

76 EVIDENCE FROM JOSEPHUS REGARDING THE BEAST

Introduction: In most preterist circles, the beast of Revelation is thought to be Rome. However, this theory is not consistent with scripture. In Daniel 2, the Kingdom of God was prophesied to be built on the destruction of the 4th beast kingdom, but Rome reached its peak of power in the second century AD. It was Israel that was destroyed upon the full establishment of the Kingdom of God in AD 70. The beast kingdom was to be destroyed with fire. Jerusalem was destroyed by fire during the Roman/Jewish War, but Rome was not. The beast killed those who did not worship him. The zealots executed thousands who did not join their forces while the Romans were in Judea solely to put down a rebellion. We need to interpret the Bible in the Jewish context, not in terms of secular western civilization. The kingdom that followed the 3rd Greek kingdom, was a free Israel under the Maccabees which inspired the zealot movement later. As eye-witness to the Roman & Jewish War and author of *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus echoed the language of Revelation suggesting first century zealot-led Israel was the beast of Revelation.

1. JOSEPHUS REFERRED TO THE JEWISH ZEALOTS REPEATEDLY AS BEASTS.

A. High Priest Jesus of Gamaliel expressed dismay over the zealot wild beasts over-running the Jerusalem temple during the war: “And this place [the temple], which is adored by the habitable world, and honored by such as only know it by report... is trampled upon by these wild beasts born among ourselves.” Josephus “Wars” 4.4.3

B. When trapped, the zealots rushed like unwitting beasts, head-long into Roman swords. “...they [zealots] were themselves run through by the Roman darts, and, like the wildest of wild beasts, rushed upon the point of others' swords; so some of them were destroyed, as cut with their enemies' swords upon their faces....” Josephus, “Wars” 4.7.4

C. When one faction of zealots captured the wife of Simon, a leader of a competing army of zealots, Simon and company behaved like wild beasts cruelly lashing out. “...he [Simon, zealot leader] grew very angry at them [attacking zealot band] for seizing his beloved wife... and, like wild beasts when they are wounded, and cannot overtake those that wounded them, he vented his spleen upon all persons that he met with.” Josephus, “Wars” 4.9.8

D. Josephus described the three factions of zealots fighting among themselves and attacking ordinary citizens of Jerusalem as the behavior of a vicious insane wild beast eating its own body. “But for the present sedition, 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.” Josephus, “Wars” 5.1.1

E. The Jews attacked the Romans with such fury, Josephus compared them to the most terrible wild beasts. “...there came out a fresh multitude of Jews, and that with such mighty violence, that one might compare it to the running of the most terrible wild beasts. To say the truth, none of those that opposed them could sustain the fury with which they made their attacks.” Josephus, “Wars” 5.2.5

2. SCRIPTURE PROPHESED BEAST-LIKE “TRAMPLING” OF JERUSALEM IN THE COMING WAR WITH ROME.

A. “They will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled down by the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled.” Lk 21:24

B. “But do not measure the outer courtyard of the temple; leave it out, because it has been given to the nations, and they will trample on the holy city for forty-two months.” Rev. 11:2

3. JOSEPHUS REPORTED BEAST-LIKE “TRAMPLING” OF JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE DURING THE WAR.

A. A High Priest despaired over the trampling of the sanctuary by the zealots. “And this place, which is adored by the habitable world, and honored by such as only know it by report, as far as the ends of the earth, is trampled upon by these wild beasts born among ourselves [Jews].” Josephus, “Wars” 4.4.3

B. High Priest Ananus despaired of the trampling of Jerusalem and the temple by the zealots. “How then can we avoid shedding of tears, when we see the Roman donations in our temple, while we withal see those of our own nation [Jews] taking our spoils, and plundering our glorious metropolis, and slaughtering our men, from which enormities those Romans themselves would have abstained? To see those Romans never going beyond the bounds allotted to profane persons, nor venturing to break in upon any of our sacred customs; nay, having a horror on their minds when they view at a distance those sacred walls; while some that have been born in this very country, and brought up in our customs, and called Jews, do walk about in the midst of the holy places, at the very time when their hands are still warm with the slaughter of their own countrymen.” Josephus, “Wars” 4.3.10

C. Once again, Jesus of Gamaliel grieved over the trampling of the sanctuary by the zealots. “Will you bear to see your sanctuary trampled on? and will you lay steps for these profane wretches, upon which they may mount to higher degrees of insolence?” Josephus, “Wars” 4.5.10

4. REVELATION PROPHESED A BLASPHEMOUS BEAST.

A. “I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads. On his horns were ten crowns, and on his heads, blasphemous names.” Rev 13:1

B. “He [beast] opened his mouth for blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, his dwelling, and those who dwell in heaven.” Rev 13:6

- C. "I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored beast, full of blasphemous names..." Rev 17:3
D. "People blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues [wounds]." Rev 16:9
E. "They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores." Rev 16:11
F. "People blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, for this plague was exceedingly severe." Rev 16:21

5. JOSEPHUS REPORTED ZEALOT BLASPHEMY DURING THE WAR WITH ROME.

Blasphemy definition: Contemptuous or profane speech or action concerning God or a sacred entity.

