In the very early fifteenth century, an English preacher, frightened by the desolations of the Hundred Years War, advised his congregation to take stock of the apocalyptic signs around them, and to view themselves in the likeness of the Jews under attack by Titus and Vespasian during the first-century Roman siege of Jerusalem.1 Aligning a late medieval Christian parish with an embattled Jewish community would prove to be an effective rhetorical device that dared its audiences to imagine not only a shared ruin, but also a shared humanity. A few years earlier, the romance entitled *The Siege of Jerusalem* began to circulate in England, dramatizing the events of the first-century siege, and embellishing these happenings with chivalric trappings. By that time, England had already experienced invasions on its shores and limitations on its sea powers imposed by Castilian-French forces, as well as repeated incursions from the north, as Scottish and English troops harassed one another’s border towns. In north Yorkshire, where the romance originated, many locals made their living by fighting with Scottish neighbours, and had themselves participated in sieges directly across the English Channel.2 Both texts mentioned here cast England and its peoples as spiritually and physically besieged, linking the pastoral call for moral reform to the possibility of decimation at both spiritual and national levels.

In a recent study, I speculated that the identification of England with first-century Jerusalem could be seen as a medieval religious exercise in crusade-influenced affective piety, which could be leveraged to augment political authority.3 Yet the preacher’s quotation above suggests an English interest not solely in identifying with the city of Jerusalem and its sacred places, but also in relating to its Jewish inhabitants, even after the Crucifixion. These particular homiletic and romance-related depictions of the first-century diaspora have yet to be fully considered. My earlier study also posited that medieval views of the poem might have shared similar interpretative possibilities with the approaches to the siege offered in contemporary medieval homiletic tradition; evidence to support that idea is offered here.4 The sermon above and others similar to it, together with the poem, show a Christian desire to re-enact and to experiment with modes of Jewish identity even beyond those presented in the Old Testament, adopting aspects of the religious ‘Other’ for purposes of increasing Christian piety. The fourteenth-century medieval romance *The Siege of Jerusalem* (*Siege*, hereafter) concentrates on the city’s Jewish citizens to the exclusion of
all other inhabitants, and sets about depicting images of Jewish life for the edification of its western Christian audience. Such spiritual encouragement was not without its depictions of violence, as the horrors of the first-century siege were by then well known.

The Middle English Siege, perhaps adapted directly from an earlier fourteenth-century chronicle composed in England, offers a violent tale of the first-century destruction of Jerusalem by Roman military leaders Titus and Vespasian. Not surprisingly, those very elements of the poem that may have made it attractive to its medieval audiences have repelled many of its modern readers. In spite of the fact that the romance was available in an edition by the 1930s, it was not until more than fifty years later that The Siege began to receive sustained scholarly attention. Many who have written recently about the poem speculate that the atrocities it portrayed have deterred quite a few would-be critics. Over the past twenty years, however, new ways of theorizing this violence have opened fruitful explorations of the poem, including work in identifying the poem’s sources, investigations of medieval religious identity, and readings both typological and literal. This study continues the scholarly reassessment of the poem, exploring the complex portrayal of Jewish identity in the medieval imaginary, and examining the poem’s uses of apocalypse tropes to create affective links between fourteenth-century Christian audiences and the first-century Jews. To this end, I examine the way the piece may have drawn on a sense of urgency shared by genres of siege narratives and contemporary apocalyptic literatures.

In exploring the Siege as an apocalyptic text, I hope to draw attention to an often-overlooked moment nevertheless vital to medieval Christian religious narrative: the interval between the Passion of Christ and the later destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. This forty-year span was interpreted by Christian exegetes as the historical moment when the Jews awaited divine vengeance for their role in the Crucifixion. Significantly, this moment would also become an appropriate analogue to the apocalypse. The poet depicts these four decades as heavily freighted with expectation and the trappings of suspense, coming to a crisis point in the siege. Yet the poet does not produce easy ways to view the Jewish characters as singly deserving of their destruction. Significantly, the poem’s Jews, while all doomed, are not consistently presented as a universalized group, morally antithetical to the glorified Christian forces that surround them. Not the evil, plotting crowds of Geoffrey Chaucer’s Prioress’s Tale, nor the bumbling plotters of the Croxton Play of the Sacrament, the poem’s Jews inhabit a range of responses within the limited confines of the siege, showing anything but a monolithic image of Judaism. The complex presentation of the Jews suggests that the poet and his source saw value in making Jewish figures relatable, thereby inviting the audiences to entertain the possibility of a better fate for the holy city’s citizens. In doing so, the narrative emphasizes this weighty moment between Passion and Vengeance and thereby offers a more nuanced reading of the Siege as an apocalyptic text. Certainly the narrative of violence and retribution is present, but it seems that the faculty of agency receives special attention in the poem.
Present-day scholarly opinion is divided over the poem’s portrayal of the Jews – often interpreting them either as purely typological representations, or as renderings of real, first-century Jews – but it is perhaps worth questioning this binary in order to reveal additional readings of the work, and to further explore the role of the forty-year ‘grace period’ in medieval thought. To examine these elements, this study looks at the poem within the context of contemporary Christian homiletic works which were also portraying Jews and using potential Jewish conversion as a powerful didactic tool. The possibility that the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70 was anything but a foregone conclusion would seem to defy generations of teaching which had interpreted the event as the apocryphal fulfilment of Scripture. Yet the fourteenth-century romance does just that, depicting its Jewish characters as if their fates were fully their own. Here, they are a people of great potential, and the poem shows them repeatedly offered the choice to alter the course of events for all time, ultimately saving themselves from destruction. It is through this portrayal of choice that the romance and homiletic texts bring together Jewish and Christian experience. From the poet’s presentations of Jewish piety, humanity, intelligence, and goodness, complete with the antitheses of these virtues, the Jews of the Siege are complex in many ways; as I hope to show, supporting homiletic texts urged Christian audiences to see themselves in this people as both awaited impending judgement.

This issue of what I will call the strategic relatability of the poem’s Jewish characters stems from the congruency that many Latin Christian theologians perceived to exist between Christians and the Jews represented in the Old Testament. As Yael Katzir has observed, ‘historians are familiar with the fact that early medieval Latin Christian peoples – the Celts of Ireland as well as the Germanic peoples of England and the Continent – identified themselves with the Israel of the Old Testament’. In enlarging this view, this article seeks to show that borrowed Jewish identity extended further – reaching beyond the Christian Bible up until the moment of Titus’ destruction of the holy city. Seen as focal points of devotion as well as derision, the identities of the poem’s Jews owed their forms to a succession of Christian writers – such as Origen and Eusebius who viewed the Jews as sinful both in rejecting Christ as Messiah and in instigating the Crucifixion – and to Josephus, who portrayed his countrymen as doomed for other reasons. The Jewish roles in the poem are not of triumphant leaders as seen in Joshua, Solomon, David, and other Jewish figures usually adopted in Christian medieval discourses of conquest and kingship. Rather, the Jews here offer unparalleled models of suffering. While they are ultimately damned, the writer portrays them as open to possibilities of redemption up until the final moments of the siege. This depiction conflicts in some ways with then-contemporary views of divine foreknowledge, but the logic of the world of the poem, whereby the possibility for redemption is offered time and again, is invoked here, just as the promise for deliverance is held out in spite of scriptural prophecies of Jewish destruction. Such a rationale will also be seen in the sermons discussed in this study.
The process of inhabiting the identity of the poem’s Jews does not necessarily mean that Christian medieval readers were viewing the Jewish characters sympathetically, although that is one profitable reading. In two thought-provoking studies, Elisa Narin van Court wrote of the Siege-writer’s sympathetic portrayal of the Jews – a depiction inspired by the writing of Augustinian Canons, including William of Newburgh and William Wykes. Unlike Narin van Court’s approach, this study entertains the possibility that the Christian medieval audience viewed the violence encountered here positively, and even considered themselves edified by it. This interpretation of violence might be compared with that of Ralph Hanna, Malcolm Hebron, Merral Price, and others who have observed that the violence in the Siege was enjoyable to its medieval audiences. Christine Chism has found the poem’s destructive zeal productive of the ‘continuity, unity and identity of Christendom’. Likewise, Mary Hamel, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, and others have found compelling explanations for the poem’s violence by way of its crusading affiliations. More recently, Alex Mueller has shown that the poem’s contexts of imperial violence indicate that audiences appreciated and were not repelled by images of tortured Jews. While there may have been little sympathy for the Jews undergoing judgement, this study hopes to show that there was a certain levelling of relation, or strategic relatability, as Jews and Christians, as people who were viewed as sinful, are placed on a par with one another in the poem. It is this borrowing of experience, then, that would have allowed for some degree of identification with the Jews as a people undergoing judgement.

