

4 THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM II

Listen!

At the walls of Antonia, a bitter struggle is being fought. The battle cries of the combatants and the clashing of swords echo all around. The brave Roman soldiers do their utmost to scale the rubble of the collapsed walls. The Jews defend themselves with the courage of desperation.

For many days, the Roman battering-rams have been pounding the massive, thick walls. But it was all for nothing. The Romans fail in bashing a breach in the wall. The heavy walls do not give way. Well, then they will try something else. The soldiers dig a large, deep hole under the foundations.

However, under the command of John of Gischala, the Zealots do not idly stand by. On the contrary, they set fire to the battering-rams of the

Romans. They venture an attack right into the Roman camp where, in between the tents, they strike down the Roman soldiers.

For a while, this had the Romans confused. They had not expected that! However, they soon rally, and the Jews are driven back.

In the Roman army camp, Titus and his officers deliberate what they should do next. They eventually decide to build an earthen wall around the entire city to prevent any food from being brought into the city.

That is an enormous task. How long will it take for that job to get done?

Titus commands that all soldiers, free from other duties, must work on this project and.... the mammoth task is finished in three days, an incredibly short time! Besides, the wall is



Destruction of Jerusalem - 70 AD.

reinforced with 30 entrenchments. It has now become impossible for the Jews to sneak out of the city to fetch food because Roman soldiers are keeping careful watch.

The city of Jerusalem is entirely blocked from the outside world. These events are another fulfilment of one of Lord Jesus' prophecies.

During His ministry, the Saviour had said: "For the days will come upon you, when the enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side." (See Luke 19:43).

This prophecy is literally fulfilled.

In the meantime, the Romans continue to undermine the wall. Finally, significant cracks appear, and eventually, because of its great weight the massive wall collapses with a thundering noise.

Immediately, Titus gives the command to storm the city. The fighting is fierce and murderous, but



Titus Flavius
Vespasianus
29 - 81 AD

the Romans continue to advance, ignoring their enormous loss of life. When one Roman falls, ten others take his place. Finally, the Roman soldiers succeed in scaling the walls. A loud "Hurrah" resounds. Are they victorious? ...No, not really. To their great astonishment and disappointment, a brand-new wall stands

behind the collapsed wall. The Romans had not counted on that! John of Gischala had had his soldiers quickly build a second wall behind the first, and on that new wall, the embittered Jews stood ready to defend and repel the Romans. A cloud of arrows whizzes toward the surprised Romans.

What next? ... Must the Romans start from scratch again?... No!

One dark night, a small group of brave and undaunted Romans silently sneak along. Very carefully, they climb the new wall. The Jewish guards do not notice a thing. Exhausted from the struggles of the last few days, they have fallen

asleep. Those guards are taken by surprise and killed by those sneaking Romans. Suddenly, a trumpet blast echoes through the night. That is the arranged signal. Titus and his men stand ready to assist that small group of brave Roman soldiers. When Titus hears the signal, he gives

the command and they storm ahead. The Jews wake up with a fright and are totally confused.

For a few seconds, they are completely dumbfounded and bewildered. Swiftly the Romans make the most of this and quickly capture the tower of Antonia. The Jewish defenders retreat to the temple. The Romans make good progress; they have conquered another section of the city and edged closer to the final victory. But still the fighting is not over. The Jews persevere in the unequal struggle.

BACK IN THE CITY

Come, let us look inside the city. Conditions are terrible, almost untenable! Packed with people, with barely any food available, a terrible famine rages. This is not surprising. If only they still had the grain which they so foolishly burned and destroyed. The people are frantic with hunger. Mothers snatch the food out of the mouth of their children. Children fight with their parents for a mouth full of food. The most disgusting things are eaten. Only the wealthiest people can buy a little food at ridiculously high prices. With gaunt faces, men and women, young and old, stagger along until they collapse from exhaustion and die.

Look, a band of Zealots are dragging themselves through the miserable city. With frenzied eyes, they hunt for food. They force their way into the houses of the wealthy people and seize the little

For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side.