A. The zealots threw all decency aside and denied burial to the slain, laughing at the prophets and God's laws. "But these zealots came at last to that degree of barbarity, as not to bestow a burial either on those slain in the city, or on those that lay along the roads; but as if they had made an agreement to cancel both the laws of their country and the laws of nature, and, at the same time that they defiled men with their wicked actions, they would pollute the Divinity itself ...These men, therefore, trampled upon all the laws of men, and laughed at the laws of God; and for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers." Josephus, "Wars" 4.6.3

B. Zealots irreverently trampled on bodies and indulged in barbarity using temple materials for their war machines. "...but for the seditious [zealots] themselves, they fought against each other, while they trod upon the dead bodies as they lay heaped one upon another, and taking up a mad rage from those dead bodies that were under their feet, became the fiercer thereupon... When they had resolved upon any thing, they executed it without mercy, and omitted no method of torment or of barbarity. Nay, John abused the sacred materials, and employed them in the construction of his engines of war..." Josephus, "Wars" 5.1.5

C. Zealot leader bragged he was fighting for God and melted down the sacred utensils of the temple for his own use. "But as for John [zealot leader], when he could no longer plunder the people, he betook himself to sacrilege, and melted down many of the sacred utensils, which had been given to the temple; as also many of those vessels which were necessary for such as ministered about holy things, the caldrons, the dishes, and the tables...that it was proper for them to use Divine things, while they were fighting for the Divinity." Josephus, "Wars" 5.13.6

D. John and his army of zealots drank the stores of temple wine and anointed themselves with the dedicated oil. "[John a zealot leader] emptied the vessels of that sacred wine and oil, which the priests kept to be poured on the burnt-offerings, and which lay in the inner court of the temple, and distributed it among the multitude [fellow zealots], who, in their anointing themselves and drinking, used each of them above an hin [1 1/2 gallons] ..." Josephus, "Wars" 5.13.6

E. Usually quite restrained, Josephus declared that if the Romans were longer delayed, God would have opened the ground and swallowed the zealots [like Korah] or drown them in a flood or incinerated them like Sodom. "And here I cannot but speak my mind, and what the concern I am under dictates to me, and it is this: I suppose, that had the Romans made any longer delay in coming against these villains, that the city would either have been swallowed up by the ground opening upon them [like Korah], or been overflowed by water [like in the flood], or else been destroyed by such thunder as the country of Sodom perished by, for it had brought forth a generation of men much more atheistical than were those that suffered such punishments; for by their madness it was that all the people came to be destroyed." Josephus, "Wars" 5.13.6

6. ADDITIONAL NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTIONS:

A. Josephus' disgust with the zealots (in 5 E), echoed Peter's statements 10 years earlier. "For if God didn't spare angels [Korah and company] when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment; and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly, and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live in an ungodly way..." 2 Pt. 2:4-6 (See Preterist Paper #72 and #65 for the Korah connection).

B. In describing the false teachers that had infiltrated the church in their day, Peter and Jude used a "beast" epithet—"irrational animals". From the description of their behavior, we believe the false teachers were zealots.

a.) "But these men, like irrational animals--creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed--do not understand whom they are insulting, and consequently in their destruction they will be destroyed." 2 Peter 2:12

b.) "But these men do not understand the things they slander, and they are being destroyed by the very things that, like irrational animals, they instinctively comprehend." Jude 10

CONCLUSION: The book of Revelation, was written around AD 65 and fulfilled by AD 70. Josephus, an eye-witness to the conflict, published his history in AD 78. The similarities of his report with the Bible should give us pause to consider an alternative to the wide-spread preterist concept of a Roman beast—perhaps first century zealot-led Israel instead.

OTHER PRETERIST PAPERS FEATURING JOSEPHUS:

#55 THEY DID NOT REPENT

#54 DESOLATIONS ARE DETERMINED

#53 THREE FALLEN KINGS AND THE LITTLE HORN

#41 ACCUSER OF THE BROTHERS

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#35 JESUS PROPHECIES FULFILLED—HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

#34 THE TWO WITNESSES OF REVELATION 11—a theory

#33 PARALLELS OF REVELATION AND JOSEPHUS' "WARS OF THE JEWS"
#31 MAN OF SIN part 2—a theory