

A Time Unlike Any Other

Play based on the events of AD70

Scene 1:

(Two tourists enter. They sit on two stones (stones are two actors that remain motionless). There are empty boxes on stage painted as additional stones.)

TOURIST 1: *(Stretching out)* My aching feet.

TOURIST 2: We sure covered a lot of ground.

TOURIST 1: And churches.

TOURIST 2: And tombs

TOURIST 1: We saw the church of Mary Magdalene, and the church of John the Baptist and the church of St. Anne

TOURIST 2: And then we went and saw where they were all buried. The garden tomb, and the tomb of the prophets and the tomb of Lazarus and the tomb of the Virgin Mary.

TOURIST 1: If I see another tomb I think I am going to die.

TOURIST 2: *(looking around)* O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. We sure saw a lot of that city today ... I wonder what Jesus would think if he saw it now.

TOURIST 1: I know what he would say ... my house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves!

TOURIST 2: One thing is for sure...it won't always be like this. I remember a Sunday School memory verse from Jeremiah "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Yahweh; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it."

TOURIST 1: And for centuries people have been trying to make it their throne instead of God's throne. Walls, wars, wailing and more walls, and more wars, and more wailing...

TOURIST 2: Jeru ... Shalem - The city of peace. It still has to live up to its name.

TOURIST 1: The Western wall is nicknamed "the wailing wall" for a good reason, isn't it?

(Both nod)

TOURIST 1: If only these stones could talk. Wouldn't they have a story to tell.

TOURIST 2: They sure would.

(horn honks)

TOURIST 2: Oh, looks like the bus is getting ready to leave.

TOURIST 1: We better go...no rest for the weary...

(They walk off stage...the stones stand up)

STONE 1: *(Stretching his back)* Oh my back; How many times have you been sat on?

STONE 2: Two million, three hundred and forty two thousand, seven hundred and sixty three times, not counting birds and crawly things.

STONE 1: I remember the first time I was sat on. It was when I was first uncovered by the flood.

STONE 2: The great flood; boy that was a long time ago. *(Reminiscing)* We were sure rough around the edges back then...

STONE 2: Speaking of the early days, I was used by women to make flour. Because I had a flat top they would pound the wheat on me. Wheat kernels were everywhere and so were the birds. And they couldn't fly away without first leaving a token of their appreciation. That's why I refuse to count birds.

STONE 1: What else happened to us in those early days?

STONE 2: Remember all those years when we were plagued with the ites?

STONE 1: Oh yes; Canaanites, and Hivites, and Hittites, and Jebusites.

STONE 2: Yes...the Jebusites...when Jerusalem really began to take shape. That's when we first met, wasn't it? We were next to each other on the wall.

STONE 1: For hundreds of years after the Jebusites we saw so much drama – kings rising and falling. The wall rising and falling.

STONE 2: Do you remember the last time – the worst time – the wall fell?

STONE 1: How could I forget? The war with Rome back in AD70...

(Stones go back down)

Scene 2:

(pre-recorded narrations – Stone 1 and 2). Acting occurs while narration is played.

STONE 1: What a time of suspense – you never knew who you could trust

STONE 2: *(Ananus in a meeting with other priests, stage left, discussing negotiations with the Romans)* You remember High Priest Ananus – the priests had grown angry at the Roman's lack of respect to their temple. The Romans had even mockingly burned unclean animals around Jewish altars! What really caused the Priests to revolt though, was when that wicked Roman governor, Florus, used his army to force his way into the temple to steal from the Jewish treasury.

(slight pause) (they exit stage right while scene continues)

STONE 1: *(John walks in stage left looking arrogant and sure of himself)* And then there was that evil John of Giscala. He was a man of great deception, and he desired nothing more than to be the leader of the Jewish rebellion. He *pretended* to be of the people's opinion and spoke strongly about the evils of the Roman government and the unjust taxation, but really he was a far worse tyrant than Rome!

(slight pause) (he exits stage right while scene continues)

STONE 2: *(Josephus sitting on edge of stage left reading scrolls)* And who could forget the Jewish Captive Josephus. The Romans had captured him two years earlier, and were quite pleased to have in prison the Jewish commander of all Galilee. Josephus was a priest by birth, and had been commanded by the priests in Jerusalem to lead the rebellion in the north. Once captured, he became a favourite among the Romans for his intelligence and his ability to foresee how events would unfold.

