



Chapter 25

***THE YEAR OF
JESUS'
CRUCIFIXION***

The Jewish records that have come down to us reckon some unusual events in Jewish history that began in the year A.D.30. This is the very year in which Jesus was crucified. This is shown in more detail in Addendum One. The one generation of 40 years that followed the crucifixion of Jesus was of profound significance to the Jewish rabbis who lived at the time and even for those who succeeded them for the next 400 years. It is time that we look at these Jewish records that most Christian theologians and scholars seem completely unaware of. These early records supply us with some of the most interesting and informative teachings regarding Jerusalem, the Temple and the Jewish people themselves in the single generation of 40 years that followed the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, the most significant thing that occurred at the very end of that period of 40 years was the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem that Jesus had prophesied would occur (Matthew 24:1-43). Let us notice some of these important events that happened in history that most people today know nothing about. What occurred will show that the Jewish authorities were well aware that something of supreme importance began in the year A.D.30 that finally

culminated in the destruction of their Temple and the city of Jerusalem in A.D.70. This period of 40 years was singularly significant in symbolic occurrences involving the Temple at Jerusalem. There was something very special with that span of 40 years. Indeed, an interval of 40 years was looked on as prophetically important to the Jewish people. The Book of Hebrews recorded: "Your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works *forty years*. Wherefore I was grieved with *that generation*" (Hebrews 3:9,10).

The Prophetic Importance of a Forty Year Period

The fact that 40 years was one generation in prophetic interpretation was a well established belief. The number 40 itself was normally attached to the symbol of trial, punishment, or a span of time associated with special human experiences. There are numerous examples to show this. Jesus' temptation with Satan continued 40 days (Matthew 4:2). The time between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension was 40 days (Acts 1:3). Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai receiving God's law (Exodus 24:18), and there was the 40 days' trip to the same area by the prophet Elijah (I Kings 19:8). There were 40 days and nights of the Flood (Genesis 7:4,17) and Nineveh was granted 40 days to repent (Jonah 3:4). We even have 40 days becoming 40 years in the judgment upon the rebellious Israelites for not entering the Promised Land (Numbers 14:34). Later, the Philistine servitude lasted 40 years (Judges 13:1), and the punishment on Egypt was prophesied to last for a period of 40 years (Ezekiel 29:11).

Even important periods associated with human life had the number 40 associated with them. The human gestation period, for example, is normally 40 weeks and in biblical parlance this was considered 40 weeks of trial on women. A boy baby was purified 40 days after his birth (Leviticus 12:3,4) and 80 days (2 times 40) for a female (verse 5). While a human became of spiritual age at 30 years (Numbers 4:3; Luke 3:23), the person was ideally given a fur-

ther 40 years of trial (or experience) in adult life (30 plus 40 years equaling the ideal 70 years of Psalm 90:10). Joseph, however, being reckoned the firstborn of Jacob was given a double blessing, and this included among other things a double period of full, adult life. He lived to be 110 years of age (30 plus two 40 year periods). Joshua also attained to the same 110 years of life (Genesis 50:22; Joshua 24:29). Moses, on the other hand, was even more blessed and lived 120 years (3 times 40). The ancients considered it no accident that Moses was not only selected for his historic role at 40 years of age, but he also led the children of Israel out of Egypt at 80 (2 times 40) and died at 120 (3 times 40).

In fact, the 40 years' period of the Exodus became the standard number of years for reckoning a generation. This is found in important historical time periods mentioned in the Bible. The time from the Exodus to the building of the Temple in Solomon's reign was understood as being 480 years (12 times 40) (I Kings 6:1). David and Solomon were considered having ruled for 40 years each (II Samuel 5:4; I Kings 11:42). Even King Saul was given 40 years (Acts 13:21) though his exact period of Saul's reign is difficult to determine in the Old Testament. And recall, the Exodus period itself was exactly 40 years, which the Book of Hebrews called "that generation" (Hebrews 3:9,10). In short, it became common to acknowledge any generation, ideally, as being 40 years in length.

"Forty years represented a generation, and thus the number 40 became a round number for a full period, a complete epoch"
(Hastings, *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. II.p.250).

As a matter of fact, the Jewish authorities in the 40 years between Jesus' crucifixion in A.D.30 to A.D.70 were given some marvelous signs from God to show that Jesus' teaching about the coming destruction of the Temple would indeed take place. It is easy to see a preoccupation that the apostles (and other Christians) must have had regarding the 40 years' period after Jesus' resurrection. When Jesus delivered the Olivet Prophecy in A.D.30 about the

destruction of Jerusalem, he said it would occur in that generation. And remarkably, the catastrophe did in fact happen in A.D.70 exactly 40 years later.