Luke 19:43

food they find. Without pity, they even snatch it out of the small children's hands, though they desperately try to hold on to it. The Zealots behave like hungry predators. Whoever dares to resist them is struck down. Daily, these large troops of plundering, hungry Zealots roam through the city. The people are terrified of them.

One day a division of Zealots went out looking for food again. Suddenly they stop. They smell something! Something delicious! The aroma of roast meat! Like maniacs, they run towards the house where that delicious smell is coming from. They kick open the door and storm inside. Their eyes burn with desire. A woman comes towards them, laughing. 'You've got meat!' they scream. 'Give it to us *or else...*!' They threaten her with clenched fists.

'Then follow me,' she tells them mysteriously. Intrigued, coveting that desirable food, the cruel soldiers follow her. They enter a room. In that room stands a table which is covered with a cloth. The woman lifts the cover a little and ...?

Yes, indeed, there is meat on a dish. But, look, what's that...The hungry Zealots back away, because ...? On that dish lies ...? I hardly dare to mention it; it is so terrible. On that dish lies . . .the leftovers of a roasted . . . child!! Having become insane through the awful pangs of hunger, that mother had killed her own child, roasted, and eaten it. With a foolish laugh, she offers the leftovers of her meal to the Zealots. This is too repulsive, even for those cruel Zealots. They back away, shocked, and refuse to eat this food. Horrified, they leave the house of this insane woman as fast as they can.

Some authors tell us that the name of this woman was Mary, the daughter of Eleazar, the Jewish commander, who with all his men, was murdered by John of Gischala.

The Lord Jesus had foretold that the time would come when those without children would be happier than those with children. Also, this prophecy has now been fulfilled.

Hundreds of people die daily from suffering and starvation. At first, the Jewish commander had the corpses buried, but eventually, so many Jews died, that was no longer possible. Instead, thousands of bodies are thrown over the wall at night. There they lay, as food for the wild animals.

When Titus hears about that, tears fill his eyes.

With an upraised hand, he declares: 'I am innocent of all that misery.' Again, he asks the Jews to stop this foolish conflict and to surrender. But the Jewish commanders stubbornly refuse. They have no compassion for the poor starving people. In their foolish pride, they reject every proposal from Titus. They persevere against all the odds.

THE TEMPLE DESTROYED.

Above the rest of the city, the large, beautiful buildings of the temple stand tall. Especially during the reign of King Herod, lots of money had been spent to make the temple beautiful. Various buildings were added.

After the capture of the tower of Antonia, the battering-rams of the Romans are placed against the temple wall. Titus would have gladly spared the sanctuary. He even offers the Jews to choose an alternative battlefield. He promises that not one Roman soldier will enter the temple.

Nothing helps. The messengers are greeted with sneers and jeers. Every proposal of the Roman general, no matter how well-intended, is rudely rejected. The Jews really believed that the temple cannot be lost; that at the crucial moment, the Messiah will come.

Therefore, Titus was forced to continue the fight. The battering-rams are put to work again. Day and night, they pound the walls with little effect. So, the Romans try another strategy. Soldiers set fire to the annexes of the temple, and soon flames spread along the beams and the burning wood crackles, columns of smoke rise above the city, an ominous sign of the coming total ruin of the sanctuary.

The smouldering, charred gates are forced open, and slowly but surely the Romans conquer the temple buildings. The Jews defend themselves with the courage of desperation and show acts of exceptional bravery. Yet they are forced to retreat.

The fighting is intense. The holy places, where once the priests of the LORD served in white garments, where once sacrifices were brought to the glory of God, are now the scene of fierce fighting. Streams of blood flow past the consecrated altars. The daily sacrifices have stopped. They have become impossible. Day after day, a bitter struggle continues all around the temple. Slowly the fire destroys the temple buildings. Every day another section collapses. However, the central Holy Place of the house of God is still standing.

Titus desires to spare the temple, and he strictly commands his soldiers not to damage it. But the King of kings had said that not one stone would be left upon another. And that word shall be fulfilled.

