

Sample chapter from *AD70 and the End of the World*, by Paul Ellis. Published by KingsPress (ISBN: 978-1927230411). For more information, visit www.ad70.org

Introduction

When I was a young boy, a prominent speaker came to our church to preach on the end times. He had charts and maps, and he had me convinced that the world was going to end in 1984. Right there and then I was ready to quit school. Phone the principal because I was never going back. What was the point of homework and exams if Jesus was about to return? Thankfully, wisdom intervened, and I didn't ruin my life.

Eschatology, or the study of end times, is a subject that is susceptible to abuse. The speaker I heard painted a terrifying vision of the future. He had us convinced we were on the verge of a great tribulation where our choices were either starvation or damnation. He told us secret organizations ran the world and that a one-world government would fall under the sway of a charismatic antichrist. Soon Christians would be hated by all. We wouldn't be able to get jobs or buy food unless we were laser-tattooed with the mark of the beast.

With any luck, we'd be raptured before we starved to death, but there was a risk we would be left behind. To insure against this possibility, we were exhorted to stay abreast of current events and share the good news about the awful future a loving God had in store for us.

I laugh about it now, but at the time it was scary as hell. I honestly wondered why my parents had been so reckless in having children in such troubled times.

As it turned out, Jesus didn't return in 1984. The world didn't blow up, and if there was a great tribulation, I must've missed it. On reflection, the only bad end-times event that happened to me in the '80s was that sermon.

Perhaps it is because of this experience that I have always been intrigued by the disciples' questions to Jesus: What will be the sign of your coming? When is the end of the world?

These are good questions to which Jesus provides brilliant answers. But they're not exactly plain answers. Jesus doesn't say anything like, "I'll be back in 2025," or "When America gets a female president I shall return."

When Jesus comes

The Bible says much about the coming of the Lord, but a lot of what it says can appear confusing. Take his first coming, for example. The Jews had been waiting for the Messiah for centuries, but where would he appear? One Old Testament prophet said he would come from Bethlehem; another said he would come out of Egypt, while others said he would come from Nazareth. Imagine the arguments!

Of course, we now know that all three prophecies were on the mark, for Jesus spent his formative years in all three places. But that was only the first coming of Jesus, and the Bible speaks of at least five. (Yes, five; I list them in Chapter 31.) It's easy to latch onto one scripture and build a story around it, but there are hundreds of scriptures about the different comings of the Lord. The potential for confusion is high.

If we wish to make sense of what the Bible says, we'd better drink deep or not drink at all. But the Bible is a big book, which is why this book will focus on the words of Jesus. In particular, we will examine his parables and prophecies of judgment and the end of the world.

Christ's longest and most astonishing prophecy is the one recorded in Matthew 24. It's known as the Olivet Discourse, because Jesus was on the Mount of Olives when he gave it. This prophecy contains the words of life and death, but these words can seem mystical and weird to our 21st-century minds. What are we to make of darkening suns, eastern lightning, and loud trumpets? What do nursing mothers have in common with fig trees and drunk servants? Thankfully these questions are explained by the context, namely the times in which Christ lived and the Old Testament prophecies which he quoted. Context does not come from *Newsweek* or *Al Jazeera* or charts linking the Freemasons with ISIS. When reading the Bible, it's always safest to let scripture interpret scripture, which is what we shall do here.

Although the emphasis is on Jesus, we won't ignore the eschatological visions of Daniel, John, and the other prophets. (More than 500 scriptures are indexed at the back of the book.) However, we will filter all we read through the lens of Jesus.

This book has two parts. In Part A we will wander verse-by-verse through the prophetic treasures of Matthew 24. Then in Part B, we will ask hard questions about the meaning of life and how to live with the end in mind. This is not a book you need to read from cover to cover, but you'll get a good sense of the Big Picture if you do. If you just want the highlights, you'll find them in the chapter summaries in the final chapter.

Why I wrote this book

Fear-based eschatology is dangerous. It binds the free and makes the church look foolish. Worse, it distorts the gospel and portrays God as something other than our heavenly Father who loves us.

Buy into a doom-and-gloom view of the future and you'll be a bad advertisement for Jesus. Instead of shining in dark places, you'll dismiss evil as a sign of the times. "Sure, this is bad, but it needs to happen so Jesus can come back." You'll hunker down in the proverbial lifeboat while the rest of the world goes to hell in a handbasket. "Thank God I'm saved. I'm going to sit tight until Jesus returns."

Thankfully, fear-based eschatology is falling out of fashion. Today many have embraced an optimistic end-times perspective, which is a good thing. But the view looking back is less

encouraging. For 2,000 years scholars and theologians have put a dark slant on Christ's words, and the result is a mixed message. "God loves you, but if you don't love him back he'll destroy you. Just look at what happened to Jerusalem."

I am no end-times expert; my passion is the gospel. I write so that you might trust the One who speaks the words of life. But over the past few years, a growing number of people have asked for my views on the events of AD70.

