

33 PARALLELS OF REVELATION AND JOSEPHUS' "WARS OF THE JEWS"

INTRODUCTION: John Wesley stated that Josephus's "The Wars of the Jews" was the best commentary on Matthew 24. Similarly, it is the best commentary on the book of Revelation. The following material is an abbreviation of Adam Maarschalk's paper: "Josephus and the Book of Revelation—Nine Case Studies," which draws attention to conspicuous similarities between the books. We have made some minor changes.

#1. RED HORSE

Civil wars among the Jews arose before the Roman-Jewish War and endured as the war wore on.

Revelation: "There went forth another horse—red, and to him who is sitting upon it, there was given to him to take the peace from the land [Israel]*, and that one another they may slay..." Rev 6:4 YLT.

Josephus: "There were besides disorders and civil wars in every city; and all those that were at quiet from the Romans turned their hands one against another. There was also a bitter contest between those that were fond of war, and those that were desirous for peace.... the barbarity and iniquity those of the same nation did no way differ from the Romans; nay, it seemed to be a much lighter thing to be ruined by the Romans than by themselves." Wars 4.3.2

#2. HID UNDERGROUND

Zealots tried to hide from the Romans in the caves and tunnels underground.

Revelation: "The kings of the earth, the princes, the commanding officers, the rich, the strong, and every slave and free person, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains." Rev. 6:15-16

Josephus: "So now the last hope which supported the tyrants [zealot leaders], and that crew of robbers [zealot troops] who were with them, was in the caves and caverns underground...they were not able to lie hid either from God or from the Romans." Wars 6.7.3

#3A. BLOOD AND FIRE

The Romans began the war in Galilee with a bloody campaign of terror, burning, killing, enslaving.

#3A Revelation: "...and the first messenger did sound, and there came hail and fire, mingled with blood, and it was cast to the land,* and the third of the trees was burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up." Rev 8:7 YLT.

Josephus: "...nor did the Romans... leave off, either by night or by day, burning the places in the plain, and stealing away the cattle that were in the country, and killing whatsoever appeared capable of fighting perpetually, and leading the weaker people as slaves into captivity; so that Galilee was all over filled with fire and blood; nor was it exempted from any kind of misery or calamity..." Wars 3.4.1.

#3B. MOUNTAIN THROWN INTO SEA/ DEATHS AT SEA

Joppa residents could not escape the Romans in boats due to severe Mediterranean storms and Roman barricades.

Revelation: "The second angel sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was thrown into the sea. One third of the sea became blood, and one third of the living creatures which were in the sea died. One third of the ships were destroyed." Rev. 8:8-9

Revelation: "And the second messenger did pour out his vial to the sea, and there came blood as of one dead, and every living soul died in the sea." Rev. 16:3

Josephus: "...there fell a violent wind upon them... and there dashed their ships one against another, and dashed some of them against the rocks, and carried many of them by force...the shore was so rocky, and had so many of the enemy upon it, that they were afraid to come to land... the sea was bloody a long way, and the maritime parts were full of dead bodies; for the Romans came upon those that were carried to the shore, and destroyed them; and the number of the bodies that were thus thrown out of the sea was four thousand and two hundred." Wars 3.9.3

#4. FOUR MESSENGERS LOOSED TO KILL MANKIND

The zealots were cornered in the temple area due two priests who were leaders of the common people of Jerusalem. The zealots falsely claimed, in a secret letter to the Idumeans, that Jerusalem was being betrayed to the Romans. Idumeans quickly came to reinforce the zealot criminals with 20,000 armed men under the leadership of four commanders.

Revelation: “And the sixth messenger did sound...and loosed were the four messengers, who have been made ready for the hour, and day, and month, and year, that they may kill the third of men; and the number of the forces of the horsemen [is] two myriads of myriads**....” Rev. 9:13-16 YLT

Josephus: “Now these [Idumean] rulers were greatly surprised at the contents of the letter, and at what those that came with it further told them; whereupon they ran about the nation like madmen, and made proclamation that the people should come to war...and twenty thousand of them were put into battle-array, and came to Jerusalem, under four commanders...” Wars 4.4.2

“The zealots and the multitude of the Idumeans fell upon the people as upon a flock of profane animals, and cut their throats...” Wars 4.5.3

#5. TWO WITNESSES KILLED, EARTHQUAKE, THOUSANDS PERISHED.

With the Idumeans aiding the zealots, a great slaughter against the Jerusalem populace ensued. The two high priest leaders were killed, denied burial, and their deaths celebrated by zealot forces. A great earthquake occurred with thousands perishing.

Revelation: “When they [two witnesses] have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. Their dead bodies will be in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified [Jerusalem]. From among the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations*** people will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not allow their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. Those who dwell on the land rejoice over them, and they will be glad. They will give gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the land....In that day there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven.” Rev. 11:7-13

Josephus: “Now there was at present neither any place for flight [from the fighting] nor any hope of preservation; but as they were driven one upon another in heaps, so were they slain... And now the outer temple was all of it overflowed with blood; and that day, as it came on, they saw eight thousand five hundred dead bodies there.” (Wars 4.5.1)

“[The Idumeans] sought for the high priests [Ananus and Jesus], and...went with the greatest zeal against them; and as soon as they caught them they slew them, and then standing upon their dead bodies, in way of jest, upbraided Ananus with his kindness to the people, and Jesus with his speech made to them from the wall. Nay, they proceeded to that degree of impiety, as to cast away their dead bodies without burial...” (Wars 4.5.2)

“There broke out a prodigious storm in the night... and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake...” Wars 5.4.5

#6 WATERS BECOME BLOOD

Bloody battles at the Jordan River and springs at the mouth of the Dead Sea occurred as Romans worked their way toward Jerusalem.

