

SESSION 3: APOSTLES & FALL OF JERUSALEM - READINGS

Since therefore many even of the ruling class believed,⁶ there was an uproar among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said there was a danger that the entire people would expect Jesus as the Christ. So they collected and said to James: 'Be good enough to restrain the people, for they have gone astray after Jesus in the belief that he is the Christ. Be good enough to make the facts about Jesus clear to all who come for the Passover Day. We all accept what you say: we can vouch for it, and so can all the people, that you are a righteous man and take no one at his face value. So make it clear to the crowd that they must not go astray as regards Jesus: the whole people and all of us accept what you say. So take your stand on the Temple parapet, so that from that height you may be easily seen, and your words audible to the whole

1. See Num. iv. 1-5, where the Nazirite rules are laid down; see also Luke i. 15.
2. A Hebrew or Aramaic word, as yet unexplained.
3. Reference unknown. 4. John x. 9. 5. Rev. xxii. 12. 6. John xii. 42.

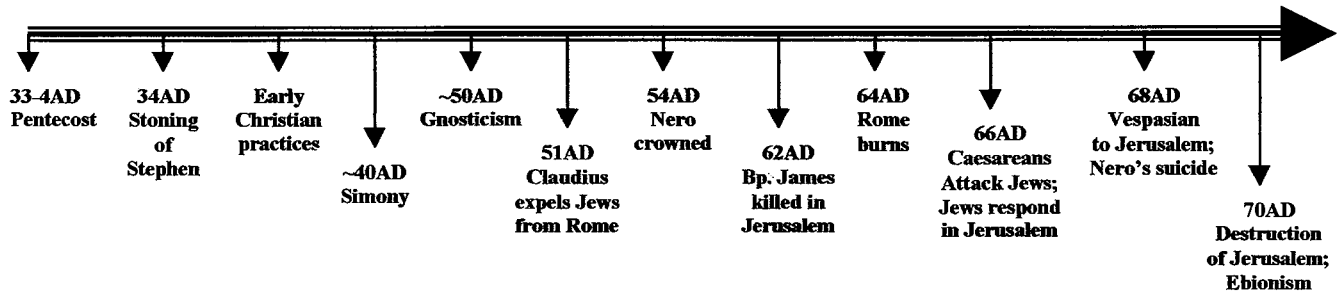
people. For because of the Passover all the tribes have forgathered, and the Gentiles too.'

So the Scribes and Pharisees made James stand on the Sanctuary parapet and shouted to him: 'Righteous one, whose word we are all obliged to accept, the people are going astray after Jesus who was crucified; so tell us what is meant by "the door of Jesus".' He replied as loudly as he could: 'Why do you question me about the Son of Man? I tell you, He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and He will come on the clouds of heaven.'¹ Many were convinced, and gloried in James's testimony, crying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' Then again the Scribes and Pharisees said to each other: 'We made a bad mistake in affording such testimony to Jesus. We had better go up and throw him down, so that they will be frightened and not believe him.' 'Ho, ho!' they called out, 'even the Righteous one has gone astray! - fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah:

Let us remove the Righteous one, for he is unprofitable to us.
Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their works,²

So they went up and threw down the Righteous one. Then they said to each other 'Let us stone James the Righteous', and began to stone him, as in spite of his fall he was still alive. But he turned and knelt, uttering the words: 'I beseech Thee, Lord God and Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.'³ While they pelted him with stones, one of the descendants of Rechab the son of Rachabim - the priestly family to which Jeremiah the Prophet bore witness,⁴ called out: 'Stop! what are you doing? the Righteous one is praying for you.' Then one of them, a fuller, took the club which he used to beat out the clothes, and brought it down on the head of the Righteous one. Such was his martyrdom. He was buried on the spot, by the Sanctuary, and his headstone is still there by the Sanctuary. He has proved a true witness to Jews and Gentiles alike that Jesus is the Christ.