Supernatural Signs for the Temple's Destruction

There were four miraculous signs in particular that the apostles and the Jewish people witnessed in the 40 years before the destruction of the Temple and the historical accuracy of these four signs are recorded in both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds. This shows that the knowledge of these four special signs was well recognized by the Jewish authorities in the period when the Talmuds were compiled. It is now time that all of us who desire to know the history of Palestine in the first century be made aware of those outstanding warning signs. These signs all started with the exact year in which Jesus was crucified and anyone with any common sense should be able to tell that they were signs from God that had their significance beginning with that very year of the crucifixion of Jesus. This fact is not only important for Christians to know, but it is equally significant for all the Jewish people today. What were those four signs?

First, note what the Jerusalem Talmud has to say on this matter. [The following translation is that of Jacob Neusner from his book *The Yerushalmi*, pages 156,157.]

“Forty years before the destruction of the Temple [starting in A.D.30] the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open. Said Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai to the Temple, ‘O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said ‘Open your doors, O Lebanon [a symbol for the Temple at Jerusalem which was made from Lebanese timbers], that the fire may devour your cedars’ (Zechariah 11:1)” (*Sotah* 6:3).

Let us now look at what the Babylonian Talmud has to say

(quoted from the Soncino Version).

“Our rabbis taught: During **the last forty years** before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-coloured strap become white; nor did the western most light shine; and the doors of the *Hekel* would open by themselves, until Yohanan ben Zakkai rebuked them, saying: *Hekel, Hekel*, why wilt thou be the alarmer thyself? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Iddo has already prophesied concerning thee: *Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars*” (*Yoma* 39b the bold letters are mine, but the words in brackets and italics are part of the Soncino text).

The four signs are precisely the same in both Talmuds, and both state that the signs began in the year A.D.30 (which is the very year in which Jesus died on the tree of crucifixion). As explained earlier in this book, there was another important historical event which happened to the Jewish nation that occurred in that same year. Let me record it again in this chapter.

“**Forty years before** the destruction of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin was banished [from the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple] and sat in the Trading Station [also in the Temple, but east of its former location]” (*Shabbath* 15a the bold letters and words in brackets are mine).

As I explained in my earlier chapter, the move of the official Sanhedrin from the Chamber of Hewn Stones (near the Altar of Burnt Offering in the Temple) could be accounted for by the falling stone-work that was over the entrance to the Hekel [the Holy Place] which supported the curtain that tore in two at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. Something must have happened to that vaulted structure called the Chamber of Hewn Stones that rendered it unfit for the Sanhedrin to enter from A.D.30 onward. The earthquake at the crucifixion could well have caused the damage. No other explanation that is discernible in the historical records makes sense. This would mean that the last trial ever held in that prestigious and beautiful building on the Temple mount was that of Jesus.

Miraculous Signs for the Jews Commence with the Crucifixion of Jesus

With the event which destroyed the beautiful chambers of the Supreme Court (the Sanhedrin) on the Temple Mount (which occurred exactly forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple), there began a series of important signs that the Temple and its ritualistic system were destined to come to an end. The apostles of Jesus would have been well aware of these signs as were the Jewish people in Judaea. Indeed, the signs were looked on as being most important to the Jewish authorities. The four signs involving the Temple were interpreted by Yohanan ben Zakkai (the most important rabbi at the time) as being warnings that the Temple was to be destroyed. This witness of Yohanan is significant because he lived both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He was the most important person in the Jewish hierarchy during the period after the destruction in A.D.70. He became head of the new seat of Jewish government which was established after A.D.70 at Jabneh (Jamnia) about thirty miles west of Jerusalem. His witness and interpretation is paramount to justify the reliability of the occurrence of these four signs.

One thing must be noticed by us all. Yohanan ben Zakkai (and all the later rabbis for the next 400 years) maintained that these four signs in the Temple were given by God to denote the coming destruction of the Temple, not that the people had gone over to Christianity or some other reason. While the four signs commenced precisely with A.D.30, the year Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead, none of the signs was associated by Yohanan ben Zakkai or the later rabbis as a disapproval from God because of the arrival of Christianity. The Jewish rabbis at the time saw no displeasure on God's part with the vast numbers of Jewish people who had gone over to a belief in Jesus in the forty years following the crucifixion. James stated that tens of thousands of Jews then believed the Gospel (Acts 21:20 Greek). Indeed, it was because the

vast majority of those Jewish Christians turned away from the faith of (and in) Jesus that Peter and Jude wrote their epistles of warning to the Jews (Second Peter and Jude) that their erroneous actions would lead the nation into becoming as desolate as were Sodom and Gomorrah. See my book *Restoring the Original Bible* where I have the significance of these events in greater detail.

