

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Chronology of the War According to Josephus

Part 7: The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem

March 70 - September 70

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<http://www.josephus.org/FlJosephus2/warChronology7Fall.html>

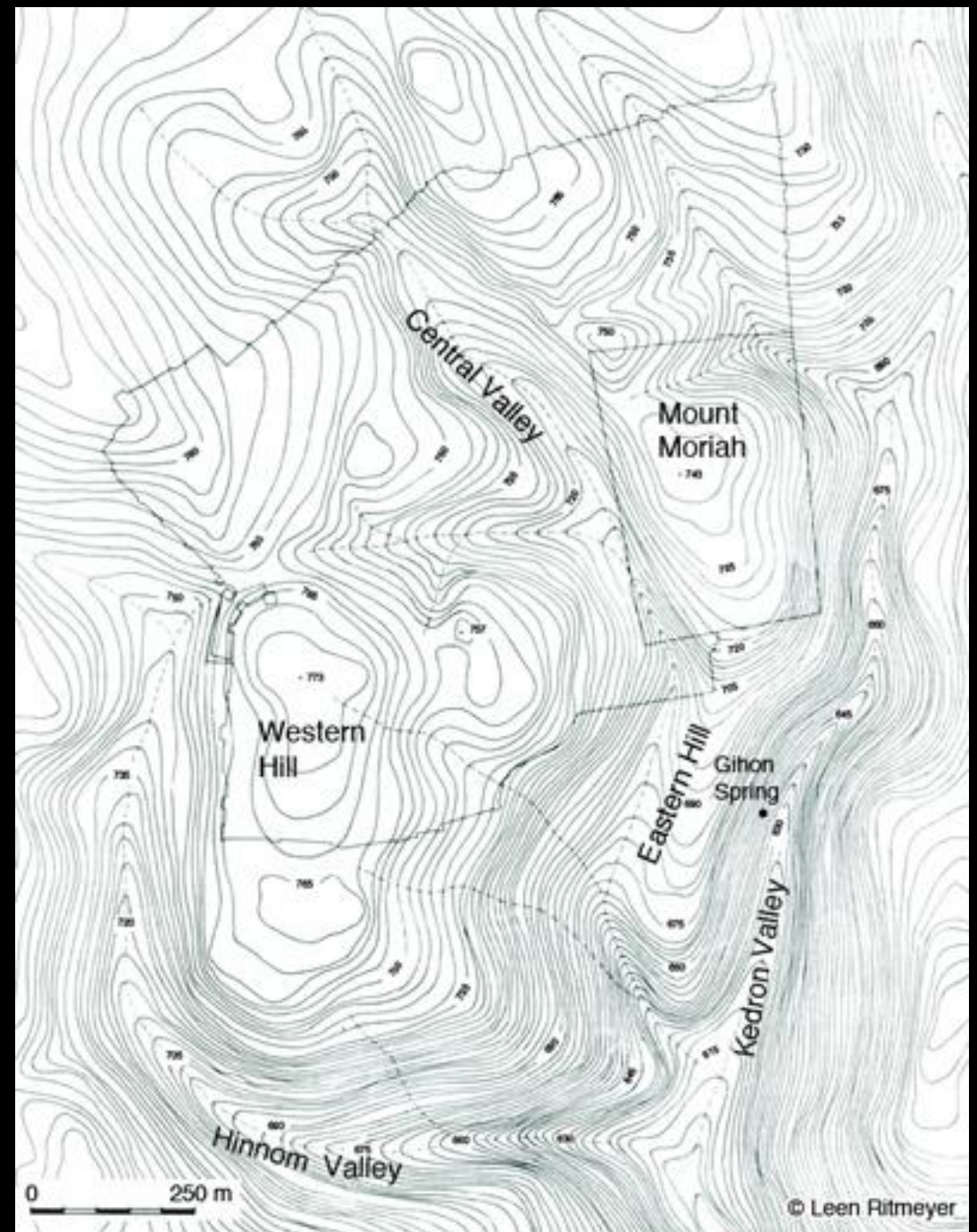
Introduction:

Now the threads come together: the warring factions, the anxious populace of Jerusalem, the Roman army, and Josephus.

