

WHAT OF CHRISTIANS IN ISRAEL
70 AD AS THE NATION
LAY IN RUINS?
JAN LILLEBY

□□□□ The last we learn when reading Acts history, ending with Chapter 28, verse 31, is what was going on□□ *with Paul the apostle to the Gentiles*□□ as he stayed in Rome!□□ Acts did not end by giving us□□ *Jerusalem*, did it? We cannot find a word of what was going on in Israel, for not to mention Jerusalem.□□ To learn of that, we have to read the books of Flavius Josephus.

When jumping to□□ *Ephesians and Colossians*, which are the writings that follow□□ Acts in the□□ *timeline*...we find not Israel,□□ nor Jerusalem at all. Not in any topic or issue which is taken up by Paul.

You cannot find Paul having written: 'Please remember and pray for Israel and for Jerusalem.' Or 'pray for the poor persecuted assembly at Jerusalem'. He simply mentions all believers – wherever they might be – as□□ *saints, and that we as believers should pray for all the saints (Col. 4:1-4)*. Paul also told the Colossians to pray for him and an open door for the Gospel, the preaching of the Mystery...

As Luke concluded his Acts history, it says that Paul lived there (Rome)□□ for two years as he still kept on with preaching the Kingdom Gospel of the millennial promised reign with Jesus as their Messiah King at Jerusalem. The dispensation of the Church as we know it, was not yet revealed...it should not come until about 63 AD, for which cause Paul wrote the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.

Ampl. Bible says,

"After this Paul lived there for two entire years (at his own expense)□□ in his own rented lodging, and he welcomed all who came to him. Preaching to them the kingdom of God and teaching them about the Lord Jesus Christ with boldness and quite openly, and without being molested or hindered."

□ Acts 28:30, 31.

We know how it had been for Paul as he left Jerusalem behind□□ *for good*: He actually fled the city to save his life! By the assistance of the Roman soldiers as we can read in Acts 23:30-35.

I have written an article-series□□ (two parts)□□ on Paul's departure from Jerusalem and his arrival at Rome,□□ *"Paul's Journey To Rome Was Entirely Piloted by the Lord"*.□□ You can learn of much better□□ *details*□□ if you read it.□□

THE MESSIANIC ASSEMBLY AT JERUSALEM

It is difficult to obtain absolute correct information/history of what happened to this important congregation in Bible history.

It kind of vanishes 'without a trace'...into the fog of war history as the rebellion against Rome started in 66 AD. However there exists variable tales on what is called the 'Pella Tradition' – namely, that the majority of the Jerusalem assembly managed to escape up to Pella in the Decapolis Province around 64-65 AD, thus escaping the looming rebellion to come against Rome. It is much disputed, and it seems to be more of a loose tale or human tradition, than plain truth and history. But it is evident that the killing of James and the elders in 62 AD must have caused the assembly to split up in fractions – some fled in that direction, others fled to the opposite direction and so forth and so on. Fear and confusion does that to people. It was hard times.

But we know (Flavius Josephus' books *The Antiquities of the Jews*, and *The Jewish War*) – that after Paul left the city in 58 AD in custody of Rome's justice system, the assembly was persecuted by the Pharisees and Sadducees for their persistent preaching of Jesus as the Messiah of God.

The chaotic circumstances which took place when Paul was tried murdered by the Asian Jews at the temple site, had stirred up the opponents to the church.

Paul had arrived Rome in the spring of 60 AD, surviving that shipwrecking at Malta (Acts 27), it so happened that about two years (18 months) later, Governor Porcius Festus got very sick, as to the extremes of him going to Rome for cure if possible. But he never recovered, and died in Rome, says historians.



But the absence of Porcius Festus from Jerusalem, in 62 AD, made High Priest Ananias II and his flock to attack the Messianic assembly (Festus would not have permitted this if he had been present) and they had James and the elders stoned to death. It happened as we read of Paul first having a dispute with Sanhedrin at Rome, Acts 28:25-28, but still kept on trying for about two years more, to convince these Jewish leaders – see verses 30 and 31, as I already quoted above. IMAGE: Porcius Festus, a wise Roman official, one of a very few!

EDITED FOR MORE DETAILED HISTORICAL FACT ON THE KILLINGS,

- date 24th March 2023:

Festus died at Rome in 62 AD, eventually late in 61 AD. The mentioned Procurator below, **Gessius Florus**, did not actually follow Festus' death from the office. He followed the appointed Procurator (by Nero) who was **Lucceius Albinus**. He was sent by Nero as he was at Alexandria, Egypt. Because of a relative short time of travel up from Egypt, Nero managed to have a new Procurator filling the vacant office after Festus. Time was of essence! But as Albinus was on his travel up to Caesarea he got the news (a delegation came to him while he still was on his way) of the illegal actions taken by Ananias II killing James

and the elders, and was infuriated. This is all told by Josephus in his book work "The Antiquities of the Jews" in Book XX, chapt. 9. The priesthood in Jerusalem had to have the consent of the Procurator before eventually punishing anyone. Just as we learn from the case of Jesus, arrested by Caiaphas – he had to bring Jesus in before Pontius Pilate for his consent to put Jesus to death. King Agrippa II punished Ananias II by firing him from his position of High Priest, and placed a follower in his place, Jesus – son of Damneus.

These two incidents of serious character regarding Israel as a nation for God and the stern sad situation of their unbelief and persecution of the Jews who believed on Jesus as Messiah, - made God cut all contact with His nation and He looked upon them as reprobate, fallen away from Him entirely.

