

The Destruction of Jerusalem

- I. Israel's context¹
 - A. Size: between Vermont and Maryland
 - B. Reason for invasion: land bridge connecting present-day Europe, Africa, and Asia
 - C. Previous destruction/invasions:
 1. Egyptians (926 BC)
 2. Assyrians (721 BC)
 3. Babylonians (597 BC)
 4. Persians (539 BC)
 5. Greeks (late 300s BC)
 6. Romans (63 BC)
 - D. Greek invasion and conquest
 1. Alexander the Great
 - a. Established Alexandria in Egypt (331 BC)
 - b. Marched to Babylon (323 BC)
 - c. Upon death in 323 BC his kingdom divided among his generals
 2. Alexandrian generals
 - a. Seleucid dynasty in Syria
 - b. Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt
 3. Israel control by Greece
 - a. Palestine annexed to Ptolemy I in 320 BC
 - b. Israel allowed free worship under Ptolemy I
 - c. Antiochus III the Great (Seleucid) annexed Israel to Syria in 198 BC
 - i. Seleucids worked to acculturate Jews to Greek religion/culture (i.e., Hellenization)
 - d. Antiochus IV Epiphanes captured Jerusalem in 175 BC
 - i. Temple plundered
 - ii. Citizens murdered
 - iii. Sabbath observance outlawed
 - iv. Circumcision outlawed
 - v. Possession of scriptures outlawed
 4. Revolt by the Maccabees
 - a. Lasted 7+ years, from 167-160 BC
 - b. Led by Judah Maccabee
 - c. Recaptured Jerusalem in 164 BC
 - d. Cleansing and rededication of the temple
 - e. In 140 BC, the revolt succeeded under Judah Maccabee's brother, Jonathan Apphus, in finally expelling Greek influence from the Palestinian region altogether

¹ For more information on the sociocultural and religious context of Judaism in the 1st C., see Anthony J. Tomasino, *Judaism Before Jesus: The Events & Ideas That Shaped the New Testament World*

5. Peace in Jerusalem lasted from 140 BC until the Roman occupation in AD 63

E. Emperors of Rome

1. Octavian, 27 BC – AD 14
2. Tiberius, 14-37
3. Caligula, 37-41
4. Claudius I, 41-54
5. Nero, 54-68
6. Galba, 68-69
7. Otho, 69
8. Vitellius, 69
9. Vespasian, 69-79

F. Flavius Josephus, Jewish historian

1. c. 37-100
2. Major works:
 - a. The Jewish War (75)
 - b. Jewish Antiquities (93)
 - c. Against Apion (94)

3. The Jewish War

- a. Major sections that relate
 - i. False prophets, 2.13
 - ii. Massacre at Jerusalem, 2.14
 - iii. Massacre of Jews at Alexandria, 2.18
 - iv. Invasion of Galilee, 3.4
- b. The siege of Jotapata (AD 67)
 - i. “The battering ram is a vast beam of wood like the mast of a ship; its fore-part is armed with a thick piece of iron at the head of it, which is so carved as to be like the head of a ram, whence its name is taken. This ram is slung in the air by ropes passing over its middle, and is hung like the balance in a pair of scales from another beam, and braced by strong beams that pass on both sides of it in the nature of a cross. When this ram is pulled backward by a great number of men with united force, and then thrust forward by the same men, with a mighty noise, it batters the walls with that iron part which is prominent; nor is there any tower so strong, or walls so broad, that can resist any more than its first batteries, but all are forced to yield to it at last.”²
 - ii. Siege continued for 47 days
 - iii. Romans conquered and killed 40,000 Jews and enslaved 1,200 women and children.
 - iv. Josephus survived by hiding in a pit; was found and taken captive, but spared by Vespasian because of the valiant effort of the Jews at Jotapata

II. The Roman Siege of Jerusalem

A. Details

1. April 14 – September 8, 70, beginning 3 days before Passover

² Josephus, The War of the Jews, 1.244.

2. Led by future emperor Titus
3. Ended with the burning and destruction of the Second Temple

B. "The Stone Cometh"

1. The early attack upon Jerusalem featured boulder-sized stones hurled into the city by catapults
2. The Jews' response:
 "They at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was of a white color, and could therefore not only be perceived by the great noise it made, but could be seen also before it came by its brightness; accordingly the watchmen that sat upon the towers gave them notice when the engine was let go, and the stone came from it, and cried out aloud in their own country language, 'The stone cometh'; so those that were in its way stood off, and threw themselves down upon the ground; by which means, and by their thus guarding themselves, the stone fell down and did them no harm."³
3. Textual disputes of Josephus's words
 - a. Some manuscripts read "the stone cometh," but certain manuscripts read "the son cometh"
 - b. J. Stuart Russell:
 "It could not but be well known to the Jews that the great hope and faith of the Christians was the speedy coming of the Son. It was about this very time, according to Hegesippus, that St. James, the brother of our Lord, publicly testified in the temple that 'the Son of man was about to come in the clouds of heaven,' and then sealed his testimony with his blood. It seems highly probably that the Jews, in their defiant and desperate blasphemy, when they saw the white mass hurtling through the air, raised the ribald cry, 'The Son is coming,' in mockery of the Christian hope of the Parousia, to which they might trace a ludicrous resemblance in the strange appearance of the missile [sic]."⁴

- C. Josephus records the great famine that came upon Jerusalem as the Jews were surrounded by the Roman armies. He laments the ungodliness seen in the famine, telling the story of a starving woman who killed and roasted her infant, eating half for herself and giving away the other half.

III. Signs in the Heavens

A. Josephus:

"Thus where the miserable people persuaded by the deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident and did so plainly foretell the future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see, or minds to consider, did not regarded denunciations that God made to them. Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus, and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shown around the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright daytime; which light lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskillful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes, as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it. At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high-priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple."⁵

³ Josephus, 1.382-383.

⁴ J. Stuart Russell, The Parousia, 1:482 (note).

⁵ Josephus, 1.453-454.

B. Roman historian Tacitus:

“Besides the manifold misfortunes that befell mankind, there were prodigies in the sky and on the earth, warnings given by thunderbolts, and prophecies of the future, both joyful and gloomy, uncertain and clear. For never was it more fully proved by awful disasters of the Roman people or by indubitable signs that the gods care not for our safety, but for our punishment.”⁶

C. Josephus:

“Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the one-and-twentieth day of the month of Artemisius, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘Let us remove hence.’”⁷

⁶ Tacitus, *The Histories*, 1.5-7

⁷ Josephus, 1:454.