

HOW TO REACH THE JEW FOR CHRIST

by

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CHAPTER TEN

JEWISH HISTORY IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA

This lesson covers the history of the Jewish people, under Rome, from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ until the conversion of Constantine in 313 A.D.

- A. The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus.
- B. The Jews in Rome.
- C. The Jews Outside of Rome.

A. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY TITUS

Shortly after the birth of our Lord, the talented but conscienceless Herod died. The kingdom was divided among his three sons, Archelaus, Antipas and Philip. Judea came under the rule of Archelaus, but he was soon deposed by the Romans (6 A.D.) and Judea was governed by Roman procurators. These men, who were appointed by Rome, had no appreciation of Jewish characteristics. This ignorance constantly aroused ill-feeling, especially over religious matters.

Pontius Pilate (26-36 A.D.) is the best known of these procurators. His conduct caused innumerable clashes with the people. His unstable character is shown in his behavior at the trial of Jesus. Two forces were at work: the suppressed theocratic consciousness of the Jews diametrically opposed the claims of the Caesars. A conflict was inevitable.

In the year 40 A.D., the Emperor Caligula ordered his image set up in the Temple area. Open rupture was averted only when Agrippa I interceded in behalf of the Jews at Rome. Agrippa's moderation was not characteristic of his successors, Felix, Festus and Agrippa II.

In Jerusalem, the Zealots, a party who demanded liberation from Rome, stung by continual insults, seized and fortified the Temple area. A Roman force was dispatched to suppress the incipient revolution. They were met at Beth-Horon and almost annihilated. The victory inflamed the whole country, but their rejoicings were premature. In 68 A.D., the Romans under Vespasian conquered Perea, while internal strife divided the Jews between Zealots and the Moderates. In the year 70 A.D., a few days before the Passover, the army of Titus appeared before Jerusalem and attacked from the north.

In fourteen days the outer wall was taken and a few days later the second wall fell. The final wall afforded the greatest resistance. But famine seized the defenders. In spite of this continued resistance, the people still looked for deliverance by God. But the One who could have helped them had been rejected, and the catastrophic events which He had prophesied took place. A Roman soldier, whether by accident or design, set the Temple afire, and the Roman legions became insane and butchered men, women and children. Jerusalem, the city over which our Lord had wept, was now waste.

It looked as though Jewish history had ended.

B. THE JEWS IN ROME

After the destruction of Jerusalem, Titus contentedly rested in the belief that he had destroyed the Jewish commonwealth. To some Gentiles who urged still sterner measures, he replied, "How can this be done? Their country is now destroyed, and no other place will receive them."

Titus was mistaken. The Jews outlived their conquerors. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans—all in turn had wreaked their vengeance upon the Jews, and what is the testimony of history? Over these ancient empires the waves of time have swept, and buried them in the gulf of oblivion, while the Jewish people, storm-tossed in seas which often raged with cyclonic fury, remain rocklike in imperishable and solitary grandeur.

In Rome the Jews formed themselves into separate communities which soon became influential in the government. The Jews gained much influence, and many proselytes of eminence in the heathen world adopted the Jewish religion.

C. THE JEWS OUTSIDE OF ROME

Outside of Rome, however, the picture was different. Insurrection followed insurrection. The beautiful synagogue in Alexandria was destroyed. In Syria and Asia Minor a new revolt began; the Jewish spirit fanned by a Messianic hope centered in Bar Kochba, made it necessary for Trajan to send his ablest general, Julius Severus, from Britain to Palestine. The revolt was quenched, but only after the Romans had wreaked fearful vengeance upon the Mediterranean Jews. A poll tax was levied, and circumcision and observance of the Sabbath forbidden.

The Jews did not fare well under the heathen emperors of Rome, but it is a melancholy fact that their lot was better under the heathen, than under the so-called "Christian emperors" of Rome. This story will be the basis of our next lesson.

THE HISTORY OF JEWISH MISSIONS IN THIS PERIOD

"Although the kingdom of God which Christ had come to realize was to extend, not only over Israel, but over the whole earth, Jesus had, nevertheless, restricted His personal activity to Israel: and had even commanded His disciples not to go in the way of the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5).

“It was not until He was about to depart from the earth that He commanded them to teach and baptize all people. The Twelve, however, directed their efforts primarily to the Jews: and the earliest Christian congregations were composed entirely of Jews and proselytes to Christianity. Apostolic missions among the Jews were so successful that James could point out to Paul thousands of converted Jews (Acts 21:20). A large number of priests were also obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7), and in the congregations which Paul founded in Asia Minor, Greece, Crete, etc., the nucleus was Jewish. That the conversion of the Jews was not lost sight of in the second or third century is proved by the dialogue of Justin Martyr with the Jew Trypho and Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos*” (*The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia*, Vol. VI, page 177). ‘

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FOR FURTHER VOLUNTARY STUDY

Many earnest students of the Word fail to understand the relation of the Jews to the Early Church. They fail to distinguish between national and individual responsibility. Wilkinson’s book, *Israel, My Glory*, is a work which no missionary to the Jews can afford to be without. Study especially Chapter III, “The Rejection of Israel: Its Causes, Consequences and Duration.”

EXAMINATION

1. Who were the Roman procurators? How did they cause trouble in Palestine?
2. What events led to the destruction of the Temple?
3. Name five nations who had conquered Palestine?
4. Who was Bar Kochba?
5. What do you know about the history of Jewish missions of this period?

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