jerusalem. This historic verification is usually traced to early Christian writers Eusebius and Epiphanius who reported that the Jerusalem Christians fled to the Decapolis city of Pella just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. **Eusebius (AD 260-340)**, the famed Church historian, writes: *"But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the*

judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men...the general course of the whole war, as well as its particular occurrences in detail, and how at last the abomination of desolation, proclaimed by the prophets, stood in the very temple of God so celebrated of old, the temple which was now awaiting its total and final destruction by fire...[is] accurately described in the history written by Josephus."

(Eusebius: Ecc.History III:5)

Epiphanius (315-403) makes reference to the same exodus to Pella by the Jewish remnant of Christ in Jerusalem and says there were both orthodox and heretical Jewish Christians in the Pella and other Decapolis areas centuries later. Epiphanius writes: *"For when the city was about to be captured and sacked by the Romans, all the disciples were warned beforehand by an angel to remove from the city, doomed as it was to utter destruction. On migrating from it they settled at Pella, the town already indicated, across the Jordan. It is said to belong to Decapolis"*.

Christ foretold, says **Dr. Jortin**, the total destruction of the city and temple; the coming of false Christs and false prophets; famines, pestilences, earthquakes, fearful sights and great signs from heaven; the persecution of the apostles, the apostasy of some Christians; the preservation of the faith; the spreading of the gospel through the Roman world; the Roman standards defiling the holy place; the city encompassed with armies, walls and trenches; the retiring of the Christians to the mountains; **the greatest tribulation that ever was known**; the time when these things should happen; the comparative happiness of the barren woman; wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom; the dispersion of the captive Jews through all nations; the continuation of the desolation; a shortening of the days of vengeance for the sake of the elect: all which came to pass. **Jortin's Remarks on E. Hist. vol. i.**

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"Christ Jesus told the apostles that when they (or any of the saints) would see Jerusalem surrounded by armies then let the people of God flee from Jerusalem and Judea. 'When you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh' (Luke 21:20).

The meaning of this verse has puzzled many people. How can it be that when Jerusalem is completely surrounded (encircled on all sides) with armies, then the people of God are told to flee the whole area of Judea (of which Jerusalem is a part)? If this is the strategy, then it seems that Christ is saying to surrender to the armies. But this is not what Christ meant in his warning.

In actual fact, this prophecy of Christ Jesus was fulfilled to the letter in the period just before the war that destroyed Jerusalem from A.D.67 to 70. We have the eyewitness account of Josephus himself (he was the Jewish historian who accompanied the Roman armies to Jerusalem and saw or reported all that occurred in Judaea within that 3 and a half year event that occurred in the heavens that could not be identified as having its origin on earth. This was clearly a 'sign" from heaven and I have not the slightest hesitation in stating that it was an exact fulfillment of what Christ Jesus said would occur that is recorded in Luke 21:20. Note what Josephus said happened just before the war with Romans commenced.

On the twenty-first of the month Artemisium [the last day of the 2nd Passover season In A.D.66], there appeared a miraculous phenomenon, passing belief. Indeed, what I am about to relate would, I imagine, have been deemed a fable, were it not for the narratives of eyewitnesses and for the subsequent calamities which deserved to be so signalized. For before sunset throughout all parts of the county [everywhere throughout Judea] chariots were seen in the air and armed battalions hurtling through the clouds and encompassing the cities" (**War,VI.5.3 or Loeb VI.298, emphasis mine**).

This is the very thing that Christ Jesus said to watch for. And then (about two weeks later) **Josephus** tells us:

Moreover, at the feast which is called Pentecost, the priests on entering the inner court of the temple by night, as their custom was in the discharge of their ministrations, reported that they were conscious, first of a commotion and a din, and after that of a voice as of a host, 'We are departing hence' (**War, VI.209,300**).

With these two signs what did the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea do? **Eusebius** tells us that this is the time they began to leave the region because of the command of Christ and went to a city called Pella on the east side of the Jordan River (**Ecclesiastical History, III.5**). They and the apostles obtained safety from the holocaust that soon enflamed Jerusalem and Judaea.

These chariots and armed forces seen in the skies all over Judaea and encompassing the cities of the Jews was similar to times recorded in the early history of Israel. Angelic powers (in this case, good angels) accompanied the armies of Israel when it was the normal period (in ancient Times) for hostilities to occur. The Bible says: 'And it came to pass, after the year had expired., at the time angels go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon' (II Samuel 11:1). The King James translators (and most modern ones) read the Hebrew as "kings," not "angels." But there is no reason whatever for reading the text as 'kings.' The verse was intended to show that angelic powers were there to aid Israel in their battles when they went to war.

A further reference (which even corroborates angelic connections with wars or the preparations for wars on earth) is 11 Samuel 5:23,24 God said to David that when he heard "the sound of a going [forth] in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you (David) shall bestir yourself [to war],' This swishing sound in the top of the trees of a turbulent waving action of the wind was recognized by David as caused by the Lord and his angelic hosts going to battle with David (see also Genesis 32:1.3 and II Kings 6:17 about angels accompanying God). But in A.D.66, instead of helping Israel win the war with the Romans that the people of Judaea were about to start, the angelic hosts were seen in the clouds in chariots and as armed soldiers encompassing the cities of Judaea and enclosing them on all sides for capitulation. This is precisely what Christ Jesus said to watch for in his Olivet prophecy." **End of quote.**

It was to this event, the most awful in history -- "one of the most awful eras in God's economy of grace, and the most awful revolution in all God's religious dispensations" -- that we must apply those prophecies of Christ's coming in which every one of the Apostles and Evangelists describe it as **near at hand**. To those prophecies our Lord Himself fixed these three most definite limitations --

- 1) that before that generation passed away all these things would be fulfilled;
- 2) that some standing there should not taste death till they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom;
- 3) that the Apostles should not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.

Sepher Yosippon

Sepher Yosippon (A Mediaeval History of Ancient Israel) translated from the Hebrew by Steven B. Bowman. War 6:289 (6.5.3.289) Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Excerpts from Chapter 87 "Burning of the Temple" For one year before Vespasian came, a single great star shining like unsheathed swords was seen over the Temple. And in those days when the sign was seen it was the holiday of Passover and during that entire night the Temple was lit up and illuminated like the light of day, and thus it was all seven days of the Passover. All the sages of Jerusalem knew that it was a malevolent sign, but the rest of the ignorant

people said that it was a benevolent sign.

...Now it happened after this that there was seen from above over the Holy of Holies for the whole night the outline of a man's face, the like of whose beauty had never been seen in all the land, and his appearance was quite awesome.

Moreover, in those days were seen chariots of fire and horsemen, a great force flying across the sky near to the ground coming against Jerusalem and all the land of Judah, all of them horses of fire and riders of fire. When the holiday of Shavu'oth came in those days, during the night the priests heard within the Temple something like the sound of men going and the sound of men marching in a multitude going into the Temple, and a terrible and mighty voice was heard speaking: "Let's go and leave this House.

It is strange that these distinct limitations should not be regarded as a decisive proof that the Fall of Jerusalem was, in the fullest sense, the Second Advent of the Son of Man, which was primarily contemplated by the earliest voices of prophecy! (F. W. Farrar)