

The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD

Late in the afternoon on Wednesday the thirteenth of Nisan during the last week of His life, **Jesus** paused on the Mount of Olives to answer three questions (see **Jh - The Three Questions**). He answered the third question first; then after describing how both the Jews and the Gentiles will reject **them**, **Christ** answered the first question: **When would the Temple be destroyed and what will be the sign that this is about to happen?**

Yeshua had said: **When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the City get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. The Gentiles will continually trample on Jerusalem until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20-24).** History confirms these prophecies in every detail.¹⁷¹⁵ The Jewish rebellion against the Roman occupying forces broke out in 66 AD. By 73 AD it had been finally crushed with the dramatic fall of Massada.

It began with a spontaneous popular rebellion. The situation had long been extremely tense. The final catalyst for the outbreak of the Jewish people's wrath was **Gessius Florus**, the last procurator who governed Judea, beginning to rob the Temple treasury in Jerusalem.

Initially the rebellion recorded excellent success. The consequence of this, however, was that Emperor Nero sent **Vespasian**, one of his best generals, with several armies into the rebellious region. In the early summer of 67 AD **Vespasian**, the conqueror of Britannia, arrived in the north of the land. Next, **Jodphat** in Galilee was subjugated by the Romans; afterwards, **Gush Halav** fell and in late summer **Gamla** on the Golan did likewise.

By conquering these important cities, Galilee came under Roman control once more. Next, **Vespasian** secured Samaria. In the Transjordan he cut off the connecting roads to Judea. Subsequently, he went down the coast and conquered **Jaffa**, **Yavne** and **Ashdod**. All of these events took place in 67 AD.

During the course of 68 AD Vespasian encircled Judea and its central point, the city of **Jerusalem**. With the exception of Machaerus he took the whole of the Transjordan as well as the west bank of the Jordan together with Jericho and Qumran. In the west, coming from the coastal towns, he conquered the entire Shefela. The towns of Lod, Emmaus and Beth Guvrin likewise fell into Roman hands. Posts were set up on the main arterial roads in the remaining area of Judea, which prevented the Jews from leaving the region. In the summer of 68 AD, however, Emperor Nero committed suicide. This resulted in confusion throughout the Roman Empire that checked the struggle against the Jews. Siege conditions hardly changed. In July 69 AD Vespasian was proclaimed emperor by a large section of the army. Consequently, he left the warzone in order to go to Rome and from there to establish his claim to the throne.

As a result, army camps surrounded **Yerushalayim** but the war did not progress. The Jews who believed in **Jesus as the Messiah** recognized that the situation was a perfect reflection of **Yeshua's** prophetic Word: **When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Luke 21:20)**. This led to a mass exodus of messianic Jews from **Tziyon** and Judea. They escaped to the mountains that are mainly in the modern so-called West Bank. In Pella, on the other side of the Jordan, in the region of Decapolis, they sought shelter from the then imminent cruelty of the Roman's war against the Jews. There they were received as peace-loving citizens and protected by King Agrippa.¹⁷¹⁶ Not one single messianic Jew is known to have died at the destruction of **Jerusalem** in 70AD! Faith in **Yeshua** and **His** Word saved the lives of Jewish believers.

We must remember that at this point the text of **Luke's Gospel** was written before 62 AD. Accordingly, we must bear in mind that **Christ's** prophecy in **Chapter 21** was already well-known among the messianic Jews in Isra'el before the war of 66-73 AD.

In July 70 AD Vespasian was the absolute ruler in Rome. By then he had already given his son Titus the task of ending the struggle with the Jews. In the spring of 70 AD Titus arrived in the warzone. The attack on **Jerusalem** took place from the north. At first the third wall was breached. This was the most northerly boundary of the ancient **City of David**; it enclosed a city that had expanded greatly during the period of Herod the Great and afterwards. Thus the suburbs within it could be conquered. Then the second wall was next. In this way it was possible to win back Fortress Antonia, then occupied by the Jews, which lay to the north of Solomon's colonnade. This strategically significant point enabled the Romans to control the Temple compound.

