

Other Cities Rome Obliterated

Commentary for May 1, 2021 — ... Before Jerusalem Was Annihilated

In 70 AD the armies of Rome under General Titus, the oldest son of Emperor Vespasian, gave the order to obliterate the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus and Titus both said (as quoted in Josephus' book *Wars of the Jews*) that when the destruction was completed, no one who knew Jerusalem would have thought a great city of many tens of thousands ever existed on those hills.

This action by Titus was done deliberately as a matter of policy. It was done to destroy the focus of the rebellion, and to warn other Jews around the empire not to rebel. There were large populations of Jews in Egypt, Syria, and Rome itself. It was also a warning to other peoples in the Roman Empire. The warning was: if you rebel, this could happen to your people, your country, your city, your family, and to you. Rome will crush anyone who goes against their rule.

This policy worked, from a human point of view. A united Roman Empire withstood all opponents for another three hundred years before it lost the cohesion (especially in the Western portion of the Roman Empire) and the important internal lines of trade, control, and hegemony over the waters of the Mediterranean Sea that ceased to be a Roman "lake." It took repeated attacks by outside forces and migrations of peoples to end the Western Empire.¹ In the meantime, Roman policy of completely destroying rebellious cities and territories as warnings was seen as effective against subject peoples who might rebel against Rome.

It Happened Before to Two Major Cities in the Roman World

Carthage lost two wars against Rome. A pretext was found for Rome to go to war against Carthage in the Third Punic War of 149 to **146 BC**. Carthage was conquered and totally demolished. It ceased to exist. When Greeks went to war against Rome, the city of Corinth also in **146 BC** was conquered and totally demolished. It ceased to exist.

Carthage and Corinth both were important maritime cities. Also, they were "**two of the largest cities and most ancient cities of the Mediterranean world** [and] **within a few months**" were both destroyed in 146 BC, just like Jerusalem in 70 AD.² Carthage and Corinth were turned into fallow ground where agriculture would be done with great stone blocks in the way. It was nothing personal, it was a calculated policy by Rome.

Carthage and Corinth were intentionally "re-founded" by Julius Caesar one hundred years after their destruction. Retired Roman army veterans were settled in both areas to reward

¹ The Eastern Roman Empire survived another 900+ years, expanding and contracting until 1453 AD.

² Nicholas Purcell, 1995. "[On the Sacking of Carthage and Corinth](#)," in D. Innes, et al, eds., *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his 75th Birthday* (Oxford), pp. 133–148.

their military service. Roman Carthage soon exported food to Rome. Roman Corinth protected the canal through the Isthmus of Corinth that shortened transit time through Greece to the eastern coast of Greece, Anatolia (Turkey today), and to the Black Sea.³ It also became a wide-open city, like New Orleans or Las Vegas today where “anything goes.”

By the time the apostle Paul arrived in Corinth to preach the Gospel to Gentiles, he had much work to do. Eating meat sacrificed to idols was a minor problem when he preached to the Corinthian *ekklesia*. Personal vice, financial vice, sexual vice, violence, as well as religious idolatry, religious prostitution, and religious demonism — all had strong roots in Corinth.

In the end Rome rebuilt Carthage with Roman citizens and it flourished. Corinth began again with Roman citizens, and later Greek families came. The city of Corinth flourished again.

Jerusalem, Titus, and Josephus

“... we know that **Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple without evident regrets**. [The Roman historian] **Tacitus agrees with Josephus in describing the temple as a virtual fortress** occupied by Eleazar’s and John’s fighters (*Antiquities* 5.13). ... **Titus’ legionary commanders agree that ‘the law of war’ made it a fair target: ‘once a fortress, no longer a shrine’** (*War* 6.239). ... **We may be confident that the Flavians⁴ had no more qualms about Jerusalem’s temple than earlier Romans had felt over temples in Corinth or Carthage**. ... (*War* 7.158–161).

Recall the centrality of the temple furniture in the parade and on the surviving arch [of Titus in Rome], as well as Vespasian’s coveting of these objects (*War* 7.158–61). **The Epitome of Dio shows a Roman perspective and reluctant soldiers to advance** (65/66.6.2). **The Flavians were not sorry about their destruction or its temple. They exploited it to the full.**”

• **Mason, *A History of the Jewish War*, pp. 501–502**⁵

Estimates range from 7%–10% of the Roman Empire population was Jewish — a large and wealthy population spread throughout the Roman Empire in the Jewish Diaspora (for example, 1 Peter 1:1). Jews continued to rebel after 70 AD. In “Kitos War” (115–117) Jews slaughtered Roman garrisons in Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Cyprus while a large Roman army fought in Parthia. Other Roman legions were brought in to crush these rebellions.

The vicious “Bar Kochba revolt” (132–136 AD) and Rome’s response depopulated Judean communities even more than during the Jewish rebellion of 70 AD. According to Cassius Dio, 580,000 Jews died, and 985 villages were destroyed. Jewish communities of Judea were devastated to an extent which some scholars describe as a genocide. (See Wikipedia, “[Jewish–Roman Wars](#).”) Jerusalem was rebuilt (at first Jews were forbidden) during Hadrian’s reign (117 to 138 AD).

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³ Purcell, “On the Sacking of Carthage and Corinth,” 133. See also Sarah Davies, “[Carthage, Corinth, & 146 BCE: Shifting Paradigms of Roman Imperium](#).”

⁴ Three Roman emperors made up the “Flavian dynasty”: Vespasian (69–79 AD), his eldest son Titus (79–81 AD), followed by his younger brother Domitian (81–96 AD).

⁵ Steve Mason, *A History of the Jewish War, A.D. 66–74* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).