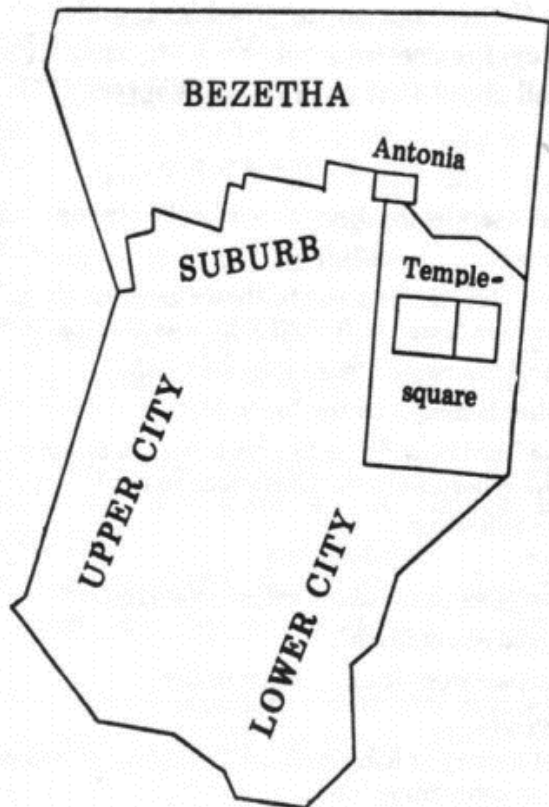


### 3. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM I

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 it 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 point in time, 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 end 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.

Many of Jerusalem's inhabitants do not agree with the Zealots; they are terrified of those ruffians. But they do not dare to resist those Zealots because they will take bloody vengeance if you oppose them.

Yet, the Peace Party, especially Ananus, wants 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 city. The people are terrified. 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 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 one of them. 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 enter. Simon usually roams and plunders 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 equally brutal.

To make matters worse, the leaders of the Zealots, Eleazar and John of Gischala, begin to argue with each other. Eleazar and his soldiers entrench themselves in the temple, John of

Gischala and his warriors barricade themselves in Antonia's tower, and Simon and his ruffians control the rest of the city. What a miserable mess!

Poor, poor Jerusalem!

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. That is not a problem, as there is enough grain in Jerusalem.

But those three competing commanders allow their soldiers to raid 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 they desperately need.



*ANTONIA complex which John of Gischala occupied.  
Wikipedia*

While fierce fighting is happening between brothers of the same people *within* the walls of Jerusalem, 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!...

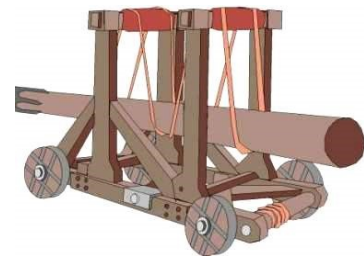
Boom!...

Boom!

The Jews in Jerusalem know very well what that

continuous thumping

means. That sound fills them with fear and terror.



*Battering ram.*

<https://womeninthebible.net/war-in-the-bible>

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 along 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



*Jerusalem during the time of Jesus .*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ea9xol4yJC4>

enough, the soldiers would storm through that opening and try to climb over the rubble into the city. If enough soldiers managed to enter the city, they could overpower it.

The Romans also used powerful, giant catapults. The soldiers used these to hurl heavy stones over the walls into the city.



*Catapult.*

<https://www.steamkids.com.au/collections/engineering-kits/products>

### **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! How terrible are the consequences of sin! War is so cruel!

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 broader. 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.



*Roman legions press their siege during the fall of Jerusalem in a work by Scottish painter David Roberts. As the siege progressed, Titus relocated the legion camps closer to the front lines and in the new town itself.*

<https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article>

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, and there are four more to go! Soon, the Romans stand before the second wall.

However, the Jewish soldiers stood 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. The Roman soldiers did 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 forced 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.



*Defending every house, every street...*  
<https://www.jw.org/en/library/books>

The bodies of friends 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 overpowered the second section of the city. The Jews must fall behind the third wall, but they keep fighting, hoping that the Messiah will 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 Passover, 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 can bring their offerings.

Look, one day, a large group of visitors approached 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 are disguised soldiers from John of Gischala who occupy Antonia's tower. They have swords hidden under their garments. 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. The temple buildings become the scene of a fierce struggle... They overwhelm Eleazar's guards. 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 defends 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 can better combat the Romans.

That is crucial because...

### THE SIEGE CONTINUES

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

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 conquer that tower, then the most robust 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 set alight 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 mighty! 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 an urgent plea: "You must surrender! Why fight any longer? Stop this hopeless battle."

Josephus does his utmost to spare his people from further suffering: "Oh, 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!"

Josephus must retreat quickly, for they would have killed him in their rage. They throw large stones at him. 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 to change the minds of his people.

### TITUS RETALIATES

When Titus hears that the Jews have 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 be 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 cruel deaths. God will not be mocked!

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

Some Jews swallow their gold, precious stones, or other valuable possessions before surrendering 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. He even pronounces the death penalty on it. However, the Arabs secretly continue with this barbaric practice. 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.



Titus, 39-81 AD.  
Wikipedia

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

## 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, b) Ananus, c) 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 compassion to the Jewish people after conquering 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 Titus's reaction 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 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 different ways this opposition was shown. Why was the resistance of the Jews to the gospel fiercer than that of the pagans?