The distant civil war in Rome, which had provided the best hope for the Judean rebellion, had passed. Ironically -- or, as Josephus would have it, through the working of Divine Providence -- that opportunity was ended by the Judean war itself, **as Vespasian's previous successes in Judea and Galilee propelled him to the imperial throne and brought peace to the city of Rome.** Vespasian has now departed for Rome and has appointed his son Titus as commander to finish the war by taking Jerusalem.



As can be seen by the contour lines of constant elevation, the steepest gradients are on the south of the city, where the deep Kidron and Hinnom valleys rise sharply to the Upper City on the Western Hill, the Lower City just below, and to the Temple Mount (Moriah), separated from the rest of the city by a central valley that Josephus calls the Tyropean Valley. **These hills or cliffs, surmounted by walls, made an assault by an invading army extremely difficult on the south, east and west. On the north, however, one can see the ascent is not as steep, and as a consequence walls were built by the Judeans to protect that side.** There are three in all, and usually labelled by their order of construction, with the First Wall the innermost, followed by the Second Wall, with the Third Wall farthest out and running in the vicinity of the northernmost city border shown on this map.



4.658-663; Life 416 - *Dec 69 - Early 70*
Vespasian dispatches Titus to Judea.

Vespasian, the new Emperor, dispatches son Titus from Alexandria to finish the war in Judea. Titus marches to Caesarea with 2000 Alexandrian troop and 3000 Euphrates guards under command of Tiberius Alexander (Jewish apostate). Josephus accompanies them.

*Eventually joined by Legions XV, XII, V, and X (4000 more troops).

5.98 ff; 5.248-257

John of Gischala controls the Temple.

John of Gischala (Josephus' old rival in Galilee) defeats Eleazar's Zealots and gains control of the inner court of the Temple. The factions are reduced to two. Simon son of Gioras (the popular leader from the countryside) has 10,000 Judeans plus 5,000 Idumeans, John has 6,000 of his original men plus 2,400 of Eleazar's that have joined him. Simon controls the Upper City and the Third Wall to the Kidron valley at the southeast corner, and part of the Lower City. John controls the Temple and environs and the Kidron valley. The region between has been reduced to ashes.

5.106-130

Approach to the city walls levelled.

Titus orders the leveling of gardens, walls, plantations of the suburbs, flattening the space from Scopus almost to the city walls. A Judean pretense at negotiations ends in an ambush of several Roman soldiers.

