

Excerpts from *The Jewish War* by historian and eyewitness, Josephus  
[To be read alongside **Matthew 24-25**, where Jesus tells His Disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem.]

### The Destruction of Jerusalem

**6:1** Thus did the miseries of Jerusalem grow worse and worse every day, and the seditious were still more irritated by the calamities they were under, even while the famine preyed upon themselves, after it had preyed upon the people. <sup>2</sup> And, indeed, the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench, which was a hindrance to those who would make sallies out of the city and fight the enemy... <sup>4</sup> but as they had their right hands already polluted with the murders of their own countrymen,

<sup>10</sup> *“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other...”*

and in that condition ran out to fight with foreigners, they seem to me to have cast a reproach upon God himself, as if he were too slow in punishing them...<sup>6</sup> And truly, the very view itself of the country was a melancholy thing; for those places which were before adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become a desolate country all over, and its trees were all cut down: <sup>7</sup> nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change; <sup>8</sup> for the war had laid all the signs of beauty quite waste: nor, if anyone that had known the place before had come suddenly to it now, would he have known it again...

*“Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. <sup>2</sup> “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*

### The Famine in the City

<sup>193</sup> Now of those who perished by famine in the city, the number was prodigious, and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable; <sup>194</sup> for if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced immediately, and the dearest friends started fighting one with another about it, snatching from each other the most miserable supports of life. <sup>195</sup> Nor would men believe that those who were dying had no food; but the robbers would search them when they were expiring, lest anyone should have concealed food in their bosoms, and counterfeited dying: <sup>196</sup> nay, these robbers gaped for want, and ran about stumbling and staggering along like mad dogs, and reeling against the doors of the houses like drunken men; they would also, in the great distress they were in, rush into the very same houses two or three times in one and the same day. <sup>197</sup> Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew everything, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch, and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from belts and shoes; and the very leather which belonged to their shields they pulled off and gnawed: <sup>198</sup> the very wisps of old hay became food to some; and some gathered up fibers, and sold a very small weight of them for four Attic [drachmas].

<sup>6</sup> *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth pains.”*

<sup>199</sup> But why do I describe the shameless impudence that the famine brought on men in their eating inanimate things, while I am going to relate a matter of fact, the like to which no history relates, either among the Greeks or Barbarians? It is horrible to speak of it, and incredible when heard.

### The Resorting to Cannibalism

<sup>201</sup> There was a certain woman that dwelt beyond Jordan--her name was Mary...[she] was with them besieged therein at this time...what food she had contrived to save, had been also carried off by the rapacious guards, who came every day running into her house for that purpose... if she found any food, she perceived her labors were for others, and not for herself; and it was now...impossible for...to find any more food, while the famine pierced through her very bowels and marrow... She then attempted a most unnatural thing; <sup>205</sup> and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said, “O you miserable infant! for whom shall I preserve you in this war, this famine, and this sedition? <sup>206</sup> As to the war with the Romans, if they preserve our lives, we must be slaves! This famine also will kill us, even before that slavery comes upon us; yet are these seditious rogues more terrible than both of the other. <sup>207</sup> Come on; be my food, and be a fury to these seditious rebels...” <sup>208</sup> As soon as she had said this, she slew her son; and then roasted him, and eat the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. <sup>209</sup> Upon this the [rebels] came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied, that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them; and with this uncovered what was left of her son. <sup>210</sup> Hereupon they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight; when she said to them, “This is my own son, and what has been done was my own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself!...the whole city was [told] of this horrid action immediately; and while everyone laid this

miserable case before their own eyes, they trembled, as if this unheard of action had been done by themselves. <sup>213</sup> So those that were thus distressed by the famine were very desirous to die; and those already dead were esteemed happy, because they had not lived long enough either to hear or to see such miseries.

*<sup>19</sup> "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! <sup>20</sup> Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. <sup>21</sup> For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again."*

### **The Temple Fire**

...<sup>271</sup> While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those who were caught were slain; nor was there a pity of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children, and old men, and common persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went around all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those who made supplication for their lives, as those who defended themselves by fighting.

*<sup>15</sup> "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-- let the reader understand-- <sup>16</sup> then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."*

<sup>272</sup> The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those who were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very large, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire. Nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise...<sup>276</sup> for the ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of those bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them...

*<sup>28</sup> "Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures/eagles will gather."*

### **The False Prophets and Foreboding Signs**

<sup>285</sup> A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. <sup>286</sup> Now there was then a great number of false prophets bribed by the tyrants to impose on the people, who announced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. <sup>288</sup> Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them.

*Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."*

*<sup>11</sup> "...and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."*

*<sup>23</sup> "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. <sup>24</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible. <sup>25</sup> See, I have told you ahead of time."*

<sup>289</sup> Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year...<sup>290</sup> Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war...on the eighth day of the month of Nisan...and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone around the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright daytime; which lasted for half an hour. <sup>291</sup> This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskillful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it...<sup>296</sup> So these publicly declared that the signal predicted the desolation that was coming upon them.

*<sup>27</sup> "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."*

*<sup>29</sup> "Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'*

Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the twenty-first day of the month of Iyyar <sup>297</sup> a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those who saw it, <sup>298</sup> and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sunset, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen <sup>299</sup> running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities.

<sup>30</sup> *"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.*

Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise,<sup>300</sup> and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "We are departing from here"...

<sup>31</sup> *And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."*

### **The Lament of Jesus, Son of Ananus**

...But, what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a common man and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for everyone to make tabernacles to God in the temple,<sup>301</sup> began suddenly to cry aloud, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, and a voice against this whole people!" This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city.<sup>302</sup> However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet he did not either say anything for himself, or anything peculiar to those who chastised him, but still went on with the same words which he cried before.<sup>303</sup> Hereupon our rulers supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator;<sup>304</sup> where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet he did not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!"...

<sup>9</sup> *"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."*

<sup>306</sup> Now, during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near anyone of the citizens, nor was seen by them while he said so; but he every day uttered these lamentable words, as if it were his premeditated vow, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!"<sup>307</sup> Nor did he give ill words to any of those who beat him every day, nor good words to those who gave him food; but this was his reply to all men, and indeed no other than a melancholy presage of what was to come.<sup>308</sup> This cry of his was the loudest at the festivals; and he continued this dirge for seven years and five months, without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he saw his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased;<sup>309</sup> for as he was going around upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, "Woe, woe to the city again, and to the people, and to the holy house!" And just as he added at the last, "Woe, woe to myself also!" there came a stone out of one of the engines, and smote him, and killed him immediately; and as he was uttering the very same presages he gave up the ghost.

<sup>32</sup> *"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.<sup>33</sup> Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.<sup>34</sup> I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.<sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

### **The Result**

<sup>404</sup> But when [the Roman soldiers] went in numbers into the lanes of the city with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook without mercy, and set fire to the houses where the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest;

<sup>37</sup> *"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.<sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark;<sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.<sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.<sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.<sup>42</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*

<sup>405</sup> 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 anything.<sup>406</sup> But although they had this pity for such as were killed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those who were still alive, but they ran everyone 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.

<sup>17</sup> *"Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house.<sup>18</sup> Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak."*