(hops of stage and walks to behind stage)

STONE 1: *(Vespasian and Titus enter from stage left; Vespasian gives command to Titus; gives him hug)* Last of all, the great Roman Commander Titus – son of the newly appointed Roman Emperor Vespasian. Titus had worked alongside his father for two years fighting the Jews in Galilee. Vespasian, now needing to return to Rome to claim the throne, leaves Titus to finish the war, with express orders to take Jerusalem quickly in order to secure his popularity among the Romans.

(Vespasian leaves stage right, to go behind stage)

Scene 3:

(Titus stands with one foot resting on Stone 1)

TITUS: *(calling out)* Bring me that Jewish prisoner, Josephus!

(Soldier 1 brings Josephus in who is bound.)

TITUS: You know as well as I do what a long, drawn out war will mean for your people, and for my army. I need to end this quickly Josephus. You know the land, you know the city, you know the people – we need your help.

JOSEPHUS: *(in disbelief)* You'd like me to betray my own people, my own heritage!?

TITUS: *(shaking his head)* You would be doing a great *favour* to your people, my friend. You know we have no intention of inflicting unnecessary hardship – your Zealots are doing more damage than we are these days. Robbers run free terrorizing any town without a Roman garrison. Your temple is being desecrated daily by those unholy men. *(draws near, convincingly)* Help me succeed quickly – your people will listen to you more than they will listen to any of us. Help them to see they cannot hope to win against the Great Roman Empire.

JOSEPHUS: *(pausing, visibly struggling with it; shaking head in dismay and frustration, sits down on stone 2; reluctantly agrees)* When do we leave?

TITUS: *(Calling out)* Soldier! *(Soldier 1 enters)* I have orders to be delivered – we break camp immediately – we head for Jerusalem at dawn. *(Soldier 1 leaves stage left, Titus and Josephus leave thru stage right)*

Scene 4:

(Stones stand up)

STONE 2: *(stretching out the kinks in his back)* Ugh! I'm always being used as a bench.

STONE 1: Better that, than a winepress!

STONE 2: Or a bake oven

STONE 1: A threshing floor

STONE 2: A rooster perch

STONE 1: A bake oven

STONE 2: I said that already.

STONE 1: A rock for a catapult!

STONE 2: Oh yeah, remember our friend who got used during the siege of Jerusalem? He was never quite the same after that – he was a broken man.

STONE 1: Yes, getting back to our stroll down memory lane...With the Roman army heading south, many of the Zealots and fanatics, including John of Giscala, came from all around the countryside and headed to Jerusalem to make one last stand against the Romans.

STONE 2: This brought no end of grief to High Priest Ananus, who still held out hope that they would be able to make a deal with the Romans for peace.

(Stones go back down)

*(Ananus enters from back right, climbs steps, turns and faces crowd who has gathered below)
(crowd of common people has gathered, whispering excitedly about what Ananus might say)*

ANANUS: *(speaking to the common people and audience)* You must see that negotiations with the Romans' are our only hope of survival. *(Firmly)* We have made our stand and Rome has taken notice. *(More calmly, gently)* Now let us talk, and work out an agreement for peace. No more corrupt governors, the sanctity of the temple....

JOHN: *(walking up with his Zealots from back of audience, yelling)* THERE IS NO USE MAKING DEALS WITH THE ROMANS. The time of talking is over. WE MUST BEAT THEM.

(common people disperse. John and Zealots gather, slightly around corner of stage right)

Ananus walks to meet Priests who have gathered onto stage left

(Pre-recorded narration by Stones 1 & 2. During narration, Priests meeting secretly, discussing surrender to the Romans, when in shock they look over to see John and a group of Zealots with swords raised, who then chase Priests off stage left.

STONE 2: And so the tension inside Jerusalem grew to a climax, until one evening John took advantage of a terrible storm to help him destroy Ananus and the priests. With Ananus gone, John was free to rule Jerusalem as a dictator and make his stand against Rome.

Once stage is clear, John alone marches back to center stage victorious, then leaves stage right.

Scene 5:

(Stones stand up to speak on either side of the stage)

(While stones are speaking – Zealots are peeking out from behind 1st wall. Roman soldiers come in with battering ram; zealots flee to behind second wall. Romans break down first wall. Zealots above peering out over second (third) wall now.)

STONE 1: And so Jerusalem once again in its long history came under direct assault. Vespasian had long put off a direct attack on Jerusalem, because it was built like a fortress and he feared the loss of many troops. With surprising speed, the Romans were able to break down the first two walls around the city in just 23 days.