AD70 was the year that Israel almost ceased to exist. (By Israel, I mean the Galilee and Judea that the apostles knew.) Israel has gone through dark times in its long and rich history, but AD70 was arguably the darkest year of all.

What does AD70 have to do with us? Quite a lot, as it turns out. Many intelligent people believe that God was behind the disaster that befell Israel. But if God destroyed Jerusalem in the summer of AD70, this is bad news for you and me, as we shall see.

When Jerusalem was destroyed, it was pretty much the end of the Jewish world, at least for a time. But I'm also interested in the end of our world, and Jesus talks about that too. Indeed, the two events share things in common, and our understanding of one will shape our understanding of the other. So although we'll begin by looking at the past, the insights we glean will help us go forward into the future.

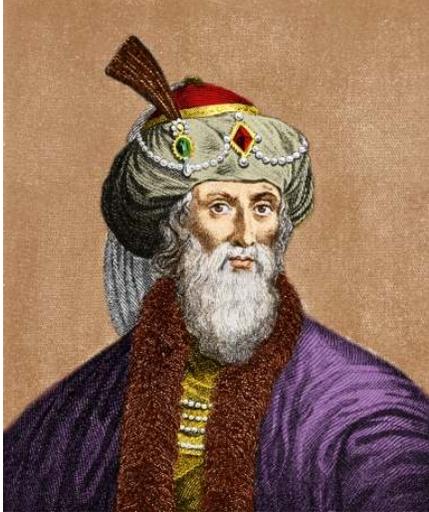
Our lives reflect our beliefs. If you are worried that a powerful antichrist is about to take control of the United Nations and that a great tribulation is imminent, it will affect the choices you make today. Personally, I believe the future is bright. Yes, there will be dark times, but Jesus is on the throne. It is his story that shapes history.

This book offers a radical departure from tradition in that it provides a grace-based version of Christ's parables and prophecies of judgment. I wrote it to give you a confident and cheerful expectation of the future. God put you on this earth to make a splash and leave a legacy, and the four men who were with Jesus on the Mount of Olives did just that. You can too.

Disturbing discoveries

Full disclosure: I have never attended seminary, and I don't have a degree in Jewish history. But before I was a writer I was a university professor, which means I like to read and study. It also means I'm not dazzled by jargon, and I can tell when the emperor's wearing no clothes.

In reading about AD70, I made a couple of disturbing discoveries. Although most Bible commentaries are written by highly educated experts, I found some authors rely on earlier commentators to such an extent that rumors and speculations offered by the former are accepted as gospel truths by the latter. In my research, I found cautious guesses, invented claims, even outright errors were repeated again and again until they were embraced as factual. This is poor scholarship because bad facts lead to bad conclusions.



Flavius Josephus: "I was there."

How did I know they were bad facts? Because when it comes to the destruction of Jerusalem, there is only one firsthand source: a Jewish historian named Flavius Josephus.

Josephus was hardly an unbiased writer, but he was there when it happened. In some ways, Josephus was the perfect chronicler because he played for both teams. He began the war as a Jewish general and ended it as a Roman emissary. He knew the key players on both sides, and he literally stood between the two armies.

His is an eyewitness account which puts it miles ahead of oral traditions and made-up stories. I have no wish to recycle hearsay and speculation, so in this book I will rely heavily on Josephus' original accounts. And I'll list my sources, so you can verify everything I say.¹

Here's another unsettling discovery. While I found many commentators who said God destroyed Jerusalem, I found none who said he didn't. Not one. Every commentator I read said, "The Jews had it coming," or they maintained a thunderous silence.

This is unacceptable. The marginalization of the Jews by some Bible scholars is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the Jews; they didn't die for him. As far as I know, no other author in 2,000 years has spoken against this injustice, which means either I'm the first to do so or I'm a first-rate heretic.

And I'm open to that. I could be wrong about everything. To help insure against this possibility, it is important to give a fair hearing to alternative points of view. To that end I have recruited a couple of knowledgeable characters: Mr. Preterist, whose name derives from the Latin word for past, believes Biblical prophecies have been fulfilled, while Mr. Futurist believes they are yet to be fulfilled. These gentlemen are smart, and they know the scriptures. They also have strong convictions, which they are not afraid to express, so don't be surprised if an argument breaks out. I'll try and keep it civil, but you have been warned. All right, here we go.

A futurist and a preterist walk into a bar...

¹ In particular, I will draw upon two works by Josephus: *The Wars of the Jews* (c.75) and *The Antiquities of the Jews* (c.94). Both works are in the public domain and can be found online. Just as there are different translations of the Bible and some are better than others, there are different translations of Josephus. I relied on two: Whiston's (1737) classic word-for-word translation (my version is the 1987 edition of *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, published by Hendrickson), and Maier's shorter and reader-friendly translation (*Josephus: The Essential Works*, published in 1988 by Kregel). Each translation complements the other. Maier gives you the story, while Whiston gives you the details. Since I did not wish to pepper this book with distracting notes, you will find most of the references to Josephus' works listed in the timeline found in Appendix 1.