Appetites for destruction: imagining the urban apocalypse

By the fourteenth century, references to the Roman siege had become part of the liturgy and were already functioning in wide-ranging sermon traditions and lay reading, including the Legenda aurea. The ultimate fate of the first-century Jews of the Roman siege was well known to Christian medieval audiences, and I do not suggest that the romance’s auditors and readers would have met the unfolding of the narrative with any degree of surprise. However, what I do hope to draw attention to is the possibility that the audiences of the Siege would have had a vested interest in noting how other social groups had dealt with inexplicable failures and crises which would have been historically interpreted as the result of divine wrath. Admittedly, the work’s eschatological connections are not immediately apparent – at least not until one considers its anonymous writer’s interests in prophecy fulfilment associated with Jerusalem’s demise. Medieval exegetes and sermon writers identified the destruction of Jerusalem as an event prophesied in Scripture and necessary to bring about the apocalypse. Some writers assigned the devastation a place in the opening of the seven seals, and John’s revelatory account calls for the ‘trampling’ of the holy city. Thus this particular siege is apocalyptic not only in its portrayal of the end of Jewish ascendancy in first-century Jerusalem, but also in the way the fall of the city was written into an apocalyptic plan which Christian writers traced from Isaiah.
to John of Patmos. In this sense, then, the Siege becomes a prefiguration of the apocalypse itself.

That medieval people worried about the world’s end is by now a commonplace, and historians have noted the range of Doomsdays that were scheduled across the period. The speculation of particular interest here concerns the year 1400, and what possible role the poetic Siege may have played as an apocalyptic text. Written in Middle English, this romance offered its audiences ample opportunity to consider their pasts and futures against the backdrop of cyclical time, for the poet presents an alternative chronology for the first-century Romans by introducing them to Christianity more than two hundred years before the reign of Emperor Constantine. This fictive tradition of first-century Roman Christianity pre-dated the poem and its source by almost one thousand years, and here in the romance the poet follows suit, weaving together a tale whereby the Roman leaders Titus and Vespasian lead an attack against Syria and Judaea out of the desire to avenge Christ, rather than from loyalty to Caesar. The text shows the influence of chronicle and romance, along with apocryphal and hagiographical genres that together reveal the decimation of the first-century Jews and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem as the twin foci of cyclical remembrance. According to orthodox belief based on John’s Apocalypse, the past and future destructions were linked: the final destruction of Jerusalem would initiate a new, heavenly city on earth, along with the conversion of the Jews to Christianity.

One can find eschatological significance in many medieval texts and art objects, making the definition of a medieval discourse of ‘last things’ cover a broad range. As Carolyn Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman point out, such discourses could refer to ‘events (such as the 1000-year reign of the saints, the advent of Antichrist, or the resurrection and Last Judgment) that might come to all humanity in time or at the end of time’. Bernard McGinn, in examining medieval apocalyptic mentalities, describes a view of history observable in medieval treatments of John’s Apocalypse, pointing to what he calls the ‘legibility’ of history and the ‘imminence of the End’. Here, historical events that seem otherwise chaotic or catastrophic take shape as part of an ordered structure, culminating in the end of time. As McGinn puts it, this ‘legibility of history, the ability to read the course of events as one reads a text, requires a sense of the imminence of the final times’. While the Jewish and Christian traditions of apocalypse are many and variable, this study focuses on the ones which had developed in Christian Europe by the later Middle Ages. England was every bit as interested in the apocalypse as its continental neighbours were, and that attraction to the topic long pre-dates the poem.

Written evidence shows an English fascination with things eschatological, and scholars such as Richard Emmerson, Rosalind Field, Katherine Kerby Fulton, Ronald Herzman, and many others have noted how late medieval literary works show the influence of apocalyptic thinking. Some research has pointed to turmoil and upheaval particular to England in the 1370s and 1380s as influences on the production of apocalyptic poetry. Citing the proliferation of political prophecies and other phenomena, Michael Bennett concludes that the late 1390s
experienced what he calls a ‘build-up of anxiety and expectation’ regarding the year 1400. The late fourteenth century would have seen repeated outbreaks of the Black Death, bouts of famine and crop failure, the Peasants’ Revolt, the Great Schism, and the previously mentioned Hundred Years War, among other hardships. Whether or not one perceives a cause and effect relationship in these events, it is notable that Penn Szittya finds in these decades ‘the most concentrated cluster of “apocalyptic” poetry in English literary history before the Renaissance’. In addition to a literary tradition of apocalyptic narrative thriving in England during the time of the Siege’s circulation, a wide range of apocalypse commentaries was composed or copied there. As is discussed below, The Siege of Jerusalem may have shared similar audiences and eschatological interpretations alongside these diverse works.

In my reading of the poem, the vengeance trope serves up the first-century siege of Jerusalem as an apocalypse in miniature, and a kind of dress rehearsal for the final performance. The first-century Jewish people portrayed in the alliterative Siege are made out to be wilfully ignorant about the portents of their destruction scattered throughout the work. Late medieval English audiences were likewise associated with this shortcoming in popular sermons. Then-existing homiletic texts and scriptural exegesis would have encouraged the romance’s audiences to consider the fate of the poem’s Jews as a potential, yet cautionary, model of their own futures. This approach to the tale has received scant attention. Although Bonnie Millar has written about the role of certain portents foretelling Jerusalem’s destruction in the alliterative romance, little has been done regarding the work’s eschatological interests. I have written elsewhere about apocalyptic and affective elements in the Siege; however, this study is part of a new project examining the work’s relation to homiletic frameworks, particularly with reference to the liturgical possibilities surrounding Jerusalem’s first-century destruction. That cities would rise and fall in a cycle of translatio imperii (as explained by the likes of Orosius) was an idea still very present in late medieval theology and popular literature. That the English audiences of the poem could have seen themselves as a part of this cycle is evident from the sermons being preached during the time of the Siege’s circulation, which share the poem’s apocalyptic signs and imagery. Certainly this interpretation is not meant as a sole reading of the poem; however, I submit that past interpretations of the poem, from the historical to the moral exegetical, would also have allowed apocalyptic, anagogical considerations for some audiences, and that these may have been concerned with the idea of moral reform in preparation for the Final Judgement. These connections are evident from the signposts which the poem itself provides regarding prophecy, and from discussion of apocalypse and religious identity extant in later medieval sermons.

Prophecy in the poem: correct interpretations as signs of salvation

Looking first to the alliterative Siege, scriptural prophecy is given a privileged place from the very beginning of the piece when the role of Christ as a prophet
is established. The first reference to this vatic status occurs in an episode where Christ’s prophetic abilities are mocked, as his Roman tormentors abuse him during the course of the Passion, blindfolding and then challenging him, “‘If thou be prophete of pris, prophesie!’ sayde, / ‘Whiche berne hereaboute bobbed Thee laste?’” (lines 15 f). Tellingly, this occurrence of doubting Christ and the implied folly of misinterpreting or ignoring scriptural writings become thematic focal points in the poem. References to *miracula* throughout the work’s first quarter consolidate the perception of Christ as a reliable prophet, and himself an answer to prophecy. For instance, one of the work’s Christian characters, called Nathan, first describes Christ as ‘Preved for a prophete þrow preysed dedes’ (line 103), referring to how Christ’s birth and later performance of miracles were seen to fulfil predictions made in Isaiah. This position of Christ’s forward-looking authority sets the stage for his scriptural prophecy about the city in the three synoptic Gospels which portray divine foreknowledge of Jerusalem’s downfall. Of these, Luke xix.43 f. is the scriptural kernel of the poem, for in these verses Christ mourned Jerusalem in words that would later be interpreted as premonitions of the Roman invasion:

> Quia venient dies in te et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo et circumdabunt te et conanguastabunt te undique ad terram prosterent te et filios qui in te sunt. Et non reliquent in te lapidem super lapidem eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuae.

(For the days shall come upon you: and your enemies shall cast a trench about you and compass you round, and straiten you on every side, and beat you flat to the ground and your children who are in you. And they shall not leave in you a stone upon a stone: because you did not know the time of your visitation.)

These verses are key to the homiletic tradition, but in terms of the romance, the poet draws particular attention to the siege as the fulfilment of these words, for reference to the passage is repeated four times throughout the text, rhetorically placed to remind the audience of the work’s relation to biblical Scripture.

While the romancer and his source blame Jerusalem’s Jews for Christ’s crucifixion, the writers also imply that the Jews need not have been the victims of war as portrayed in Luke’s Gospel. Here, it is notable that the writer works to show that the vengeance about to be meted out to the Jews was not a foregone conclusion, and that the passage of time between the Crucifixion and Roman siege was seen as an indication of God’s merciful quality. After the Passion events, the poet explains, Christ waited another forty years for the Jews to ‘tourne’ or to repent and convert to Christianity; as the writer puts it,

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For al þe harme þat He hadde,  hasted he noȝt
On hem þe vyleny to venge  þat his veynys brosten,
Bot ay tarried on þe tyme  þif  þey tourne wolde;
3af  hem space þat Hym splide,  þey hit spedd lyte,
XL winter, as Y fynde,  and no fewere 3yrrys
Or princes presed in hem  þat Hym to pyne wroȝt. (lines 19–24)
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The romance likewise presents leaders Titus and Vespasian as would-be mirrors of this image of a God slow to anger, for the men offer repeated opportunities of surrender to the besieged Jews.

