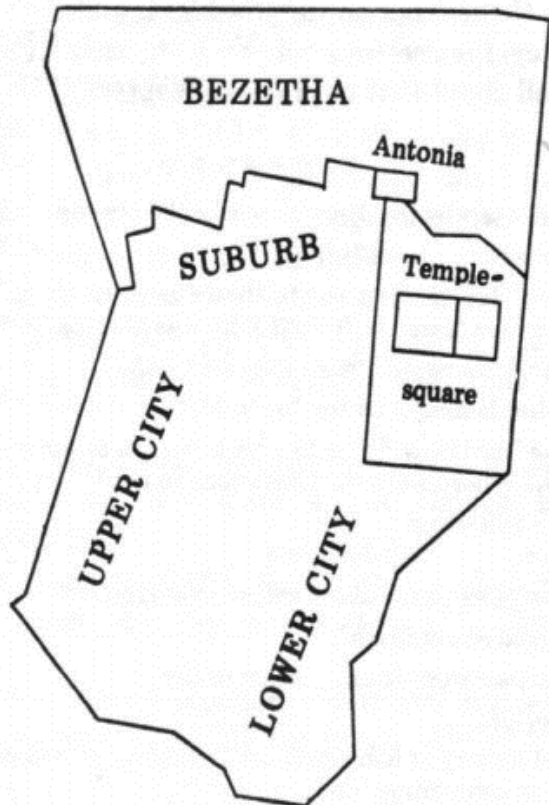


### 3. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM I

Jerusalem is a strong city built in the Judean hills. A massive wall with many strong towers is built around the entire city boundary to protect her against enemies.

Internally, walls divide the city into five different



Map of Jerusalem

sections: The suburb Bezetha with the main entry into the city; the tower of Antonia; the temple mountain with the beautiful temple; the upper city and finally the lower city.

With a proper defence system in place, Jerusalem is almost impossible to conquer. But at this stage, the Jews are not united; sadly, they are very divided. Instead of the Jews being united to fight against the common enemy, the Romans, they destroy each other by murderous infighting.

There are two factions in Jerusalem. One faction wants to make an end to the war and make peace with the Romans. That is the 'Peace Party'. The prominent Jews, members of the Sanhedrin and

many priests belong to this Peace Party. Ananus, the high priest, is their leader.

The other faction is the 'War Party'. They are called 'Zealots'. Those Zealots refuse to make peace with the Romans; they want to fight the Romans to the bitter end. Two brutal men command the Zealots. They are Eleazar and John of Gischala.

A significant part of Jerusalem's inhabitants do not agree with the Zealots, yet they are very afraid of those ruffians. They do not dare to resist those Zealots because they will take bloody vengeance if you oppose them.

Yet, the Peace Party, and especially Ananus, want to try to drive the Zealots out of the city. Secretly, they get busy arming many residents.

#### AT WAR

One dark night, a life and death battle is fought between the Peace Party and the Zealots. The weather is stormy, and thunder rumbles above the terrified city. Tongues of lightning flicker and its sharp flashes light up the warring parties from time to time. But when the morning finally dawns, the Zealots have unfortunately gained the victory. The streets are littered with the dead. Twelve thousand of the most prominent Jews have been killed. Ananus, the high priest and leader of the Peace Party is utterly defeated.

Now the Zealots rule the city!

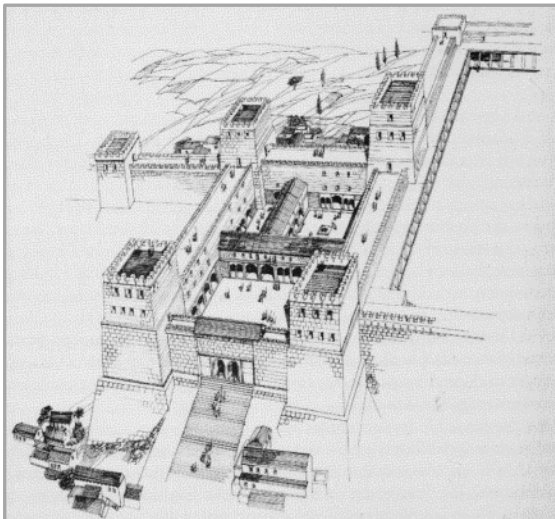
In fear of the Zealots, some people open the city gate to allow a certain Simon to come in. Simon usually roams and plunders about outside the city with his gang of ruffians. They hope that Simon will drive out the Zealots. That plan fails dismally.

