

Brief Summary of the Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD

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This is just a brief summary of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 AD. For a more detailed account of these events, the *Wars of the Jews* by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus is highly recommended.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate.

(Matt. 23:37-38)

Scriptural Background

Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities mentioned in the Bible, also called Salem (Gen. 14:18; cf. Ps. 76:2), and Jebus (Judges 19:10) in its earlier days. When Israel was conquering the land of Canaan, they were unable to drive the Jebusites from the city (Jos. 15:63; Judges 1:21), and so it remained under foreign control until the time of David (2 Sam. 5:5-9). It was David who brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6), and prepared the way for Solomon to build the temple (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chr. 22; 1 Kings 6). Upon completing the temple, Jerusalem was declared as the chosen city of God, and center of the Jewish nation (2 Chr. 6-7).

From the very beginnings of the nation of Israel, God made very clear the blessings of loyal devotion to Him, and the curses of disobedience (Deut. 28). These curses were largely fulfilled in 722 BC and 586 BC, when the kings of Assyria and Babylon took Israel and Judah captive; the latter destroying the city of Jerusalem in the process (2 Kings 24-25). Just prior to the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Jeremiah foretold of this impending doom, yet stated that God would not make a full end of the nation (Jer. 5:18). It was Daniel, also writing around this time, who told of the full end, prophesying “**on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate**, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate” (Dan. 9:24-27).

Hundreds of years later, the disciples of Jesus came to show him the great buildings of the temple, to which Jesus replied “not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Shocked, the disciples inquired “When will these things be?” (Matt. 24:1-3) Jesus then went into detail regarding events that would take place during that generation (Matt. 24:34). He warned his disciples “Therefore when you see the **abomination of desolation**, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:15-16). Luke's account of this warning makes clear just what Daniel was talking about:

But when you see **Jerusalem surrounded by armies**, then know that its

desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.
(Lk. 21:20-22)

The city was to be destroyed by the Romans as a result of the evil of that generation, culminating in the rejection of Jesus as the Son of God. Those wicked men were to be miserably destroyed (Matt. 21:37-41), and have their city burned up (Matt. 22:1-7). During the crucifixion of Jesus they said themselves that his blood would be upon them and their children (Matt. 27:25), and so felt the full wrath of God (cf. Heb. 10:29-31).

The Holy City Destroyed

In 66 AD, the Jews, greatly troubled by the procurator of Judea, Florus, revolted against Rome. In that same year, Cestius Gallus, governor of Syria, came upon Jerusalem to end the revolt, but for some reason withdrew (cf. Matt. 24:15,16; Mk. 13:14; Lk 21:20,21; Rev. 7:3) and nearly lost his troops to the retaliating Jews.

In 67 AD, the Roman Emperor, Nero, sent General Vespasian to end the uprising once and for all. Giving time for civil war in Jerusalem to weaken Jewish forces, Vespasian marched through Galilee, where the leader of the revolt in that region, Josephus, surrendered. Convincing the general to spare his life, Josephus later accompanied the Roman army as it laid siege to Jerusalem.

In 68 AD, Nero committed suicide, and civil war ensued as four emperors took the throne between June 68 AD and December 69 AD. It was during this time that Vespasian, the fourth and final emperor of 69 AD, was proclaimed Caesar by the army, and so decided to head for Rome, leaving the problems in Judea to his son, Titus. It was Titus who laid siege to the city, and ultimately destroyed it, along with the temple. In perfect harmony with the words of Jesus, Josephus attributes this desolation to the unwillingness of the wicked Jews to surrender (who had prevailed over those seeking peace with Rome).

Listed below are some noteworthy statements made by Josephus and others regarding this time period:

...it had so come to pass, that our city Jerusalem had arrived at a higher degree of felicity than any other city under the Roman government, and yet at last fell into the sorest of calamities again. Accordingly, it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were...
(Wars Preface; cf. Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14)

The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible

with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time. (Tacitus, The Histories 1.2, 109 AD; cf. Matt. 24:6; Rev. 6:4)

...the famine was too hard for all other passions...children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their very mouths, and, what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants...but the seditious [Jews] everywhere came upon them immediately and snatched away from them what they had gotten from others...they also invented terrible methods of torment to discover where any food was...
(Wars 5.10.3; cf. Rev. 6:5)

Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness that this was, from the beginning of the world.
(Wars 5.10.4; cf. Matt. 23:33-36; Rev. 18:24)

...but they [Romans] ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood.
(Wars 6.8.5; cf. Matt. 22:1-7; Rev. 9:1ff.; 16:5,6)

...hath not its great antiquity, nor its vast riches, nor the diffusion of its nation over all the habitable earth, nor the greatness of the veneration paid to it on a religious account, been sufficient to preserve it from being destroyed
(Wars 6.10.1; cf. Rev. 18)

...but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited
(Wars 7.1.1; cf. Matt. 24:2; Rev. 18:21-23)

Though Jerusalem today has been rebuilt, it has no temple, and ceases to be the chosen city of God. It has been replaced with the new heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2), where the true temple is wherever God dwells (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Rev. 21:22).

Informative Links

Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks -

http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/daniels_prophecy_of_the_seventy_weeks

The Destruction of Jerusalem -

<http://www.padfield.com/1998/matt24a.html>

Was The Seige at Jerusalem in AD 70 the Worst in World History? -

http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/was_the_siege_at_jerusalem_in_ad_70_the_worst_in_world_history

What About the Great Tribulation of Matthew 24? -

http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/what_about_the_great_tribulation_of_matt_hew_2421

The Siege of Jerusalem -

http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/the_siege_of_jerusalem

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