

The Folly of Setting Prophetic Dates

Commentary for November 1, 2021 — a Terrible Example from History

This Commentary is a fitting companion to this month's article, "JAWS of the Jerusalem Temples." The article is introduced by the "[November 2021 Newsletter](#)" that has useful background information to the article.

Below is "The Folly of Men in Setting Prophetic Dates," a reprint of an article by Dr. Ernest Martin, published in September 1981. The source was the Jewish historian Josephus, who was both a combatant and a captive eyewitness. He was given full access to Roman and captured Jewish records. He was befriended first by Emperor Vespasian between 75 and 79 AD, and his son Titus who commanded troops for the siege. *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus contains casualty figures, likely from Roman records. **Here is Dr. Martin's article:**

Josephus was an eyewitness to the Roman/Jewish War of 66 to 73 AD that Jesus Christ prophesied would take place. It was a disaster for the Jewish nation. The Jews went to war against the Romans because they believed the prophecies of Daniel were about to be fulfilled.

What a horror when they realized they had been wrong in their understanding of Daniel. What the Jews did in 66 to 70 AD is powerful teaching for us today if we will understand the lesson of history they suffered. ***People are already prophesying that major wars will break out by the end of this year (1981) or in 1982.*** Many thought disasters should have occurred back in 1972 to 1975. People want to set dates when Christ said not to do so.

The following is a record of those killed or sold into slavery because they began to date the prophecies of the Bible. This historical record has some good lessons for those today who are prone to do the same thing.

Tally of Fatalities Recorded by Josephus

Number	Notes	Source
3,600 killed	in Jerusalem by the troops of Florus (66 AD).	<i>War</i> 2:305
8,400 killed	in Joppa by the troops of Cestius Gallus (66 AD).	<i>War</i> 2:509
2,000 killed	on Mount Asamon in Galilee (66 AD).	<i>War</i> 2:512
18,000 killed	in two battles at Ascalon by Antonius and his forces (66 or 67 AD).	<i>War</i> 3:9–28
27,000 killed (12,000) (15,000)	at Japha near Jotapata (67 AD) by Trajan and by Titus Caesar.	<i>War</i> 3:298 <i>War</i> 3:305

11,600 killed	on Mount Gerezim by Cerealis (67 AD).	<i>War 3:315</i>
40,000 killed	at the siege of Jotapata (67 AD).	<i>War 3:337</i>
4,200 killed or drowned	at Joppa (67 AD).	<i>War 3:427</i>
6,500 killed	on the Sea of Galilee (67 AD).	<i>War 3:531</i>
1,200 killed	at Tiberius (67 AD).	<i>War 3:539</i>
9,000 killed	at Gamala (67 AD).	<i>War 4:80</i>
6,000 killed	in the escape from Gischala (67 AD).	<i>War 4:313</i>
27,000 killed (8,500) (12,000)	in Jerusalem by the Idumaeans and by the Zealots (67 AD).	<i>War 4:313</i> <i>War 4:333</i>
700 killed	at Passover at Engeddi (68 AD).	<i>War 4:403</i>
15,000 killed	in the escape from Gadara to the Jordan, besides a vast multitude drowned in the Jordan (68 AD). NOTE: Josephus Gorionides (<i>aka</i> Josippon, a scholar in 10 th cen- tury AD) in his history of the same event wrote that the number killed to be 92,000. This could well be true since Josephus said that so many bodies floated down the Jordan River that they dammed up the stream to such an extent that it overflowed its banks. He also said the Dead Sea became choked with dead bodies coming from the Jordan River.	<i>War 4:435</i>
10,000 killed	in two village areas of Idumaea (68) AD.	<i>War 4:447</i>
1,000 killed	at Gerusa by Annius (68 AD).	<i>War 4:488</i>
1,100,000 killed (estimated)	in the five-month siege of Jerusalem (70 AD). (115,880 corpses were carried through the southwest gate of the Temple) (600,000 were carried out through other gates, <u>then the Romans stopped counting</u>)	<i>War 6:420; 5:568; 6:435–442</i> <i>War 5:567–568</i> <i>War 5:570–571</i>

This gives a total of at least 1,284,700 people killed in the Roman/Jewish War.

[These were counted and itemized in Roman documents. Most died from swords, spears, arrows, rocks, disease, or starvation. *DWS*]

Other Deaths

We are not told how many were killed in the following smaller battles ...