STONE 2: As Titus advanced through the city he ordered that no Jews caught in the assault be put to death, and their homes were not to be destroyed. The battle then turned to a stalemate when the Romans reached the enormous third wall. Not only was it 60 feet high, it was 15 feet thick! *(Stones go back into stone position)*

(Titus, Josephus and Soldier 2 enter from stage right)

TITUS: Josephus, come, you must go and talk to them – help them to see the uselessness of fighting; help them to see that we are not the enemy – we will give life and peace to all those who are willing to stop fighting.

JOSEPHUS: *(nodding hesitantly; walking over to wall, puts foot on Stone 1)* Men of Jerusalem, please listen to what I have to say.

(John & Zealots up high on wall, common people enter and gather on ground)

ZEALOT 1: Traitor!

ZEALOT 2: Lover of Gentile dogs!

JEW 1: *(sitting on Stone 2; to Jew 2)* What does he have to say? Perhaps Titus is willing to negotiate?

JOHN: *(overhears Jew 1; vehemently)* NEVER SHALL WE NEGOTIATE WITH THE ROMANS!

JEW 2: *(talking to Jew 1)* I heard a rumour that all the Jews captured in the outer part of the city have been given freedom. At least that's more than we have here under *these* tyrants *(nodding up to Zealots)*.

JOSEPHUS: Rome wants *peace* with us Jews

ZEALOT 1: *(angrily)* How can you call yourself a Jew – saving yourself by sacrificing your men!

JOSEPHUS: Titus offers free passage to all those who want to leave the city. He will show mercy to those that stop fighting now.

JOHN: Don't listen to him – he's a Roman slave! These are the murderers of your loved ones. If anyone so much as breathes a word about surrender it will be death for them and their whole family! We'll *never* make a deal with the Rome!

(Zealot 2 shoots arrow towards Josephus, hitting Soldier 2 (Nicanor), who falls over injured)

JOSEPHUS: Nicanor!!

TITUS: *(In rage)* If it's war they want...we'll give them war! Cut down every tree for ten miles – start building the siege towers!

(Josephus, Nicanor and Titus exit stage right)

Scene 6:

(John is sitting in a chair with feet up on a table eating lavishly; Zealots have come to report to him.)

ZEALOT 1: The Romans keep allowing Jewish pilgrims into the city for Passover, but they refuse to let them leave. We are stretched as far as our food resources will allow.

ZEALOT 2: People are starting to feel the effects of the siege. More and more, there are whispers of surrendering to the Romans.

JOHN: *(standing up, angrily)* No, NO! *(To Zealot 1)* Find the naysayers, and get rid of them. *(To Zealot 2)* Simon – you know the stockpiled food inside the temple? *(Zealot 2 nods)* Burn it. NOW!

ZEALOT 1: *(In disbelief)* BURN it?! That's enough food for the whole city for a year!!

JOHN: *(walking to front of stage, crazed)* There is too much talk of surrender. We must make the people fight; we must *force* them to fight!

(Zealots and John leave stage left)

(Stones stand up)

(During narration below, Romans carry in siege tower and place stage right at front of stage)

STONE 2: And so the people inside the city groaned and prayed that the Romans might come and deliver them from the bloodthirsty zealots.

STONE 1: The siege towers Titus had commanded to be built created new worries within the city walls. John led a group of men in a bold and desperate attempt to destroy the siege towers by lighting them on fire through tunnels they had dug under the third wall. The Zealots watched with relief as the siege towers burned to the ground.

(John and group of Zealots use shovels to dig their way across front of stage "below" siege tower. They imitate the siege towers being lit on fire. Romans smell fire, scream and flee. Siege tower falls over while Zealots race down back shouting victoriously.)

Scene 7:

(Titus is at his desk thinking, Soldiers 1 and 2 come in to him, with Josephus.)

TITUS: *(Looking up, very frustrated)* They've destroyed my towers! I have ¼ of the whole Roman army sitting outside Jerusalem and we've been stopped by a few Jews! *(stands up and paces back and forth)*

SOLDIER 1: Sir, let's throw everything we have at attacking them – they'll only be able to hold us off for so long.

TITUS: No, it's not going to work – we'll lose too many men for it to seem like a victory for Rome.

SOLDIER 2: Sir, a siege won't work either – they are getting too many supplies into the city still. It's too large of an area to monitor the whole perimeter.

TITUS: *(paces back and forth and stops to rest his foot on Stone 1, which then gives him an idea; kicks the rock excitedly)* Then we'll build a wall. Let's put this army to work. Josephus – how big will this need to be?

JOSEPHUS: *(stepping forward)* About 4 ½ miles around. You'll want to dig a trench and then build the wall – you'll use half the materials and still have a wall that's high enough.

