

# The Jewish War & the Destruction of Jerusalem

Matthew 24:1-35

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## INTRODUCTION:

A. To “rightly divide the word of truth,” please remember:

1. **Matthew 24:4-35** pertains to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans

2. **Matthew 24:36-51** pertains to the end of the world

B. Lesson Text: **Matthew 24:1-35**

C. The Jewish rebellion against Rome and the outbreak of war began in 66 A.D. and culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. with the exception of the retaking on Masada in 72 A.D. by the Romans.

1. Jesus foretold of Jerusalem’s destruction in Matthew 24:1-35
2. A profitable study can be had by considering the matter.

## **THE JEWISH REVOLT BEGINS IN 66 A.D. AND ENDS WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM IN 70. A.D.**

A. When under the proconsul Gessius Florus in 64 A.D., the injustice, oppression and tyranny had reached the boiling point.

B. The Jews had long labored under some wrong misconceptions.

1. The Jews had wanted to make Jesus a King . . . but He refused.
2. They envisioned a Messiah that would overcome Rome and drive them from Palestine.
3. Once the rebellion took place, they were confident that God would come to their rescue and vindicate their cause.

C. By 66 A.D., dissatisfaction turned into open rebellion.

1. It began in Caesarea and above all in Jerusalem.
2. In **November of 66 A.D.** Jewish Zealots had driven Roman forces from Jerusalem and had actually slain more than **600** Roman troops.
3. The Roman occupation forces, and also the high priest tried to stop the rebellion, but were not equal to the situation and were slaughtered.

D. The bull-necked emperor, Nero, gave two simple commands:

1. Destroy Jerusalem.
2. Level the temple.

E. To lead the Roman armies assigned to deal with the Jewish revolt, Nero assigned a fifty-seven year old commoner, Vespasian, who would be assisted by his energetic son, Titus.

1. Much was at stake. The conquered nations comprising the Roman Empire watched with great interest as the Jews, single-handed, fought the Roman Goliath.
  2. The Jews were so close to winning the war that Rome was forced to use its full military weight against them so as to insure:
    - a. That the Jews did not win their independence.
    - b. That the whole empire not be encouraged by the actions of the Jews and try to win their own independence.
- F. The extreme Jewish patriots were not satisfied with the tame manner in which Flavius Josephus conducted his preparations to lead the Jewish armies.
1. He was an aristocrat who had formally belonged to the peace party.
  2. They felt his heart might not be in it.
  3. Following bloody massacre and counter massacres, Josephus ended up turning to the Romans as a collaborator.
- G. Josephus tells us that when Cestius Gallus had earlier come with his army against Jerusalem, after some time he raised the siege.
1. After he had left, many of the oldest of the Jews went out from Jerusalem as from a sinking ship.
  2. A few years later when Vespasian came with his troops against Jerusalem, a great multitude fled from Jerusalem to the mountains for security.  
**Matthew 24:16** – “Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”
- H. The Jews of Jerusalem revolted against an emperor whom they would not call a god.
1. After the land had been subdued by Vespasian, the siege of Jerusalem was finally undertaken in the spring of 70 A.D. by his son Titus. His mission was to end the war and destroy Jerusalem.
    - a. Meanwhile, Vespasian was recalled to Rome to become the emperor.
    - b. The “rampart” (siege wall) of some 39 stadia (about 7,800 yards) was build around the city of Jerusalem in three days. Its purpose was to starve them out.
  2. **INTERESTING FACT. The siege by Titus began in April of A.D. forty years to the week from the time of the crucifixion of Christ on April 7, 30 A.D.**
  3. Titus had the **10<sup>th</sup>** and **15<sup>th</sup>** Roman legions with him.
- I. Instead of uniting their forces and presenting a united front against their common enemy, the Romans, the Jews carried on a constant and devastating warfare with each other which sapped strength and wasted their resources.
1. The Temple swarmed with the blood of 8,000 zealots.
  2. Suffice it to say, that the Jews, deceived by false prophets who promised them a temporal deliverer, persevered in their rebellion long after reasonable chance of success had disappeared.
  3. Hostile Jewish factions opposed and fought against each other.