These particular instances of proffered treaties draw ultimately from Josephus’ account, *The Jewish War*, although it goes without saying that the poem’s Titus and Vespasian are portrayed here as seemingly merciful for different reasons from those the Josephan chronicler attests, not to mention the other additions introduced in the poem. In this case, when considering the offers of surrender in the romance, it is clear that there were problematic terms. For example, the second peace offering follows directly on the heels of the awful Roman murder of Caiphas and his high priests, after which the Jewish response, the desire ‘to hit [Vespasian] with a rock’, must have been understated to say the least. In the last two instances of truce offered in the poem, as seen in Josephus, the majority of Jerusalem’s inhabitants wish to take up the opportunity for peace but are stopped from doing so by two fellow citizens; notably, these men were seeking to profit from the long-standing political conflicts exacerbated among the Jews within the city. Significantly, such dissent does show that the poet did not perceive the opposing forces of the poem univocally as ‘good’ Romans versus ‘bad’ Jews, for just as some of the poem’s Jews are treacherous and some are not, the Romans also demonstrate the spectrum of good and evil. In all cases Jewish or Christian, individual decisions come to affect the fates of entire communities. One way or another, the romancer portrays the Jews as missing vital opportunities for any kind of mercy.

In addition to Christ’s prophetic authority and the Roman attempts at diplomacy, similarly significant chances to ‘tourne’ from the romance’s course toward destruction are shown to be simply missed or misinterpreted by the Jews. To be sure, this pattern of misinterpretation is a commonplace in medieval Christian perceptions of Jewish identity already established by Paul and in Christian scriptural commentary. Among many examples, Christian art likewise regularly offered visual representations of Judaism in the image of blind Synagoga. The poem deploys similar depictions of recalcitrant Jews for whom interpretative vision fails. Here, the poet seeds the romance with clues to the future, although these seem to pass unnoticed. For example, Roman might is portrayed in near-miraculous fashion, suggesting the soldiers’ inevitable victory. To this end, after the initial engagement between Jews and Christians, the poet reports:

Yit were the Romayns as rest as they fram Rome come:
Unriven eche a renk and noght a ryng brosten,
Was no poynpt perschid of alle here pris armure.
So Crist His knyhtes gan kepe tille complyn tyme. (lines 609–12)

The odds of these victories are also fantastic in light of the descriptions of the armies the writer offers. With 100,000 knights, 25 oliphant (each bearing 100 armed men), 100 dromedaries (each carrying 20 men), a large number of camels carrying 10 armed men each, and an amazing number of chariots, one
would think that the poem’s Jewish force of about 2,105,100 would have no trouble against the Roman Christian army, which comprise a meagre 58,000 armed men, with no ‘orientalized warbeasts’ on their side. One may speculate that the poet wished to show the Roman victory against these odds as a kind of marvel, for scholars of the historical siege estimate that the actual Jewish forces involved numbered a much more modest 23,400, against the Romans’ 60,000. In contrast, the poet recounts in true romance fashion that those on the favoured Roman side earn impossible victories, as the millions-strong Jewish force is reduced to 7,000 fighting men by an army 3 per cent of its size.

Besides Roman displays of might, other events occur which the writer identifies as remarkable, and which, as an audience might infer, would have deserved notice as omens of special import. Here, the poet describes events he calls ‘selcouths’ (lines 825, 1222), or marvels, of increasing intensity to which the work’s Jews appear blind. These ‘selcouths’ include violent occurrences, such as a man killed by a stone hurled from a siege engine (lines 825–8); a pregnant woman and her unborn baby who are killed in the same way (lines 826–32); fortifications toppling around the Temple (lines 833–6); and money losing its value (line 1141). Yet I would argue that the writer increases the stakes a few lines later by reporting occurrences believed to have been predicted by biblical Scripture itself. This is evident, for instance, in the horrific cannibalistic event where a mother consumes her child in an episode seen to fulfil Lamentations ii.20 (lines 1081–100). Finally, drawing again ultimately from Josephus’ Jewish War, the poet lists those ‘selcouth the thynges’ that would have been seen over the city for ‘al þe õ õeres tyme’ leading up to the siege (lines 1221f.), once again suggesting that even though there was warning, the Jewish inhabitants are blinded to important portents. These include a ‘bryȝt brennyng swerd’ seen in the sky (line 1225), and ‘Armèd men in þe ayere upon ost-wyse, / Over þe cyte were seyn sundrede tymes’ (lines 1225f.). Similarly, a birth omen appears, ‘A calf aȝen kynde calved in the Temple / And eued an ewe-lombe at þe offfryng-tyme’ (lines 1227f.). There is also the depiction of a prophet echoing Josephan and scriptural accounts, as the poet describes,

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\begin{align*}
A \text{ wye on the wal} & \quad \text{cried wondere heye,} \\
'Voys \text{ fram est, voys fram west, } & \quad \text{voys fram þe foure wyndis'}! \\
\text{And seyd: } '\text{Wo, wo wo} & \quad \text{worþ on } 30\text{u boþe,} \\
\text{Jerusalem þe Jewen toun} & \quad \text{and þe joly Temple.' (lines 1229–32)}
\end{align*}
\]

The man’s words, situated here as the most direct, clearly articulated of the prophetic signs, are shown to be misinterpreted, however. As the romancer explains:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And þan þe [vilayns] devysed hem} & \quad \text{and vengaunce hit helde,} \\
\text{And wyten her wo} & \quad \text{þe wronge þat þey wroȝte} \\
\text{When þey brutned þe burwe} & \quad \text{þe byschup Seint Jame;} \\
\text{Noȝt wolde acounte hit for Crist,} & \quad \text{þe care þat þey hadde. (lines 1237–40)}
\end{align*}
\]
Here, the Jewish interpreters of the prophecy finally do perceive the Roman incursion as a vengeful act organized directly against them, but miss the point by believing it done on behalf of St James’s murder, not Christ’s Passion. All of these prophetic episodes just mentioned, excepting the interpretation involving James, stem ultimately from Josephus. Yet Millar has noted that the chronicles of the Roman siege by Josephus, Hegesippus, and Higden do not mention the marvels of the celestial sword and armed men, nor the unnatural birth, until the destruction of the Jewish Temple has already begun. In contrast, by placing these events earlier, the Siege-poet or his direct, chronicle source creates suspense and expands the perception of Jewish agency. This manoeuvre at once heaps blame on the Jews for ignoring these signs, and would have validated the vengeance narrative.

Significantly, a similar portrayal of wilful blindness is visible in Josephus’ Jewish War, for he wrote openly in his chronicle of what he called the ‘folly’ of his countrymen in ignoring these signs of impending destruction. Conversely, the poetic Siege shows these as missed opportunities for Christian conversion. Certainly there was much about Josephus’ account of the Jewish War that appealed to later Christian apologists who, like Origen, reshaped their source text into a narrative that implied Jewish culpability for Jerusalem’s destruction. Yet Josephus did not blame his community for its demise; in fact, as he strove to explain the fall of Jerusalem, he articulated a version of translatio imperii long before Orosius. As Otto Benz has observed, this view of the place of Jerusalem had much to do with how Josephus portrayed himself as an interpreter of the signs prognosticating the city’s doom:

In his [Jewish War] … Josephus says that he had tried in vain to tell his countrymen in the beleaguered city of Jerusalem that the power of Rome was irresistible in the present (5.364). He explained that God lets political leadership shift from one nation to another, and in the present He stands on the side of the Romans (5.367). This may explain the fact that saving deeds of God and epiphanies, which the Zealots or Essenes had hoped for, did not happen in Israel during the first century A.D. The evaluation of history given by Josephus and revealed in his work … did not allow for mighty acts of God in his own time.

Like the medieval Christians who surveyed the misfortunes of the fourteenth century as apocalyptic signs, the Jews described by Josephus perceived the siege as a spiritual test to be endured before an age of renewal and the appearance of the Messiah.

