

## The Destruction of Jerusalem, Part 3

Luke 21:23-24

May 5, 2024

Well, we are in Luke's record, his account of the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21. You'll want to turn there. And over the last two weeks, we've seen how Jesus has been preparing his disciples for the siege on Jerusalem. He's been shepherding them out of the danger and into a place of safety.

And as we begin this morning, I've got bad news and good news. The bad news is this sermon you're about to hear. It is nothing but bad news. It's dark. It's hard to listen to, hard to hear. And if there's any good news, the good news is that I'm not preaching this same sermon next week, which is Mother's Day. There's your good news. Take great delight in it because that's about the only good news you're going to hear from this point on.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

But the day has come to look at the terrible siege and be reminded of what happened, well, it's been 1,954 years ago, what happened during some very dark and troubling days in the land of Judea, a Roman province at that time, and the city of Jerusalem in particular.

And before we get into some of the details and the history of that, I want to tell you why what we're about to hear, which is tough to hear, I guarantee it's not going to be on your list of favorite sermons, but I want you to know why this is so necessary. It's necessary, obviously, because it's in Scripture. It's there because God intended it to be there. Also, in an expository ministry we don't pick and choose what we focus on. We preach the next text, so we don't skip over things that are difficult.

But there's a larger purpose, here, that I want you to understand in the context of Luke's gospel. Luke wrote this gospel with one purpose in mind and says in the very beginning, in his prologue to his gospel, Luke 1:1-4, "Having investigated everything carefully from the beginning." That is to say, he

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

used an intentional and careful methodology to study and search out the truth and gather accounts and lay out the narrative of Christ and his ministry and his gospel in consecutive order, as Luke 1:3 says. And he did that so that his patron and his good friend, a Christian friend, "the most excellent Theophilus," he tells him, "so that you might know," verse 4, "so that you might know the exact truth." That word translated "exact truth" means to know with certainty, to know fully, to know with a deep, abiding, life-changing conviction. He writes, "so that you might know with certainty about the things that you have been taught."

So every paragraph in Luke's gospel, every sentence, every word, every jot and tittle of this gospel is in pursuit of that purpose, that he might know with certainty. So as you hear the history this morning, and there is a bit of history to cover this morning, as you hear this, keep that purpose of the author in mind. And its one purpose would be, the human author and the divine author, same purpose, as you hear this, keep that purpose in mind and then consider this very simple thought. If we boil it down to this, what this sermon is about this morning: Jesus predicts the future. Jesus tells us what's going to happen in the world in the future. He tells us what's coming. And you've

got to ask yourself, "Who is it who knows things like that? Who knows the future?"

I mean, everything that we're exposed to, everything that we hear and see and read in all the media that we consume on a daily basis, the media that's coming to us, it's like drinking from a fire hose, isn't it? There's so much out there. We're exposed to so much. But ultimately, in all that media and all the experts that are quoted, everybody who claims to know what's going to happen, what's going on, to interpret things to us, really, ultimately, those experts know nothing at all. They're human beings like you, like me. They don't know what's going to happen tomorrow any more than you do.

But Jesus, who lived 2,000 years ago, he sees the end from the beginning. He speaks about what's happening now as clearly as he speaks about what happened then, as clearly as he speaks about what happens in 2,000 years. He knows it all. He predicts the future. And as we'll see this morning, one of his repeated predictions about the fall of Jerusalem, when he spoke it, it was still in the future, 40 years in the future, and yet it came

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

to pass. And it came to pass in a very public way. This isn't some hidden prophecy in some dark room, in the Illuminati, in conspiracy theories. This is Jesus speaking about something that took center stage in the world. This is a matter of recorded history, not just biblical history, but all extra-biblical history corroborates everything that's written in Scripture, becomes another one of those stubborn facts of history that testifies to the truth of the Christian faith, to the veracity of Scripture, to the veracity of everything that Jesus said.

So listen: Every word that he has spoken is true. Every single prediction that he made, it will come to pass. And that's what we need to hear this morning. That's the point. That's why Luke records this, so we can have certainty about the things that we've been told, certainty about the things that are written. We need to pay close attention.

Depending on your relationship to God, depending on your relationship to Christ, that's either very good news for you, or it's very, very bad news. If you do not trust the Scripture, if you have doubts that this has any power at all, if you don't

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

believe the gospel, if you don't trust in Jesus Christ, I'm warning you, and it's not me warning, it's just me pointing to description and warning you, everything he says will come to pass. Take refuge now in the only Savior that there is, because there's only one name under heaven by which we must be saved, and it's his name.

God sent his one and only Son to be the Savior of all who would believe. So if you will trust in him, give up trusting in yourself. Give up trying to figure it out. Give up trying to answer all your questions, and you submit your mind and your heart and your will to him. Do what he says. Trust him, and he'll lead you into the only refuge that there is. And that really is what it comes down to. Do you trust in him or do you trust in yourself? That is the dividing line between those who are believers and those who are unbelievers. And for the Jews living in Jerusalem and Judea in the late 60s of the first century AD, it's about to get really grim because they trusted in themselves; they didn't put their faith in him.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

In Luke 21:5, as his disciples are marveling over the massive stones of the temple, how beautiful everything is, Jesus says in verse 6, "For these things which you're looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." And that's just merely an expansion of what he had predicted earlier, telling the Pharisees in Luke 13:35, "Behold, your house has left you desolate." The temple, the very heart of their Jewish identity, the very Jewishness of the Jews that was tucked safe behind these seemingly impenetrable, impregnable walls of Jerusalem, Jesus says, "It's coming down. Anything that you trust in, power, wealth, strength, might, your intellect, your doubts, the things that you think are most certain, it's all coming down." Take that as a metaphor for whatever you trust in that's not him. Take that as a metaphor for anything that you put your faith in besides God and God alone.

