

A **'Brief'** but **'Thorough'** description regarding the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70



The Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 marks a significant and deeply consequential event in both Jewish and Roman history.

This cataclysmic event signalled the end of the First Jewish-Roman War, culminating in **the destruction of the Second Temple**, the heart of Jewish religious, political, and cultural life.

The fall and its aftermath reshaped the Jewish diaspora, influenced the development of both Judaism and Christianity, and marked a victorious yet tumultuous period in the Roman Empire.

Simmering tensions between the Jews and Romans

In the years leading up to AD 70, Jerusalem held immense significance as the political, cultural, and spiritual centre of Jewish life.

The Second Temple, built after the return from the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century BC, stood as the focal point of Jewish religious worship.

Judea, the region surrounding Jerusalem, became a client kingdom of Rome in 63 BC after Roman general Pompey's successful siege of Jerusalem.

Over the next several decades, the relationship between Rome and its Jewish subjects was fraught with tension.

A series of Roman governors, perceived by many Jews as corrupt and insensitive to Jewish laws and traditions, exacerbated these tensions.

Additionally, heavy taxes imposed by Rome fuelled discontent among the Jewish populace.

The Jewish Revolt (66-70 AD)

The First Jewish-Roman War, often referred to as the Jewish Revolt, began in AD 66.

The revolt was a reaction to a series of political and religious tensions, including instances of Roman misrule and a growing nationalistic fervour among Jewish factions.

The revolt initially saw success for the Jewish rebels, who managed to expel the small Roman garrison stationed in Jerusalem.

However, Rome soon dispatched a larger force to quell the rebellion, setting the stage for the siege and eventual fall of Jerusalem.

The key power-players

Vespasian: The Roman Emperor

Vespasian was the Roman Emperor who initiated the campaign against the Jewish revolt in AD 66. However, during the course of the war, he was called back to Rome amidst a political crisis and subsequently rose to power as emperor in AD 69, leaving his son Titus in charge of the Judean campaign.

Titus: The Roman General

Titus, son of Vespasian, was the Roman general who led the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He had been serving under his father in the campaign against the Jewish revolt and took command after Vespasian returned to Rome. Titus was known for his military skill and leadership, which was critical in the successful but brutal siege of Jerusalem.

Josephus: The Historian and Witness

Flavius Josephus, originally Yosef ben Matityahu, was a Jewish historian and military leader turned Roman citizen. He initially fought against the Romans during the revolt but surrendered and became a prisoner.

Eventually, he won the favour of Vespasian and served as his interpreter and advisor. Josephus wrote a comprehensive account of the Jewish Revolt, including the Fall of Jerusalem, in his work ["The Jewish War"](#).

His works provide one of the most detailed contemporary accounts of this period.

Publius Cornelius Tacitus - Roman historian and politician

As a Roman historian and politician. Tacitus is widely regarded as one of the greatest Roman historians by modern scholars.

Tacitus's Histories offers insights into Roman attitudes towards Jews, descriptions of Jewish customs, and context for the First Jewish–Roman War. His Annals are of interest for providing an early account of the persecution of Christians and one of the earliest extra-Biblical references to the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jewish Leaders and Factions

At the time of the revolt and the siege, Jerusalem was not unified under a single leader but was home to several Jewish factions.

These included the Zealots, militant nationalists who played a significant role in initiating the revolt against Rome; the Pharisees, who were experts in Jewish law and had a significant religious following; and the Sadducees, who were largely aristocratic priests.

The lack of unity and infighting among these groups contributed to the difficulty in mounting a cohesive defence against the Romans.

The Siege of Jerusalem

In the spring of AD 70, Titus gathered his forces around Jerusalem¹. His army consisted of about 60,000 men, including Roman legionaries, auxiliaries, and troops provided by regional allies.

The Roman forces were well-equipped and experienced, having been engaged in the Jewish Revolt for several years.

Inside the city, the Jewish defenders were in a state of disarray due to infighting among different factions. Despite this, they had prepared for the siege by storing food and fortifying the city's walls.

Jerusalem's geographical position on high ground and its formidable fortifications presented a significant challenge to the Roman attackers.