For these reasons, the romance, like the contemporary homiletic tradition which simultaneously flourished, shows a deeply rooted interest in presenting the ability to correctly interpret prophecy as a hallmark of sacred identity. As Millar has pointed out, the ‘intrinsic indetermination of prophecy’ motivated Thomas Aquinas to determine that ‘correct interpretation of prophecy as well as the ability to have visions of the future was the result of divine inspiration’. Here, the ability to derive divine meaning is handed over to the poem’s Roman Christians, just as the city itself subsequently is. The homiletic texts use this
‘translatio’ to similar effect. Turning briefly to a selection of sermons, one sees again the import of attention to signs and their correct interpretation when looking back on the events of the Roman siege. The sermons draw striking parallels between recalcitrant Jews of the first century and reprobate Christians of the fourteenth. As part of a long-established Christian medieval homiletic tradition, the passage from Luke xix.43f., which was cited above, served as Christ’s direct warning for spiritual reform in sermon texts, similar to its uses in the poem. By the fourth century, this particular Lucan passage was included in the lectionary as the Gospel reading for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity. Gregory the Great employed the verses in one of his homilies on the Gospels, finalizing it both as a remembrance of the Roman siege and as an important devotional device in medieval sermon writing. Gregory, taking his cue from the exegetes before him, urged an interpretation of Jerusalem as the city of the soul, under attack by the devil. For instance, in Homily 39 on Luke xix, he writes:

Sed quia eversam iam Ierusalem nouimus, atque eversione sua in melius commutatam … debemus ex rebus exterioribus introrsus aliquam similitudinem trahere, atque ex eversis aedificiis parietum morum ruinam timere.

(But we know Jerusalem has already been overthrown, and transformed into something better by its overthrow … [Since this is so,] we must extract some inner similitude from these external events; these overthrown walls of buildings must cause us to fear the ruin of our lives.)

Gregory’s commentaries would become widely incorporated into the liturgy and sermon texts for centuries to come, influencing works like Bede’s commentary on Luke, and accounts of the Roman siege in Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea* and John Mirk’s *Festial*, all of which were prime texts for English fourteenth-century sermon writers. Similarly, compilers and composers of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sermons were indebted to earlier Latin authors and compilers, like Robert of Gretham and the compiler of the *Filius matris*. In all of these sources, evidence of interest in the apocalypse may be found. In her assessment of medieval ecclesiastical tradition, Veronica O’Mara has noted that much remains to be done in the study of the portrayal of the apocalypse in Middle English sermons. In her investigation of late medieval apocalypse-themed sermons, such as that by Master Richard Alderton of London in 1406, O’Mara has focused on those for the Second Sunday after Advent and the Ninth Sunday after Trinity, and finds that Middle English sermons were often more specific to the liturgical calendar than were their Old English counterparts. However, as H. L. Spencer has shown, there were ‘many other occasions when Doomsday might come under review’ in late medieval sermons. In all of O’Mara’s extensive research, she finds that only Thomas Wimbledon’s sermon offers a precise date for Doomsday, and even this with Wimbledon’s disclaimer. Because of the relationships among the falls of Jerusalem, and apocalypse as it was conceived both privately (in death) and communally (at the Final Judgement), it seems appropriate to add to O’Mara’s list those apocalypse sermons that expound on Luke xix.
Romancing Jewish identities of the siege in medieval sermons

There are many uses of the first-century Roman siege story in the fourteenth-century English sermons, and references to it often appear for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity in which portions of Luke xix form the lectionary reading (as accords with Sarum Use). This is not to limit the verses’ appearance elsewhere in the liturgy; for instance, they often appear as the Gospel reading for celebration of the Feast of St James the Less, and occasionally as the reading for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity. In the few works I will have room to mention here, Christian and Jewish identities are elided with ease in light of the impending ‘apocalypse’. One example appears in an anonymous late fourteenth-/early fifteenth-century sermon translated from Robert de Gretham’s Anglo-Norman Miroir, regarding Luke xix. This piece originates in a Holkham manuscript described by Kathleen Blumreich as a collection of sixty prose Sunday sermons from the first Sunday in Advent to Shrove Sunday, and also for ‘various saints’ days throughout the liturgical year’. The original Miroir, composed c.1250–60, was ostensibly written for a woman of high social status for use in her private devotions; however, the author’s view toward a still wider audience is seen as he addresses a masculine plural readership of ‘barons’ and ‘seignours’. While little is known about Gretham, he may have been an Augustinian Canon and ‘probably of English extraction’. The copy of the translation, made around the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, is the oldest extant manuscript of a lost exemplar; Blumreich convincingly suggests that Gretham himself may have been the original translator. Significantly, both the Miroir and its later translation were popular items and frequently copied into works of liturgical import; the Middle English translation itself is extant in five other manuscripts. The Middle English copy follows Gretham closely, including his intention for the piece, that it promises spiritual health by way of interior reflection. As Gretham explains: ‘Þe mirour onlyche ryȝte þe body, & þys ryȝte boþ body & sowle.’

The sermon on the Gospel opens with the usual explication of Christ weeping over Jerusalem and the fate of its inhabitants, thereby showing Christ as knowledgeable about the future Roman incursions. In treating the Jewish war, the Miroir-writer offers an image of historical symmetry, stating that since Jerusalem was destroyed by Vespasian and Titus, it is ‘gret riȝt’ that they did so to avenge God and Christ, father and son. Remarking on this vengeance, the writer mentions ‘tokens’, ‘many wonders’, and ‘merveiles’, such as the lamb born in the Temple, the star in the shape of a sword, and the celestial army, all of which he says were divinely sent to the Jews so that they might ‘amenden hem & don penaunce’. Echoing Gretham, the late medieval translator suggests that this is an important lesson for his Christian audience, stating that ‘Of þe wonders þat bifellen þere þe Iewes ne helden noȝt but for fantome, Ichil sey þou a party for to warnen þou þorȝ her follye’. As well as representing the fate of the first-century Jews as a cautionary tale, Gretham and his source, like other contemporary sermon writers and the Siege romancer, write as if the Jews had had a choice: ‘Certes ȝif þat þei wolden han turned to hym & haue amended
hem of her yvels, God is so ful of pite þat he wold haue forþeven hem altogider.' Similarly, the Christian audience must identify with the Jews at some level, for he warns, ‘now loke we what it bitokeneþ for to amend our lyf þouru õ.

Having set out the depiction of Jewish stubbornness, the Mirour-preacher then offers a spiritual remedy: again echoing Gregory the Great and paraphrasing Gretham, the adaptor likens the siege of Jerusalem to a soul ensnared by sin, writing, ‘3if þat we wil þe good kepe to our synnes, & se hou þat þe cite of þe soule is ful of synne … sone he schulde fynde why þat he myþt be sory. But we ben so ablinded þerþliche willes þat we holden it al follye.’ Here, Jews and Christians share alike in the ignorance of sin. Yet alongside this evocation of the besieged city of the soul is also the image of the Day of Judgement, complete with a warning: ‘But þe day of God þat he haþ sett schal com þer al þis wille schal failen us þat we now haue here. For al þat oure folere herte, þer it schal be dedliche harm. And David seþ in þe sauter, “Þan þey departen al her þouðtes” [Ps. cxlv: 4].’ In this quotation as well as that previously given, Christian conversion weighs in the balance against the destruction and death of the soul. Moreover, the use of Psalm cxlv echoes Gregory, as the writer goes on to explicate how the death of thoughts is linked to the destruction of the city walls. In light of these quite serious threats, there is some urgency to the sermon, as the audience is encouraged to amend its ways before God ‘schewe[s] his vengeance’.

Another example utilizes Luke xix’s reference to the Roman siege in a less pointed manner, but deserves brief mention for its presentation of apocalyptic measures in a popular and influential collection. This late medieval sermon with quite early roots is part of the cycle of sixty sermons on the Sunday Gospels and other occasions taken from the twelfth-century Latin Filius matris collection, often falsely attributed to William de Montibus. The translated sermons exist in varying condition in three other manuscripts, one of which (the Royal MS) is also bound with a copy of Thomas Wimbledon’s sermon, which was, as mentioned below, a very popular work with apocalyptic interests. Like the Gretham text, the Filius matris translation was most probably designed with a ‘reading intention’, to assist learned lay piety. For instance, the explicatio of Luke xix in this sermon speaks to the importance of chaste Christian behaviour. As the writer explains:

If he fynde us chaste, riþtwise, and sobre, þanne ech day he shal visite us and with his visitynig liþtne us with enerness of kunnyng. And with such liþtynig he shal iustifi en us þorouþ vertuouse worchyng; and bi such vertuouse worchyng he shal magnifie us bi his graciusce confermyng in al love of vertu and treuþ to be togidere heires with hym aftir in blisse everylastyng.