4. What did Jesus say in **Matthew 12:25** – “. . . Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.”
- J. Titus pressed the siege of Jerusalem because it was crowded with people who had come for the observance of the Passover..
  - a. Cut off their water supply.
  - b. Cut off the food supply.
  - c. The heat was insufferable.
  - d. Those who tried to escape were captured and crucified before the walls of Jerusalem as an example and warning to others.
  - e. Josephus tells of one mother, that in this time of such famine, actually ate the flesh of her own small son.
- K. Josephus tells that some **2,500,000** assembled at the last Passover just before the city of Jerusalem was destroyed.
  1. **1,000,000** perished in the siege.
  2. **347,000** perished in other places.
  3. Of the remainder, some **97,000** were carried into captivity.
  4. **11,000** starved through neglect or sullen refusal of food.
  5. On **July 17**, the daily sacrifices were interrupted.
  6. Some weeks later after the legions has assaulted the walls and gained entrance into the city, the Romans put to the sword all Jews whom they happened to encounter.
    - a. Titus desired greatly that the Temple should be spared and promised to spare the Jews if they would stop their resistance.
    - b. Several times he sent Josephus to persuade his countrymen to do so.
    - c. But the providence of God directed otherwise.
    - d. The Fortress of Antonia fell to Titus on **July 22**
    - e. Fire consumed the buildings.
    - f. The Romans burned the gates and entered the Temple courtyards.
    - g. In fulfillment of the prophecy Jesus made about the Temple being destroyed, it did burn and was destroyed on the Jewish Sabbath that occurred on Saturday, **August 10, 70 A.D.**
    - h. **INTERESTING FACT: The Temple was burned on August 10, A.D. 70, 656 years to the very exact day that Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians had burned Solomon’s Temple on August 10, 586 B.C.**  
NOTE: Herod’s Temple was 150 feet tall.
    - i. When Jerusalem was captured, scavengers would turn over every stone in order to retrieve the melted gold.
    - j. **INTERESTING FACT: Ever since the destruction of the Temple, no sacrifice has ever been offered up to God on Jewish altars.**
- L. The end of the war.
  1. The Romans assaulted Herod’s Palace and entered the Upper City.

2. The resistance ended on **September 26, A.D. 70**.
  3. The **10<sup>th</sup> Legion** encamped in the ruined temple.
  4. Many who survived were either:
    - a. Sold into slavery.
    - b. Taken to Rome for the wild beasts.
  5. After the destruction of the Temple, the Sadducees disappear. No temple meant no sacrifices, and thus no place was needed for a priestly class.
  6. Judiasm, as a political state was ruined.
  7. The militant zealots were decimated.
  8. Knowing all of this makes the story of Masada all the more beneficial from the Jewish vantage point.
- M. In Matthew 24:1-2, Jesus said that the Temple would be destroyed.
1. The Temple was destroyed about 40 years after Jesus was crucified by the Romans.
  2. In 70 AD, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and killed an estimated 1.1 million Jews.
  3. During the destruction, fire was set to the Temple.
  4. The fire caused the gold-leaf ornamentation on the Temple ceiling to melt.
    - a. The melting gold flowed down the walls and settled into crevices within the stones.
    - b. **The Romans pried apart the stones to remove the gold. This fulfilled Jesus' prophecy that not one stone would be left standing on another.**
    - c. **Matthew 24:1-2** – “Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be **THROWN DOWN.**”

## **SUMMARY AND CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS AT THE FALL AND DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM**

- A. The revolt broke out in **66 A.D.**
- B. **April, A.D. 70** - The siege by Titus began in April of A.D. forty years to the week from the time of the crucifixion of Christ on April 7, 30 A.D.
  - a. 10<sup>th</sup> Legion
  - b. 15<sup>th</sup> Legion
- C. **May 25** - Romans breach the Third Wall on May 25 and capture the New City.
- D. **May 30 - June 2** - Romans enter Second Quarter forcing the Jews to withdraw behind the First Wall.
- E. Titus divided attack on First Wall and the Fortress of Antonia fail.
- F. Romans build a siege wall around the city.

1. 39 stadia.
  2. 23,400 feet
  3. 7,800 yards
  4. 4.43 miles
  5. Did it in three days.
- G. **July 22** - Romans renew their assault on the Fortress of Antoinia and are successful this time in taking it.
- H. **August 10** - Romans burn the gates and enter the Temple courtyards. The Temple is destroyed by fire. The 10<sup>th</sup> Roman Legion camped in the ruined Temple
- I. **Around September 2** – Romans burn the Lower City.
- J. Romans assault Herod’s Palace and enter the Upper City.
- K. **September 26** - The resistance ends.

### **MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE HOLY TEMPLE, USING DATES THAT ARE COMMONLY ASCRIBED BY VARIOUS HISTORIANS**

- A. **The first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC and was rebuilt 70 years later. The rebuilt Temple stood for 586 years and was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.**
- B. Both Temples were destroyed by the most powerful empires of their day. (Babylonian Empire in 586 BC and the Roman Empire in 70 AD).
- C. After the destruction of both Temples, hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered, taken as slaves and forced out of Jerusalem.
- D. According to the ancient historian Josephus, both Temples were destroyed on the same day of their respective years - the 9th day of the Jewish month of Av . . . . . Our **August 10<sup>th</sup>**

### **CONCLUSION:**

- A. Knowledge of these events can better help us understand two other events:
1. Paul’s final arrest apparently came while he was at Troas.
    - a. After his trial he was eventually executed (Beheaded, according to tradition.
    - b. 2 Timothy 4 reveals much.
    - c. With A.D. 68 being the year of his death, the revolt was in its 2<sup>nd</sup> year.
    - d. No wonder the Romans were so negative towards Paul.
  2. The saga played out at Masada from A.D. 70-73 and the Romans compulsion to bring it to an end.
    - a. Jewish Zealots took Masada at the beginning of the Jewish revolt in A.D. 66.
    - b. 960 men and women.
      1. Led by Eleazar ben Yair

