THE GREAT TRIBULATION:2,300 DAYS THAT CHANGED HISTORY

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From Jerusalem's Warning in 66 CE to the Fall of Masada in 73 CE

1. Introduction

Daniel's prophecy of 2,300 evenings and mornings supplies the chronological framework for this study of the Great Tribulation. Its initial fulfilment involved Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the persecution of the Jewish people and the restoration of the Temple under Judas Maccabeus. Jesus' later warning about Daniel's abomination of desolation also directs attention to the judgement upon Jerusalem in the first century (Matthew 24:15).

This lesson dates the Great Tribulation from **23 December 66 CE to 10 April 73 CE**, a period of 2,300 elapsed days. Josephus records the day and month of the defenders' deaths at Masada. Using the reconstructed Hebrew calendar, we can establish the proposed Julian date and calculate backwards to determine when the Great Tribulation began. This period encompasses the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and remains distinct from Daniel's seventy-week prophecy and the Millennium that started when the captives arrived in Antioch in December 70 CE.

Earlier AIM lessons established the wider biblical and historical background, including the seven seals, the 144,000, Daniel's seventy weeks, ancient calendars and the Roman armies described in Revelation. Building upon that foundation, we now examine Jesus' warning to flee Jerusalem, the Roman campaign that followed and the events at Masada that mark the conclusion of the Great Tribulation.

2. Calendar Framework

A. The Hebrew and Julian Calendars

The Roman Julian calendar provides the historical dates used throughout this lesson. The Hebrew calendar follows the cycles of the moon but adds an extra month in certain years to keep its festivals in their proper seasons. Under the later fixed nineteen-year calendar, ordinary years contain 353–355 days and leap years contain 383–385 days. Leap years occur in years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19 of this cycle.

The Utrecht Hebrew Calendar provides consistent retrospective equivalents. These calculated dates are useful for chronology, but the later fixed calendar does not independently prove which dates were observed by communities in first-century Judea. All elapsed-day calculations use the Julian calendar.

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HEBREW-YEAR CALENDAR

Year CE	Hebrew Year (AM)	Year # in 19-year cycle	Year Type	# of Days	# of months
65-66	3826	7th	Common	354	12
66-67	3827	8th	Leap	385	13
67-68	3828	9th	Common	353	12
68-69	3829	10th	Common	355	12
69-70	3830	11th	Leap	384	13
70-71	3831	12th	Common	355	12
71-72	3832	13th	Common	353	12
72-73	3833	14th	Leap	384	13

Hebrew Years Calculated Using the Fixed Calendar

Because Hebrew months and years vary in length, Daniel's 2,300 days cannot be calculated by assuming that every month contains thirty days. The duration must be established by counting the actual number of days between the beginning and end of the period.

B. Reading the Historical Dates

Josephus used Greek and Macedonian month names alongside Roman provincial dating. A named Macedonian month cannot be equated mechanically with the Julian month of similar position. In the tables, red identifies dates recorded by an ancient source or fixed calendar observances, while blue marks AIM reconstructions and Julian conversions. A converted date is not therefore an independently documented first-century date.

The ancient sources give several kinds of chronological evidence. An exact day and month attributed to Josephus is a statement from his narrative; the corresponding modern Julian date is the result of a calendar conversion. A proposed year, such as placing the heavenly armies in 67 CE, is a further historical inference. These should not be treated as interchangeable categories of certainty.

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3. Daniel's 2,300 Days

A. The Initial Fulfilment and the Further Application

Daniel 8:14 (NKJV)

> For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.

Daniel's prophecy describes the interruption of the daily sacrifices, the desecration of the Temple and the suffering of God's people (Daniel 8:13-14). Its initial fulfilment concerned the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, beginning with the murder of the High Priest Onias III and culminating in the cleansing and rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BCE. Jesus later referred to Daniel's abomination of desolation when warning His disciples about the approaching judgement upon Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-16).

Daniel's vision concerns the daily sacrifices, desolation and the trampling of the sanctuary and its people (Daniel 8:13-14). Its initial historical application is associated with Onias III, persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the rededication of the Temple in 164 BCE. Jesus later invoked Daniel's abomination of desolation when warning His disciples about the events ahead (Matthew 24:15-16).