While not overtly focused on apocalyptic timing, the interest in this excerpt nevertheless rests on the fate of the soul in the afterlife, and the merits of being prepared for death. Just as in other sermons mentioned here, the writing clarifies that Christ did not weep so much for the physical destruction of the city (literally, the stones) as he did for its people.
In another instance, well-known sermon-writer Thomas Wimbledon presents the threat to Jerusalem similarly, but adds a tone of urgency to his pleas for moral regeneration, outlining a specific timetable. His sermon, ‘Redde racionem villicacionis tuae’, composed in 1387 and probably delivered that same year at St Paul’s Cross, was known throughout England. It persisted long past the Reformation, as Owst states: Puritans ‘were delighted to bind it with their own volumes of sermons’, and it also appeared in Foxe’s _Acts and Monuments_. Unlike the other examples I discuss, this particular sermon was probably not preached on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity but rather at Quinquagesima. At fifty days before Easter, its proximity to Lent would have made that Sunday a particularly apt time to encourage spiritual renewal. Its popularity is seen in the at least eighteen extant manuscripts and twenty-two printed texts which circulated and were transcribed widely. This sermon mentions Jerusalem’s fall to the Romans as proof of Christ’s prophetic ability, and refers to an unnamed doctor to say that Antichrist would appear in the year 1400. Wimbledon also mentions Joachim of Fiore, telling his audience that the exegete had predicted the world’s end in 1200, and that this prediction, now late, could come due at any moment.

This threat is, of course, a call to moral reform at the eleventh hour, giving the audience just thirteen years to adopt any changes. Commenting on a status of souls, Wimbledon lumps reprobate Christians and observant Jewish people together as the damned, stating that on the Day of Judgement: ‘Woe shall befall the pagan, the Jew, the false Christian, and those who have shut out the household of God, that is, remembrance of the passion, contemplation of his goodness, and the memory of his benefits.’ Like the Jews of the Roman siege, this logic implies that these Christians would do well to recognize the signs around them.

The reading for Wimbledon’s sermon, Luke xvi.10, treats the parable of the vineyard, in which the field workers are responsible to give an account of their merit. The sermon touches upon Luke xix only indirectly. But the theme, which Wimbledon translates into the vernacular as ‘õ elde rekenynge of þy bailie’ (line 120), is fully concerned with those same interests that occupy the romance: revenge and penance. Wimbledon states his intentions for the work, that ‘for now I shal shewe ŵo how ŵe shal dispose ŵe to avoide þanne þe vengeance of God, whanne þer shal be tyme of so streyt dome’ (lines 131–3).

The issue of interpretation of _miracula_ likewise was made explicit in at least one instance: in one manuscript of Wimbledon’s sermon dated 1400, containing contents all written in the same hand, the text appears with a tract interested in the miraculous, explaining ‘Which ben trewe myraclis and which ben false’. Not unlike _Piers Plowman_ and other contemporary texts, Wimbledon’s sermon queries the proper functioning of society, forming a link between the moral behaviour of the individual and that of the group. This interest in different societal levels is reminiscent of the _Siege_ which represents Jewish citizens of the town as pious believers from a wide societal range, from ‘princes and prelates’ to ‘clerkes and communes’ (lines 317f.). Preaching to the members of the estates of priesthood, knighthood, and labourers (line 39), Wimbledon asks each estate
three questions: the first, ‘how hast þou entrid ... into þyn office? Oþir for helpe of þe peple to distroie falshed and forþeren trewp, oþir for desir of synnyng oþer worldly worship?’ This format, suitable for self-introspection prior to confession, interrogates the motivations of the auditors, while the second question, ‘how hast þou rewlid?’, addresses conduct, especially when making impartial judgements of the poor and rich alike. The third question, ‘How has þou lived, þou þat demest and punysschist oþer men for her trespass?’, expresses concerns over personal spiritual accountability. While these questions relate only indirectly to the themes of the poetic Siege, it is worth noting how applicable would have been the sermon’s teachings on vengeance.

The second part of the sermon works to contextualize God’s vengeance as a greater good, benefiting believers and their societies (line 713). Wimbledon categorizes divine judgement neatly into two sections: the singular and universal. At the level of personal circumstance, he says, divine vengeance works through means of illness, old age, and death; significantly, the world itself is viable to such ‘summoners’ to judgement, seen in sickness of the world (when humanity’s love of God and neighbours is ‘litle and feynt’), the ‘elde’ of the world as the apocalypse looms, and the world’s death in Last Judgement. Wimbledon mentions St Paul, John Chrysostom, Joachim of Fiore, and Hildegard of Bingen as experts in his process of eschatological reckoning, and also cites earlier authorities, including Augustine, Bede, and Orosius, as he calculates the age of the world. It is in this context of addressing a world grown old that Wimbledon discusses Jerusalem. The section on the city’s destruction refers directly to the Gospel of Matthew where Christ also predicts Jerusalem’s demise (line 865), and also marginally notes Matthew xxiv. The contents of these verses are similar to those of the Lucan verses under discussion here; Luke xix is even mentioned marginally in two of the early extant English manuscripts of Wimbledon’s text, one of them in an important sermon collection. In answer to the questions Christ was asked by his disciples, namely, ‘what tyme þe cite of Ierusalem shulde be destroyed’, ‘what token were of his comyge to þe dom’, and ‘what signe were of þe ende of the world’, Wimbledon invites his audience to confl ate the signs of Jerusalem’s end with those he sees in his contemporary times. Similarly, he portrays Christ as an authoritative prophet who, he says, after all, correctly foretold the city’s fall to the Romans.

Wimbledon wisely qualifies his predictions, however, pointing out that ‘Crist ȝaf [his disciples] no certeyn tyme of þese þyngis whan þay schulle falle,’ alluding, of course, to the end of time, but also warning, ‘but he ȝaf hem tokens by whyche þey myȝte wite whan þey drowen nyȝ’. Notably, the apocalypse and Jerusalem’s destruction witness similar portents: ‘rewme schulde ryse aȝens rewme, and peple aȝens peple, and pestilences and erþe schakynges,’ which, he adds, ‘we haue seye in our dayes’. Adding to the urgency of his cause, Wimbledon next refers to an unnamed ‘doctour’ (line 882) who predicts the coming of Antichrist 1,400 years from the birth of Christ (line 896). One wonders about the effect that such specificity may have had on Wimbledon’s audiences, especially as the sermon was adapted over the next decade and a half.
approaching that particular deadline. Wimbledon’s approach is made the more complex by his qualifying statement, wherein he says that his hope in sharing this information is ‘not as to schewe any certeyn tyme of his comyng … but to schew þat he is nyȝ, but how nyȝ I wote neuere’.91 Like the ruined city, the Jews as threatened inhabitants are key figures in Wimbledon’s warnings. Echoing John’s Apocalypse xiii which looks back to the Old Testament to quote a prophetic voice, Wimbledon recalls to his audience the prophecy, ‘Wô[ë]o[ë] to hem þat dwelleþ in erþ,’ and again figuratively links the fate of the first-century Jews with that of medieval Christians, stating:

Wô[ë]o[ë] to þe Iewe, þat tristed so moche in þe olde lawe; þan schal he see Marie sone demyng þe world, whom he despised and sett on þe cros. Wô[ë]o[ë] to þe false Cristene man, þat knewe þe will of his Lord and fulfillid it not.92

It should be noted that the Roman siege clearly appealed to Lollard sympathizers who reprised versions of Wimbledon’s earlier-mentioned sermon as sympathetic to their cause. Many scholars have demonstrated that, originally, this sermon was in no way associated with Wyclif’s movement; for example, Alexandra Walsham comments on Wimbledon’s themes and, like Marjorie Reeves, has observed that ‘[i]nterest in the Joachimite prophecy and feverish speculation regarding the chronology of AntiChrist’s coming were both features of mainstream culture rather than discursive strands monopolized solely by the Lollards’.93 Notably, Wimbledon’s text was later taken up by Protestant reformers as an artefact of the pre-Reformation, and made to appear as a precocious pro-Protestant piece.94 From orthodoxy to heresy, to church reform, the image of the first-century Jewish people at a crossroads of conversion attracted a wide audience and had broad applications.

Wimbledon and his predecessors were not the only homiletic writers to point out such important likenesses between Christians and Jews in relation to the fall of Jerusalem. Luke xix figured similarly among both orthodox and less orthodox writing. As noted above, it is not surprising that, because of their service in aid of moral reform, Titus and Vespasian’s images had an afterlife in many Wycliffite sermons of the late medieval period. In one anonymous Wycliffite sermon from the first half of the fifteenth century, Christians are instructed to weep for their own sins, ‘the sins of others, the wretchedness of the world, and the “desolacioun of the cuntre”’.95 The writer of this piece enjoins Christians to mourn, ‘so that their souls are not destroyed by the devil as Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus and Vespasian’.96 Though that manuscript and its related texts are described as a ‘textual tangle’, there are many more traditions related to it.97 In her representation of a Wycliffite sermon cycle, Anne Hudson offers a version of the sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity that uses the Lucan passage and mentions Titus and Vespasian. After beginning with an account of Christ’s weeping over the city and summarizing the Gospel, the writer comments: ‘Alle þese wordys weren schewyd in ded, and Iosephus makyþ mynde of hem how Tytus & Vespasian … enseghedon [besieged] Jerusalem and destroyden men and wallys.’98 The subsequent exposition is typical of the orthodox sermons
already mentioned, citing human failure to ‘turn’ toward God even when the need to do so is great: ‘þis is o pryve synne wiþ whyche þe feend blendþþ men, þat þey sorwe not more for synne þan þei doon for oþer harm, for þus wille is mysturnyd and men faylen to serve God.’