The Jewish Authorities saw the Fate of the Temple beginning in A.D.30

The truth is, Jesus had foretold, just two days before his crucifixion, that Jerusalem and the Temple were destined to be destroyed (Matthew 24:1-3). He had also told the authorities that he, himself, was the new Temple and that he (being that new Temple) would be raised from the dead after three days (John 2:19-21). All Jewish Christians who believed Jesus were looking for the destruction of the physical Temple that existed in Jerusalem, and Yohanan ben Zakkai (who lived at the time of the apostles, and afterward) also knew that God was prophesying the destruction of the Temple by the four major signs that were given at the time. Let us now look closely at what those signs were.

Notice How Powerful were the Four Signs

The Babylonian Talmud lists the first sign as being that in which the lot 'for the Lord' did not come up in the right hand (*Yoma* 39b). What was meant by this? The Holy Scriptures speak about this ceremony (Leviticus 16:5-34). On the Day of Atonement two identical goats were brought before the High Priest and lots were cast over them (one source says the lots were in the form of a white and black stone, the white stone was 'for the Lord' and the black was 'for the Scapegoat'). The priest would put his right hand into a receptacle containing the two stones and without looking down, select a stone with his right hand and place it over the right hand goat. The Babylonian Talmud says that in the previous two hundred years the stone would be sometimes white and sometimes black as

most people would have expected (that is, a random selection each year would bring up the black stone as often as the white). But beginning in A.D.30 (the very year in which Jesus prophesied the coming destruction of the Temple, and the very year of his death and resurrection), the right hand of the High Priest selected the black stone every time for forty straight years.

The odds of a black stone coming up forty times in a row are almost astronomical in scope. And, according to *Pascal's Table of Binominal Coefficients* (a table of odds first devised by the French scientist Pascal who lived from A.D.1623 to 1662 in which he showed odds in a pyramid style), the numerical odds of this happening under normal circumstances would be one chance in 1,099,511,627,776.

Whew!

But the Jewish records show this rare phenomenon occurred with regular consistency for forty straight years. The apostles would have been well aware of this occurrence and with each year passing with the same consistency of the black stone coming up in the High Priest's hand, they would have been amazed with its significance. Some Jewish authorities at the time (and certainly later) were also impressed.

An Even Greater Miraculous Event in the Temple

That does not conclude the matter. Both Talmuds also report another sign (from eye-witness accounts) that boggles the imagination. Also beginning in A.D.30 (the very year of Jesus' crucifixion), the western light of the Menorah (which is the Hebrew name for the seven branched lampstand in the Holy Place) went out for the same period of forty years. This Menorah was positioned with its seven lamps facing north. The western lamp was that which was next to the Holy of Holies and it was the most important for that reason. In fact, we are told in the Talmud that at dusk the lamps that were unlit in the daytime (the middle four lamps remained unlit,

while the two eastern lamps normally stayed lit during the day) were to be reignited from the flames of the western lamp (which was a lamp that was supposed to stay lit all the time — it was like the eternal flame that we see today in some national monuments). Josephus, citing an earlier historian, said that on the Temple Menorah there was a flame that was supposed to be kept lit night and day (*Apion* 1:22; and also see *Tam.* 3,9; 6,1; *Sifra, Emor* 13,7; *Sif. Num.* 59; *Yoma* 33a; etc.).

This western lamp was to be kept lit at all times. For that reason, the priests kept extra reservoirs of olive oil and other implements in ready supply to make sure that the western lamp (under all circumstances) would stay lit. But what happened in the forty years from the very year Jesus said the physical Temple would be destroyed and in the very year that Jesus became a new, resurrected Temple for the Jewish people and for all the world? *Every night* for forty years *the western lamp went out* and this was in spite of the priests each evening preparing the western lamp so that it would remain burning all night. This is eyewitness Jewish testimony!

Now, using the chances, according to *Pascal's Table of Binominal Coefficients* (which shows that there can be only one chance in 1,099,511,627,776 for a black stone to come up in the right hand for forty occasions), imagine what the odds would be for the western lamp (that was supposed to be the eternal flame for the nation) *to go out* each of the 365 days of a year for forty years? The odds of that happening are so astronomical that even mathematicians would stagger at trying to show a normal decimal answer like that given in Pascal's pyramidal illustration.

There were even Further Signs in the Temple

But that is still not all. For forty straight years (during that single generation following Jesus' crucifixion) the crimson strap never changed its color to white as it had often done in the previous two hundred years. This is a ceremony not mentioned in the Holy

Scriptures, but it was associated with the Day of Atonement from at least the time of Simon the Righteous (an honorable and upright High Priest who lived in the third century B.C.). It was noticed that on the Day of Atonement, when Simon would go into the Holy of Holies, that a crimson-colored thread that he had in association with his person miraculously turned white for the forty years he was priest and that the 'lot of the Lord' always came up in his right hand (*Yoma* 39b). It appears that this positive indication in both ceremonies (with the white constantly in evidence in the time of Simon the Righteous) became a pattern for future signs to the Jewish people in showing God's appraisal of the Temple and its rituals. They came to believe that these signs showed God's pleasure or displeasure with their activities. This is because of a special sign given in the year of Simon the Righteous's death that showed what the white and the black indications were intended to mean. Note how the Jewish rabbis came to understand these things.