The Roman campaign against Judea brought renewed desolation upon Jerusalem, the Temple and its people. These events correspond to the prophetic themes Daniel described and to Jesus' warning of the judgement approaching Jerusalem. Section 7 establishes how the resulting chronology relates to Daniel's 2,300 days.

B. Jesus' Warning to Flee

Luke 21:20-21 (NKJV)

> But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her

When Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem in autumn 66 CE, believers witnessed the very danger Jesus had foretold. His subsequent withdrawal in November provided an opportunity to obey Jesus' instruction to flee before the Great Tribulation began on **23 December 66 CE**. The sequence matters: Jesus gave a clear warning and an opportunity to escape before the approaching judgement.

Cestius Gallus' assault upon Jerusalem in autumn 66 CE supplied the visible warning. His subsequent withdrawal gave time to depart. The warning and the opportunity to escape preceded the calculated beginning of the 2,300-day period on 23 December 66 CE; they should not be assigned that date themselves.

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Matthew places Daniel's abomination of desolation within an urgent instruction to those in Judea: the person on the housetop must not delay to collect possessions, and the worker in the field must not return for clothing (Matthew 24:15-18). Luke identifies the military circumstance through which the danger would become apparent: Jerusalem surrounded by armies. Read together, the accounts connect an identifiable public event to an immediate response.

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4. Prelude: Events and Signs

A. Jesus' Sign and the Generation

Matthew 24:30 (NKJV)

> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Jesus declared that these events would occur within the generation He addressed (Matthew 24:34). The sign of the Son of Man revealed His heavenly authority and announced the approaching judgement upon Jerusalem. The extraordinary heavenly appearances recorded by Josephus provide an important historical correspondence, which Section 5 examines in connection with the events of 67 CE.

B. Selected Chronological Markers

The following overview retains the chronology needed for this lesson; dates not reported explicitly by Josephus remain reconstructions.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS AND SIGNS | 62–70 CE

Josephus' accounts with AIM historical reconstructions

Josephus §	Date recorded	Julian calendar	Hebrew calendar	Historical event / AIM interpretation
62–63 CE				
6.300–303	Tabernacles	7-13 Oct. 62 CE	15–21 Tishri	Initial proclamation: Jesus son of Ananus warns Jerusalem, the Temple and its people.
6.303–309	Several months later	Early 63 CE (proposed)	Not fixed	Appears before Albinus, who orders him scourged; he cries, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!"
6.309	7 years, 5 months	After hearing to 70 CE	Not fixed	Sustained lament. AIM counts the reported duration after the hearing, not automatically from Tabernacles.
66 CE				
6.289	Comet	22 Jan–28 Apr 66 CE	18 Shevat–25 Nisan	Halley's Comet
6.289	One year	66 CE (proposed)	—	Josephus reports a sword-shaped star over Jerusalem and a comet continuing for a year.
2.284	Artemisius	15 May–18 Jun 66 CE	3 Sivan–1 Tammuz	Unrest begins in Caesarea; calendar equivalents reconstructed.
2.315	16 Artemisius	16 May 66 CE	4 Sivan	Unrest in Jerusalem.
—	Pentecost	18–19 May 66 CE	6–7 Sivan	Pentecost in the earlier 66 CE chronology; pending separate verification.
6.424	Passover	Passover 66 CE	14 Nisan	Cestius' census: 256,500 sacrifices; 2,700,200 participants.
67 CE				
6.298–299	21 Artemisius	21 May 67 CE	18 Iyyar	Heavenly chariots and armed troops in the clouds. AIM identifies this as the sign of the Son of Man.
6.299–300	Pentecost	7–8 Jun 67 CE	6–7 Sivan	Feast of Weeks: Josephus reports a shaking, great noise and voices. Precise festival day is unspecified.
70 CE				
6.309	During the siege	70 CE	After the siege equipment built	Jesus son of Ananus dies when struck by a stone from a Roman siege engine while still warning the city.

RED: date/duration recorded by Josephus. BLUE: AIM reconstruction or calendar conversion.
67 CE Hebrew–Julian pairs confirmed in supplied calendar image: 21 May = 18 Iyyar; 7 June = 6 Sivan; 8 June = 7 Sivan.
This calendar cross-check does not independently establish the year or Julian equivalent of Josephus' 21 Artemisius.
The start of Ananus' reported seven years and five months remains AIM's two-stage interpretation.
Source: Josephus, The Jewish Wars 2.284, 2.315, 6.289, 6.298–309, 6.424.