In resisting repentance, Jews and Christians are seen to share a certain blindness.

Another late fourteenth-century sermon collection on the Sunday Gospels is that from Bodley 806, which was influenced by the Wycliffite cycle, and known to have influenced two subsequent sermon collections. It was assembled by a compiler working from sources of Odo of Cheriton and Nicholas of Aquevilla. The sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity offers an explicatio of the Lucan passage uncharacteristic of the other orthodox sermons examined here. As Spencer observes, the compiler was ‘most probably a secular priest, who certainly disliked friars and held strong opinions on preaching the gospel’. The writer asks, ‘Siþ benefi  ces ben bouþte and synnes solde, sacraments and pardouns, letters of fraternite, massis and preiers, and oþer goostly dedus ben [bartered], who wold not seye þat ne antichrist regneþ?’

Though clerical critique does not solely mark the text as Wycliffite, evidence from throughout the collection shows that the compiler of the Bodley 806 sermons had access to and appreciation for ‘the source texts and influences of academic Wyclifism’ and found a source in the English Wycliffite Sermons. Whatever one wishes to make of this relation, other elements of the sermon are identical to those shared in the more orthodox examples. For instance, the sermon writer recounts Christ’s weeping over the holy city, for ‘Jerusalem, the city of peace, represents the human soul; Christ wept for those whose souls were spiritually dead through sin’. Interpreting the prophecy itself, he writes, ‘Christ prophecied that enemies would surround the city as with a wall; similarly devils will surround sinful souls with their own sins.’

Like some of the other sermons mentioned here, there is also a sense of some urgency; as the writer explains, Christ punished those in Jerusalem after only forty years, ‘although the people had that time to repent, they did not; people now have had longer and have not’. Though an analysis of the different orthodox and less orthodox uses of these verses is beyond the scope of this study, it has been recognized that in assessing medieval Wyclifite heresy, most individuals occupied a broad scale between orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy; likewise, these positions and sermon references reflect the fact that certain beliefs changed valence over time, making it difficult to discern definitive patterns of non-orthodox expression. Nevertheless, it is notable how widespread Titus and Vespasian’s image had become, holding currency for orthodox and non-orthodox as shared signs of penance, vengeance, and divine justice.

Looking at later medieval orthodox sermons roughly contemporary with those Wyclif-influenced examples just mentioned, one finds a sustained interest in reinterpreting the siege and its Jews as elements to be spiritually contemplated. From a sermon cycle from the central east Midlands, dated c.1409–13, another sermon preached on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity provides an urgent deadline, but also makes a direct link between the Romans who besieged Jerusalem and England’s neighbours who threaten the country during the Hundred Years
War. The writer applies these interests to his commentary regarding the Lucan reading concerning Jerusalem,

Spiritually the city [Jerusalem] signifies all sinners who should be the house of God but are besieged by the devil. Their sins will surround them to accuse them and they will be cast into hell. The city also signifies every sinful kingdom ‘and namely the rewme of Engelond.’ In less than forty-two years, unless it changes itself, the kingdom will be surrounded by enemies, and towns and castles will be destroyed, ‘as they han now begunnyn’.

In this piece, both first-century Jewish figures and fifteenth-century English people are shown at a pivotal point of spiritual decision. Clearly, the writer posits a close relationship between English morality and success in this war; he also forecasts an end to English life as his audiences know it, not in the destruction of the world, but in the decimation of the country. As Spencer has shown, this compilation was probably designed for private lay reading, possibly with an aristocratic female audience in mind, again suggesting the significant place of the imperilled Jew within Christian medieval devotion.

Another Midlands sermon cycle dated to the mid-fifteenth century likewise shows the continued link between Christian and Jewish penance. This sermon cycle found in Oxford, Bodleian MS e Mus. 180, probably draws on an earlier vernacular source. It is an orthodox compilation that also exists in varying extents in four other manuscripts; all of which were written by the same scribe for commercial productions. The sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity focuses in particular on the efficacy and importance of penance. After offering the Lucan Gospel, the explicatio shows that the verse applied not just to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also to the contemporary hearers of the sermon, promising

if þu be sorowfull for þi synnes, many gracis schall be ðe of almyþi God. Perfore we schall pray to þat precius lord lhesu þat we may haue þat speciall grace to be sory in hert for our synnes, thorow þe whiche we may com to þe blisse þat God bowȝte us to.113

In the subsequent discussion of the Gospel, Christ’s weeping is clarified as a sign of sadness not over the forthcoming physical destruction of the city, but rather for the inhabitants within. As one summarized version of the sermon explains, ‘[Christ] wept out of compassion for the people of Jerusalem and their sinful lives. Titus besieged the city and thousands died.’ Important in this interpretation of the sermon is the idea that even those considered the worst sinners (as the Jews were) are worthy of forgiveness, along with the related notion that Christians must always have mercy on their enemies. For instance, in relating Christ’s weeping in Luke xix to other scriptural occurrences, the writer offers,

Christ wept for Lazarus, as Christians should show compassion particularly to habitual sinners. Christ wept for Judas; Augustine says that this shows Christians ... should have pity on their enemies ... The gloss asserts the efficacy of tears in provoking God’s mercy ... If Judas had wept as Peter did, he surely would have had forgiveness.
While the sermon, like the others mentioned here, still encourages medieval Christians to repent of their sins, it also represents a pointed message regarding the treatment of adversaries by encouraging mercy rather than wrath. Although the sermon does not necessarily imply a sympathetic response to the Jews (indeed, it equates ‘Jewishness’ to sinfulness), it is tempting to perceive here not just a cautionary tale, but also a levelling of humanity, as Jews and Christians are encouraged similarly to seek God’s mercy for their sins.

Borrowing Jewish identity by way of liturgical time

Finally, in looking one last time at the group of orthodox medieval sermons just mentioned, it should also be noted that their placement in liturgical time marks important points of contact between the Jews of the siege and English Christians. With the exception of Wimbledon’s sermon for which the exact date of delivery is undetermined, these English sermons delivered on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity occurred at a time in the liturgical year that was meant to establish a direct link between medieval Christian Europeans and the first-century Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem. This particular Christian Sunday, also known as the Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday, drew inspiration from the observance of 9 Ab, the Jewish day of mourning in remembrance of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 587 BC. Importanty, the lament over the fall of the Temple was not applied solely to the period of Babylonian captivity, but also to that of the fall of the second Temple in AD 70.116 This remembrance was known to early Christians, including Jerome.117 Moreover, early examples of the Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday formulary were already in existence by the sixth century.118 By the late Middle Ages, themes on the destruction of Jerusalem appeared in at least 200 European homilies and sermons, most often within the summer sequence of Sundays.119 While many of these services used Luke xix.41–7 as the Gospel lesson, some Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday readings instead offered Luke x.25–37, containing the parable of the Good Samaritan, as the verses for this lesson; however, Amnon Linder notes that this usage decreased in Europe after the twelfth century.120

As far as scheduling Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday in the liturgical year, there may have been an intention to mesh its observance with that of the Jewish calendar, as Linder has suggested. Certainly this overlap of Christian and Jewish holy days is seen in other instances, but this one is remarkable for its shared memories of Jerusalem’s demise, and the diverging rationale behind each religion’s celebration of it. Early dating evidence places the Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday between the Sanctoral dates of 30 July and 2 August, and by the late medieval period, when it was celebrated on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, it had an actual date range between 12 July and 15 August.121 Linder’s compelling studies of this tradition show that these days parallel the dates of Jewish commemoration of 9 Ab, with both dates falling in close proximity every two years, and occasionally sharing the same calendar date.122 Indeed, the
evidence of that Sunday’s earliest celebration indicates that, in the year 591 when Gregory the Great was believed to have delivered his Homily 39, 9 Ab occurred on Saturday 4 August, while the Destruction of Jerusalem Sunday was celebrated the preceding Sunday, 29 July. While late medieval Christian laity may not have been aware of the chronological confluence of their celebration with 9 Ab, they certainly would have recognized the commemoration of Jerusalem’s downfalls, particularly in the Roman siege. This historical connection would have given medieval Christians a sense of tradition that seemed very ancient indeed.