For, now there are three leaders in the city, all of whom are equally brutal and merciless.

To make matters worse, both leaders of the Zealots, Eleazar and John of Gischala, begin to argue with each other. What a miserable mess!

Eleazar and his soldiers entrench themselves in the temple, John of Gischala and his warriors barricade themselves in the tower of Antonia and Simon and his ruffians control the rest of the city.

Poor, poor Jerusalem!



*ANTONIA complex which John of Gischala occupied.*

To make matters worse, many visitors are in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. The city is packed. Some say there are more than two million Jews in the city. In itself, that is not a problem as there is enough grain in Jerusalem.

But those three competing commanders allow their soldiers to make raids in each other's territory. And what do those fools do?... They set fire to each other's wheat-filled warehouses and destroy the food supplies which they will so desperately need.

And while within the wall of Jerusalem fierce fighting is happening between brothers of the same people, while the precious and much-needed grain goes up in flames, outside the walls the mighty Roman army, with their general Titus, draws near.

### THE SIEGE BEGINS

Soon the whole city is surrounded by the Roman army. Jerusalem is besieged. What will happen now? A powerful Roman army outside her walls and civil war inside. No, that cannot end well!

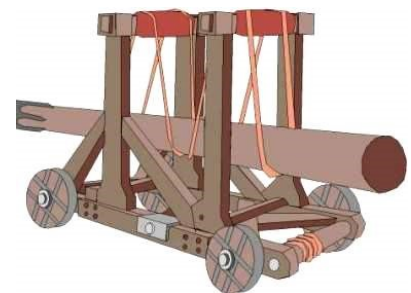
Boom! ... Boom! ... Boom! ...

What is that? ... Who does that? ... Listen, there it goes again. Boom!... Boom!... Boom!

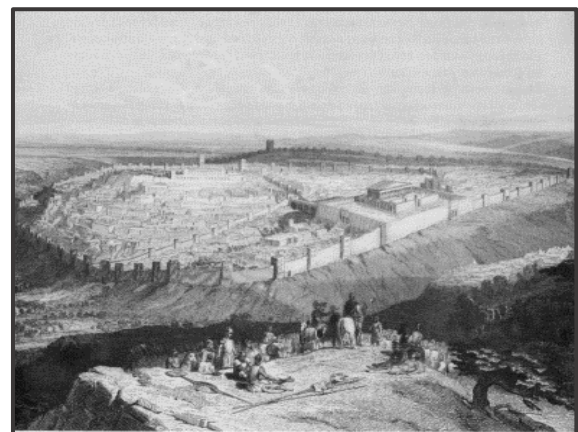
The Jews in Jerusalem know very well what that continuous thumping means. That sound fills them with fear and terror.

Is this the booming of a cannon?... Oh no; that's impossible. Cannons didn't exist yet. The Romans are causing that terrible booming sound. Their mighty battering-rams continuously hammer at the walls of Jerusalem.

Battering-rams? ... What are they? In those days, the Romans used a certain kind of wagon in their wars. They



fitted massive heavy, thick beams between four wheels. A central pole with a solid iron point swung on thick ropes in the centre of the wagon. Those siege engines were called battering-rams. Such a battering-ram was pushed against the wall so that the iron point could constantly strike the stones of the city wall. Because such a battering-ram hammered continuously against the same spot, the rocks would begin to loosen and at last that part of the wall would collapse. That caused an opening, a breach. When that breach was big and wide enough, the soldiers would storm through that opening and try to climb over the rubble into the city. If enough soldiers managed to get inside the city, they could overpower it.



*Jerusalem at the time of the siege by the Romans.*

The Romans also used powerful, large catapults.



The soldiers used these to hurl heavy stones over the walls into the city.

## TITUS ATTACKS JERUSALEM

At Titus' command, those battering-rams are placed against the outer wall, and those weapons batter the thick walls continually. You understand that in the long run, nothing can withstand that. Soon breaches are made in the walls of Jerusalem.

There is fierce fighting around those breaches. Brave and fearless, the Romans try to climb over those heaps of rubble. The Jews defend themselves with the courage of lions. The battle cries of the fighting men echo all around.

Who takes notice of the wounded? ... No one!  
Who pities the dying?... No one! War is so cruel.  
How terrible are the consequences of sin!