C. Jesus Son of Ananus and the Heavenly Warnings

Josephus records that Jesus, son of Ananus, began warning Jerusalem of its approaching destruction during the Feast of Tabernacles, in 62 CE. His repeated cries against Jerusalem, the Temple and its people disturbed the Jewish authorities, who brought him before the Roman procurator Albinus several months later. Albinus ordered him scourged, but despite the severity of his punishment, he continued crying, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" He was eventually released.[1]

Josephus states that these warnings continued for **seven years and five months**. In the chronology established here, this period began following his hearing before Albinus, rather than at his initial proclamation during Tabernacles. His warnings ended during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, when a stone from a Roman siege engine struck and killed him. His final recorded words were, "Woe, woe to myself also!" (*The Jewish Wars*, 6.300-309).

Josephus also describes two extraordinary celestial signs: a star resembling a sword above Jerusalem and a comet that reportedly remained visible for an entire year. Halley's Comet appeared in 66 CE, reaching perihelion on 25 January and making its closest approach to Earth on 20 March. Its appearance provides a probable astronomical explanation for the comet Josephus describes, although the historian does not name it.[2]

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5. Sign of the Son of Man

A. Heavenly Armies in the Ancient Accounts

Matthew 24:27 (NKJV)

> For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Josephus describes chariots and armed troops appearing among the clouds before sunset on 21 Artemisius. Tacitus likewise describes armies appearing in the sky, weapons flashing and the Temple illuminated. Pseudo-Hegesippus retells the tradition in the fourth century, drawing extensively upon Josephus rather than providing independent eyewitness evidence.[3]

This lesson identifies the reported heavenly armies with the sign of the Son of Man and places the appearance on 21 May 67 CE (18 Iyyar). Josephus supplies the day and month, not this reconstructed year. The sign belongs to the historical judgement associated with Jesus' prophetic declaration.

Matthew places the sign of the Son of Man immediately after "the tribulation of those days" (Matthew 24:29-30). This refers to the distress surrounding Cestius Gallus' advance upon Jerusalem and subsequent withdrawal in 66 CE, rather than the completion of the entire 2,300-day Great Tribulation. The heavenly armies Josephus reported, dated to 67 CE in our chronology, therefore followed the initial Roman warning and revealed the heavenly authority of Jesus Christ.

B. The Passover Census

At Passover in 66 CE, Cestius Gallus sought to demonstrate Jerusalem's population to Nero by asking the chief priests to count the festival sacrifices. Josephus reports 256,500 sacrifices, shared by at least ten people each and often twenty, and gives a total of 2,700,200 ritually eligible participants. His figures portray an exceptionally large gathering, although they are not independently verified headcounts. The minimum calculation of ten participants per sacrifice produces 2,565,000, rather than his reported total. The dating adopted here follows Nadav Sharon's assessment that Cestius probably commissioned the census during his Passover visit in spring 66 CE.[4]

Such gatherings provided opportunities for news to spread throughout Judea and beyond as pilgrims returned home. The census, however, does not establish how many people witnessed the heavenly armies. Its placement in 66 CE remains distinct from this lesson's identification of the heavenly-armies sign in 67 CE.

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C. Caiaphas and the Council

Matthew 26:64 (NKJV)

> Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The significance of Matthew 26:64 lies in the audience Jesus addressed. Caiaphas and the council heard a declaration that the Son of Man would be seated at the right hand of Power and would come upon the clouds. The statement invokes Christ's vindication and authority before those who were judging Him.

The heavenly armies reported by Josephus provide a historical correspondence with Jesus' declaration. Their appearance in 67 CE, within the generation He addressed, revealed the Son of Man's authority and vindication. Although Josephus does not identify Caiaphas among the witnesses, Jesus' words matter because He addressed the council that condemned Him.

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6. Cestius Gallus and the Roman Warning



Illustrative XII Legion Standard

A. The Advance Upon Jerusalem

In autumn 66 CE, Cestius Gallus, governor of Syria, advanced upon Jerusalem with Legio XII Fulminata, detachments of other Roman legions, auxiliaries, cavalry and allied troops. His army camped on Mount Scopus, northeast of Jerusalem, before approaching the city. Josephus assigns the subsequent advance to 30 Hyperberetaios.[5]

Before reaching Jerusalem, Roman troops suffered 515 casualties in an engagement near Lydda (*The Jewish Wars*, 2.515-519). Mount Scopus lay about seven stadia (1.3 kilometres) northeast of Jerusalem, giving Cestius a commanding view of the city's approaches. Josephus records that the Romans waited three days, expecting the inhabitants to surrender, before advancing on the fourth. The presence of Roman armies at Jerusalem brought Jesus' warning in Luke 21:20 into immediate focus.