The ninth of Av, or Tisha B'av is a national fast day for those who love **the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** all over the world, and commemorates the destruction of the Second Temple in **Tziyon**. It is astonishing that the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple on the exact same day 658 years earlier. **According to Rabbinic tradition the sin of the Ten Spies produced the annual fast day of Tisha B'Av. The rabbis teach that when the Israelites accepted the false report, they wept over the false belief that ADONAI was setting them up for defeat. The night that the people cried was the ninth of Av, which became a day of weeping and misfortune for all time (Mishnah Taanit 4:6).**

Five national calamities have occurred on Tisha B'av. First, the rabbis teach that during the time of Moses, Jews in the desert accepted the slanderous report of the ten spies, and the decree was issued forbidding them from entering the Land of Israel (1312 BC). Second, the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the First Temple. One hundred thousand Jews were slaughtered and millions more exiled (586 BC). Third, the Romans, led by Titus, destroyed the Second Temple. Some about 1.1 million Jews died, and another 97,000 were exiled (70 AD). Fourth, the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed the Bar Kochba revolt. The city of Betar - the Jews' last stand against the Romans - was captured and liquidated. Over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered (135 AD). Fifth, the Roman general Turnus Rufus plowed under the Temple area and its surroundings. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city - renamed Aelia Capitolina - and access was forbidden to Jews.

Other grave misfortunes throughout Jewish history occurred on the Ninth of Av: First, the Spanish Inquisition culminated with the expulsion of Jews from Spain on Tisha B'Av in 1492. Second, World War One broke out on the eve of Tisha B'Av in 1914 when Germany declared war on Russia. German resentment from the war set the stage for the Holocaust. Third, on the eve of Tisha B'Av 1942, the mass deportation began of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, en route to Treblinka.

When **the Lamb of God** stood before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor asked the people: **What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?** And they answered him saying: **His blood is upon us and our children (Matthew 27:25)!** They had no idea how true that statement would be about forty years later. An eyewitness account was recorded by Josephus, a Jew who became a Roman historian . . . and he recorded what he saw.

Factions within Jerusalem

As the Romans worked their way to **Jerusalem**, about a million people, both good and bad, were driven into **the City**. The country population had been torn by dissension before faction reared its ugly head in **Yerushalayim**. Every town was seething with turmoil and civil war, and as soon as the Romans gave them breathing space they turned their hands against each other. Between the advocates of war and the lovers of peace there was a fierce battle. Family unity was undone by partisan bitterness when family members severed all ties of blood and attached themselves to the men who thought as they did and, as a result, lined up on opposite sides of the political fence. Faction reigned everywhere, the revolutionaries with the boldness of youth silenced the old and sensible. They began to plunder their neighbors, then forming themselves into gangs, they extended their robbery all over the country, so that in lawless brutality the Romans were no worse than the victims' own countryman - in fact those who were robbed thought it far preferable to be captured by the Romans.

Atrocities in the City

Jesus could see the camp of the enemy **encircle Jerusalem and hem her in on every side**, hugging closer and closer in a deadly embrace. Before being caught in the grip of war, pilgrims arrived to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And as the Romans tightened their grip on the countryside around **Jerusalem**, even more fled to what they thought would be safety behind the walls of **Yerushalayim**. But the various gangs of bandits also came with them, and they infiltrated **the City** as well. They brought with them war, faction, starvation, and every imaginable crime, murder being the most common. There was civil war within **Zion** and the only time they stopped fighting each other was when the Romans attacked. **Jeremiah** had prophesied that there would be **Magor-missabib (Jeremiah 20:3b)**, or **terror on every side (Jeremiah 20:10, 46:5, 49:29; Lamentations 2:22; Psalm 31:13)**. Inside **the City** walls was a warzone; outside the city walls the Romans were killing them. There was no rest. They were at war twenty-four hours a day, every day. Without a doubt, there was **terror on every side**. The Romans said that the only leader the Jews had was desperation.

