

The Destruction of the Temple

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Destruction of Jerusalem

Jewish rebellion can be traced to the days of Herod (about A.D. 44) when the Zealots resisted Roman rule. As the Romans increased their intolerance of the Jews and Jewish practices, the Pharisees became allied with the Zealots in open revolt. Rebellion spread quickly throughout Judea and into Galilee which resulted in the Roman general, Vespasian, to wage battle and retake Galilee about A.D. 67.

Vespasian then turned his attentions southward toward Jerusalem. He regained control and put down

rebellion in Samaria, Peraea and Judaea. In A.D. 68 Vespasian made efforts to isolate Jerusalem. The Roman troops took Peraea, stationed troops at Jericho and moved into the Shephelah and Emmaus - all in preparation for the taking of Jerusalem. However, with Nero's suicide in Rome and the resulting struggle for power, the campaign against Jerusalem was put off until A.D. 70. Vespasian was himself proclaimed the new Emperor of Rome, and he ordered Titus, his son, to resume the task of destroying the Jewish rebellion.:

Early May AD 70

The 5th, 12th, 15th Roman Legions assemble on the western side of the city of Jerusalem, while the 10th Legion camps on the east side of the city. Under the leadership of Titus, the son of the new Roman Emperor Vespasian, the Roman army laid siege to the city of Jerusalem.

Early May

Titus with two legions of Roman soldiers from the north (Legions 12 and 15) joined forces with the 5th Legion stationed in Emmaus and approached Jerusalem from the north and west respectively, while the 10th Legion approached from the north-east.

Late May

In late May the Roman Legions using siege towers (Wars V:292, 296), breach the Third Wall. City inhabitants flee to the protection afforded by the Second Wall which fell five days after the Third Wall. The Jews regrouped and drove the Romans back, retaking the area of the Second Wall, but it fell again four days later (Wars V:331-347). City inhabitants are pushed back into the Temple Mount area and into the old city. On May 30 through June 2 the soldiers enter the Second Quarter, forcing the Jews to withdraw behind the First Wall.

June-July

Titus sent Josephus to talk to the Jews about surrender (Wars V:362-419). By this time the famine was serious within the city (Wars V:426-429) and many Jews attempted to escape, but they were caught by the soldiers who “nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest; when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses” (Wars V:451). To prevent further attempts at escape, the Romans erected a siege wall (Wars V:499). The length of the wall was 39 furlongs (4 miles) and had 13 forts along its length. It was completed in just 3 days (Wars V:508-509). Shortly after the siege wall was completed, Josephus was struck in the head by a stone thrown by the defenders of the city (Wars V:541). During this time it was found that some of the Jewish fugitives

had swallowed gold to smuggle out of the city. The Arabian and Syrian members of the Roman Legions thus started cutting open any captured fugitives.

Late July

The Romans built a siege wall around the city of Jerusalem in early July to prevent the escape of the Jews hiding within the city. With the siege wall completed, the Romans once again attack this time at the Antonia Fortress and it falls into Titus' hands on July 22.

August

After the destruction of the Fortress of Antonia, the soldiers set fire to the buildings at the edge of the Temple Mount easily entered the Temple Mount and captured the Temple itself. The Romans also undermined the north gate to the Temple Mount (Wars VI:222).

September

The Romans set fire to the Temple as well as the other buildings of the Temple Mount. They then brought their ensigns to the burned out Temple and offered sacrifices to them (Wars VI:316). Titus had his soldiers build ramps up the side of the Western Mount (Wars VI:374) and breached the wall at Herod's palace. The Roman soldiers “went into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses wither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine” (Wars VI:404-405). When Titus entered the upper city he stated “we have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no other than God who ejected the Jews of these fortifications, for what could the hands of men, or any machines, do towards overthrowing these towers” (Wars VI:411).

Escarpment

Separating the Lower and Upper cities, and escarpment is a long cliff or steep slope separating two level areas. For many years it was thought that a

wall separated the Upper and Lower cities. However, it is now thought that no actual wall ever existed, but that buildings and other structures were constructed along the escarpment which effectively acted like a wall between the two sections of Jerusalem. When the city was taken by Rome (A.D. 70), the escarpment held back the Roman soldiers for a brief time as they moved from the Lower to the Upper city.

First Wall

In late May, after the Second Wall was breached and the Romans entered the Second Quarter, the Jews withdrew behind the First Wall. The Romans did not breach the First Wall, but instead entered the Upper and Lower Cities from the area of the Temple on or about September 2. According to Josephus the First Wall was “built very strong because David and Solomon and the following kings were very zealous about this work” (Wars V:143). Josephus was in error in attributing the First Wall to David and Solomon.

Fortress of Antonia

The Fortress withstood the initial attack of Titus and his Roman troops but finally fell to a second attack launched on or about July 22. Titus ordered the Fortress to be demolished to make way for his army into the Temple Mount (Josephus, Wars VI:93).

Herod’s Palace

Herod’s Palace was attacked and entered by the Roman soldiers, with resistance ending on or about September 26.

Hinnom Valley

This valley located on the south side of the city of Jerusalem is often referred to as the valley of the son of Hinnom. The valley is associated with the worship of Molech and later may have been the place where the corpses of animals and criminals were burned. The name of the valley may be synonymous with “hell,” as the Hebrew phrase “gel’ (valley of) and”hinnom” become the Greek word

“geenna” otherwise known as “Gehenna.” (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 2 Chron. 33:6; Jer. 7:31-32)

Kidron Valley

This was the valley just east of the City of David and modern-day Jerusalem through which flowed the brook of Kidron.

Lower City

As the city of Jerusalem expanded to the surrounding area, the terrain resulted in varying elevations for the city. The Lower City was set in a depression which set it much lower than the Upper City. The Lower City fell to the Roman soldiers on or about September 2.

Second Wall

The Romans breached the Second Wall and entered the Second Quarter of the city of Jerusalem in late May. Titus set up an “engine” (battering ram) at the middle tower of the north part of the Second Wall (Wars V:317). When they breached the wall the Roman soldiers entered that part of the city, but the Jews counterattacked. Titus had failed to enlarge the breach, thus many of the Roman soldiers were trapped and killed inside the wall. Roman reinforcements retook the wall four days later (Wars V:331-347).

Temple

The Temple was destroyed by fire when the Romans entered the Temple Mount on or about August 29. According to Josephus, Titus had intended to spare the Temple saying “although the Jews should get upon that holy house, and fight us thence, yet ought we not to revenge ourselves on things that are inanimate, instead of the men themselves” (Wars VI:241). However, the Roman soldiers set the house of the Lord on fire. When Titus heard of the fire, he rushed to the scene and entered the Temple. Hoping yet to save it, he gave orders to a centurion to beat the soldiers away from the Temple but by then the fire had spread to the interior and Titus had to retire. Thus “the holy house burnt down without Caesar’s approbation” (Wars VI:266).