B. Lightning and the Legionary Standard

The Twelfth Legion, *Legio XII Fulminata*, bore a name meaning "thunderbolt-bearing". Its association with lightning, together with the Roman eagle standard, provides a striking parallel with Jesus' imagery of lightning and eagles in Matthew 24:27-28. Cestius' army approached Jerusalem from Mount Scopus to the northeast and later withdrew towards Beth-horon to the northwest and west. Within AIM's interpretation, this movement from the eastern approaches towards the west reinforces Jesus' prophetic imagery.[6]

These military symbols and movements complement the direct warning Jesus gave in Luke 21:20-21. The Roman army's appearance around Jerusalem signalled approaching desolation, while its subsequent withdrawal gave those who heeded His words an opportunity to flee.

C. The Withdrawal and its Consequences

Cestius abandoned the assault and withdrew towards Beth-horon, where Jewish forces exploited the narrow mountain passes to inflict a devastating defeat. Josephus reports that the Romans lost 5,300 infantry and 380 cavalry during the retreat. Together with the earlier 515 casualties near Lydda, this gives a combined total of 6,195 men lost across separate engagements (*The Jewish Wars*, 2.519, 2.555).

Although the Jewish victory did not remove the threat of a renewed Roman campaign, it provided a vital opportunity to leave Jerusalem. Josephus records people departing following the Roman defeat. Section 8 examines how agricultural responsibilities, religious observances and the approaching winter may have influenced the timing of their journeys.

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7. Start and End Dates of the Great Tribulation

A. Jesus' Warning and the Beginning of the Great Tribulation

Luke 21:20-22 (NKJV)

> "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Jesus identified the surrounding of Jerusalem by Roman armies as the warning that its desolation was approaching. Cestius Gallus' withdrawal after the defeat at Beth-Hpron on **8 November 66 CE** provided an opportunity to escape, and Josephus confirms that people subsequently departed from the city (*The Jewish Wars*, 2.556). The calculated beginning of the

Great Tribulation on **23 December 66 CE** followed 45 elapsed days later. The warning, the opportunity to flee and the beginning of the 2,300-day period were therefore distinct events.

B. Trampling of Sanctuary and People

Daniel's vision joins the daily sacrifice, transgression and trampling of the sanctuary and its people:

Daniel 8:13-14 (NKJV)

> "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

During the Roman war, the Temple sacrifices ceased; Roman troops destroyed the sanctuary in 70 CE, and warfare, enslavement and slaughter devastated Judea. These events give Daniel's imagery a historical setting within the 2,300-day reconstruction.

During the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Temple's sacrificial service was interrupted; Roman forces entered and destroyed the sanctuary; and the population experienced conflict, famine, killing, displacement and captivity. These events occurred within the proposed 66-73 CE interval, not all on the same day.

Daniel's imagery encompasses both the violation of the sanctuary and the suffering of its people. Josephus gives a vivid account of the destruction within the Temple precincts: "Many of them were trampled on by one another, while a great number fell" (*The Jewish Wars*, 6.257). His description illustrates the devastation that accompanied Jerusalem's fall in 70 CE.

C. The Sanctuary Vindicated

LUKE 21:24 (NKJV)

> And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The Hebrew word *wenișdaq*, translated "cleansed" in Daniel 8:14, can also convey the sense of being put right or vindicated. Under Judas Maccabeus, this meant cleansing and rededicating the earthly Temple. The first-century application was different. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God had already established His New Covenant sanctuary:

- **Jesus is the true Temple:** His body is the Temple raised after three days (John 2:19-21).
- **Believers are God's Temple:** The Holy Spirit dwells within His people (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- **The Church is God's dwelling place:** Believers are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The destruction of Jerusalem's Temple in 70 CE publicly vindicated the New Covenant sanctuary already established through Christ. This judgement did not create the New Covenant, nor did the conclusion of the Great Tribulation in 73 CE require the physical restoration of the earthly Temple.