Israel had thus come to the 'point-of-no-return' – and soon there would inevitably come doom and destruction, just as Jesus warned of in His prophetic parable of the 'King's Servants' in Mat. 22:7. God would send His soldiers against them and kill those murderers and burn down their city! This happened in 70 AD, after almost 4 years of siege, as Titus' army crushed them and destroyed Jerusalem and much of Judea. Historians hold that about 1, 1 million people were killed during this catastrophic misfortune due to Israel's uproar and rebellion against Rome. Yet: Jesus **clearly warned** of this disaster coming, because of the persecution of His believers! Thus we learn that the destruction of Israel was a result of their rebellion, but it came as a punishment for having killed the Lord's innocent servants, the apostles and many of their followers. This is serious stuff folks.

In 64 AD it is noted that the officer who took the vacant seat which had been occupied by Albinus, was Gessius Florus, a governor who was very brutal and not a peace-maker like Festus had been. Albinus had been sent to become Governor of Mauretania Tingitana. Albinus held office there until 69 AD.

Florus governed Judea and Jerusalem from 64 to 66 AD. As always, that office operated from the sea port of Caesarea and the Roman garrison there. Only 44 kilometer west of Jerusalem.



Gessius Florus had the same indifference to the Jewish populace as Pilate but did not have the political intellect to calm the tense Jewish society when things turned sour. In other words, as Josephus states, Florus was incompetent. So it seems that it was this bad governor who contributed to stir up the anger of the Jews. He became probably the 'match stick' to light the fuse!

The artificial class divide, the corruption of

both the local and senate governments in the area, and the unbridled disdain for the Jewish people— **brought about a riot in Caesarea in 66 CE.** There, the Zealots, a band of un-Hellenized anti-elite Jews, wiped out the Roman-backed elite Greeks that had inhabited the area.

The incompetence of that new governor came to its peak. He went plundering!— He took out his anger and revenge by occupying the temple site. What lunacy!

Gessius Florus, in a rage of— *scorned hubris*, plundered the Holy Temple to fund the cult of Caesar and erected statues of Emperor Nero and himself with the money he took. This obviously enraged the Jewish people. The temple was not only the center— of religious and social life for the Jewish people, but it was a sign of God's presence in the Holy City. When Florus raided the temple and ordered the residents nearby to follow his form of polytheism around it, it was the biggest insult to the Jewish religion. The Jewish people rebelled. Random attacks on Roman citizens followed throughout Judaea, particularly in the northern towns. There, in areas such as Nabata, the Jewish people overthrew the Roman Government.

Compare these dramatic events with the chaos caused by Paul's visit— in 58 AD near the same temple: They wanted to 'keep the temple clean from Gentile dogs' and jumped Paul trying to kill him. They accused him of having brought a Gentile into the temple, the Greek Trophimus, but they lied. But in 66 AD – 8 years later, the temple-fanatics got God's 'pay-back' – Gentiles plundered their 'Holy Temple'. I don't know, but maybe Paul somehow got word of this, since he stayed in Rome the last years of his life. What must he have thought of hearing this?



But as Jerusalem was entirely taken out and burnt on the 10th— of September 70 AD (which was a Sunday) – the very same calendar day as when the Babylonian king had burnt the city in 586 BC and taken Jews captive to Babylon!

There cannot be much chance— of escaping such a— violent destruction of Jerusalem and Judea. When the Roman Army finally managed to crack the city wall open, they took full control of it, and every opponent was killed, even men who did not put up resistance were killed. It was total rage, total war.— IMAGE:— Temple is looted and set to burn; painting by— *Francesco Hayez, 1867.*

Sorry to say, I am afraid that those among the Christian believers present there when it happened, were killed as well. War kills both those guilty and those who may be innocent. War is merciless...anything can happen, to anyone.

There is not one clue – regarding Paul and his preaching of the free Grace Gospel – that this Gospel ever found its way into Israel. Not before the destruction, and absolutely *not* after the destruction. I am not even certain if Paul's Grace Gospel have found its way into Israel *in our time either*. Maybe, maybe not...?

Paul could *theoretically* have sent epistles to believers inside Israel, but we cannot find any such writings whatsoever. It seems to me that Christ had given up on Israel in a manner of total anger, total wrath – a righteous wrath. They had killed His servants, whom He loved, and they had persecuted His believers for decades in a most vicious manner. The destruction in 70 AD was an expression of the fierce wrath of God Almighty and His Son Jesus Christ. No doubt.

Paul never got the opportunity to preach that Grace Gospel there, but he managed to spread that Gospel all over the southern and west Turkey, called *Asia-Minor* back then; where we in Paul's time find the cities of Ephesus, Hierapolis, Laodicea, Philadelphia, Sardis, Colossae and others. He had his Gospel out almost *twenty years before* anyone could buy and read Matthew's Gospel story (it came out in 80-85 AD). John's Gospel came even later.

Inside the land of Israel, the only Gospel which has been preached was the one of the *Kingdom of God* on earth, the millennial kingdom which shall be ruled by Jesus after His Second Advent. Peter and the eleven had this mission, not Paul. (Gal. 2:7, 8). That Kingdom-message ended entirely at Rome, Acts 28:25-28. They had fallen from God as a nation. The point of no return had been reached.

The free international Grace Gospel according to Paul's revelation of the Mystery (Eph. 3:1-9) never was preached in Israel. Not by any of the apostles, nor any of their followers. I am quite sure.