The siege has lasted for months already, yet the fighting continues undiminished. The 10th of August of the year 70 approaches. The Romans stage a fierce attack. Both friend and foe fall. The struggle surges back and forth. Who will win? Look, a Roman soldier seizes a burning piece of wood and hurls it through an open window into the temple itself, into the main building. We do not know whether that piece of timber fell against a curtain, but in no time the flames flare up high from inside the temple. When the Romans see that, they get a fright. But soon they are adding more fuel to the fire!

Titus himself comes running. He immediately gives the command to quench the fire, but the soldiers ignore his commands. Titus threatens with the most severe punishments, but it does not help. On the contrary, they disobey him and even start fires in different parts of the building. They lose complete control of the inferno. Paralysed with fear and dumbfounded the Jewish defenders see what is taking place. The impossible is happening before their eyes. They cannot believe it, but they must! Don't they hear the crackling of

the wood? Don't they hear the roar of the destructive flames? Don't they see the blazing inferno inside the main temple building?

The shock paralysed them so much that they forget to fight and defend themselves. Helplessly the Jews allow the Romans to murder them.

Some of the remaining priests put their hands in front of their eyes and throw themselves into the flames. They do not want to see the destruction of their sanctuary. Others stand there crying like babies. The Roman soldiers plunder and steal as much as they can before everything turns to ashes. Six thousand women and children are still gathered on the temple galleries where they had sought refuge. All of them perish miserably in that fire.

Deeply moved, Titus enters the sanctuary, and sees the ruin of the once beautiful temple. He had been unable to stop it.

Some of the Jews, who live in the upper city, climb onto their rooftops, and see with immense horror that the temple is ablaze. Their grief-stricken wailing is heard from afar.

When finally, on the evening of that terrible day, the sun goes down, the beautiful, grand temple of the Jews has become a smoking heap of rubble. The destruction of the temple is so complete that not one stone remained upon another.

Remarkably, the first temple which Solomon built, was also destroyed on the 10th of August by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, 668 years ago. God is an Avenger of sin. Although Simon continues to defend the upper city, the Jews' resistance is not very strong after the destruction of the temple. The strength of their opposition is broken; their courage shattered.

A month later, Titus had conquered the entire city. No, it wasn't Jerusalem anymore. The Roman soldiers set fire to all the houses. They didn't rest till the city was destroyed and burned.

MORE PROPHECY FULFILLED

The terrible judgment of God has come. The Jews have suffered terribly. Over a million Jews, men, women, and children, lost their lives in this desperate struggle. Tens of thousands were made prisoner, and some of them were led away to Rome. Titus also took both Jewish commanders, John of Gischala and Simon prisoner.

Thousands of Jews were sent to Egypt in ships. There they will be sold as slaves. In long queues, waiting to be sold, they stand in the slave market. But there were so many Jewish slaves that finally there were no more buyers. Josephus writes in his book that a Jew was exchanged for a pair of slippers. They nearly gave the Jews away, but no one wanted them anymore. What now? ... There are still 3000 Jews left. They don't know what to do with them. And then ...? They let those three thousand Jews starve to death. Terrible, don't you think? Poor, poor people.

Here we see fulfilled the prophecy of

'And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you: 'You shall never see it again. And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no-one will buy you.'

Deuteronomy 28: 68

Deuteronomy 28:68 where we read: "And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you: 'You shall never see it again. And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no-one will buy you.'

Moses had foretold this. If they did not walk in the statutes of the Lord; if they trampled God's commandments underfoot, those terrible judgments would come upon them.

And....they *have* returned to Egypt in ships. They *were* sold. Finally, there were no buyers left, as there were too many slaves, and three thousand Jews starved to death.

For centuries God had patience with the Jewish people. He had sent His servants and prophets to



A statue of Titus unearthed in Herculaneum, which can be found in a Berlin museum

them to warn them seriously, but they did not listen. They had ill-treated God's servants, yes, even killed them!

Finally, God sent them His Son. Perhaps they would listen to Him. But they delivered Him to the Romans. They cried out, "Crucify Him". Yes, they even dared to call for His innocently spilled blood to be upon them and their children.

