

A Review of Questions 1 & 2

by
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The first two questions asked of the Lord Jesus by His four disciples had to do with the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus did not see fit to answer the first question which was, "when shall these things be?" The reason why He did not answer this question, is because He had answered it earlier, in that very same day. After His warnings to the scribes and Pharisees, He concluded what He had to say to them with, "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Mt. 23:36). His answer to their second question, "What sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7) was very clear. He said, "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that its desolation is near" (Lk. 21:20).

In *The Wars of the Jews*, written by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, is his eyewitness account of all that took place concerning the Jewish rebellion that brought about the destruction of the Jewish temple of worship and the city of Jerusalem. A synopsis of that account follows:

In 66 A.D., the procurator of Judea deliberately provoked the Jewish people to revolt.² Jews who had sedition in mind, for whatever reason, persuaded those who officiated in the divine service of the temple to refuse to receive any gift of sacrifice from any foreigner. This included the sacrifice of Caesar. The war between the Jews and the Romans began with this act!²

It was after the Roman garrison in Jerusalem was killed³ that a legion of Roman troops, in 68 A.D., was ordered to Judea and surrounded Jerusalem to put an end to the rebellion.⁴ The seditious element of the city was ready to surrender, after being besieged, when the Roman commander decided, for unknown reasons, to retreat. During their retreat, many Roman soldiers were killed and much of their equipment was lost as they fled from the city.⁵

It was while this retreat was taking place that those who remembered and believed the warning and sign given by the Lord Jesus Christ were able to escape from the city.⁶ By doing so, they escaped the horror of what was to come to those who stayed within the city walls.

Because all of Judea was in arms and turmoil, Rome sent three of her finest legions to Palestine to quell the rebellion. Under the command of Vespasian, these legions were able to bring order to the region.⁷ It was late in 69 A.D., when Vespasian sailed back to Rome to become her emperor and sent his son Titus to Jerusalem.⁸ Titus would later succeed his father as emperor of Rome.

While Vespasian had been laying the countryside of Judea to waste, in his effort to end the Jewish rebellion there, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had suffered many acts of atrocity from the three seditious Jewish factions fighting among themselves for control of the city. During this time these Jewish factions also destroyed great quantities of corn and other provisions stored in the city.⁹ This is why the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, was to write, "...the sedition destroyed the city, and the Romans destroyed the sedition." He also believed, "...that we may justly ascribe our misfortunes to our own people, and the just vengeance taken on them to the Romans."¹⁰ In April, 70 A.D., great numbers of Jews and proselytes from all over Judea and from many other nations were in Jerusalem. They had come, as was the custom, to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹¹

The Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which follows it, were instituted by Jehovah in memory of Israel's being spared from the last plague upon Egypt and Israel's deliverance from bondage (Ex. 12:12-17). It was and still is celebrated annually and takes place in our month of April, which is the first month of the Jewish year (Ex. 12:2; 13:4; Lev. 23:5-6).

It was at this time when Titus came upon Jerusalem and began his siege of the city. With him were the three legions which his father Vespasian had given him charge of along with the legion which had suffered a large loss of men and equipment while being chased from Jerusalem two years earlier during the early days of the rebellion.¹² Titus set the strongest part of his army by the northwest corner wall of the city.¹³ After twenty-four days of heavy fighting, Titus had control of the first two walls of the city.¹⁴ One wall remained to be taken. During this time, many of the Jewish people who had been trapped in the city were willing to surrender to the Romans, who offered them food and safety, but they were prevented from doing so by the seditious factions.¹⁵ The people and the seditious factions retreated into the inner fortified city. This area included the beautiful Jewish temple of worship and the tower Antonia, which was like a fortress. The tower Antonia had been built by King Herod the Great and named after his good friend, Mark Antony.¹⁶