Well, after the disciples heard this prediction about the destruction of the temple, they come and ask about the timing of these things, which includes the end, the end time, includes his Second Coming; and we've shown that throughout the time that we've been in the Olivet Discourse. They have a number of

questions that kind of fall into the category of "when will these things happen?" It's plural. But more immediately, these disciples perceive, and they perceive rightly, that the destruction of the temple means the destruction of the city as well. And there's a sense that they have that this is going to come pretty quickly.

Jesus gets to that answer in verse 20 of Luke 21. Take a look at it, there, Luke 21:20. Jesus says, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded," or we could translate that, "being surrounded by armies." So it's kind of showing a progression, there. When this is happening, when this is starting to happen, being surrounded by armies, "then know that its desolation is at hand." That's a command. "Know this: It's desolation is at hand. It's imminent. It's upon you." "Then," and here's a series of commands, "then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Those who are in the midst of the city, leave. Those who are in the country, in the countryside, don't enter the city, because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days, for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath against



# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

this people, and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Last time, the last couple of weeks we worked through those first few verses, verses 20-22, in which Jesus assures his disciples about their safety. He's following up on what he told them in verses 18 and 19, that “not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.” Just as God commanded Noah to build an ark to escape the judgment and his obedience to that command was his escape from the global, worldwide flood; just as the angel commanded Lot to run from Sodom and not turn back, and Lot's obedience to that command was his escape from the fire and brimstone that rained down and destroyed those cities, so also the disciples' obedience to Jesus' commands will spare their lives.

So what happened? Did they survive? Did they make it out? Well, to answer that question, let's begin with the first point for the morning. First point, I've got two points this morning.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

Here's the, the first, the flight of the believing Christians. The flight of the believing Christians. There's an early Christian tradition that indicates there were Christians in Jerusalem who did make an early exit from Jerusalem. They relocated to the city of Pella in Perea, and that's in the region of the Decapolis, a Gentile region, predominantly. Pella, the original Pella, is located in Macedonia. It's the birthplace of Alexander the Great. And so the name Pella, there in Perea, in the land of Israel, in that area, is an indication of that city's Hellenization, of its Greek character.

So this is one reason that Pella made a good city of refuge for this Christian community escaping from Jerusalem, getting out of that city, because there's a Hellenized city of the Decapolis. Pella is not likely to have a very large Jewish population because of the defilement of the Gentiles around them. So they're not likely to harbor Jewish revolutionaries. And that meant that that city would not be subject, likely not to be subject, to any unwanted imperial scrutiny over that city. It'd be a safe place to go.

So the earliest witness we find of the tradition of the Christian flight to Pella is found in Eusebius. He wrote in the early fourth century something called *Ecclesiastical History*. He's one of the earliest church historians. This is what he says. He says, "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." That's Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*. And this, by the way, is tradition. It's not Scripture, it's tradition. So we understand it's not infallible, it's not divinely inspired, it's subject to error, subject to human error.

But at the same time, we understand, like many books in history, there's a reliable account, here. Probably Eusebius received this from an earlier second-century record of someone named Hegesippus the Nazarene. And he was a second-century recorder of history. We don't have any of his, I think we just have some fragments of his documents, but nothing that can verify where he got this from, exactly. But it seems it came from him.

Or another witness would be Ariston of Pella. He was a Jewish Christian from the mid-second century who was one of Eusebius' sources, another of his sources, in that ecclesiastical history of the fourth century. So you've got two second-century witnesses that provided information to Eusebius, who was in the early fourth century. That's what he writes about, the flight of the Christians from Jerusalem to Pella.

There's another witness from the late fourth century, Epiphanius of Salamis. Epiphanius is a man who lived in Palestine. Later, though, he became the Bishop of Salamis on the island of Cyprus in 367 AD. He wrote a polemic, a series of treatises against different heresies at the time called *Panarion*, and Epiphanius in that work refers several times to the Christian migration out of Jerusalem into Pella. I'll just give you the first one as an example since they are kind of similar in overlap, but here's what he writes: "All the disciples settled in Pella after the remove from Jerusalem, Christ having told them to abandoned Jerusalem and withdraw from it because of the siege it was about to undergo. They settled in Perea for this reason and lived their lives there." End quote.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

There's another reference in the *Panarion* that locates the Christian community as being not just in Pella, specifically, but near Batanaea and Bashanitus. Those are both located east of Galilee and east of the Jordan River, right in the same area. So it's, again, verification by triangulating information, seeing where these people were. Epiphanius, he has corroborated just now, he's a late fourth-century writer, he corroborates what the earlier fourth-century writer Eusebius had recorded as well. And Epiphanius goes even further. He adds more information about these Christians who lived in Pella.

Evidently, according to him, it was the disciples of the Apostles that went to Pella, not the Apostles themselves. So these are those who heard the gospel from the Apostles, kind of like Luke. He is one of those who heard the gospel from the Apostles. The writer to the Hebrews is one of those who heard the gospel from the Apostles. He's a second-generation, not a first-generation witness. So these are disciples of the Apostles. They are the ones that went to Pella. There were no Apostles living there. It's important to know.

This Christian community in Pella had to deal with an early heresy called Ebionism. It was kind of a form of Gnosticism that they struggled with in those early days. And there were some actual heretics, kind of a sect of Christianity, some heretics that grew up within that community that were dealt with for centuries to come. Some of the disciples of the Christians who took refuge in Pella returned to Jerusalem later, some time later. I'll mention them at the end of the sermon today.