- in the seditions [Jews fighting against Jews] at Caesarea (*War 2.620–631*);

- at Jerusalem on seven different occasions [before the Roman siege];
- at Tyre, Hippus, and Gadara (*War* 2.477–478);
- at other [unnamed] battles;
- in another major skirmish in Galilee (*War* 3.59–63);
- at Mount Tabor (*War* 4.54–61);
- the escape from Jericho up to the hill-country of Judaea (*War* 4.431–439);
- the battle round about Gerasa (*War* 4.486–490);
- the engagements in Idumaea by Simon Giorae (*War* 4.503–544);
- in Hebron when its inhabitants were slain by Cerealis (*War* 4.552–554).

Jews Sold Into Slavery

Besides these vast numbers killed, Josephus records many who were sold into slavery:

- At Iapha (2,130 people, *War* 3:305);
- at Jotapata (1,200, *War* 3:337);
- at Tiberius (36,400, *War* 3:540);
- in the escape from Gischala (3,000, *War* 4:115);
- at the Jordan (2,200, *War* 4:436);
- in Idumaea (1,000, *War* 4:448);
- after the capture of Jerusalem or during the siege (97,000, *War* 6:420).

Healthy young Jewish male slaves were variously

- sent to dig the canal at the Isthmus of Corinth (*War* 6:529);
- sent to the mines of Egypt (*War* 6:418);
- paraded as prisoners at Vespasian's triumph in Rome and then strangled (*War* 6:418);
- destroyed in the theaters or in stadiums by gladiators, killed by each other, or by wild beasts (*War* 6:529). They did not live long.

What a Waste of Lives!

Jesus told His disciples such a horror WOULD happen.

“And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.”

• Luke 21:20–21

The vast majority of people who lived at that time refused to heed the teachings of Christ on this matter. They were assured that the prophecies of Daniel were to be fulfilled. In fact, the prime leaders of the nation were convinced that God had to intervene at that time. What a disaster! They were so wrong!

Since the population of Judaea and Galilee must not have been more than 3 or 4 million, it can be said that well over one half the Jewish population of the areas were killed or sold into slavery. And **ALL OF IT** because of a misapplication of prophecy.

It is truly a dangerous thing to trust in date-setting, but it is being done on a wide scale today by many evangelists and preachers. Maybe one day they will learn their lesson not to do it. Yet people are prone not to learn from history. They have to live through it themselves to grasp its significance.

End of the article by Ernest L. Martin, edited by David Sielaff

[Editor's Note, addition, 2021]: Many Jewish prisoners were used as slave labor to construct the Colosseum in the city of Rome. Construction was funded from gold and silver taken from the Temple in Jerusalem by Rome. This was not just wealth from the Temple treasury. See the interesting 2001 article, "[Financing the Colosseum](#)" by Louis H. Feldman, *Biblical Archaeology Review*; Jul/Aug 2001, page 20.



The Temple was also a depository for the wealth of rich Jewish people from around the world wherever Jews lived. Many Jews visited Jerusalem during the spring or fall festivals (Acts 2:1-11). It was convenient for them to store some of their wealth in the Jerusalem Temple to minimize the risk of transporting their wealth for the feasts. They thought their gold was safe, protected in God's Temple. The Temple would fit the category of a "depository bank" as explained in the article "[What is a Depository Bank?](#)" from the online *Herold Financial Dictionary*¹

When Jerusalem was captured, all the gold in the Temple became the property of Rome by conquest. The Roman Emperor Vespasian used part of the Temple gold to build the magnificent Colosseum. Many Jewish prisoners died in its construction; still more died in the arena as victims in the Roman blood sport games. *DWS*

God warned His people not to fight Babylon in Jeremiah's time (Jeremiah 21:9, 38:2). Many fought. They died. Religious zealots in 66 AD thought prophecies demanded the Jews fight against Rome. God would honor their dedication and intervene for "righteous Israel." Read "[Signs of the Times in the First Century](#)." Some Christians responded and chose to **"live by the sword."** Some will do the same in the future before Christ returns to earth. Again, God may not protect those who fight (John 18:10-11 and Matthew 26:51-52).

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¹ "A Depository Bank refers to a facility like an office, building, or even warehouse that acts as a depository for safeguarding and storage purposes. ... The term also pertains to any depository institution which takes in financial deposits from their clients."