Conclusions

Whether or not all who encountered the alliterative Siege of Jerusalem took away with them the interpretation of spiritual reform is impossible to know, but it is certain that the poem’s audiences and adapters considered the portrayal of imminent danger worth perpetuating as good entertainment, moral edification, or both. Certainly those texts which followed after the alliterative poem, such as the English metrical romance of Titus and Vespasian and its so-called ‘offspring’, the fifteenth-century Siege in Prose, demonstrated concentrated interest in prophecy and heightened portrayals of Jewish degeneracy, and this may be due in part to their reliance upon the Vengeance de Nostre Seigneur tradition. Indeed, a more ‘homogenously villainous’ Jewish presence has been identified in Titus and Vespasian than is present in the alliterative Siege, and also includes expanded images of Jewish alterity that the alliterative Siege does not. In its focus on the perceived Jewish rejection of God’s love, the Titus and Vespasian poet minimizes his text’s focus on ideas of Jewish potential for mercy, thereby diminishing a positive relatability. But the alliterative Siege of Jerusalem, for the reasons discussed here, makes its Jewish figures more like medieval homilists saw their congregations, catching the Jews, like the English sermon auditors, on the cusp of a big decision. Like the Siege, contemporary sermons and liturgical observances invited audiences both to identify with the Jews as a people in moral crisis, and to condemn them for their blindness. In this poem and in the homiletic readings discussed here, constructs of ‘Jewishness’ are employed variably as characteristics to both embrace and repudiate. It is perhaps this narrative device of seeming ambivalence that creates the illusion of suspense, and through which the events of the first century come to embody a prototype of horror genre: predictable in every way and nevertheless satisfying both to those medieval audiences who might have enjoyed its consummated violence, and to those who saw it as a moral exemplum of divine justice.

In this romance as in the sermons mentioned here, I would argue that Christian audiences were invited temporarily to ‘become’ the Jewish Other by way of the imagination, identifying with the Jews as sinful beings, yet ultimately rejecting and besting them as superior interpreters of their God’s covert messages about the future. Speaking more generally to this complex position of medieval Jewish identity in medieval literature, Steven Kruger writes:
The Jewish opponent – that is, in this case, the repudiated Jewish component of the self – is defeated, but it also survives as something that must be repeatedly grappled with. Or, to adopt a more explicitly Freudian reading, the Jewish identification that is laid aside is yet somehow necessary to the new Christian self, called forth in order to testify to the truth of that new self and thus, paradoxically, still available to that self, even still somehow a part of it.127

In the alliterative Siege of Jerusalem, Christian audiences are invited to identify with the first-century Jews up to a point, examine ‘shared’ aspects of stubbornness and blindness, and then ‘tourne again’ toward their God. In the Siege as well as in the sermons, apocalypse looms in many guises: civic destruction, community diaspora, translatio imperii, individual death, and even the world’s end. Within this cultural matrix, the Jewish people are depicted as a group whose time has come; but for much of the poem, they are in stasis as the choices between conversion and destruction are made, and the sword literally hangs over their heads. In this poem, we can envision some medieval audiences perceiving their own fates hanging in the balance as they marked what some believed was the end of time. In many ways, highlighting the apocalyptic concerns of the alliterative Siege of Jerusalem makes evident how inseparable Christian medieval identity was from its fantasy of Jewish heritage.

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NOTES

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4 Yeager, Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative, pp. 104f.
5 Regarding a new source for the Siege, see Andrew Galloway, ‘Alliterative poetry in Old Jerusalem: The Siege of Jerusalem and its sources’, in Medieval Alliterative Poetry: Essays in

7 Along with its apocalyptic analogues, this vengeance motif, established by the second century, would go on to motivate the crusading movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For crusading vengeance, see Susanna Throop, ‘Zeal, anger, and vengeance: the emotional rhetoric of crusading’, in Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion, and Feud, ed. Susanna Throop and Paul Hyams (Aldershot, 2010), pp. 177–201; see pp. 177, 193.

8 Certainly the theological complexities of free will versus divine destiny are important here; though there is little room to discuss these issues in this article, see treatment of them in Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologica, part II, quaestio 17–21; Summa contra Gentiles, book 4, chapter 22.


10 As Heinz Schreckenberg has shown, Origen was the first to make use of Josephus ‘with apologetic zeal’, developing an ‘anti-Jewish interpretation of the fall of Jerusalem … according to which the Jews lost their homeland and their Temple in the year 70 on account of their crimes and their rejection of Jesus’; see his ‘The works of Josephus and the early Christian Church’, in Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit, Mich., 1987), pp. 315–24 (p. 318); see also Schreckenberg, Die christlichen Adversus-Judaes Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.–11. Jh.) (Frankfurt a.M., 1982), p. 233.

11 Katzir discusses Frankish kings hailed as these latter-day crusading figures in ‘Conquest of Jerusalem’, p. 104.


15 For instance, Mary Hamel, ‘The Siege of Jerusalem as a crusading poem’, in Journeys...


17 See, for example, Ezek. iv.1–3; 16f., Dan. ix.26f., and Luke xix.41–5.

18 See Apoc. xi.2. Here, it is important to note that the dating of John’s Apocalypse is debated, split generally by arguments placing its composition either before or after the historical siege of Jerusalem in the first century AD.

19 Titus vows to avenge Christ (line 188), and is baptized to become a ‘Christian king’ (line 194). The appearance of such fictitious Romans was not new; they were themselves the product of a fourth-century poet sometimes referred to as Pseudo-Hegesippus, who re-rendered Josephus in creative fashion.

20 See the most immediate sources of the work traced to Josephus’ Jewish Wars, the Vindicta Salvatoris, Jacobus de Voragine’s Legenda aurea, Roger of Argenteuil’s Bible en français, and Ranulf Higden’s Polychronicon; see Galloway for a more recent assessment in ‘Alliterative poetry in old Jerusalem’.


25 Some of these medieval phenomena include an alarming astrologist’s letter, scenes of apocalypse painted for the chapter-house at Westminster Abbey, reactions to a comet, and other events. See Michael Bennett, ‘Prophecy, providence, and the revolution of 1399’, in Prophecy, Apocalypse, and the Day of Doom, ed. Morgan, pp. 1–18 (p. 8).


27 Szittya’s useful study provides a survey of these works that includes the Berengaudus commentary and the French prose commentary popular in English or Anglo-Norman illuminated Apocalypses, Middle English Apocalypses, and thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English mendicant commentaries. For similar discussion, see Suzanne Lewis, who
describes two distinctive cycles of Apocalypse illustrations created in England in the mid-thirteenth century, one designed to accompany a Latin commentary of Berengaudus and the other called the Corpus-Lambeth stem, made for an anonymous French prose gloss of the Apocalypse. Suzanne Lewis, ‘Exegesis and illustration in the thirteenth-century English Apocalypse’, in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Emmerson and McGinn, pp. 259–75 (p. 259). From theologians like John Wyclif and Richard Rolle of Hampole came further Apocalypse commentaries, as well as those by Robert of Bridlington, John de Lanthy, and many manuscripts whose authors remain unknown. Lollard use of the Apocalypse was notable; see for instance the anonymous *Opus arduum*, written from prison in 1390, and Walter Brute's depositions to Bishop Trefnant before his trial in 1392 – here Brute views the English as God’s ‘chosen people’ and predicts that the Antichrist will both rise and be defeated in England. For more, see Szitty, ‘Domesday Bokes’, pp. 393, 396f. Robert of Bridlington was twelfth-century prior of the Augustinian Canons at Bridlington in Yorkshire who wrote ‘In septem visiones Apocalypses’; John de Lanthy was a twelfth-century Augustinian Canon (and subprior of Lanthony) who composed ‘De expositionibus libri Apocalypsis’.

Bonnie Millar, ‘The role of prophecy in the *Siege of Jerusalem* and its analogues’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 13 (1999), 154–78; and Bonnie Millar, ‘The *Siege of Jerusalem* in its Physical, Literary, and Historical Contexts’ (Bodmin, 2000), pp. 116–21. In considering the variations among the portrayals of the siege prophecies, Millar describes the texts’ interest in the correct interpretation of omens and in the ability to discern true from false prophets. In contrast to Millar’s work, which sets the poem in light of different narrative versions of the siege events, my study discusses the portrayal of prophecy and apocalypticism in relation to contemporary sermons that used the story of the Roman siege to show its fourteenth-century audiences that the Day of Judgement was near. Focusing on a particular set of omens, her study traces the treatment of prophetic materials in Josephus’ *Jewish War*, Pseudo-Hegesippus’ fourth-century rendition of *The Jewish War*, the fifth-century literal Latin translation of Josephus by Rufinus of Aquileia, Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea*, and Ranulf Higden’s fourteenth-century *Polychronicon*. Versions of Pseudo-Hegesippus’ *The Jewish War*, the fifth-century literal Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia, and Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea* all circulated broadly in England by the fourteenth century; similarly, Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon* had a wide readership in its original Latin form and also in the Middle English translation by John Trevisa in the 1380s and in a separate, fifteenth-century translation. See Millar, ‘The role of prophecy’, 155–9; and *Siege*, ed. Hanna and Lawton, pp. xl–xlii.