Now when did this flight from of the Christians from Jerusalem to Pella happen? The date of this is uncertain. It's unknown. It could have occurred as early as 65 or 66 AD, prior to the failed campaign that we talked about last time of Cestius Gallis. Could have happened afterward. It's impossible to say really, but in any event this flight to Pella would indicate an early escape. This would be well before they were able to witness what Jesus told them to watch out for in Luke 21:20: Jerusalem being surrounded by armies. They got out well before that happened. They didn't want to wait until Jerusalem was being encircled by the Roman legions.

It's interesting because I think Christians were prepared by Jesus' warning, and then by what happened in the early chapters of the book of Acts, you can see they're being prepared mentally to make their way out of Jerusalem, and we find evidence of that. We know from the book of Acts that persecution uprooted many of the Christians that were living in Jerusalem. They didn't stick around. They left Jerusalem, and they took the gospel with them to other places. They were scattered because of the persecution that happened, even at the stoning of Stephen. We also know from the book of Acts that the Apostles were on the move, they were traveling. They didn't stay put. They were traveling around taking the gospel to other places, being obedient to the Great Commission.

Some Christians, though, they did remain, they did stay in Jerusalem. That was their home. They witnessed Cestius and his failed campaign, which we talked about last week. They saw that failed campaign, and seeing that, they knew that things are getting more tense, things are getting more severe; they realized that the time is short. They probably started making plans to leave. Perhaps they waited until Titus and his legions

arrived in Judea and waited until he marched upon Jerusalem. When they saw Jesus' prediction coming true, that's when they left and took flight from Jerusalem. They were taught by Christ exactly how they could escape the coming desolation, and by obedience to his word, they did.

Now for the unbelieving Jews, it's the opposite story. That takes us into a second point for this morning. Number two, the plight of the unbelieving Jews. There's the flight of the believing Christians. That's the group you want to be a part of. Here's, number two, the plight of the unbelieving Jews. Eusebius wrote also in *Ecclesiastical History*, in the same passage from which I just read, here's what he says: "When those that believed in Christ had come to Pella 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."



# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

Interesting how Eusebius writes that. It's just like when God sent the angel to visit Abraham, Genesis 18, Genesis 19. Remember, Abraham acted as a mediator and said, "Would you destroy the city if there are 45 righteous people there?" Then he talks him down, 40, 35, 30, talks him all the way down. Actually, it ended up there was only Lot and his two daughters. Once he pulled them out of Sodom, there were no righteous people in Sodom, and God let loose his judgment. Same thing with Noah. Once God tucked Noah and his family safely in the ark and shut the door, God rained down his judgment, didn't he, on the whole earth. There were no righteous people on the earth.

Same thing here. This is what Eusebius is saying, as if the royal city of the Jews, the whole land of Judea, were entirely destitute of holy men, no pious people left, no holy people left, and God rains down his judgment, totally destroyed that generation of impious men, "to execute the days of vengeance," as Jesus said in verse 22. God made use of these impious men in his judgment. In fact, there were, we mentioned this last time, but there were several factions of impious men led by impious men: Eleazar, Simon bar Giora. God turned them against each other. These are leaders of different factions, and turning them

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

against each other within the walls of Jerusalem, this made the judgment even more severe for the people who lived there, but it also drastically shortened the siege. In fact, the whole thing, once Titus arrives and gets on scene and surrounds the city, sets up siege works, this whole thing's over in less than six months. The city was prepared to be there for years, well-supplied for years to come. The siege lasted less than six months.

Last week we met Eleazar. Eleazar was the former temple treasurer. He was also captain of the temple guard, so he had authority over the power and the money in Jerusalem, in the temple. He became leader of the Zealots, the Zealot party. He's the one who killed Menahem, the the would-be king of Jerusalem who came there, turned tyrant, and he died. We also met Simon bar Giora, who led the sneak attack against Cestius. He also later defeated the legions, pursuing them out to Beth Haran and destroyed them. Another man was Ananus. He was the former high priest of the temple, and he led a royalist faction, those who were basically loyal to Rome and in league with Rome. He was part of the high-priestly family and part of the aristocratic class there, so it made sense for him to stay in connection with

Rome, and he's fighting and leading another faction. There's another man named John of Giscala. He fled from Galilee to Jerusalem, where he'd been fighting against the Romans, and he came there and led yet another faction.

So you've got at least four different factions there, all fighting against each other. Eleazar and the Zealots fought against Ananus and the royalists. John of Giscala, he's in the middle, playing one side against the other, hard to tell where his loyalties are. As Eleazar and Ananus are fighting, bloody violence ensues within the city, street-to-street, you know, house-to-house, street fighting. A Zealot victory at that time seemed uncertain. And so Eleazar hired some mercenaries, 20,000 Idumean mercenaries. He hired them to come into Jerusalem and help them.

So the Idumeans buy the deal, and they accept the prospect of money. They arrive at Jerusalem, and Ananus, the leader of the other faction, barred the gates to shut them out. This angered the Idumeans severely, and when the Zealots found out about that and cut the bars to the gate to let them in, these

Idumeans went on a bloody rampage, killing 8,500 people, pillaging houses, doing just unthinkable, despicable things in the city. And when they found Ananus, they butchered him along with his followers.

After that, the Idumeans heard a rumor in the city, passed around by the residents, that they'd been tricked by the Zealot party, tricked by Eleazar who had hired them. And so they say, "Forget this, we're taking off." They took off. This enraged the Zealots, so they go on their own bloody rampage within the city, killing the people of their own city. This is terrible judgment already happening.

Meanwhile, back in Rome, Nero had sent Vespasian to go and deal with this Jewish uprising, this Jewish revolt. As we said, any revolt like this, any unrest, is choking out the tax revenue that Rome desperately needs to fund all of its projects and all of its wars. They've got to get the money flowing again. So Nero sends Vespasian to go deal with the Jews. Vespasian, as he's making his way down, he has reports coming back to him of all this factious violence, and so he takes his time getting down

there. He says, "Well, let's just sit back and watch these seditious Jewish factions tear each other apart. And maybe by the time I get there, I'll just walk right into the city."