The price of corn was unbelievably high. **Jerusalem** was surrounded and they could not even gather herbs, some were in such dire straits that they raked the sewers and old dunghills and swallowed the refuse they found there. So what they could not bear to look at in the past now became their food.¹⁷¹⁷ Things, which not even the filthiest dumb animals would look at they picked up and brought themselves to swallow. In the end they actually devoured belts and shoes. Some even tried to live on scraps of hay.¹⁷¹⁸

There was a woman, Mary, daughter of Eleazar, who lived east of Jordan in the village of Bethzub (House of Hyssop). She came from a good family and was very rich, and had fled with the rest of the population to **Jerusalem**, where she shared in the atrocities in **the City**. The party chiefs had plundered most of the property she had packed up and moved from Peraea into Tziyon; the remnants of her treasures and any food she had managed to obtain were being carried off in daily raids by their henchmen. The wretched woman was filled with uncontrollable fury, and let loose a stream of abuse and curses that enraged the looters against her. When neither resentment nor pity caused anyone to kill her and while the hunger was eating away at her and the rage consumed her even more, she yielded to suggestions of fury and necessity, and in defiance of all natural feeling laid hands on her own child, a baby at her breast. "Poor little Mite!" she cried. "In war, famine and civil strife why should I keep you alive?" With the Romans there is only slavery, even if we are alive when they come; famine is only delaying slavery, and the partisans are crueller than either. Come, you must be food for me, to the partisans an avenging spirit, and to the world a tale, the only thing left to fill up the measure of Jewish misery." As she spoke she killed her son, then roasted him and ate one half, concealing and saving the rest. When the news reached Rome some of them refused to believe it, some were distressed, but for most it only added to the distain they already had for the Jewish race.¹⁷¹⁹

The Horrors of the Siege

The partisans welcomed the destruction of the people, to their way of thinking it left more for them. The only people who, in their opinion, deserved to survive were those who had no use for peace and only lived to defeat the Romans. The masses who opposed them were a mere drag and they were glad to see them go. When the Romans tried to break through the walls they delayed them by filling the breach and walling it up with their bodies.¹⁷²⁰

Then another scene in the shifting panorama, and **the City** destroyed with the bodies of **her** children among **her** ruins. When the Sadducees bought the potter's field with Judas' thirty pieces of silver they bought the curse that went with it (**Jeremiah 19:11b**). **Jesus** could see this before **His** very eyes. No wonder **He wept (Luke 19:41)**. During the siege there were so many dead bodies that they were brought up to the walls and thrown into the valley below. In the course of his rounds, the Titus saw the valleys cooked with the dead, and a putrid stream of trickling under the decomposed bodies, he groaned, and uplifting his hands called on the Roman pantheon to witness that this was not his doing.¹⁷²¹

Inside the walls, the bodies of natives, aliens, priest and laymen were piled on each other, and the blood of men and beasts formed lakes in the sacred courts. When it was no longer possible to carry out the bodies, the corpses had been piled up in the largest houses and the doors locked. The innumerable bodies piled up all over **Zion** were not merely a revolting, stinking sight, but they also obstructed the fighting men as they made their sorties. For like men marching across a battlefield littered with thousands of dead, they were forced to trample dead bodies. **Indeed, there was no more room to bury the dead.**¹⁷²²

There was a steady stream of deserters that eluded the Zealots who would never surrender. But the flight was difficult as every exit was guarded and anyone caught going out, whatever the reason, was assumed to be going on their way to the Romans and murdered. However, if the deserters paid enough they were let go, so that the rich purchased their escape and only the poor were slaughtered. Dead bodies along all the main roads were heaped up high. Many who were anxious to desert decided instead to perish in **Jerusalem** for hope of a burial. But the Zealots left the dead bodies rotting under the open sky, and anyone who buried another soon needed it himself.¹⁷²³

And yet another scene, those trying to escape were shown no mercy. Those who escaped the zealots inside fell victim to another horror. A camp of Roman horsemen caught a deserter picking gold coins out his excreta. They swallowed the coins before leaving because the partisans searched all and there was great deal of gold in **the City**. But when the trick was discovered, the rumor spread that all the deserters were arriving stuffed with gold. As a result, the Romans cut open the refugees and ransacked their bellies. In a single night nearly two thousand would be ripped open.¹⁷²⁴

If they were not gutted, they were flogged and subjected to every kind of torture before being crucified in view of the wall of **Jerusalem**. The Roman General Titus realized what was happening, for every day five hundred or more fell into their hands. However it was not safe to let men captured by force go free. And to guard the great numbers of prisoners would tie up most of his troops. Therefore, the soldiers themselves, through bitterness and rage made crosses and nailed their victims to them in various positions as a grim joke. In the end, there was no room for the crosses, and no more crosses for the bodies.¹⁷²⁵