5.133; 5.567

May 1, 70 Nissan/Xanthicus 14

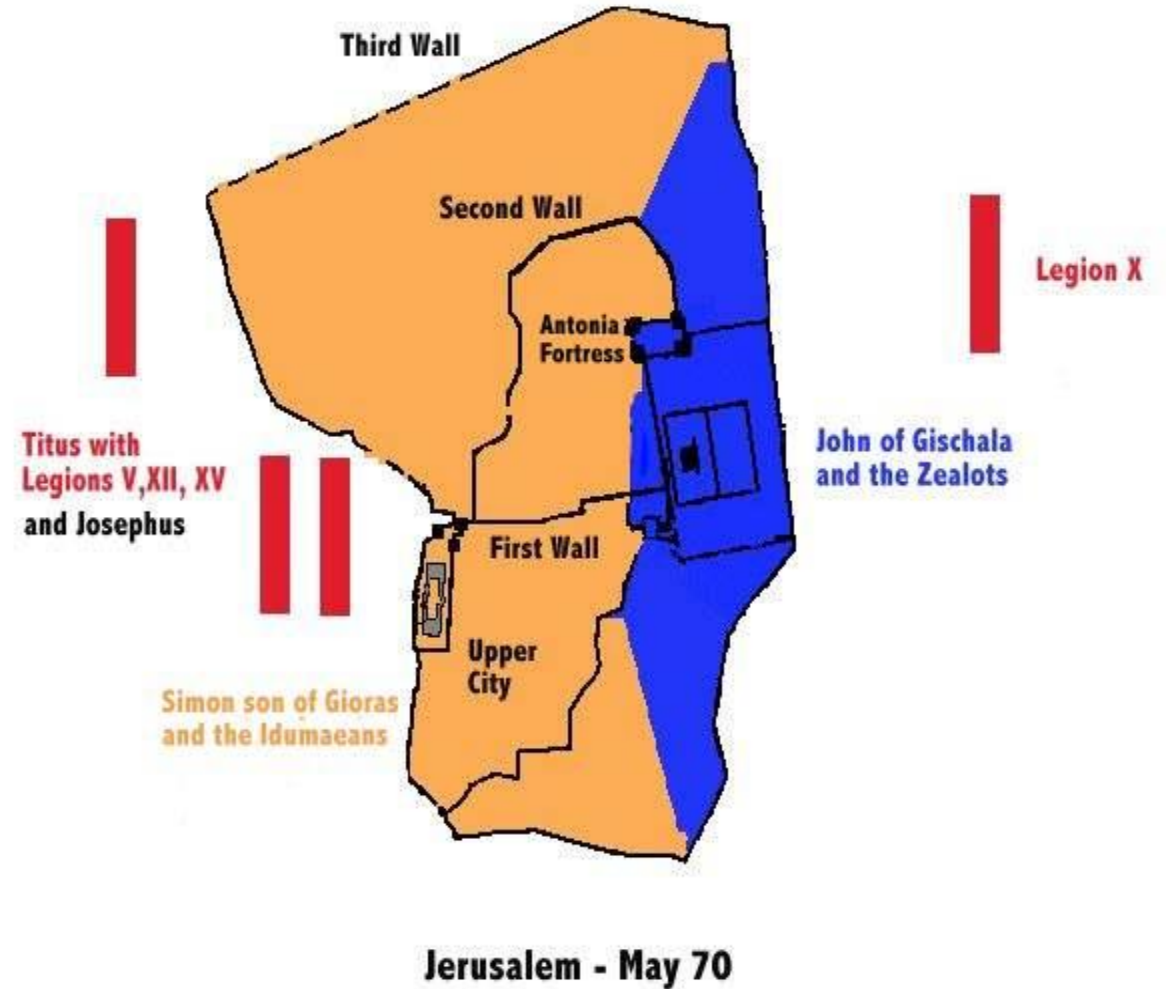
Titus moves camp to NW Jerusalem.

Titus and three legions move camp to the northwest corner of Jerusalem, two stadia (1/4 mile) from the tower Psephinus. The Xth Legion remains on the Mt. of Olives.

5.260

Assault point chosen.

Titus decides to make assault "opposite the tomb of John Hyrcanus" in the northwest in order to capture the Upper City and the Antonia fortress. The Legions are ordered to build earthworks.



5.262-274

Both sides begin artillery fire.

Simon places previously captured Roman artillery on the walls opposite the works, but his men are inexperienced with their use. Titus positions artillery in front of his engineers for protection. The Xth Legion has the best artillery, capable of sending a one-talent (75 pound/34 kg) stone a distance of two stadia (one-quarter mile/370 meters). The Judeans place observers on the walls to warn of the incoming missiles, which are clearly visible white stones, allowing time for their men to take cover. The Romans respond with stealth technology: they paint the stones black.

5.275-289

The battering rams begin to act on the walls.

The ramps having been completed to within ramming distance, Titus orders the battering rams into action. The tremendous noise of the battering spurs the rival Judean factions into a truce, and they jointly attack the rams from the walls with fire and projectiles. In a ground sortie, Judeans set fire to the Roman works -- "Jewish daring outstripped Roman discipline" -- but Titus drives off the attackers and the fire is extinguished. In this attack one Jewish prisoner is taken and crucified in sight of the walls to frighten the populace. An Idumean general, John, is killed by an arrow.

5.300-302 *May 25 Artemisius/Iyyar 7* Outermost wall breaks.

