

## 4 THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM II

### Listen!

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

The Roman battering-rams have been pounding the massive, thick walls for many days. But it was all for nothing. The Romans fail to bash 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 camp, Titus and his officers deliberate what to 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 completed in three days, an incredibly short time! Besides, the wall is reinforced with 30 entrenchments. It has now become impossible for the Jews to sneak out of



*Destruction of Jerusalem - 70 AD. Painting by Francesco Hayez*

the city to fetch food because Roman soldiers are watching carefully.

The city of Jerusalem is completely blocked from the outside world. These events are another fulfilment of one of Lord Jesus' prophecies. During His ministry, the Saviour 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.

*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

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  
39 - 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. The Romans swiftly make the most of this and quickly capture the tower of Antonia. The Jewish defenders retreat to the temple. The Romans made good progress; they 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 they so foolishly burned and destroyed. The people are frantic with hunger. Mothers snatch the food out of the mouths 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 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 in 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 hunger pangs, that mother had killed her 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 this woman's name 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.

The large, beautiful buildings of the temple stand tall above the rest of the city. Lots of money had been spent to make the temple beautiful, especially during the reign of King Herod when 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. No matter how well-intended, every proposal of the Roman general is rudely rejected. The Jews believed that the temple



*The Romans slaughtered everyone and razed the once mighty city to the ground, including the Second Temple.*  
<https://short-history.com/>



cannot be lost and that the Messiah will come at the crucial moment.

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 that the total ruin of the sanctuary is near.

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.

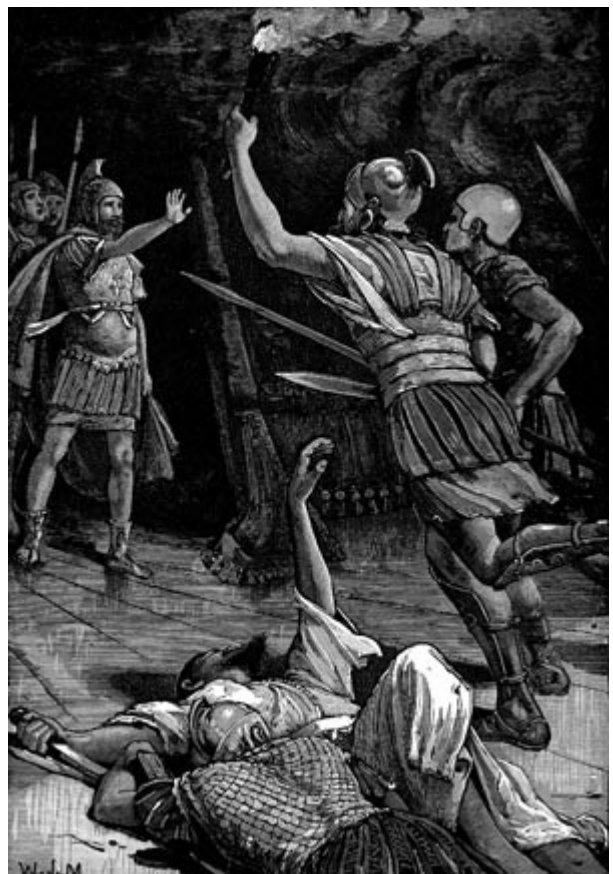
The fighting is intense. The holy places, where once the priests of the LORD served in white garments, where once sacrifices were brought to the glory of God, are now the scene of fierce fighting. Streams of blood flow past the consecrated altars. The daily sacrifices have stopped. They have become impossible. 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 still stands.

Titus desires to spare the temple and 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 will 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 into the main temple building through an open window. 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 commands to quench the fire, but the soldiers ignore him. 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?



*Titus made a personal appeal to his soldiers to put out the fire to save the Great Temple, but his soldiers' lust for revenge for the heavy losses they suffered proved too strong in the long run.*

<https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/>

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

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

Remarkably, the first temple 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 temple's destruction. The strength of their opposition is broken; their courage is 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 utterly destroyed and burned.

#### MORE PROPHECY FULFILLED

The terrible judgment of God has come. The Jews have suffered terribly. Over a million Jews, men,



*Destruction of Jeruzalem. Painting by Nicolas Poussin. Wikimedia Commons*

women, and children lost their lives in this desperate struggle. Tens of thousands were made prisoners, 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 3,000 Jews left. They don't know what to do with them. And then ...? They let those three thousand Jews starve to death. Terrible! Poor, poor people.

Here we see fulfilled the prophecy of 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 ways of the Lord and trampled God's commandments underfoot, those terrible judgments would come upon them.

And....they *have* returned to Egypt in ships. They *were* sold. Finally, no buyers were 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 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? Now they can hear distant cheers 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.

*'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.'*

Deut. 28: 68

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

The Roman people have erected a beautiful arch of honour for him. 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 and will never see it again. They risked everything. They lost everything.





*Sculpture 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*

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; now, no mercy is offered to them. Besides, Jews have become very contemptible. Before then, they were the fiercest enemies of the gospel. But that is past. 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 on the earth. Despised! Persecuted! Often driven about like wild animals!

'His blood be on us and our children!' They have experienced it. That blood did come upon them! Even in the last war - 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* country.

### QUESTIONS

1. What strategy did Titus use in his attempt to conquer Jerusalem?
2. What strategy did John of Gischala use 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 without children at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. (Matthew 24)
6. Give possible reasons why Titus wished 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?



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

## THE WAILING WALL



This is a section of the Western Wall or also called the Wailing Wall. It is one of the last remaining walls of the Temple built by Herod in 19 B.C. It was burned by the Romans in 70 A.D and, since its destruction, Jews have flocked to the remains of the temple to pray. The Western Wall has become one of the holiest places in Jerusalem because of its proximity to what used to be the place in which God dwelt within the temple. That place was called the Holy of Holies or the Ark of the Covenant. The place where Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah (The Temple Mount), where the Al-Aqsa Mosque now stands.

Jewish people pray at the Wall, day and night, to lament the destruction of the temple and over a city they consider holy. That is where the name "Wailing Wall" comes from.