

set in motion by the cheat of a counterfeit Nero. Cities in Campania's richest plains were swallowed up and overwhelmed. Rome was wasted by conflagrations, its oldest temples consumed, and the Capitol itself fired by the hands of citizens. Nobility, wealth, and the refusal or acceptance of office were grounds for accusation, and virtue ensured destruction.

## The Roman Destruction of Jerusalem

Sylvester Hassell gave a very detailed account of conditions responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. He wrote that in the days of Felix and in the twelfth year of Nero's reign, AD 66, a dispute arose between the Jews and Syrians as to the ownership of Caesarea. Each claimed it. It was referred to the Roman Emperor who decided against the Jews who latter became indignant and took up arms in defense of their claim. They assailed both Syrians and Romans on all occasions and in all places of their meeting together. Throughout all Judea little else was heard of but robberies, murders, and every cruelty imaginable—cities and villages were filled with the dead of all ages and sexes, and of every quality, down to even infants.<sup>1</sup>

This war of open rebellion against the Roman government was inaugurated in the second year of the government of Florus, AD 66. The Jews next pushed their conquests beyond the river Jordan, took the fortress of Cyprus, and put all the Roman captives to death. The Roman governor of Syria, Cestius, was bestirred to action and marched into Judea with a powerful army, burned the towns and villages in his way, massacred all the Jews he came in contact with, and encamped near Gibeon about the time of the feast of tabernacles. The Jews at Jerusalem, hearing of his approach, forsook the solemnities of their religion and flew to arms and proceeded to meet him with such fury that they lost only twenty-two men while the Syrians lost about five hundred. The governor, Cestius, sent messengers to propose terms of peace, but the Jews killed one of them and wounded the other. This enraged Cestius, and he marched forward and encamped in preparation to attack Jerusalem on the Octobrt 30, AD 66. This put the Jews in great consternation and they abandoned the outworks and retired to the inner defense circle around the temple. Cestius burned the outerworks and laid siege to the inner defenses and took up headquarters in the royal palace. He then hesitated. His generals were bribed. The Jews made a sortie and succeeded in repulsing him and they drove him back to his camp at Gibeon, harassed his rear, secured the passes, and attacked his army in flank. The Romans lost about four thousand men and two hundred horses. But, favored by night, on the November 8 they happily found a pass through the narrow straits of Bethoron and escaped.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "History of The Church of God," Sylvester Hassell, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 218.



Milman wrote, "The Romans might have easily made themselves masters of the city of Jerusalem: and it was to the universal surprise that Cestius called off his troops when he seemed to have the advantage. Though the war continued, Jerusalem was not besieged again till April, AD 70. During this period from AD 66 to 70, the Christians in Jerusalem, remembering Christ's words of warning (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21), fled beyond the Jordan to Pella in the north of Perea, sixty miles north of Jerusalem, where king Herod Agrippa II gave them sanctuary. Thus they escaped the horrors of the final siege of Jerusalem.

"The retreat of Cestius aroused Nero, who sent Vespasian and his son Titus into Galilee with an army of sixty thousand well disciplined and equipped men, ready for service. They burned Gadara and marched to Jotapata, which was finally taken after a forty-seven day battle in which forty thousand inhabitants were slain and twelve hundred were taken prisoner, Josephus included.

"Vespasian was soon elevated to the throne of the Caesars and returned to Rome for a time, leaving his son, Titus, in charge of the army there. Titus took Joppa, and upon his father's return, Vespasian besieged Jotapata. Joppa, which had been remanned by a great number of Jews since it was taken by Cestius, was retaken by Vespasian. Gamala and Tabor were taken, completing the conquest of Galilee, and the whole Roman army took a rest at Caesarea before they began the siege of Jerusalem.

"While the Romans and Vespasian were resting in winter quarters, the Jews in Jerusalem were exhausting themselves warring among each other. Hassell wrote that at that time they were the worst population on the face of the globe and eventually suffered more than any other. The dominant party, the war party, consisted of the vilest men, the proudest, most ambitious, cruelest, most rapacious, and they were addicted to the most horrid crimes. Josephus says that they acted more like infernal beings than like men.

"John of Gischala had placed himself at the head of the dominant party and practiced the most unheard of cruelties upon the innocent and inoffensive. However, when the party of John had quelled all opposition to them within the walled city, they began to turn their murderous weapons against each other, all of which was favorable to Rome. Famine and pestilence also prevailed in the city and made its conquest the easier. Vespasian marched out of Caesarea in the spring of AD 70 and penetrated Idumea, plundering and burning every place he passed. On receiving news that he had been elected emperor, he left his son Titus in charge of the army and repaired to Rome. His advice to his son was to utterly destroy Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup>

Although Jerusalem seemed impregnable with its three walls and stately towers, Titus wasted no time in complying with his father's command. The siege commenced on April 14 and ended on September 8, when it was finally

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, pp. 218-219.



taken and entered by Titus. Stillingfleet wrote that about six hundred thousand Jews had been killed during the onslaught.