After 15 days of battering, Jerusalem's outer (Third) wall begins to break from the rams. The insurgents abandon the wall without much concern, in favor of defending the other two. The Romans raze a large part of the wall and the northern quarter of the city.

*Camp is moved inside the wall to outside the second wall.

5.331-347 *May 30*

The Second Wall cracks. Titus enters; forced back.

Jerusalem's Second Wall is breached five days after the Third Wall. Titus with picked troops recklessly enters the breach in the Second Wall and into a crowded market district, asking the citizens to surrender peacefully so as to preserve the city. But the Judean militatnts attack, many soldiers are wounded, "and the entire invading force would probably have been annihilated, had not Titus come to their relief, covering them as the soldiers are forced back through the wall.

5.347 *June 4 – Early June*

The Second Wall is razed. Defenses built.

After battling four more days, the Romans finally master the Second Wall and raze its northern portion.

Titus splits his forces to build four embankments: Legions V and XII build earthworks against the Antonia Fortress so as to attack the Temple, and Legions X and XV build works in the northern part of this city across from John Hyrcanus' monument in order to take the Upper City. The rebels fire on them with hundreds of artillery pieces.

5.420-445

Horrific famine seizes Jerusalem.

Although Josephus "with his tears thus loudly appealed to them," the insurgents do not yield. However, non-combatants are inspired to desert; they sell their possessions for gold, then swallow the gold coins to hide them as they escape to the Romans. The deserters give the Romans pitiful reports of increasing famine in the city and attacks by insurgents performing house-to-house searches for food, beating and torturing those within. The wealthy are robbed and murdered by the forces of John and Simon. "To narrate their enormities in detail is impossible; but, to put it briefly, no other city every endured such miseries, nor since the world began has there been a generation more prolific in crime."

5.446-451

Mass crucifixions.

As the construction of the embankments proceeds the Romans capture escapees from the city, as many as 500 a day. Prisoners are tortured, killed, then crucified before the walls to intimidate the populace. Titus is saddened by this necessity of the crucifixions. "So great was their number, that space could not be found for the crosses nor crosses for the bodies."

5.466-490; 5.522-526

June 16 Artimesius 29

The rebels destroy the earthworks.

On the seventeenth day of the building of the works, John undermines the Antonia earthworks built by the Vth Legion and sets fire to the supporting timbers, causing the tunnels to collapse and the whole works to burn. Two days later Simon's men set fire to the other works and battering engines. The Roman soldiers are dispirited at the loss of so much hard work and also at the lack of timber to rebuild, for all the trees around the city had been cut down for a distance of 90 stadia (10mi / 16 km).

5.491-534

Titus decides to starve the city.

Titus holds a difficult consultation with his officers. Unable to rebuild the works, but unwilling to wait indefinitely, Titus decides to blockade the city completely to prevent food supplies entering. At the same time he will rebuild the embankments at one position only, against Antonia. Enthusiastic troops build an earthen wall (or trench) completely around the city in three days. All hope of escape being cut off, the famine within the city intensifies. Burials are neglected, bodies pile up. Insurgents continue the trials of prominent persons, execute eminent men and imprison Josephus' father.

5.548-561

Deserters cut open for their gold.

Syrian troops discover some deserters have swallowed gold coins. The rumor spreads that all deserters are filled with gold. Arabs and Syrians cut open all who escape the city. "In one night no less than two thousand were ripped up." Josephus interprets this as another example of divine retribution.

5.567-572

Hundreds of thousands dead.

Deserter Mannaeus ben Lazarus is assigned by the Romans to watch a city gate. He counts 115,880 bodies carried through the gate during the siege, in the period from Xanthicus 14 to Panemus 1 (May 1 to July 20). Reports from within the city give the total dead among the lower classes at 600,000.

6.1-22

July 20 Panemus/Tammuz 1

New earthworks ready. Antonia Breached.

The Antonia earthworks are completed in 21 days. These are heavily guarded, as all timber had been used within 10 miles of the city. John makes a strong attempt to destroy the constructions but fails.