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PP 59-60



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There was a woman, Mary the daughter of Eleazar, who lived east of Jordan in the village of Bathazor ('House of Hyssop'). She was of good family and very rich, and had fled with the rest of the population to Jerusalem, where she shared in the horrors of the siege. Most of the property that she had packed up and moved from Peraea into the city had been plundered by the party chiefs; the remnants of her treasures, and any food she had managed to obtain, were being carried off in daily raids by their henchmen. The wretched woman was filled with uncontrollable fury, and let loose a stream of abuse and curses that enraged the looters against her. When neither resentment nor pity caused anyone to kill her, and she grew tired of finding food for others – and whichever way she turned it was almost impossible to find – and while hunger was eating her heart out and rage was consuming her still faster, she yielded to the

suggestions of fury and necessity, and in defiance of all natural feeling laid hands on her own child, a babe at the breast. 'Poor little mite!' she cried. 'In war, famine, and civil strife, why do I keep you alive? With the Romans there is only slavery, even if we are alive when they come; but famine is forestalling slavery, and the partisans are crueller than either. Come, you must be food for me, to the partisans an avenging spirit, and to the world a tale, the only thing left to fill up the measure of Jewish misery.' As she spoke she killed her son, then roasted him and ate one half, concealing and saving up the rest.

At once the partisans appeared, and sniffing the unholy smell, threatened that if she did not produce what she had prepared they would kill her on the spot. She replied that she had kept a fine helping for them, and uncovered what was left of her child. They, overcome with instant horror and amazement, could not take their eyes off the sight. But she went on: 'This child is my own, and the deed is mine too. Help yourselves: I have had my share. Don't be softer than a woman or more tender-hearted than a mother! But if you are squeamish, and don't approve of my sacrifice – well, I have eaten half, so you may as well leave me the rest.' That was the last straw, and they went away quivering. They had never before shrunk from anything, and did not much like giving up even this food to the mother. From that moment the entire city could think of nothing else but this abomination; everyone saw the tragedy before his own eyes, and shuddered as if the crime was his. The one desire of the starving was for death: how they envied those who had gone before seeing or hearing of these appalling horrors!

The Jews, unable now to leave the city, were deprived of all hope of survival. The famine became more intense, and devoured whole houses and families. The roofs were covered with women and infants too weak to stand, the streets full of old men already dead. Young men and boys, swollen with hunger, haunted the squares like ghosts and fell wherever faintness overcame them. To bury their kinsfolk was beyond the strength of the sick, and those who were fit shirked the task because of the number of the dead and uncertainty about their own fate; for many while burying others fell dead themselves, and many set out for their graves before their hour struck. In their misery no weeping or lamentation was heard; hunger stifled emotion; with dry eyes those who were slow to die watched those whose end came sooner. Deep silence enfolded the city, and a darkness burdened with death. Worse still were the bandits, who broke like tomb-robbers into the houses of the dead and stripped the bodies, snatching off their wrappings, then came out laughing. They tried the points of their swords on the corpses, and even transfixed some of those who lay helpless but still alive, to test the steel. But if any begged for a sword-thrust to end their sufferings, they contemptuously left them to die of hunger. Everyone as he breathed his last fixed his eyes on the Temple, turning his back on the partisans he was leaving alive. The latter at first ordered the dead to be buried at public expense, as they could not bear the stench; later, when this proved impossible, they threw them from the walls into the valleys. When in the course of his rounds Titus saw them choked with dead, and a putrid stream trickling from under the decomposing bodies, he groaned, and uplifting his hands called God to witness that this was not his doing . . .

I cannot refrain from saying what my feelings dictate. I think that if the Romans had delayed their attack on these sacrilegious ruffians, either the ground would have opened and swallowed up the city, or a flood would have overwhelmed it, or lightning would have destroyed it like Sodom. For it produced a generation far more godless than those who perished thus, a generation whose mad folly involved the nation in ruin.¹

Josephus, The Jewish War