So he starts marching down to Jerusalem. Then Nero died. He died on June 9 of AD 68. So Vespasian halts momentarily. He actually didn't. When I say, "momentarily," I mean a year. He didn't even resume his March again until a year later in June of 69. And even then, when he starts again on his march, he's again interrupted. The political intrigue in Rome that he heard about is being reported to him. He finds out about this, and it presents an opportunity now for Vespasian not just to be General Vespasian, but Emperor Vespasian.

So he avoids any entanglement in Jerusalem. Doesn't get himself involved in that war. He did become emperor in December of AD 69, and with his authority established in hand, he deploys his son Titus to go and deal with Judea and its revolutionaries. It's because that Jewish problem and that instability in Judea still is there, still needs to be reckoned with, still costing him valuable tax revenue. So he's got to get that cash cow

flowing again. He's got to deal with those irksome Jews and their factions.

So as Titus marches with his legions, Jerusalem is divided by violent factions. This means there's no real rule of law and order and judgment in Jerusalem. The streets are ruled by thugs. Crime is running rampant. This is just destroying the residents of Jerusalem. They're under this oppression. They're caught in the crossfire. They're being robbed by violent gangs that keep breaking into their homes, beating people, raping, plundering, stealing, robbing. It's a horrific scene of total anarchy, social chaos, brutal violence. Truly, these are "days of vengeance set to fulfill all the things that are written."

Now last week we read some of those things that are written. I'd like to take you back to Deuteronomy 28 to see kind of an extended section of some things that are written in warning the Jews of this very thing. Moses predicted, in this passage in Deuteronomy 28, a future siege. And that prediction that he gives way back in Deuteronomy, before the, the children of Israel even enter into the land of promise, the prediction is

fulfilled first during the Babylonian siege. But then again that siege is eclipsed by this one of the Romans, their siege in AD 70.

If you find your way to Deuteronomy 28, go to verse 49. Listen to this. This is what God revealed through his prophet Moses. Deuteronomy 28:49: "Yahweh will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose tongue you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

"Moreover, they shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you're destroyed, who also will not allow grain, new wine, or oil, and the increase of your herd, or the young of your flock to remain for you until they have caused you to perish. And it shall besiege you in all your gates until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land. And it shall besiege you in all your gates throughout your land, which Yahweh, your God, has given you."

Again, he speaks this before they even enter in to receive their promised possession. The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem fulfilled this prophecy. And yet Israel thinks, "Well, that's done, that's done and dusted. We've been through that, been through the exile, been through the siege. We're back in the land. It can never happen again, can it?" It's about to happen again. And what's going to happen will eclipse the horror of the Babylonian siege. Vespasian dispatches his son Titus to put down the Jewish revolt in Judea, to go sack Jerusalem. He did that, dispatched him in December of 69 and early 70, and Titus left Alexandria, Egypt, marched northward, heading first to Caesarea to meet up with the commander of the Euphrates troops, Roman troops from Euphrates, where he'll pick up two more legions on the way to Jerusalem.

And while Titus is there gathering his troops, the Jewish factions are still warring against each other. They're doing the Romans' work for them. They're warring against each other, weakening any chance they would have against the Romans. Again, in the providence of God, this is to intensify the demise of this impious people, to hasten their judgment. The Roman



# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

historian Tacitus writes this: quote, "The population at this time had been increased by streams of rabble," he's talking about people, "streams of rabble that flowed in from other captured cities." We mentioned this last time, cities that Cestius had flowed through in Galilee and destroyed. He was on a scorched-earth campaign, so they flee from there, go to Jerusalem. Vespasian had also done a lot of destruction on his way, his slow march down to Jerusalem. All these people and all their destroyed villages and cities and towns and little hovels and places where they live, they go into the city. You always take refuge in a walled city when the Romans are coming.

Anyway, continuing, "The most desperate rebels took refuge there, and consequently sedition was the more rife. There were three generals, three armies. The outmost and largest circuit of the walls were held by Simon, the middle of the city by John, and the temple was guarded by Eleazar. John and Simon were strong in numbers and equipment. Eleazar had the advantage of position. Between these three, there was constant fighting, treachery, and arson, and," important sentence, "a great store of grain was consumed."

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

So the famine that decimated Jerusalem surprisingly was not a direct result of the siege. The Jews actually had plenty of resources and stores to survive for many years inside these walled cities. They had aqueducts and springs, so they had plenty of water, plenty of grain, plenty of resources. And yet a great store of grain was consumed, burned up. The famine was due to this influx of Galilean rebels, hungry dissolutes coming into the city, eating up the stores, but then the infighting among the Jewish factions.

Josephus, he records that Eleazar, John, and Simon, these three factions all fighting one another within the walls of the city, safe from the Romans outside, they're well-supplied with food to last for many years, under attack by Simon. "John's men, being drunk and tired," Josephus says that John, "set on fire the storehouses. They were full of corn and other provisions. And Simon, upon John's retreat, attacked the city also, as if they had on purpose done it to serve the Romans, destroying what the city had laid up against the siege, and thus cutting off the nerves of their own power. Almost all the corn was burnt, which would have been sufficient for a siege of many years."

They're killing themselves! The editor's note in my copy of Josephus, he writes this: "This destruction of such a vast quantity of corn and other provisions, sufficient for many years, was the direct occasion of the terrible famine that consumed incredible numbers of the Jews in Jerusalem during its siege. Nor, probably, could the Romans have taken this city, after all, had not these seditious Jews been so infatuated, and thus madly to destroy what Josephus, here, justly styles 'the nerves of their power.'"