But now the measure of their sins and wickedness was full. God has settled accounts with the Jews. Punishment has come, and it was severe.

But that self-same God still lives! Do you believe that?... Do you ever think about that? Seek the Lord, before it is too late.

TITUS' HOMECOMING

The streets of Rome are full of people. People even climb onto the housetops, on the white marble temple stairs and on the statues to get a

good view. What do they want to see? ... Listen, distant cheers are heard, which are coming closer and getting louder. The expectant Romans crane their necks to see... to look.

Yes, here he comes, here he comes! Who is coming? Just look! A large procession of people approaches. The thunderous cheering gets louder. Through that countless multitude, a chariot slowly rides along Rome's streets. It is a triumphal chariot and, on that chariot, stands ... Titus! The great victor!

Proudly the Roman general stares ahead. The people cheer him on enthusiastically. With his brave warriors, he returned from the Jewish country. Now he stands in his triumphal chariot and rides victoriously into Rome.

The treasures they managed to salvage from the burning temple before the fire destroyed everything, are part of the procession.

To honour him, the Roman people have erected a beautiful arch, an arch of honour. That is the triumphal arch of Titus. That arch still stands in Rome today.

Behind the procession follow thousands of Jewish prisoners.

Some will have to serve the Romans while others will be thrown to the wild animals. The Roman people will cheer when the arena is coloured red with their blood. Poor, poor prisoners. They have been carried away from their country, which they will never see again. They risked everything. They lost everything.

Those Jewish commanders, heavily chained, walk past as well, their heads bowed. John of Gischala is sentenced to life imprisonment. Simon receives the death sentence. They take him to a high cliff

and mercilessly thrust him over the edge into the deep ravine so that he is dashed to pieces on the rocks. That is the terrible end of those godless Jewish commanders. They showed no mercy to others, and now no mercy is shown to them. Besides, Jews have become very contemptible. Before then, they were the fiercest enemies of the gospel. But that is gone. Yes, they remain hostile, but their power is broken. They have no say anymore. Their influence is gone.

The Arabs have taken over the Jewish country. For centuries, gentiles trampled Jerusalem. For centuries, the Jews wandered as exiles upon the earth. Despised! Persecuted! Often driven about like wild animals!



Relief of the Arch of Titus showing the triumphal procession after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Spoils from the second temple in Jerusalem, including the seven branched candelabra, the silver trumpets and the Table of Showbread are carried.

'His blood be on us and our children!' They have experienced it. That blood did come upon them!

Even in the last war - that is the second world war - more than six million Jews perished. Hitler and his henchmen murdered them. By the thousands, they were driven into the gas chambers.

Many survivors returned to their country in later

years. Many again live in the land of their fathers.

What else will happen? I do not know. Nobody knows what will happen in the future. Only God knows.

From this terrible history, we may learn that God is just. God will punish sin. Also the sins of our nation.

QUESTIONS

1. What strategy was used by Titus in his attempt to conquer Jerusalem?
2. What strategy was used by John of Gischala in his attempt to save the city?

3. Explain how the prophecy of Jesus in Luke 19:43 was literally fulfilled.
4. Describe conditions in Jerusalem during the siege.
5. Explain the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jesus regarding those who were without children at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. (Matthew 24)
6. Give possible reasons why Titus was eager to preserve the temple.
7. Why did the Jews refuse to defend themselves after the temple was destroyed?
8. What prophecy was fulfilled in the destruction of the temple?
9. What remarkable coincidence occurred regarding the dates of the destruction of both temples? Was this a coincidence or is there meaning behind it?
10. Explain the fulfilment of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 28:68.
11. What is the triumphal arch of Titus?
12. What punishment did the Jewish commanders receive?
13. What effect did the destruction of the Jews have on the spread of Christianity?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Why did the Jews place so much trust in the temple, even though they certainly must have known that the first temple had been destroyed?
2. What was the Lord saying to the Jews with the destruction of their temple?