The Romans, under heavy fire, bring siege-engines against the Antonia Fortress. Armored engineers undermine the foundation. Suffering the pounding of the battering rams, a portion of the wall collapses -- it has been weakened by the tunnel previously dug by John's men to attack the earlier works. But the Romans are dismayed to discover John has built another wall behind it.

6.68-92 *July 24*

Romans take Antonia.

Two dozen soldiers, acting on their own initiative, lead a daring night attack and seize Antonia. The rebels fall back into the Temple grounds, battle fiercely and prevent further Roman advances.

6.93-129

August 5 Panemus/Tammuz 17

Temple sacrifices end.

6.93

Josephus argues with John to restore the sacrifices.

Josephus delivers a message from Titus to the rebels, within hearing of all the populace: John may leave the Temple so that it will be no longer polluted, and the sacrifices may be restored. John enters into a heated argument with Josephus, John stating the city was God's and so could not be captured, Josephus replying that John had driven the divine presence away by stopping the sacrifices. John is unmoved, but great numbers of upper-class citizens, especially priests, desert at this point to the Romans.

6.130-149

Battle for the Temple.

A major battle for the Temple between the Romans and Judeans ends in a draw. Josephus records the names of a number of Judean heroes.

6.150-157

Earthworks built around the First Wall.

The legions build several embankments to approach the First Wall: one at the northwest corner of the inner Temple, one at the northern hall between two gates, one opposite the west portico of the outer court, and one opposite the north portico. The work is exhausting, timber having to be carried from a great distance.

6.193-219

Horrible famine. The news of Mary provokes hatred and despair.

The victims of famine are dying in countless numbers. Hungry rebels like mad dogs stagger from house to house searching for food. Shoe leather and grass is gnawed on. Famine reaches its ultimate depth: the tale of Mary daughter of Eleazar shocks the rebels and Romans alike. "For fear of being regarded as fabricator, I would gladly have omitted this tragedy, had I not innumerable witnesses among my contemporaries." Titus vows to bury this abomination beneath the ruins of the city.

6.233-237

Titus orders the Temple gates set on fire.

"Now that Titus saw that his endeavor to spare a foreign Temple led only to the injury and slaughter of his troops," he orders the gates set on fire. The silver melts and the fire enters the woodwork and spreads to the porticoes. After a day, Titus orders the fire extinguished and a road built to the gates for the ascent of the Legions, but fires continue to burn. Two important officers of Simon's desert to the Romans.

6.229-243 *August 28 Lous/Av 9*

War council on whether to destroy the Temple.

Titus decides to save it.

Titus holds a council to decide what to do with the Temple. This council consists of his six chief staff officers: Tiberius Alexander (prefect of the forces and of Jewish descent), the commanders of Legions V, X, and XV, the prefect of the two Alexandrian legions, and the procurator of Judea. The tribunes and procurators also are called in. Some commanders recommend it be destroyed, others that it be preserved unless the rebels used it as a fortress. Titus states he would preserve the Temple at all costs, even if used as a fortress, because its beauty should be preserved as a possession of Rome.

6.244-264; Jeremiah 52:12 (contra 2 Kings 25:8)

August 29 Lous/Av 10

Roman soldier sets fire to the interior of the rooms surrounding the sanctuary.

The Judeans attack the guards in the outer court through the east gate, are forced back to the inner court after a three hour battle. Titus withdraws to Antonia, resolving to attack the next day.

But the rebels again attack and are routed back to the sanctuary. At that moment one of the soldiers, without orders "but moved by some supernatural impulse," snatches a burning timber from a fire and throws it through a golden door on the north side of the chambers surrounding the sanctuary.

6.265

Interior of the holy house set on fire.

Titus is given the news. He attempts to order the fire extinguished, but is either not heard or is ignored. Battle rages around the altar. Titus enters the sanctuary to view its contents. The interior is not yet on fire, and seeing that the building can still be saved, Titus makes a second attempt to have the fire put out. But when he exits the building, one who had entered with him thrusts a firebrand through the hinges of the gate. The interior of the sanctuary is now on fire. "Thus, against Caesar's wishes, was the Temple set on fire."

6.271 ff

The Temple is consumed by fire.