Ever heard that expression "cutting off the nose to spite the face"? This is that lived out, added to the infighting between these imposing forces, added to the hordes that were coming into Jerusalem and swelling up the population of the city, eating all the stores, further fighting, crime and robbery running rampant.

The famine, once the food started running out and people got hungry, became brutal. The famine turned residents and non-residents against each other, stealing from one another, robbing each other. Even the gentlest souls in the city were turned into

the most ravenous beasts, animals willing to eat one another, just, again as Moses predicted. If you go back to Deuteronomy 28:53, this is exactly what Moses wrote. Continuing on from verse 53, Moses says, this is horrific, "Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom Yahweh your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you. The man who is refined and very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and toward the wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he will eat, since he has nothing else remaining, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in all your gates.

"The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes, and toward her son and daughter, and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack

of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your gates.”

You say, “Did that really happen?” Yeah, it did. “I mean, did it happen as bad as that?” Tragically, yeah, it did happen as bad as that. Titus arrived at Jerusalem, starts surrounding the city, sets up his encampments, and started his siege. He arrived there in Jerusalem just prior to the Passover, around March, April of AD 70. And he was cunning, too. He didn't mind all these Galilean hordes and former revolutionaries and all these people pouring into the city. He didn't mind. He let them right in. But then he didn't let anybody leave. It just was swelling up like a blister. He just let it go. He wanted to exacerbate the food shortage. He wanted to increase the chance of famine, add to the misery.

The population numbers for Jerusalem during the siege, they're not entirely clear. Tacitus says 600,000 men and women were ready to fight. There were weapons to spare in Jerusalem, so they're all ready to fight. And Tacitus says men and women were ready to fight. That matches Josephus' numbers. He said

that 1.1 million people died. So 600,000 ready to fight, 1.1 million people dying. Yeah, that actually corresponds. There are some today who cite the penchant that Josephus had for inflating his numbers somewhat. That may be, but whatever the number was, it was high. There were way too many people in that small city.

But whatever the numbers, the population was well armed and ready to fight, and the arrival of Titus eventually allied all the factions together for the moment to unite against the common threat. Tacitus says that "the number ready to fight was larger than could have been anticipated from the total population. Both men and women showed the same determination, and if they were to be forced to change their home, they feared life more than death." What that comment means is these Jews were so committed to their city. That city was their identity. That temple was their identity. We don't understand. I mean, Americans, we move all over the place all the time, right? Many of us are transplants from other parts of the country, even other parts of the world.

Not these Jews. These Jews, they weren't going anywhere. They're dug in like the deepest tick into the city. Tacitus goes on and says, "Such was the city and the people against which Titus now proceeded. Since the nature of the ground did not allow him to assault or employ any sudden operations, he decided to use earthworks and mantlets." Mantlets are a portable barricade; maybe you've seen them. It's like a shield, like a like a riot shield, but it's bigger. It's a portable barricade that protects him against projectiles coming from the top of the walls.

So "he decided to use earthworks and mantlets, and the legions were assigned to their several tasks, and there was a respite of fighting until they made ready every device for storming a town that the ancients had ever employed or modern ingenuity had ever invented." End quote. Basically, Titus takes his time. He knows the people are starving. Any time that he gives his men to prepare everything they need to go against this city, as the days go by and the weeks go by, those people are starving and weakening. That's what he's counting on.

Then he deployed his troops to cut down the trees, build siege works, build machines for assaulting the city, prepare big battering rams to penetrate the wall. I mean, think medieval warfare. That's what you have here. Josephus says, "The legions cut down trees for 90 furlongs around the city." A furlong is 220 yards; 90 furlongs is 11.2 miles in circumference around Jerusalem. That's a lot of trees. This landscape is ravished, ripped apart, left barren. Josephus laments this. He says, "Truly, the view of the country was a melancholy thing. Places which were adorned with trees, pleasant gardens, now became a desolate country in every way. Its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that has formerly seen Judea and knows the most beautiful suburbs of the city and now saw it as a desert, they could not but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change, for the war had laid all the signs of beauty quite waste."

It wasn't just a landscape that was laid waste. This famine was laying waste to people, starving them, turning this once beautiful, this once noble city into this macabre scene, something out of a blood-soaked horror movie, like a zombie apocalypse happening within the walls of Jerusalem. The starvation decimated the population. Survivors were driven mad,



committing abominable acts, just as Moses predicted. Josephus said, "The starving people became like mad dogs. They're reeling against the doors of houses like drunken men, reeling, stumbling, falling. Gangs of armed men barged into homes, searching for any signs of food, tormenting the owners, who denied that they had any. And after searching the home and finding nothing, they tortured the owner on the grounds that he hid the food too cleverly." You're getting beaten, whether you like it or not.

Josephus describes the condition of the starving. He says, "Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, it obliged them to chew everything while they gathered such things that the most sordid animals would not touch, and they endured to eat them. Nor did they at length abstain from leather girdles and shoes. The very leather which belonged to their shields, they pulled off and gnawed. The very wisps of old hay became food." There were unspeakable acts of atrocity that were committed, such as cannibalism, mothers giving up their children. They participated in the act, mad with hunger, not in their right minds, obviously.

Tacitus again says this: "The possibility of going out of the city being brought to an end, all hope of safety for the Jews was cut off. The famine increased, devoured the people by houses, by families. Rooms filled with dead women and dead children, city lanes with the corpses of old men. Children and youths swollen with famine wandered the marketplaces like shadows, fell down wherever death overtook them. The sick were not strong enough to bury their own relatives. Many, indeed, died while burying others, and many betook themselves to their graves before death came upon them. There was neither weeping nor lamentation. Famine stifled all natural affections. Those dying a lingering death looked with dry eyes upon those who died before them. Deep silence, a death-laden night, encircled the city." End quote.