Time and again, the Romans assault the city, but every time they are repulsed by the desperately fighting Jews. Dead bodies are piled high. Death has a plentiful harvest.

After each failed assault, the battering-rams are placed against the walls again to make the breach even larger and wider.

The battle lasts for weeks but finally, after a month of battering, the Romans succeed in penetrating the city.

The Jews fall back; they must. The superior forces are too strong. The first part of the city, Bezetha, as seen on the map, has been conquered by the Romans.

But the battle is not over. Bezetha is only a part of the city. Remember how thick walls divided Jerusalem into five sections? The Romans have only taken this one suburb; there are four more to go! Soon the Romans stand before the second wall.

However, the Jewish soldiers stand ready to defend that second wall as stubbornly as they did the first wall.

A shower of arrows whiz toward the Romans. But it does not help. Roman soldiers do not become discouraged.

On the contrary! The battering-rams are placed against the second wall and soon, day and night, the ominous sound is heard throughout the city again. Five days later, a significant breach has been hammered through the wall. The enemy draws near, clambers through the opening and the Jews must fall back again. Cheering, the Romans force their way into the second part of the city. But the Jews do not flee. On the contrary! With the courage of despair, they defend every house, every street.

Bodies of slain friend and foe cover the streets. And....? The Jews manage to drive the Roman soldiers back! Rome suffers significant losses and must withdraw.

However, the proud Roman general does not give up so easily. 'Forward!' commands Titus.

Again, the brave warriors storm ahead in the face of death. They force their way into the city. This time they hold their ground, and every house, every building and structure is immediately levelled to the ground.

Finally, the Romans overpower the second section of the city. The Jews must fall back behind the third wall, but they keep fighting, in the hope that the Messiah shall appear at the height of their need, and rescue them from this steadily advancing Roman invasion. However, they wait in vain, for the Messiah *has* come. But those blinded Zealots do not believe that.

While the enemy batters the walls non-stop and mounts attack after attack, the civil war within the city continues undiminished.

## SURPRISE ATTACK

Jerusalem is still full of visitors who came for the Pass-over, possibly up to a hundred thousand. All

these visitors were locked in the city when Titus surrounded Jerusalem with his army.

Eleazar, one of the three Jewish commanders, entrenched himself in the temple. It is war, yet Eleazar allows the gates of the temple to be opened so that those celebrating the Passover feast could bring their offerings.

Look, one day, a large group of visitors approach the temple. They also wish to bring their offerings. The soldiers of Eleazar, who stand guard at the entrance, let them pass. And why not? These people have come to pray and to sacrifice, not to fight, at least, so it seems.

But Eleazar's guards are mistaken because those so-called pious sacrificers *are* no sacrificers. They have swords hidden under their garments. They are disguised soldiers from John of Gischala who occupies the tower of Antonia. In this way, they succeed in penetrating right into the inner temple. That was treason, but they did not care.

Suddenly they draw their swords and attack the unsuspecting soldiers of Eleazar. They overwhelm Eleazar's guards. The temple buildings become the scene of a fierce struggle. It does not take long before Eleazar is killed in that bitter fight, and most of his soldiers perish with him. Eleazar and his men were brutally murdered.

After this mass-murder, two commanders remain: John of Gischala and Simon. John controls the tower of Antonia and the temple grounds, while Simon will defend the upper city area. The Romans occupy Bezetha and the lower city. John of Gischala and Simon agree to a truce of sorts so that together they are better able to combat the Romans.

That is crucial because....

### THE SIEGE CONTINUES

Boom!... Boom!... Boom!...

Listen! The battering-rams are at it again. The Romans are now battering the walls of the tower of Antonia. That tower of Antonia is of crucial importance strategically. If the Romans succeed in conquering that tower, then the strongest section

of the city is theirs. Then the worst of the battle is over.

The Jews who are defending the tower of Antonia realise that as well.

However, before they start the battle for that tower, the Roman general Titus first tries to put an end to this bloody conflict. He pities the people of Jerusalem who are already plagued by hunger. Remember how the Zealots put fire to each other's warehouses, filled with precious wheat, and deliberately destroyed that valuable food? This foolishness resulted in food shortages in the city. Titus realises this and tries to persuade the Jewish people to stop this senseless war.