Everywhere the hand of **God** could see the silence of death. As the Romans fought their way to the Temple grounds, the slaughter became even more frenzied. People were slaughtered everywhere. Most of the victims were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, butchered wherever they were caught. Around the bronze altar the heap of corpses grew higher and higher, while down the steps of the Nicanor Gate (see **Nb1 - The Nicanor Gate**) poured a river of blood as the bodies of those killed at the top slithered down to the bottom. Their dead bodies defiling the holy Sanctuary.¹⁷²⁶

The Destruction of Jerusalem

While the Sanctuary was burning, looting went on right and left. All who were caught were put to the sword. There was no pity for aged, no regard to rank or sex. Little children and old men; laymen and priests alike were butchered. Every class was held in the iron embrace of war, whether they defended themselves or cried out for mercy. Through the roar of the flames as they swept relentlessly on could be heard the groans of the falling. The entire city seemed to be on fire. The noise was terrifying. There was the war cry of the Roman legions as they converged; the yells of the partisans encircled with fire and sword. The panic flight of the people cut off, then falling into the arms of the enemy . . . and their shrieks as they were slaughtered like animals.

Yet the flames were nothing compared to the ocean of blood. Nowhere could the ground be seen between the corpses, and the soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased after the fugitives. In the end, not one spot in all of **Yerushalayim** was empty; every single spot had its corpse, the victim of hunger or murder.¹⁷²⁷

Jesus had prophesied that **not one stone** would be **left upon another** (**Matthew 24:2**). Finally, there was no one left for the soldiers to kill or plunder, not a soul on which to vent their fury. Cesar ordered them to destroy **the whole City** and Sanctuary. When the Temple was set on fire by orders of the Roman general Titus the gold melted down between the cracks of the Herodian stones. Later, when it cooled down, the Roman army had to remove **stone upon stone** to get to the gold that had melted between the cracks.

The fact that there are remains of the surrounding walls of the Temple mount still standing today does not diminish the fulfillment of **Yeshua's** prophecy. First, the statement was not meant absolutely. It referred specifically to the viewpoint of the apostles on the Mount of Olives at that time. Second, **Jesus** used a typical expression. If someone today were to say, "After the bombing of Dresden, not one stone was left upon another," no one would understand this in an exact, mathematical sense. Linguistically, it simply means:

Dresden experienced total destruction. This is also the case with **Jerusalem**. Note, however, that there remains absolutely no trace of the Court of the Gentiles, the actual sacred area of the Sanctuary or of the buildings around it including the Royal Stoa.¹⁷²⁸

Afterward, **Jerusalem** was so virtually leveled to the ground that no one later visiting the spot would believe it had once been inhabited. All the prisoners who were led away as slaves to be sold at various places throughout the Roman Empire from the beginning to the end of the war totaled 97,000.¹⁷²⁹ During the course of the war some 1,100,000 people - according to Josephus - lost their lives. Of these the majority were Jews by race but not citizens of **Tziyon**. They had come together from the whole country for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and had suddenly been caught up in the war. To give a detailed account of the crimes conducted against the Israelites and their **city** is impossible, but it would be no exaggeration to say that no other city has ever endured such horrors, and no generation in history endured such wickedness. We know only too well how literally this scene became a reality.¹⁷³⁰

There was no one left for the soldiers to kill or plunder, not a soul on which to vent their fury . . . so Titus ordered them to destroy **the whole City** and Sanctuary to the ground leaving the very tallest towers (today this can be seen in the Tower of David) to serve as protection for the garrison that was to be left behind, and to show later generations what a proud and mighty city had been humbled by the gallant sons of Rome. All the rest of the fortifications encircling **Jerusalem** were so completely leveled that no one visiting the spot would believe it had once been inhabited.¹⁷³¹

By 73 AD Massada had been overrun and the holocaust was over. The Jewish people were dispersed, in a process that lasted for centuries, to all five continents (**Luke 21:24**). The Triumphal Arch of Titus in Rome still recalls today the destruction of the Second Temple.