Even the Roman general Titus, he the conqueror, coming here for his triumph to please his father, to bring glory to Rome, even he, according to Eusebius, "as Titus went around and saw the trenches filled with the dead, thick blood oozing out of the putrid bodies, he groaned aloud, raising his hands and calling God to witness that this was not his doing." Even the pagan had the good sense to look up at God and say, "Please don't hold

this to my account." That's incredible. The Romans were not known for their sympathy.

This is exactly what Jesus first saw, as he said, recorded back in Luke 19:43-44, "The days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, surround you, hem you in on every side, will level you to the ground, your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." And can I say, beloved, while you hear of Christ, do not fail to recognize the time of your visitation. Hear him. Come to him. Submit yourself to him. Let this warn you.

Again, look back at Luke 21 and verse 23. Jesus says this: "Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days." Woe to the moms. Isn't it interesting that as he looks down the corridors of time and the history of the world, of the future history of the world, and he looks at the siege from the perspective of its most tragic consequences, this crushing brutality and force and devastation comes upon the most delicate of people: pregnant moms, nursing moms, those who are

the tenderest and most vulnerable of Jerusalem citizens. This is what Jesus is thinking about. In fact, he can't stop thinking about these women as he faces imminent death, as he faces his own imminent death, as he faces the shameful death of his crucifixion, as he's walking up to Golgotha.

You can turn to Luke 23:27 and see, it seems, incredibly, that even as he marches to his own death, which is just in a couple of days from Mount Olivet, he hardly thinks about himself. Instead, we can see in Luke 23:27, he's got mothers on his mind. Look at verse 26: "When they led Jesus away, they took hold of a man, Simon of Cirene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus." He's so weakened from all the beatings he took, he had to have somebody else carry his cross. "And following him," verse 27, "was a large multitude of the people and of women who were mourning, lamenting him. But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, stop crying for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.'"

Why would he say such a thing, especially at a moment like this when he's marching to the cross? I mean, the Roman soldiers are just within moments going to nail nails through his hands and his feet, raise him on a cross, and drop that cross into its stand, and watch him and mock him and scoff as he slowly, painfully dies this death by asphyxiation, extreme blood loss. Why would he say that? What's on his mind? The tragic prophecy of Moses from Deuteronomy 28:53-57. He knows what's about to happen to Jerusalem. He knows what's about to happen to the mothers of Jerusalem.

One such mother, a woman named Mary, she was from an eminent, wealthy family. She's one of those delicate women who would not even let her feet touch the ground. And here in the siege, she's starving. She's at her wits' end, and she gives up her nursing child to a horrific act of cannibalism. For the sake of propriety, at this time I'm not going to read what Josephus recorded, not going to read what Tacitus recorded. It's too terrible, too gut-wrenching, too tragic.

But I will summarize to say that Tacitus speaks that after this act had happened, the violent men breaking into homes, like I said, robbing people of their food, they smell a smell and they come into her home to rob her of her food. And Tacitus says, "They were immediately seized with horror and amazement and stood transfixed at the sight. And after she explained what she did, the men went out," Tacitus says, "trembling." These are hardened men with no conscience at all, callous, killing, robbing, plundering, looting, filling their own bellies. They don't think twice about that. And yet they are appalled at what they see.

Listen, there is no recovering from this. Even if she were to survive, and people in that city were to survive physically, there is no recovering. Living with that shame would be to them a fate worse than death. Tacitus says, just summarizing the account, he says, "Such was the reward which the Jews received for their wickedness and impiety against the Christ of God." I'll only add this, that this is merely the public demonstration of God's wrath against their wickedness and impiety for rejecting the Christ of God. This is an outward, important, external, outward judgment for them rejecting the Christ of God.

But the full reward of God's vengeance: That awaits a future final judgment, doesn't it? And when they die, when their bodies die, and they're physically no longer here, then they're cast into Sheol or Hades, as we read at the end of Luke 16, the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich man burning in torment. And what's he waiting for? He's waiting for Judgment Day, Judgment Day, where he will pass from the jail of Sheol and Hades and be cast into the lake of fire with the devil and his angels. That's what these people will face as well.

What's there to say? All we can do is echo the words of the writer to the Hebrews, who said, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Jesus said in Luke 12, "Don't fear those who can kill the body and after that there's nothing they can do. I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear the one, one, who after he kills the body has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell. Fear him." Go back to Luke 21:23. Jesus continues, "There will be great distress upon the land, wrath to this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword, will be led captive into all the nations."

Well, that's what we've been describing, and there's more to describe. Those who survived famine, survived fire, the Romans slaughtered them, and slaughtered them without mercy, without any remorse. As I said, the numbers that Josephus gave are 1.1 million dead, another 97,000 taken into captivity. Tacitus says of them, "The tallest of the youths and those distinguished for beauty were preserved for the triumph."

By "the triumph," he's talking about a public triumph as Titus and his legions marched through the city of Rome with these prisoners, these young, beautiful people, the pride of Jerusalem, who have chains tied around their neck, and they're pulled through the city to be mocked at and scorned and triumphed over by the citizens of Rome. "Of the rest of the multitude," Tacitus says, "those over, over, 17 years of age were sent as prisoners to labor in the works of Egypt, while still more were scattered through the provinces to meet their death in the Colosseum by the sword and by the beasts. Those under 17 years of age were carried away to be sold as slaves, and of these alone the number reached to 90,000."