Revelation: “The third [angel] poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of water and, and they became blood. I heard the angel of the waters saying, ‘You are righteous, who are and who were, you Holy One, because you have judged these things. For they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. They deserve this.’” Rev. 16:4-6

Josephus: “They [Jews] then extended themselves a very great way along the banks of the [Jordan] river, and sustained the darts that were thrown at them, as well as the attacks of the horsemen, who beat many of them, and pushed them into the current. At which fight, hand to hand, fifteen thousand...were slain, while the number of those that were unwillingly forced to leap into Jordan was prodigious... and Jordan could not be passed over, by reason of the dead bodies that were in it, but because the lake Asphaltiris [Dead Sea] was also full of dead bodies, that were carried down into it by the river. And now Placidus [Roman General]... put his soldiers on board the ships, and slew such as had fled to the lake [Dead Sea]...” Wars 4.7.5

Another bloody water battle, led by Vespasian at the Sea of Galilee.

Josephus: “Sometimes the Romans leaped into their ships, with swords in their hands, and slew them; but when some of them met the vessels, the Romans caught them by the middle, and destroyed at once their ships and themselves who were taken in them. And for such as were drowning in the sea, if they lifted their heads up above the water, they were either killed by darts, or caught by the vessels; but if, in the desperate case they were in, they attempted to swim to their enemies, the Romans cut off either their heads or their hands;...one might then see the lake

all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink, and a very sad sight there was on the following days over that country; for as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks, and of dead bodies all swelled; and as the dead bodies were inflamed by the sun, and putrefied, they corrupted the air..." Wars 3.10.9

#7. JERUSALEM DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS

Jerusalem was divided into three warring factions opposing each other and consuming itself.

Revelation: "The great city [Jerusalem] was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. Rev. 16:19

Josephus: "[T]he sedition at Jerusalem was revived, and parted into three factions, and that one faction fought against the other... one should not mistake if he called it a sedition begotten by another sedition, and to be like a wild beast grown mad, which for want of food from abroad, fell now upon eating its own flesh." Wars 5.1.1

"And now there were three treacherous factions in the city, the one parted from the other. Eleazar [ben Simon] and his party, that kept the sacred first-fruits, came against John.... Those that were with John plundered the populace and went out with zeal against Simon." Wars 5.1.4

#8. GREAT HAILSTONES

Roman catapults battered Jerusalem with great white stones weighing 70-100 pounds.

Revelation: "Great hailstones, about the weight of a talent, came down out of the sky on people. People blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, for this plague is exceedingly severe." Rev. 16:21

Josephus: "The engines, that all the legions had ready prepared for them, were admirably contrived; but still more extraordinary ones belonged to the tenth legion... Now the stones that were cast were of the weight of a talent, and were carried two furlongs and further. The blow they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them for a great space." Wars 5.6.3

#9. TEN KINGS

After the zealots routed the Syrian Roman troops who came to Jerusalem in a pre-war effort to put down the rebellion, Jewish leadership knew the Romans would return with a vengeance, so they selected 10 generals as a provisional government over the various territories of Palestine. Ultimately, these leaders were superseded by radicalized zealot factions.

Revelation: "The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour...For God has put in their hearts to do what he has in mind, and to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished." Rev. 17:12-17

Josephus: These are the ten leaders: 1. Joseph, the son of Gorion (Governor of Jerusalem) 2. Ananus, the high priest (Governor of Jerusalem) 3. Jesus, the son of Sapphias, one of the high priests (Idumaea) 4. Eleazar, the son of Ananias, the high priest (Idumaea) 5. Niger, the then governor of Idumaea (Idumaea) 6. Joseph, the son of Simon (Jericho) 7. Manasseh (Perea) 8. John, the Essene (toparchy of Thammas; "Lydda was also added to his portion, and Joppa, and Emmaus") 9. John, the son of Matthias (toparchies of Gophnitica and Acrabastene) 10. Josephus, the son of Matthias (both the Galilees and Gamala). (Wars 2.20.2-4 greatly abridged and numbering added).

*The Greek word "ge" is often translation earth or land, but frequently is a reference to "The Land," that is, the land of Israel.

** The usual translation of Rev. 9:16, is 200 million. In ancient times, a myriad was 10,000. We question the usual multiplication.

*** tribes, languages, and nations appears to be a reference to Israel and the many provinces from which the people originated. See Acts 2: 9-11

Please see: "Pursuing Truth" website (Adam Maarschalk <https://adammaarschalk.com/>) for his full article, "Josephus and the Book of Revelation—Nine Case Studies." Also see his work on The Beast of Revelation.

"The Wars of the Jews" by Josephus totals about 230 pages. You can start at book 2 chapter 12 to the end to read the essential history of the war. It is available free on line various sites.