"Our Rabbis taught: In the year in which Simon the Righteous died, he foretold them that he would die. They said: Whence do you know that? He replied: On every Day of Atonement an old man, dressed in white, wrapped in white, would join me, entering the Holy of Holies and leaving it with me, but today [on that final Day of Atonement that Simon performed his high priestly duties] I was joined by an old man, dressed in black, wrapped in black, who entered, but did not leave, with me. After the festival of Tabernacles he [Simon the Righteous] was sick for seven days and then died" (*Yoma* 39b words in brackets are mine).

From that moment on, the priests began to notice that the 'lot for the Lord' (which was the ceremony ordained in the Old Testament) would come up randomly, one time white and one time black. But that was not all. The crimson thread would sometimes also turn white and at other times it would remain its crimson color. This procedure prompted the Jewish rabbis to interpret that if the crimson thread turned white, then God approved of the Day of Atonement rituals every year and Israel could then be assured that they were forgiven their sins as the Holy Scriptures stated. Thus,

these traditional rites of the crimson colored thread and the biblical ceremony of the black and white stones were established as official signs of God's pleasure or displeasure. But note this. With the year A.D.30, the crimson thread never turned white again and the white stone never came up in the right hand of the high priest (for the period of forty years) from the time of Jesus' crucifixion until the complete destruction of the Temple in A.D.70.

The Temple Doors would also Open by Themselves

Yet still, there is even more to relate from the historical records of the early rabbis. During that same period of forty years, the doors of the Hekel (the doors in back of the Temple curtain that tore in two at Jesus' precise time of death) were found to be opening of their own accord at night during the time the Temple was off limits to the people. Both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds state that this opening of the Hekel doors was something that happened throughout the whole period of forty years. And recall, the fact of these signs was vouched for by no less than Yohanan ben Zakkai (the top rabbi after the fall of Jerusalem) who was an eyewitness to all the things that had happened in the Temple in those forty years before its destruction.

By reckoning all these four signs together (with their multiplied occurrences) as being mere coincidences and that they happened in a natural and normal way is entering the realm of patent absurdity. The odds of those things occurring by chance are so astronomical that to express the odds in a linear decimal fashion would stretch the limits of human terms to reckon it. But that these four signs were directly from God (and that their wonderful consistency of action was showing the coming destruction of the Temple that Jesus foretold) is something that made sense to the early rabbis who lived from the time of the Temple's destruction and for almost four hundred years afterward. The apostles would also have been knowledgeable of these matters. In my estimation, those remarkable signs to the Jewish people came through the direct intervention of God.

To believe they happened by chance is absurd.

What does this Mean for Jewish People Today?

These supernatural signs which were accomplished in the Temple at Jerusalem beginning precisely in the year when Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead should have an appraisal of supreme importance to Jewish people today. Indeed, they ought to be considered as signs that even Christians and other Gentiles should acknowledge as being essential in understanding the role that Jesus has played in matters dealing with the former Temple and the city of Jerusalem that were destroyed in A.D.70.

These miraculous events were not done in a corner. They were available for all the Jewish people at the time to witness and to appraise. They are also available for the Jewish people and Christians to appraise at the present time. These records have not been maintained in Christian sources, but they have come down in the Jewish records themselves. Every Jewish person ought to read them and to be aware of the significance of these signs which God gave to them over that 40 years from the crucifixion of Jesus to the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. When they are considered, the wise would surmise that something of great consequence took place in A.D.30 that prompted these supernatural signs to be given to the Jewish people. And note, these signs were not done somewhere in the desert so that no one could justify their occurrence or not, but they were done in the very heart of the Temple itself where all the priests and the highest authorities of the Jewish nation were attentive. It is time that these signs be known, once again, to the Jewish people and to all people in the world so that people can appraise just what significance they might mean for all people.

One thing for certain, if these signs did in fact occur (and the evidence is plainly given in both Talmuds maintained by the Jewish authorities), then we are directed to something of great importance

and of profound influence beginning in the year A.D.30. And what was the most outstanding event to occur in that year (that all historians today would recognize as a fact)? That very year was the year for the crucifixion of Jesus, and for the next 40 years there was a constant reminder by God of the coming destruction of the Temple, the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish way of life, just as Jesus had foretold on the very Mount of Olives in which he was crucified. It is time that all the world begin to realize the importance of these significant events.