Josephus provides an eyewitness account of the destruction, the fire and the noise. "You would indeed have thought that the Temple-hill was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame, yet the stream of blood was more copious than the flames." He observes that this was on the very day and month that the First Temple had been burnt by the Babylonians.

6.281-288

Crowds of people burned alive on the porticoes following a false prophet.

The Romans burn all the buildings in the Temple complex, destroying the treasure chambers of the wealthy. The populace, especially poor women and children, are persuaded by a "false prophet" to go up to the Temple court to receive deliverance from the Deity. The crowd of about 6,000 climbs onto the porticoes, which are set on fire by the Romans. All perish.

6.316-322

Roman sacrifices performed in the Temple.

Romans carry standards into the sanctuary at the east gate and sacrifice to them. So much gold has been taken from Temple that the price of gold throughout Syria is halved. The priests are executed by Titus.

6.323-355

Rebels in the city refuse to surrender.

The rebels flee into the city and ask for council with Titus. Titus lectures them and offers to spare their lives if they surrender. The rebels reply they cannot accept his offer, having sworn never to do so. Instead they ask to be freed into the desert. An angry Titus ends the talks, orders troops to burn and sack the city.

6.374 *September 7*

Siege of the Upper City.

Titus orders new earthworks built to attack the Upper City. Four legions work on the west side of the city opposite the royal palace. Syrian auxiliaries build embankments to the east of the Upper City.

6.379-6.383

Rebels and their families sold as slaves.

The chiefs of the Idumaeans send emissaries to surrender to Titus, but Simon discovers the plot and executes the conspirators. There are masses of deserters to the Romans, most of whose lives are spared by Titus. Over 40,000 captured citizens are released by the Romans, but the rebels, including women and children, are sold as slaves. Due to the excess of supply, they are priced low.

6.387-391; 7.162

Temple treasures recovered.

Priest Jesus ben Thebuthi delivers some of the Temple treasures to Titus in exchange for protection. Included are two candelabra, solid gold and massive tables, bowls, and platters, the veils, the high-priests garments including the precious stones, and many other items. The Temple treasurer Phineas provides more, including priestly clothing and incense. The treasures are eventually displayed by Vespasian in Rome in the newly constructed Temple of Peace.

6.392-402; 6.409-413; 6.403-408

September 25-26 Gorpiaeus/Elul 7-8

Romans take the Upper City. Jerusalem Sacked.

The earthworks against the Upper City are completed after 18 days. The rebels panic, fleeing or surrendering without a fight despite their superior position in the massive Herodian towers. Many hide in the ravine below Siloam and then in the underground passages.

The Romans now command the whole city, plant standards on the walls, and loot the city. All Jerusalem is in flames.

6.414-419

All people in Jerusalem enslaved or killed.

Everyone in Jerusalem is made a prisoner; any that are armed are put to death, as are the old and feeble. Fronto is appointed to determine the fate of the rest: those under age seventeen are sold, the strong are sent to the work camps, others to the games.

6.420-422

1,000,000 dead.

Number of prisoners taken in the entire war: 97,000. Died during siege: 1,100,000. This large number during the siege was due to the Passover celebration, as Jews from many countries had been in the city for the festival when the siege began. Josephus tells skeptical readers this number is consistent with Cestius' population estimate under Nero.

6.430-43; 7.26-36

Simon and John captured.

Simon hides in the underground passages with his close followers. He attempts to tunnel his way out, but eventually gives up and arises out of the ground at the site of the Temple wearing a royal purple robe. He surrenders quietly to General Terentius Rufus. This alerts the Romans to the passages, which are then searched; 2,000 bodies are found. John gives up from starvation. John is sentenced to life in prison, while Simon is to be executed at the triumph in Rome.

6.434; 7.1-4

Jerusalem and the Temple demolished.

Romans set fire to the outlying quarters of the city and tear the walls to the ground. Titus orders the whole city and Temple to be razed to the ground, leaving only the tallest towers and a small portion of the wall on the west. The Xth legion is left to garrison Jerusalem.