The Roman siege against Jerusalem fulfilled exactly what Jesus had spoken: "days of vengeance" predicted in Scripture, coming upon all, even the most delicate and vulnerable, such as the pregnant mothers, such as the nursing mothers. Great distress, not only upon Jerusalem but upon the whole land of Judea, as well, as the wrath of God is against this people, the Jews, for their rejection of Messiah.

Oh, but what about the prediction back in verse 6? Don't forget about that. He reiterates what he said in chapter 19:44: "There will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." What about that? What about the temple? We've talked about this already, that ancient temples were storehouses of the treasure of the kingdom and plunder taken in battle, votive offerings offered by the faithful, the worshipers. Temples back then often served as banks. This is certainly true of the Jerusalem temple.

Part of the indictment on the religious leadership, in fact, particularly the high-priestly family, is that they

treated the temple as a business enterprise, making lots and lots of money off of other people's money. Even apart from what was allegedly stored inside the temple, the descriptions we have of the temple, the beauty, the glory, some of which we've covered in great detail, the place kind of coated with gold and marble and beauty, all that's there, too. We need to look no further than the disciples, who wonder at the temple in Luke 21:5, that this place is loaded with loot.

So the Roman legions, this is stoking their envy, stoking their greed, and they are looking for a bonus on this campaign. They are hoping to turn this campaign into a really lucrative endeavor, pad their retirement account or even speed up retirement plans altogether and get out of the army and go buy a piece of property somewhere. Josephus wrote about those who tried to desert the city after the arrival of Titus. There were some deserters who tried to sneak out of the walls or come down the walls and get out, get away.

Josephus was there, by the way. I don't know if I mentioned that earlier, but Josephus was there. He'd been connected to

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

Ananus and the royalists. He'd been connected to King Agrippa and the royalists. Then he fought for them up in Galilee, and then went through a failed campaign there, and a lot of trouble, acquitted himself fairly well. But when Vespasian came, he bowed allegiance to Vespasian. He spoke of Vespasian and his son Titus as being predicted by God, that God was sending them for the judgment of the Jews. Josephus understood that. When Vespasian heard that Josephus was somewhat of an eminent man, Vespasian later adopted Josephus into his family, gave him the family name Flavius, which is why you'll see in his writings Flavius Josephus.

So he's there, he's watching all this. He's a first-hand witness to what's happening there in Jerusalem. He's there as an advisor to Titus, the general. He sees as some of the deserters leave the city of Jerusalem, they had swallowed pieces of gold. They tried to hide them from the robbers that were within the city, so they swallowed gold, and they sneaked them out of the city and past the Roman legions. And they hope that eventually, when they expel them, they'll have money to start their new life.

Not so fast, though. The story gets a bit gruesome, but here goes. Deserters, these deserters, when they came to the Romans, they were themselves suffering from famine. Their bellies were distended and swollen from starvation, and once they escaped from Jerusalem and found some food, many of them failed to discipline themselves to eat the food slowly, a little bit, nursing themselves back to health. They weren't careful, so some of them died, and their bellies burst open. Syrians were in the area and Arabians as well. They came, looted the dead. When they found these burst-open bellies, they found also the loot, the gold. Once word got out, according to Josephus, he says, "In one night's time about 2,000 of these deserters were dissected by the Syrian looters. They didn't wait until they died."

This, all this, all these rumors poured fuel on the fire for the Roman legions. They're eager to get this siege over with and quickly breach the walls, get in the temple, pull this place down brick by brick. There's a rumor, actually, that gold is hidden in the walls of the temple. It was on July 20 of AD 70 that Titus breached the Antonia fortress, which is right on the northwest corner of the temple, captured several days later. Another battle ensues because that's connected to the temple.

And now Titus is facing a stalemate with these stubborn Jews who are fending him off from coming into the temple any further from the Antonia fortress.

They're deciding what to do with the temple. His men are saying, "Let's march in, slaughter them all, burn the place down and get after the loot." He tries to prevent it. He's trying to save the temple. In fact, Caesar tells Vespasian, "No, do not destroy that temple." Contrary to his wishes, though, without his orders, one of his soldiers snatches a burning ember from the fire and throws it into one of the chambers that's attached to the sanctuary, and the place just goes up in flames. Despite Titus' attempts to save the temple, the temple is consumed with fire.

And Josephus says that even though the city and the temple were burning, and even when Titus, and Caesar himself, tried to restrain the soldiers from going into the blaze, "the hope of plunder induced many to go on, as having this opinion, that all the places within were full of money, seeing that all around about it was made of gold." Roman soldiers tore that place

apart, so there was "not left one stone upon another which was not torn down." The place that just days before was adorned with beautiful, massive stones is now reduced to a smoldering pile of burnt rubble, black ash, exactly as Jesus predicted.

Now I realize a sermon like this is hard to hear. It's a lot to take in, a lot of history. But do you get the point, beloved? Do you get the point? It's absolutely critical for us to see and take notice and pay close attention to this. If you like to jot down points, here's just a few little implication, application points for you. Here's what we need to take notice of from a sermon like this. It's, I admit, hard to hear.

First, notice that what Jesus predicted came true, and it came true literally, not figuratively. This isn't type, shadow, metaphor, figures of speech. This is literal. This is literal. It's the literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation hermeneutics that brought us to this kind of clarity with this text that we see fulfilled perfectly and literally in Scripture, just like this. I recommend we follow that same literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic through the rest of the text

as well, don't you? But what he said, what he predicted, came true. What does that mean for the rest of his predictions?

Secondly, if what Jesus said about Jerusalem was fulfilled literally, what else did Jesus say we ought to pay attention to? What other predictions will literally come true? Think about that for yourself, personally. Think about that for your life, for your priorities, for the way you live, maybe for the way you're not living.

