

Symbolism of the Destruction of the Temple in 70 AD

The first century Christians knew from the words of Jesus and from Daniel that the world could not end before the Temple was destroyed. The devastation that occurred around that event is referenced many times in the New Testament in order to prepare the early Christians for that time. Even though that event is long past, it has importance for subsequent believers. Not only was the end of the Temple a physical accomplishment of a prediction by God, but also a symbol of at least three spiritual truths.

The End of the Law of Moses

1. The end of the Law did not occur when Jesus was crucified. Many quote Colossians 2:14 out of context to claim that the Law was nailed to the cross. The context refers to Gentiles (verse 13), not Jews. What were nailed to the cross were the judgments against us.
2. The apostles continued to observe the Law all through the book of Acts, and recommended that Jewish Christians do the same (Acts 21:18 – 25).
3. To explain the attitude of the Jewish Christians, perhaps the example of David is appropriate. On more than one occasion, David had opportunity to kill King Saul. David had already been anointed by Samuel as the next king. But, David considered it inappropriate for him to speed the process along (1 Samuel 24:4 – 7, 1 Samuel 26:7 – 12). The Jewish Christians waited patiently for God to accomplish His promise of the end of that era (Daniel 9:27).
4. Since the Law applied only to the physical descendants of Israel who lived in a small geographic area, Gentile Christians would consider the end of the Law to be interesting, but not applicable to them. The magnitude of the event implies that something more is being symbolized.

Completion of the Written Word and the Gathering of the Elect

1. Ephesians 4:7 – 14 says that Jesus granted miraculous apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the equipping of the saints UNTIL we all come to the unity of the faith. If this does not happen until the end of time, then Jesus' prayer in John 17:20 – 21 failed. Rather, these miraculous people were provided until the objective standard was completed and delivered to the whole world (Colossians 1:6, Romans 1:8, Jude 3). God has the ability to spread the gospel to the whole world in an instant. He chose to cause that dispersal to take about 40 years (perhaps 30). Clearly, a dozen men could not accomplish this task, so the time frame is still miraculous. God chose to disperse the message through human deliverymen, so He was obliged to operate within the boundaries of the free will He had previously granted. So, the spreading took time, much like the Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years in order to grow a new generation.
2. Revelation 11:3 – 14 describes the miraculous messengers of the gospel, that they stayed alive by their powers despite tremendous opposition. But, when their testimony was complete (verse 7), Satan was able to kill them. The litmus test for whether a passage refers to the end of time is whether anyone survives. This scene is followed by another that refers to the physical earth, so this completion of the written Word occurred at a point in history. Otherwise, we should be expecting more books to be added to the Bible.

3. Jesus applied Daniel 7:13 – 14 to Himself (Matthew 24:30, Luke 21:27, Luke 22:69, Matthew 26:64), “The Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” This event is connected with “gathering together the elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31, Mark 13:27). Jesus was careful to specify that this was not at the end of time, but rather would be accomplished before that generation passed away (Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30). Further, Jesus, Paul, and Peter specified that there would be no signs of the end of heaven and earth (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32, 1 Thessalonians 5:2 – 3, 2 Peter 3:10), yet Jesus gave several signs of His “coming in the clouds.”
4. As promised, the gospel went “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile,” (Acts 13:46, Romans 1:8, 2:9, 2:10). Paul notes in Romans 11 that a significant percentage of Jews did not accept the gospel, and were cut off from the family of God, but that this was part of the plan. However, this low response rate was not permanent, as described in the latter part of the chapter (viz., 11:25). The destruction of the Temple was a watershed event for many unbelieving Jews. Although they did not, at the time, believe that Jesus was the Messiah, they had read Daniel and knew that the Temple could not be destroyed until after the Messiah came. When the Temple fell, many unbelieving Jews turned to Jesus because of the accomplishment of the prophecy of Daniel. The “fullness of the Gentiles” had come in; many Jews brought up the rear, and the elect had been effectively gathered from the four corners of the earth.

The End of Satan’s Power on Earth

1. Jesus described the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem as the worst of all time (Matthew 24:21, Mark 13:19). Further, Jesus said that “unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”
2. Satan was lord of this earth during Jesus’ time and that of the apostles (Luke 4:6, John 14:30, Ephesians 2:2, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 Peter 5:8). In addition to tempting Jesus (Matthew 4, Luke 4) and demon possession, Satan could take away the Word to prevent belief (Luke 8:12), had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14), deceived (Revelation 12:9), and accused (Revelation 12:10). However, Jesus hinted that this would not always be the case (John 12:31)
3. Jesus is the king of this world now (Revelation 1:5, 2:27, 12:5, 11:15, 19:15, Psalm 2:8 - 9). After Jesus returned to heaven, a war ensued, after which Satan and his angels were exiled to the earth (Revelation 12:8 – 9). Satan knew he had only a short time, so he had great wrath against the faithful, which spilled over onto the unbelievers (Revelation 12:12 – 17). This is the source of the great tribulation described by Jesus, the worst of all time.
4. In conjunction with the destruction of the Temple, Satan was bound in the abyss (Revelation 20:2 – 3) and can “deceive the nations no longer.” Compare to 2 Corinthians 4:4. The bad angels also are bound in the abyss (Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4), as predicted by Zechariah 13:2 and applied by Jesus in Matthew 26:31.