It was fear of what the seditious Jews would do to those relatives left behind that kept many of the Jewish people who were in the city from deserting to the Romans. It was their hunger that caused many of the trapped Jews to try to gather food outside the city walls. The attempt to gather food resulted in as many as five hundred and more Jews to be captured by the Romans each day. Those captured were then tortured or killed or crucified in grotesque positions. The forest of crosses before the walls of Jerusalem grew larger as each day passed.¹⁷

The famine, in the meantime, "...began to extend its progress, and devour the people by whole houses and families."¹⁸ Many of those who did manage to desert to the Romans overate upon receiving food. Their overeating caused their starving bodies to actually burst open.¹⁹

After taking the tower Antonia, both Josephus and Titus made pleas to the seditious Jews to spare the Jewish temple of worship from damage by moving their forces to another location. Their pleas were ignored.

Josephus wrote, "Now of those that perished by famine in the city the number was prodigious; and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable." Josephus also wrote that, "Moreover their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew everything. It was when Titus heard that a mother had roasted and eaten her own child that he said, "Men ought not to leave such a city upon the habitable earth to be seen by the sun, wherein mothers are thus fed, although such food be fitter for the fathers than for the mothers to eat of, since it is they that continue still in a state of war against us, after they have undergone such miseries as these.

According to Josephus, Titus had given orders that the temple was to be spared. But those of the seditious Jews did not have the same concern, for they were the first to set fire to it.²³ When the assault by the Roman soldiers finally reached the inner courts of the temple grounds, they were out of control. Josephus was to record that one of these soldiers, "...cast fire on the gate's hinges in the dark, so that the flames leapt out from the holy house, and Caesar and the generals retired, and no one any longer forbade its burning; and thus was the holy house destroyed, without Caesar's assent."²⁴

Titus completed the devastation by ordering that the city and the temple be demolished. This action fulfilled not only the prophecies of the Lord Jesus but also those of the Old Testament prophets Micah and Daniel (Jer. 26:18; Dan. 9:26; Mic. 3:12). These were prophecies that had been given and recorded hundreds of years before the actual event took place.

Jerusalem had become a city of the dead! Josephus wrote, "...the number of those that perished during the whole siege..." was "...1,100,000...."²⁶ "Nor was there any place in the city that had no dead bodies in it, but what was entirely covered with those that were killed, either by the famine, or the rebellion."²⁷ Josephus also stated that Titus "...frequently cursed those that had been the authors of their revolt."²⁸

Those Jews who managed to survive through the many acts of atrocity that came about from the three seditious Jewish factions fighting among themselves for control of the city that had destroyed the provisions of the city and the siege of the city by the Romans that followed were dispersed throughout the world as slaves. The number of Jewish slaves was so great in this dispersion that they had little value.²⁹ This dispersion of the Jews and their small value as slaves among the nations of the world was also a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and that of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lev. 26:33; Dt. 4:27; 28:63-68; Ps. 44:11-12; Lk. 21:24).

Flavius Josephus, Wars of the Jews.

1) Book 2, Chapters 14 through 17. 2) Book 2, Chapter 17. 3) Book 2, Chapter 17. 4) Book 2, Chapter 19. 5) Book 2, Chapter 19.

6) Book 2, Chapter 20. 7) Book 4, Chapter 9. 8) Book 4, Chapter 11.
9) Book 5, Chapter 1. 10) Book 5, Chapter 6. 11) Book 5, Chapter 3.
12) Book 5, Chapter 1. 13) Book 5, Chapter 3. 14) Book 5, Chapters 7 &
8. 15) Book 5, Chapter 10. 16) Book 1, Chapter 21 and Book 5, Chapter
5. 17) Book 5, Chapter 11. 18) Book 5, Chapter 12. 19) Book 5,
Chapter 13. 20) Book 6, Chapter 2. 21) Book 6, Chapter 3.
22) Book 6, Chapter 3. 23) Book 6, Chapter 2. 24) Book 6, Chapter 4.
25) Book 7, Chapter 1. 26) Book 6, Chapter 9. 27) Book 6, Chapter 7.
28) Book 7, Chapter 5. 29) Book 6, Chapter 9.