D. Calculating the Endpoint at Masada

Masada was the last major Jewish stronghold to fall to the Romans during the First Jewish-Roman War, marking the conflict's final phase.

Josephus, The Jewish Wars, 7.401

> This calamitous slaughter was made on the fifteenth day of the month Xanthicus.

Using Josephus' identification of Xanthicus with Nisan (Antiquities, 2.311) and the Utrecht Hebrew Calendar, 15 Nisan 3833 AM corresponds to 10 April 73 CE (Julian), the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6). Josephus dates the deaths of Masada's defenders to 15 Xanthicus and records that Roman soldiers entered the fortress the following morning. The 2,300-day period therefore ends with the defenders' deaths on 10 April, with the Roman entry following on 11 April.

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I adopt 73 CE as the year marking the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. Using 10 April 73 CE as the endpoint places the beginning of Daniel's 2,300-day period on 23 December 66 CE. This is the chronological position advanced in this lesson. Josephus supplies the day and month without explicitly naming the year, and scholars have argued for 74 CE, notably Cotton on the evidence concerning Silva's career. The calculation establishes the interval between the adopted dates; it does not independently resolve that historical debate.[7]

E. Calculating the Beginning

Subtracting 2,300 actual elapsed Julian days from 10 April 73 CE gives 23 December 66 CE. The method does not assume thirty-day Hebrew months, and inclusive counting would give a different result. The Hebrew-year table below shows how the interval is distributed across common and intercalary years.

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DANIEL'S 2,300 DAYS

Section 7E | Calculation by Hebrew calendar year

23 December 66 CE to 10 April 73 CE Julian calendar

Hebrew year (CE span)	Year in 19-year cycle	Year type	Full year length	Days within period	Running total	Julian date / milestone
66–67 CE	8th	Leap	385	279	279	23 Dec 66 CE | Start
67–68 CE	9th	Common	353	353	632	
68–69 CE	10th	Common	355	355	987	
69–70 CE	11th	Leap	384	384	1,371	
70–71 CE	12th	Common	355	355	1,726	
71–72 CE	13th	Common	353	353	2,079	
72–73 CE	14th	Leap	384	221	**2,300**	10 Apr 73 CE | End

Total: 2,300 actual elapsed days | Daniel 8:14

Blue denotes calculated dates and AIM's proposed prophetic endpoints.
Utrecht fixed Hebrew calendar projected backwards; Masada's year (73/74 CE) is debated.

The first Hebrew year is partial because the calculated beginning falls on 17 Tevet 3827 AM, after the start of that Hebrew year. The concluding Hebrew year is likewise partial because the period ends on 15 Nisan 3833 AM rather than at the year's end. The intervening five Hebrew years contribute their complete calculated lengths. The chart identifies 279 days in the first partial year and 221 in the last, with 1,800 days across the five intervening years:

279 + 1,800 + 221 = 2,300.

8. The Flight from Jerusalem in 66 CE

A. Believers Respond to Jesus' Warning

Cestius Gallus' defeat and withdrawal from Jerusalem in November 66 CE gave believers an opportunity to escape before the renewed Roman campaign. Josephus confirms that people began leaving Jerusalem following the Roman defeat.

Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, 2.556

> After this calamity had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink;

This vivid comparison conveys the sense of impending catastrophe. The historian does not say that these individuals were the Jerusalem church, yet the account establishes that departure was an actual response to the Roman defeat, not merely a possibility imagined retrospectively.

Matthew 24:16-18 (NKJV)

> "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house, and let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes."

Matthew's warning makes the issue practical. A person on the housetop was not to retrieve belongings, nor was someone in the field to return for clothing. The urgency is consistent with believers leaving while the Roman army no longer blocked the approaches to Jerusalem. Their exact departure dates are not preserved, so the chronological framework should not be made more precise than the evidence allows.