So third, if you're not a Christian, if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, please bow the knee now. Serve the Lord in joyful obedience. Serve him as your Lord and your Savior and your King. Please take note of this: These Jews died because they didn't do that. These Jews died because they rejected Christ as King. Do not commit the same colossal, tragic, and eternal sin against God.

The fourth implication, for those of you who are Christians, I could say as well for those of you who are not Christians, but for those of you who are Christians, listen,

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

don't let what happened to these Jews in AD 70 cause you to elevate yourself above them or think lower of them. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, most of those, save a few, were unbelievers who rejected God. Moses, Joshua, Caleb, just a few. The rest of them, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "God laid their bodies waste in the wilderness, raised up the next generation, the second generation, to go into the promised land."

But because God chose and favored the Jews as descendants of Abraham, realize that God judged any nation that scorned the Jews, that despised the Jews, that mocked their misery. Be careful, very careful about how you think of the Jews, especially as we watch in our own time, on our own college and university campuses, in our own cities, how the tide of public opinion is turning against the Jewish people, and we're seeing anti-Semitism on the rise. Be very careful how you think about the Jews, about that nation, about those people. Have the attitude of Titus, that even though he was an instrument of God's destruction and vengeance upon those people, he had sympathy for what he was seeing before him. And we, even more than Titus, realize, "but for the grace of God, there go I."



# GRACE CHURCH

---

Grace

So the fifth, fifth implication for all you Christians, once again behold the good shepherding of the Lord and Savior, your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Look at how he shepherds his people. He got his people out of there. He shepherded them to safety, didn't he? I mentioned in Epiphanius earlier one of the early traditions on the flight of the Christians to Pella. There's another of his works where Epiphanius tells about a man named Aquila, who later visited this pile of rubble that used to be Jerusalem, visited in the time of the Roman emperor Hadrian. So this is 47 years after Jerusalem's destruction.

And Epiphanius says Aquila, when he came to this area, came to Jerusalem, this rubble, this pile of rubble, "found the temple of God trodden down and the city devastated, save for a few houses and," notably, "the church of God." While in Jerusalem, Aquila says, "he saw the disciples of the disciples of the Apostles," so third-generation Christians. And he said that "they were flourishing in the faith." These are people who came back from Pella. Epiphanius says this: "They'd come back from Pella to Jerusalem. They were living there and teaching."

# GRACE CHURCH

---

Greeley

That is the Christian mission, isn't it? That's the Christian attitude. Since the days of the early church, God used persecution in Jerusalem to scatter the Christians, to send them out, to spread the gospel to the nations. In fact, I can't help but find it curious how eager those early Christians were in the early chapters of Acts to sell their property, liquidate their estates, all their real estate in Jerusalem. They're like, "Why hold on to this anymore?" They put the money to gospel use. They knew the time is short, and they know the money's not going to do them any good tied up in real estate in Jerusalem. So they put it to gospel use. They think of their stewardship. They give themselves to gospel endeavors. Might the predictions of Jesus have loosened their ties to property, city, place, family? Oh, you bet.

And after the devastation and destruction is over, and the rubble, it's just a pile of rubble, but there are Jews that came back there. You know what those Christians did? They said, "I'm going to move from my comfortable refuge here in Pella. I'm going to go back there and live in the rubble, and I'm going to evangelize those Jews. I'm going to love them, and I'm going to tell them about their Messiah, and I'm going to tell them how to

repent. I'm going to tell them about the salvation that I found, and the rescue that Jesus affected for me, not only physically to get out of Jerusalem before the destruction came, but the spiritual salvation that I found in the Savior, a wonderful Savior, the Messiah, your Messiah, Jesus, the Christ."

Beloved, what about you? Whatever time we have before Jesus comes again to rapture the church, even if we die before he gets here, do you know the time is short? You don't know how much time you have. You may not live until tomorrow. With whatever time you have, will you use it for his glory? Will you give yourself to his work? Will you give yourself to love one another, and love the dying thousands all around us? That's what these Christians did. They're to be commended for showing good stewardship.

Well, when we come back next week, we're going to take some time to pause in the flow of the narrative and do a little comparison and contrast with these verses we've just covered in Luke 21:20-24, and we're going to look at what seem to be

parallels by some, but they're not, over in Matthew and Mark.  
Bow with me in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you so much for the witness of Scripture. We thank you for the devotional passages, where the devotional truths and the warm love and compassion of our Savior Jesus Christ are right on the surface of the page, where we can just gather it up like fruit and sit down and enjoy strolling in green pastures and sitting beside still waters alongside the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also thank you for these darker passages of Scripture that warn us. We thank you that the Savior, the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus is there to walk us through the valley of the shadow of death, to lead us through that valley and out of it and into a place of refuge and safety. And I once again want to pray for any here who don't know you, and they know they don't know you, that they would put their faith in Christ. Father, would you be pleased to grant salvation even today.

# GRACE CHURCH

---

For those who are here and they think they know you, but they don't? They profess to be yours, but they show no fruit in their life. They remain the same. In fact, in some cases their hearts sour and get more bitter and critical, and turn against you, turn against your words, turn against your people. Would you please soften their hearts and grant them regeneration unto saving faith? Would you please be gracious to save them?

And for those of us who have been saved, regenerated by your grace by the Holy Spirit, those of us who have a new nature and eyes to see and ears to hear, hearts to understand and believe and embrace the truth, all of that by your grace; for those of us whose minds have been renewed and who are being transformed day by day even as the outer man is decaying and withering away, and the inner man is being renewed day by day, and that by your power and by your mercy and by your goodness, will you please instill within us a deep, abiding certainty, in the fear of the Lord, to believe the things that are written, and that we would order our lives in such a way as to give a good account to you, in the end, of the stewardship of this gospel and this life that you've given us? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.