"One of the most tragic reports resulting from the siege was that of the unhappy and starving mother, Miriam, fulfilling the prophecy of Moses (Deut. 28:56-57). After the siege had been underway for some time, famine among the besieged was inevitable and Miriam's house was repeatedly plundered of all she had been able to procure. Hassell wrote that she had vainly attempted to prevail upon the Romans to put an end to her miserable existence, but to no avail. Frantic at length with fury and despair, she cut the throat of her infant and boiled it; and, having satiated her present hunger, concealed the rest. Its smell, however, soon attracted the 'human tigers' to her house, and they threatened her with the most excruciating tortures if she did not reveal her provisions to them; upon which, she set forth before them the relics of her mangled infant, bidding them to eat heartily and not be squeamish, since she, its once tender mother, had made no scruple to butcher, dress, and feed upon it. At the sight of this horrid dish, they stood aghast, petrified with horror, and departed, leaving her with the remains."<sup>1</sup>

When the reports of Miriam feeding upon her child spread through the city, for the first time, the Jews began to think of themselves as forsaken of the providence of God, and expected the most awful effects of His anger. Nor were their fears ill-founded, for when Titus heard of this inhuman deed, he vowed total destruction of the city and its people because they had so often refused his proffers of pardon and have preferred war to peace, rebellion to obedience, and famine to plenty. He was determined to bury that cursed metropolis under its ruins.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, Titus felt reluctant to destroy so many human beings, often forgiving them upon their repentance. And such was his regard for the magnificence and value of the temple; although, it is said that the destruction was against his orders, his soldiers set fire to the temple and it was totally destroyed. After the temple was destroyed, Titus entered into the ruins of the sanctuary and Most Holy place, the remaining grandeur and riches of which, even then, surpassed all that had been told him of it. The Jewish historian Josephus, who had come over to the Roman side, declared that, Titus had tried to save the sanctuary, but another tradition discounted this view.

Titus saved out of the temple the golden candlestick, the table of the showbread, the altar of incense, all pure gold, and the book of the law, wrapped up in a golden tissue. Upon his leaving the sacred place, some soldiers set fire to it, in consequence of which, they all began to plunder it, carrying off costly utensils, robes, gold plating of the gate, etc. The temple was burned on

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, pp. 220-221.

<sup>2</sup> "History of The Christian Church," William Jones.



August 10, AD 70, the same day of the year it was said that the first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and Titus was proclaimed Emperor. Thus was fulfilled Christ's prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation<sup>1</sup> (Matt. 24:15).

Preparations were now made for a vigorous attack on the upper city, and particularly on the royal palace. On September 8 the city was completely subdued by Titus and his soldiers were instructed to complete their destructive work of fire and slaughter of the noble structures, fortifications, palaces, towers, walls, and other ornaments, and to level them with the ground as though he had nothing in view but to fulfill the predictions of Christ concerning its destruction, as contained in Matt. 24. He left nothing standing but a piece of the western wall and three towers, which he reserved merely as a monument to future ages of what had been the strength of the city and the skill and valor of its conqueror. Such was the dreadful issue of this war, terminating in the utter downfall of the Jewish state and nation, from which it has never recovered to this day—according to Sylvester Hassell, 1885. Not only the wisdom but the justice of God seems very conspicuously displayed in this great event. This people had always been favored with prosperity while obedient to God and His prophets. On the other hand, calamity of some kind had been the never failing consequence of their disobedience.

Titus' victory in Jerusalem brought him much acclaim. He was crowned with a diadem at Memphis, Egypt. His image was placed on Eastern coinages, an honor which had always been reserved for emperors only. The Roman senate offered him a special triumphant celebration, but it was turned into a joint celebration with his father Vespasian.

<sup>1</sup> "History of The Church of God," Sylvester Hassell, p. 222.



Hassell continued and explained that Titus,

Vespasian's son, was considered superior to his father. But after only two years and two months as the Emperor of the Roman Empire, he was poisoned, presumably by his brother Domitian, who succeeded him to the throne in the year AD 81. His temper and disposition seemed to have been inherited from the monster Nero. His savage cruelty was directed to his subjects generally, for he did not seem to have any particular hatred for the Christians until about the fourteenth year of his reign, AD 95, when he had several Christians put to death and others banished on account of religion, both in Rome and in various parts of the Roman Empire. Among the number put to death was his own cousin and colleague in the consulship, Flavius Clemens, and among those who were banished were the wife and niece of the latter, both named Flavia Domitilla. The apostle John is said to have survived the persecution of Domitian—though it is uncertain how long—and to have died in the reign of Trajan about AD 98 at Ephesus, at which city he was buried.

Over the Empire, the crime alleged against the Christians at this period was that they were atheists, simply because they refused to acknowledge or worship the gods of the heathen or even throw a grain of incense on one of their altars. As Christians had neither temples nor altars nor sacrifices, it was taken for granted that they worshipped no god, were haters of the gods, and could be nothing better than atheists.

Domitian, however, relaxed his persecution of the Christians before his assassination in the sixteenth year of his reign, AD 97, and was succeeded in the empire by Nerva, an excellent prince. His reign made the Romans as happy as the reign of Domitian had made them miserable. However, after an excellent sixteen months reign he died suddenly on January 23, AD 98, and was succeeded by Trajan who was reported to be courteous, affable, humane, and just, and perhaps not undeservedly esteemed in the eyes of the Romans as one of the best princes with whom Rome had ever been favored.<sup>1</sup>

Sylvester Hassell recorded in *History of The Church of God* a typical example that related Trajan's and the Roman authority's attitude toward Christians around the last of the first century and the beginning of the second century AD. Hassell wrote that Trajan became emperor in AD 98 and soon appointed his friend, Pliny the Younger, to head the government in Bithynia in Asia Minor (Turkey). Severe edicts against Christians that were issued by preceding emperors were still in effect when Pliny assumed authority, and he was greatly disturbed because all found to be Christian or admitting to be Christian were put to death. Pliny was greatly struck by all of this and wrote to Trajan for advice on how to handle the matter of the multitude of Christians and the severity of the laws against them.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.