B. Refuge Beyond Jerusalem

Eusebius preserves an early Christian tradition that the Jerusalem church received a divine warning and sought refuge at Pella, a town in Perea, beyond the Jordan. Writing in the fourth century, he records the destination but does not identify the precise date of departure (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.3). The withdrawal of Cestius Gallus in November 66 CE provided an opportunity for such a journey, although the surviving account does not establish when the believers reached Pella.[8]

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FLIGHT FROM JERUSALEM | 66 CE

Section 8 | Prelude to the Great Tribulation

8 November 66 CE to **23 December 66 CE** Julian dates

Josephus §	Recorded date	Julian calendar	Hebrew calendar	Historical event / proposed reconstruction
2.555–556	8 Dius	8 Nov 66 CE	2 Kislev	Cestius defeated at Beth-horon; prominent Jews begin leaving Jerusalem.
2.558	–	9 Nov 66 CE	3 Kislev	Proposed departure of envoys sent by Cestius to Nero in Achaia.
–	–	29 Nov 66 CE	23 Kislev	Sabbath; calculated calendar date.
–	–	1–8 Dec 66 CE	25 Kislev–2 Tevet	Hanukkah: eight-day Feast of Dedication.
2.556	–	9 Dec 66 CE	3 Tevet	Possible later departures after Hanukkah; not dated by Josephus.
–	–	13 Dec 66 CE	7 Tevet	Sabbath; calculated calendar date.
–	–	16 Dec 66 CE	10 Tevet	Traditional fast of the Tenth of Tevet.
2.558	–	21 Dec 66 CE	15 Tevet	Hypothetical arrival of envoys after 42 days; journey length unknown.
–	–	**23 Dec 66 CE**	**17 Tevet**	**Calculated start of the proposed 2,300-day Great Tribulation.**

Undated historical event (Josephus 3.1–3): Nero learns of the defeat and appoints Vespasian; Josephus does not specify the day of his decision.

RED: Josephus' date and calendar-derived Hebrew dates for the recorded event, observances and calculated start.
Sources: Josephus, The Jewish Wars 2.555–558; 3.1–3. Utrecht Hebrew Calendar (retrospective calculation).

C. Defeat of the Romans on 8 November

The defeat of Cestius Gallus at Beth-horon, dated to **8 November 66 CE** in this chronology, ended the immediate Roman threat and opened a period in which people could leave

Jerusalem. Although the Jewish victory was substantial, Rome would return with greater military force. For those who recognised Jesus' warning, the withdrawal provided an opportunity to escape before the calculated beginning of the Great Tribulation on **23 December 66 CE**. The intervening 45 days form the period considered in the following subsections.

D. Gathering the Olive Harvest

The autumn olive harvest was an important source of food, oil and income for families throughout Judea. Those preparing to leave their homes might have wished to gather provisions, sell produce or obtain money for their journey. Such considerations could help explain why some refugees departed later than others. However, neither Josephus nor the Gospel accounts connect the flight from Jerusalem specifically with the olive harvest. These were possible practical considerations, not reasons for disregarding Jesus' urgent warning to flee.

E. Hanukkah and the Timing of Departure

Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication mentioned in John 10:22, commemorated the cleansing and rededication of the Temple following the Maccabean victory. In the reconstructed Hebrew calendar, **25 Kislev–2 Tevet 3827 AM** corresponds to **1–8 December 66 CE**. Following the Roman defeat, the festival may have strengthened hopes of national deliverance, encouraging some families to remain until its conclusion. Such a delay is possible, although neither Josephus nor Eusebius records that the Jerusalem believers postponed their departure because of Hanukkah.

F. Not on the Sabbath

Matthew 24:20 (NKJV)

> Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

Jesus instructed His disciples to pray that their flight would not occur on the Sabbath. The Sabbaths following Cestius' withdrawal fell on **15, 22 and 29 November**, and **6, 13 and 20 December 66 CE** (Julian). The final two Sabbaths followed Hanukkah and preceded the calculated beginning of the Great Tribulation on 23 December. Customary restrictions could complicate travel, obtaining provisions and arranging transport, particularly for families. Nevertheless, Jesus' warning did not require believers to remain in danger, and these dates do not establish when individual families departed.

G. The Fast of Tevet

The Fast of **10 Tevet** commemorated the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1; Zechariah 8:19). In the reconstructed calendar, it fell on **Tuesday, 16 December 66 CE**, seven days before the proposed beginning of the Great Tribulation. For people recently threatened by Roman armies, remembering Jerusalem's earlier siege would have carried particular significance. Fasting might also have discouraged some families from undertaking a demanding journey that day. However, the observance did not prohibit escape, and no historical source identifies it as a cause of delayed departure.