- 2. Jewish survivors had fled there.
- c. Flavius Silva took the 10<sup>th</sup> Roman Legion, thousands of slaves and prisoners of war.
- d. Built a siege ramp
- e. The end came on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan in the spring of A.D. 73.
- f. A mass suicide took place the night before the Roman onslaught.
  - 1. By casting lots, 10 men were appointed to see which one would finish the deed.
  - 2. Two women and five children hid rather than submit to death.
- B. God’s Word is accurate in every detail about anything it says.
- C. Whether we are discussing the destruction of a city . . . system of law . . . Or an individual life . . . we need to heed what the Bible says.
- D. The Bible has never failed us . . . it never will!
- E. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation.**

## Josephus & the Destruction of Jerusalem

### Josephus Flavius (War of the Jews - Book VI, Chapter 8 - 5)

Josephus, in his classic writings almost 2000 years ago, describes the destruction of Jerusalem and the setting of the houses on fire, a month after the temple was set on fire.

“So the Romans being now become masters of the walls, they both placed their ensigns upon the towers, and made joyful acclamations for the victory they had gained, as having found the end of this war much lighter than its beginning; for when they had gotten upon the last wall, without any bloodshed, they could hardly believe what they found to be true; but seeing nobody to oppose them, they stood in doubt what such an unusual solitude could mean. But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook without and **set fire to the houses** whither 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; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching any thing. But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they 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.” *Josephus*

# The House of Kathros – The Burnt House

The Talmud is a 5th Century AD book of religious practices, an extension and interpretation of the earlier texts of the Mishna (which compiled the oral traditions in about 200AD). The extension is called Gemara. In the following text is a poem that lists some priestly families that abused their positions in the temple, including the Kathroses. **Apparently, this family was disliked because of their writings and perhaps other deeds. They also got rich from commercial activities at the temple, which drew criticism to a level that they appear in a black list of families.**

"...Woe is me because of the **House of Kathros**, woe is me because of their pens. ... for they are the High Priests, and their sons are treasurers, and their sons-in law are trustees, and their servants beat the people with staves".

## Flavius Josephus

Josephus was a historian who lived from **37 A.D. to about 100 A.D.** He was a member of the priestly aristocracy of the Jews. Josephus spent the latter part of his life in or around Rome as an advisor and historian to three emperors, (1) Vespasian, (2) Titus and (3) Domitian. For centuries, the works of Josephus were more widely read in Europe than any book other than the Bible. They are invaluable sources of eyewitness testimony to the development of Western civilization, including the foundation and growth of Christianity in the 1st Century. Josephus, who introduced himself in Greek as son of Matthias (Matthew), an ethnic Jew, a priest from Jerusalem", fought the Romans in the First Jewish-Roman War of 66–73 as **a Jewish military leader in Galilee.** Prior to this, however, he was sent as a young man in his early twenties for negotiations with Emperor Nero for the release of several Jewish priests. He later returned to Jerusalem and was drafted as a commander of the Galilean forces. After the Jewish garrison of Yodfat fell under siege, the Romans invaded, killing thousands; the survivors committed suicide.

According to Josephus, however, in circumstances that are somewhat unclear, Josephus found himself trapped in a cave with forty of his companions. The Romans asked him to surrender once they discovered where he was, but his companions refused to allow this. He therefore suggested a method of collective suicide: they drew lots and killed each other, one by one, counting to every third person. The sole survivors of this process was Josephus and one of his soldiers

who then surrendered to the Roman forces invading Galilee in **July 67** (around 30 years old) and became prisoners. The Roman forces were led by Flavius Vespasian and his son Titus, both subsequently Roman emperors. **In 69, Josephus was released, and according to Josephus's own account, he appears to have played a role as a negotiator with the defenders during the Siege of Jerusalem in 70.**

In 71, he arrived in Rome in the entourage of Titus, becoming a Roman citizen and client of the ruling Flavian dynasty (hence he is often referred to as Flavius Josephus). In addition to Roman citizenship he was granted accommodation in conquered Judea, and a decent, if not extravagant, pension. It was while in Rome, and under Flavian patronage, that Josephus wrote all of his known works. Although he only ever calls himself “Josephus”, he appears to have taken the Roman praenomen Titus and nomen Flavius from his patrons. This was standard practice for "new" Roman citizens.

Josephus's first wife perished, together with his parents, in Jerusalem during the siege, and Vespasian arranged for him to marry a Jewish woman who had been captured. This woman left Josephus, and around 70, he married a Jewish woman from Alexandria by whom he had three male children. Only one, Flavius Hyrcanus, survived childhood. Josephus later divorced his third wife and around 75, married his fourth wife, a Jewish woman from Crete, member of a distinguished family. His last marriage produced two sons, Flavius Justus and Flavius Simonides Agrippa.

Josephus's life is beset with ambiguity. For his critics, he never satisfactorily explained his actions during the Jewish war — why he failed to commit suicide in Galilee in 67 with some of his compatriots, and why, after his capture, he accepted patronage from the Romans.