The siege lasted approximately five months. Initially, the Romans attempted to breach the city walls using siege towers and battering rams.

When this failed, they resorted to a blockade, aiming to starve the city into submission.

The conditions within the city quickly became desperate.

¹ **Luke 21:20** And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

Food and water supply dwindled, and disease² spread among the inhabitants. Infighting among the Jewish factions also continued, further weakening the city's defences.

In the summer of AD 70, the Romans finally managed to breach the Third Wall, then the Second, and finally penetrated the heavily fortified First Wall, entering the Upper City.



Slaughter and Destruction

One of the most significant and heart-wrenching events during the fall of Jerusalem was the destruction of the Second Temple³.

According to historical accounts, the Roman soldiers set the Temple on fire, disregarding Titus's orders to spare it.

² Matthew 24:7" and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

³ Matthew 24:1-15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:5-6 & 20

The Temple, a magnificent structure considered the heart of Jewish religious life, was reduced to ashes.

This event occurred on the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av, a date that is still observed by Jews today as Tisha B'Av, a day of mourning and fasting.

The fall of Jerusalem was also accompanied by significant loss of life. Josephus provides an account of the carnage, stating that the Romans killed⁴ many of the city's inhabitants.

Those who were not killed were taken as slaves, with many sent to the mines of Egypt or sold in slave markets.

The city of Jerusalem was thoroughly sacked by the Romans. Buildings, homes, and walls were torn down, leaving the city in ruins.

The level of devastation was such that Josephus claimed that those who visited the city after its destruction could scarcely believe it had ever been inhabited.

The Romans also carried off the treasures of the Temple as spoils of war, including the Menorah, which was famously depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome.



⁴ During the Siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, it's estimated that between 600,000 and 1,100,000 people, mostly Jewish, were killed, according to ancient historians Josephus and Tacitus

The widespread impacts of the fall

The fall of Jerusalem had dire immediate consequences for the Jewish people. Hundreds of thousands had been killed during the siege, and those who survived faced enslavement, exile, or life in a ruined city.

The loss of the Second Temple was particularly devastating, as it was not only the centre of religious worship but also a symbol of national identity.

It marked the beginning of a long diaspora for Jewish people. With the city in ruins and **the Second Temple destroyed**, many Jews were displaced, sold into slavery, or chose to leave the region.

They established communities throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, profoundly shaping the Jewish experience and identity.

With the destruction of the temple, the practice of Judaism had to adapt, necessitating a major shift in religious practice and thought, leading to the development of Rabbinic Judaism

For the Roman Empire, the fall of Jerusalem was a significant victory, strengthening the rule of Emperor Vespasian and his son Titus.

The victory was celebrated in Rome with a triumphal procession, as depicted on the [Arch of Titus](#), and consolidated their power after the tumultuous Year of the Four Emperors.

The destruction of Jerusalem also had a profound impact on the early Christian movement. Many followers of Jesus had fled the city before the siege⁵, spreading their beliefs to other parts of the Roman Empire.

The destruction of the Temple and the city validated, for some, Jesus' prophetic warnings about Jerusalem's fall.

Without a central Jewish authority in Jerusalem, and with Jewish communities scattered, Christianity began to evolve as a distinct religion, increasingly separate from its Jewish roots.

⁵ Matthew 24:16-21; Mark 13:14-18; Luke 21:21-24

But can we trust the historical sources?

Archaeology provides crucial evidence for understanding the Fall of Jerusalem.

The burnt layer found at the archaeological sites, remnants of the city's fortifications, artifacts from the destroyed Temple, and the Roman siege works at Masada all contribute to our understanding of the event.

Coins inscribed with **"For the Freedom of Zion"** found in Jerusalem also attest to the fervour of the Jewish Revolt.

The most comprehensive account of the Fall of Jerusalem comes from Josephus, however in scripture Daniel the Prophet Jesus prophesied of Jerusalem and the temples destruction⁶ and exactly how it was prophesied is exactly what happened.

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⁶ Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:1-23; Mark 13:1-23; Luke 21:20-24