H. Not in Winter

Winter brought additional dangers to those travelling through Judea. Heavy rain could make steep tracks slippery and watercourses difficult to cross, while cold nights, shorter daylight hours and uncertain shelter increased the hardship. Families travelling with children, elderly relatives and provisions would have been particularly vulnerable. Jesus' instruction to pray that their flight would not occur in winter therefore addressed genuine dangers that could make an already difficult journey considerably worse.

Acts 27:9 (NKJV)

> Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them

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Luke's account of dangerous sailing after the autumn Fast illustrates the seasonal difficulties travellers faced around the eastern Mediterranean. Although sea conditions do not establish the weather on a particular Judean road, the passage reinforces the practical importance of travelling before winter made journeys increasingly hazardous.

I. Cestius Informs Nero

Josephus records that Saul, Costobarus and Philip, commander of King Agrippa's forces, fled Jerusalem and sought refuge with Cestius Gallus. Cestius then sent them to Nero to report the rebellion and blame the Roman procurator Gessius Florus. By directing the emperor's anger towards Florus, Cestius hoped to protect himself from the consequences of his military defeat (*The Jewish Wars*, 2.556-558).[9]

Reaching Nero in Achaia required a substantial journey from Judea, potentially involving both overland travel and Mediterranean crossings. Allowing **42 days**, from a proposed departure on **9 November** to an estimated arrival around **21 December 66 CE**, provides one possible reconstruction. Josephus does not record the envoys' exact departure, route or arrival date, so this calculation illustrates a possible journey rather than an established itinerary.

Josephus subsequently describes Nero's concern over the rebellion and his appointment of Vespasian to command the Roman campaign (*The Jewish Wars*, 3.1-8). Cestius's defeat therefore led to a more determined Roman response. However, Josephus supplies no precise date for Nero's decision. The beginning of the Great Tribulation on **23 December 66 CE** is established by the 2,300-day calculation from Masada, not by an independently recorded imperial order.

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9. Summary

Daniel's 2,300-day period begins with the Maccabean persecution and Temple restoration. Jesus' warning concerning Daniel's desolation supplies the basis for examining a further application to the first-century judgement upon Jerusalem.

Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem in autumn 66 CE; his withdrawal and defeat on 8 November opened an opportunity to flee. Josephus records departures, and Eusebius preserves the tradition of the church escaping to Pella. Agricultural, festival and seasonal considerations may have affected individual journeys, but no specific Christian departure date survives.

Josephus dates the deaths at Masada to 15 Xanthicus. The fixed-calendar reconstruction adopted here equates 15 Nisan with 10 April 73 CE. Calculating backwards 2,300 elapsed Julian days reaches 23 December 66 CE. The period began under Nero, included Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE and ended during Vespasian's reign.

Together, the biblical and historical evidence presents the Great Tribulation as the judgement Jesus foretold upon Jerusalem and Judea. His warning provided an opportunity to escape; the destruction of the earthly Temple in 70 CE publicly vindicated the New Covenant sanctuary already established through Christ, and the deaths at Masada marked the conclusion of the proposed 2,300-day period.

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AI Assistance Disclosure

The bulk of the research and writing for this lesson was done prayerfully by Dr Neville Westerbeek van Eerten. AI tools were used for editorial review and to check consistency, references, and chronology. Some of the wording and some of the illustrations were developed with the aid of AI. The author reviewed the final piece and is responsible for the interpretation, accuracy, and conclusions of the material.

Historical and Scholarly References

[1] Josephus, The Jewish Wars, 6.300–309

[2] Josephus, The Jewish Wars, 6.288–289; Christina Griffith, “Halley’s Comet,” Penn Museum (2019)

[3] Josephus, The Jewish Wars, 6.298–299; Tacitus, Histories, 5.13; Pseudo-Hegesippus, De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae, 5.44

[4] Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, 2.280–283; 6.422–427. Nadav Sharon, “Cestius Gallus, Gaius, suffect consul, 42 CE,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, updated 7 March 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.1494. Sharon dates Cestius' Passover visit to spring 66 CE and considers it likely that the census was ordered then. Josephus does not explicitly state the census year; the association with that visit is a scholarly inference.

[5] Josephus, *The Jewish Wars,* 2.515–555, especially 2.528–530.

[6] H. M. D. Parker, The Roman Legions (1957), p. 269

[7] Josephus, *The Jewish Wars,* 7.401–406; *Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.311; Utrecht University, Hebrew Calendar.

[8] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.3.

[9] Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, 2.556–558

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