First, he attempts to make them afraid. He has his troops march in review; we would say, 'a military parade'. With their weapons, all the Roman soldiers march in formation past the walls. He hoped that this show of strength would terrify the Jewish people. Most of the Jews climb the walls to watch this parade. Tens of thousands of disciplined soldiers march along, the ground rumbles beneath the thousands of footsteps. Behind and between the Roman troops come the battering rams and catapults.

When the Jews see this parade, terror fills their hearts. The Roman army is so immensely powerful! They flee from the walls. They no longer dare to stay and watch this. But despite this display of power, they still refuse to surrender.

Next, Titus sent Josephus, the former Jewish general to the Jews with the urgent plea: 'You ought to surrender! Why fight any longer? Stop this hopeless battle.'

Josephus does his utmost to spare his people from further suffering: 'O, brothers,' he begs, 'lay down your weapons, surrender! You can never win this war. The Romans are too strong. Why must thousands be killed? Why must tens of thousands die from starvation and misery? Stop this useless shedding of blood. Please, lay down your weapons'.

And....? What is their answer to this well-meant advice of Josephus? ...



They respond with a scornful laugh. They call him names:

'Traitor!'

They throw large stones at him. Josephus must retreat quickly, for they would have killed him in their rage. Stones whiz past his head.

'Give up the fight? ... Surrender? ... Never!'

That is the response of the embittered Jews. Josephus returns to Titus without having achieved anything. He failed in changing the mind of his people.

### TITUS RETALIATES

When Titus hears that the Jews had insulted and thrown stones at Josephus, his ambassador, he becomes angry.

'I will make them pay for that', he threatens.

Till now, Titus has treated the captured Jews and prisoners well. This is about to change. From now on, without any trial, the prisoners are crucified in full view of the city.

Soon there is no space left to put up another cross. Thousands and thousands of Jews die the terrible death of the cross.

God is just. In blind rage and hatred, the Jews had cried out and shouted: 'Crucify Him!' ... 'Crucify Him!' ... They had roared, 'His blood is on us and our children.'

Now that shed blood *has* come upon them. Roman soldiers are now nailing them and their children to the cross and they die a cruel death. God will not be mocked!

What a horrific sight that must have been to the Jews in Jerusalem. They tremble when they see that massive display of crosses.

Some Jews swallow their gold and precious stones or other valuable possessions before they surrender to the Romans.

Many Arabs also serve in the Roman army. When those Arabs hear about that, they cut their prisoners open, hoping to find gold and diamonds. Many Jewish prisoners suffer a cruel death that way.

When Titus hears about this, he strictly forbids such cruel behaviour. Yes, he even pronounces the death penalty on it. However, the Arabs secretly continue with this barbaric practice.



Titus

How terrible!

God has severely punished the wickedness of the Jews. Shall He then not punish us on account of our sins? ... Just think about this because God is and always remains the same.

Notwithstanding all that misery, the Jews did not consider downing their weapons. All Titus' attempts to put a stop to this horrendous struggle failed because the Jews continued to fight on stubbornly.

### QUESTIONS

1. Draw and label the sections of Jerusalem.
2. Give three reasons why Jerusalem was such a strong city.
3. List the two Jewish parties. How did they differ?
4. What groups of people belonged to the Peace Party?
5. Identify the following:  
a) Eleazar c) Ananus b) John of Gischala d) Simon
6. How did the Zealots take over the city?
7. How did Simon become a leader in the city?
8. How did the quarrels between the leading groups further weaken Jerusalem? What can we learn from this?
9. Identify the following:  
a) battering-ram b) catapult
10. Why were there so many Jews in Jerusalem at that time?

11. How did Eleazar's leadership come to an end?
12. How did Titus show his compassion to the Jewish people after he had conquered Bezetha and the lower city?
13. What advice did Josephus give to the people? Why did they refuse to follow his advice?
14. What was the reaction of Titus to the defiant Jews?
15. Show from this story that God will not be mocked, for that which man sows, he shall also reap.
16. Why did some of the Jews swallow their treasures? What did the Arabs do?

### **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. Show from this story that a 'house divided against itself cannot stand'.
2. Many Jews were crucified on the cross, a just retribution for their iniquity. Find two Biblical examples to prove that God punishes sin in the same way it was committed.
3. Read Psalm 49. What does this psalm tell us about our riches?
4. Trace the history of the opposition of the Jews to the Gospel in the various cities of Paul's missionary journeys. List the various ways this opposition was shown. Why was the resistance of the Jews to the gospel fiercer than that of the pagans?