Based on the other texts with which the *Siege* appears in nine known manuscripts, Ralph Hanna III and David Lawton have observed that the romance was ‘capable of polyvocal recuperations during its textual life’, and that its audiences experienced the *Siege* variably as ‘quasi-scriptural narrative’, a ‘pendant to the Passion’, crusading poem, ‘learned classical history’, and ‘tale of Roman conquest’. *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. Ralph Hanna III and David Lawton, EETS, 08 320 (London, 2003), p. xxvii. I cite this edition in this study as *Siege*, hereafter.
31 Luke xix.43f. For similar prophecies, see also Luke xxi.6, Matt. xxiv, Mark xiii.2, Luke xxi.6; and prophecies in Jer. ix.11 and xxvi.18, Mic. iii.12, Lam. ii, and Zech. xiv.2.


33 Josephus’ first-century De bello Judaico and Antiquitates Judaicae were known in medieval England in Latin translation.

34 Siege, ed. Hanna and Lawton, paraphrasing lines 783f.

35 Vespasian asks for delivery of the city’s bishops and keys (lines 349–52); Vespasian asks the Jews to surrender after the murders of Caiphas and the high priests (lines 769–72); Titus sees Jewish suffering and offers a truce, but this is foiled by ‘Jon the Jenfull’ (line 1135) – John of Gischala – see Josephus, Jewish Wars, 4.2.1; and Titus again sees Jewish suffering and offers truce, but this is similarly foiled (line 1156).


38 See Siege of Jerusalem, ed. Michael Livingston (Kalamazoo, Mich., 2004), pp. 2–5. For similar oliphants, see examples in Morte Arthur, Alexander the Great narratives, and I Macc. vi.43.


40 See MED, ‘selcoute’, n., (a) Wonder, amazement; (b) an unexpected event, circumstance, or turn of fortune; a marvelous achievement; a wonder, marvel, miracle. See also Siege of Jerusalem, ed. Livingston, p. 67 n. 3.

41 See Laura Smoller for discussion about the increasing late medieval popular literacy regarding the interpretation of natural portents and marvels as signs of the apocalypse, in ‘Of earthquakes, hail, frogs, and geography: plague and the investigation of the apocalypse in the later middle ages’, in Last Things, ed. Bynum and Freedman, pp. 156–87 (pp. 164–6).

42 For different reasons, Millar also notes a heightening of import behind the signs; see ‘Role of prophecy’, pp. 173–5.

43 See the story’s treatment in Jacobus de Voragine’s Legenda aurea, see entry 67 under St James; see also its original presentation in Josephus’ Jewish War, 6.3.4.

44 See Josephus, Jewish War, 6.5.3.

45 See Siege, ed. Livingston, p. 110 n. 1227 regarding the interpretation of succession, that the calf needed for Passover is replaced with a lamb, a sign of Christ.

46 See Isa. lxxii.6; Jer. xiii.27; and Apoc. viii.13. See also Josephus’ Jewish War, 6.301–9, Josephus describes the man as giving the warning continuously during the four years before the war, and some time after it had begun.
In the analogous texts, note his portrayal as a social nuisance rather than trustworthy prophet; see Millar, ‘Role of prophecy’, pp. 161f.

Josephus ascribes the beginning of Jerusalem’s fall to the citizens’ murder of High Priest Ananias (the Younger), not James; see Jewish War, 4.315. No mention is made of James in the Jewish War, but he does appear in Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities, as the brother of Jesus Christ, see 20.9.1.

Millar notes that Jacobus de Voragine and Ranulf Higden both say that Josephus cited the death of James as the reason for Jerusalem’s demise; see ‘Role of prophecy’, pp. 168, 170.


Benz defines ‘epiphany’ as ‘a marvelous intervention of God which brings liberation to His people in a desperate situation’; see ‘Miracles’, p. 223.

Ibid., p. 218.

Benz notes that the Jewish prophets ‘believed that Israel had suffered enough and that the slavery under Roman rule would soon come to an end, at the time appointed by God. They must have linked the biblical tradition of Moses and its signs and wonders with that of Daniel, to whom the timetable of eschatological events had been disclosed in a vision (Dan. 9: 20–27)’; ibid., pp. 227f.


Gregory I, Homilia XXXIX, in Homiliae in Evangelum, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCSL 141: 382 (3).

Other manuals popular in late medieval England included Peter Lombard’s Sentences and John Bromyard’s Summa praedicantium. For early commentators, see Rabanus Maurus...

58 For more discussion on late medieval Gospel preaching, see H. Leith Spencer’s study English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages (Oxford, 1993), pp. 134–95.


60 Spencer, English Preaching, p. 209.


63 See also Spencer’s discussions of the manuscript, English Preaching, pp. 218 and 277.


69 Ibid., pp. 330f.

70 Ibid., pp. 332f.; see also Repertorium, p. 2116.


72 See Gretham’s explanation linking city walls and human thought, ibid., p. 336.

73 Ibid., p. 339.

74 London, British Library, Harley MS 2276, fols 118r–120v; see also Repertorium, pp. 1224f. and 1300f.


76 London, British Library, Harley MS 2276, fol. 118v.

77 Ibid. and Repertorium, p. 1300.

78 Thomas Wimbledon, Redde rationem villicationis tuae, ed. Ione K. Knight (Pittsburgh, Pa, 1967). The manuscript used for this edition is part of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 357; according to Knight, its collation ‘proves to be the closest to the reconstructed original’; see ibid., p. 2.

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80 Wimbledon, Redde rationem, ed. Knight, p. 116. Other manuscripts include the full London, British Library, Royal MS 18.A.xvii, the partial Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Kk.6.2, and fragmentary Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Kk.6.28.

81 Wimbledon, Redde rationem, ed. Knight, p. 113. Joachim of Fiore predicted that the end of the world would occur sometime between 1200 and 1260.

82 Repertorium, p. 60.


84 See Wimbledon, Redde rationem, ed. Knight, p. 71, lines 163–6 and pp. 80f., lines 312–13; p. 75, line 235 and p. 83, line 348; and p. 77, lines 268f. and p. 84, lines 373f.

85 See ibid., for singular judgement: p. 106, line 713; p. 106, line 714; and p. 108, line 781. For collective judgement, see p. 109, line 783; p. 111, line 850; and pp. 116, line 882.

86 Ibid., p. 113, lines 838f.


89 Ibid., p. 115, line 869.

90 Ibid., p. 115, lines 876–8.

91 Ibid., pp. 116f., lines 898–902.

92 Ibid., pp. 124f., lines 1046–54.


96 Repertorium, p. 117.


98 Hudson, Wycliffite Sermons, pp. 78f. and 260–3; see p. 261, lines 17–21.


100 Spencer, English Preaching, pp. 128–30; cf. pp. 189 and 252–4. For its later role as borrowed text, see pp. 287f.

101 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 806, fols 1r–130r; see fols 95v–97r. See also Repertorium, pp. 1700f. and 1778–80. For further discussion of the texts’ Wycliffism, see Hudson, Wycliffite Sermons, pp. 110–15; for connections to subsequent cycles, see Spencer, English Preaching, pp. 286–9.

102 Spencer, English Preaching, p. 252.

103 Fol. 93v.

104 Spencer, English Preaching, p. 291; for Wycliffite Sermons, see p. 292.

105 Fol. 93v and Repertorium, p. 1778.

106 Fols 95v–96v and Repertorium, p. 1779.

107 Fol. 96v and Repertorium, p. 1779.

108 Warminster, Longleat House MS 4–041, fols 84r–86r.

109 Repertorium, p. 2563.

110 See Spencer, English Preaching, pp. 36–41; see also pp. 23, 260, 275–7.

111 Ibid., p. 509; cf. pp. 68 and 184.

112 Oxford, Bodleian MS. e Mus. 180 represents the fullest manuscript of the others extant of this sermon cycle. See Repertorium, pp. 1828f. and 1859f.
113 Oxford, Bodleian MS. e Mus. 180/019, fols 98′–101′; see 98′.  
114 Fol. 98′ and Repertorium, p. 1860.  
115 Fols 99′–101′ and Repertorium, p. 1860.  
118 See Linder’s reference to the Leonine Collection, ‘Destruction of Jerusalem’, p. 256.  
119 Ibid., p. 254; with reference to J. B. Schneyer, Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters (Münster, 1972–80).  
120 I have found several examples of the Luke x.25–37 reading in records of fourteenth-century English sermons in the Repertorium. For Linder, see ‘Destruction of Jerusalem’, p. 263. Those services that use Luke x.25–37 will sometimes adopt Bede’s homily on that lesson.  
122 Ibid., p. 276.  
123 Ibid., 276f.  
125 See Siege, ed. Hanna and Lawton, p. xxxix n. 16.  