TITUS: Good – men, you've got your orders – get to work. Gather all these old stones together – I want it done by the end of the week. Anyone caught between the walls trying to escape is to be held prisoner.

(Men disperse to various posts, exiting stage right)

Scene 8:

Pre-recorded narration of Stones 1 & 2, while Zealots pace the stage with swords, grabbing "food" from common people's hands; common people are terrified.

STONE 2: With the completion of a new wall around the city in just three days, no supplies could get in or out. Food supplies dwindled to the point where people would eat anything that might help to sustain life – hay, belts, and shoes. The Zealots ran uncontrolled through the city, taking food right from people's mouths. As Christ had warned, this would be a time of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever would be."

Titus & Josephus walk in front of stage to wall and look up in horror

STONE 1: With thousands dying each day in the city, Titus looked on in dismay that the Zealots still refused to surrender. When witnessing the mounds of dead bodies dumped over the city walls, he reached up his hands towards heaven....

TITUS: *(raising hands above his head)* I call God to witness that this is not my doing!!

JOSEPHUS: *(Stepping forward)* Sir, please, may I go one last time to talk to them. My wife...my parents...they are still in the city.

TITUS: *(Nods his head in assent and exits stage right)*

JOSEPHUS: *(approaches the city wall)* Men and brethren. Think not only of your lives. Think of your wives and children. If you surrender now, our city...our temple. Caesar will spare it all!

JOHN: *(spitting in disgust toward Josephus)* We have no fear of being captured – Jerusalem is the city of God! He will protect us.

JOSEPHUS: And if he doesn't – does that not mean that our God has forsaken His city for the wickedness of you Zealots? God is giving this city over for capture and destruction. *(Begging)* Surrender now!

JOHN: NEVER!!!!

Zealots wave swords, shouting violently, while common people look on in terror and dismay, crying and holding each other

*(Josephus exits stage right, very depressed)
(Zealots and common people slowly exit stage left while continuing to act)*

Scene 9:

(Stones stand up)

STONE 2: It was that very night that the same tunnels dug earlier by the Zealots to destroy the Roman siege towers caused the third wall to weaken, creating an opening for the Roman army.

STONE 1: Rising early in the morning to lead his men into battle, Titus gave strict orders to his men to spare the temple – it was to be a gift for his father the emperor.

*(Stones go back down)
(Titus marching his men into battle from stage right. John and Zealots set for the attack on stage left)*

TITUS: CHARGE!

(fighting ensues, Romans quickly overpower Zealots who flee from stage left)

JOHN: Fall back to the Temple! Fall back to the Temple!

(John and Zealots leave stage left, chased by the Romans, circle around from back of stage and come out in front of stage left, still being chased).

(Fighting pauses as both sides take up their new positions).

TITUS: Steady men.....FOR ROME!

(Titus and Josephus stay in rear. Men shout as the 2 sides charge forward and clash in epic battle. Majority of Jews are slain. John escapes down side aisle of audience.)

JOSEPHUS: *(pointing to right side of stage)* General, the Temple! The Temple! It is on fire!

TITUS: NO!! NO!!.....The treasures! Get the treasures out of the temple!

(Roman soldiers collect objects from the Temple, carry them out to exit left side of stage; music plays and smoke billows).

(stage cleared)

Scene 10:

(Pre-recorded narration by Stones, during which Titus and soldiers enter from back center of audience carrying treasures. John is being led bound. Vespasian appears center stage, holds up arms to welcome Titus and his men.)

STONE 1: After the Romans captured Jerusalem and the Temple, Titus order the remains of the temple to be razed to the ground, and thus was fulfilled the words of Christ's "there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." He then left his army in Jerusalem and returned to Rome to present the spoils of war to his father.

STONE 2: Vespasian held a grand parade through the streets of Rome where the glories of the Temple and the captured zealot leader – John of Giscala – were put on display in celebration of Rome's victory over the Jews.

(Titus enters stage right to greet Vespasian)

VESPASIAN: Titus my son, what a victory you have wrought for Rome! Servant, bring the victor's wreath!

(Servant enters with victor's wreath. Vespasian goes to place it on Titus' head)

TITUS: *(rejecting wreath)* Father, please. There is no merit in vanquishing a people forsaken by their own God.

VESPASIAN: As you wish, my son. *(pause)* Now, let me tell you of my plans for the spoils of the Jewish Temple. *(puts arm on Titus shoulder, points to place off in distance)*. There – for all the world to see from this day on, we shall build a monument so grand that the world will never forget Rome's victory over the Jews. *(pause)* It will be built by the sweat of Jewish slaves, *(pause)* and paid for out of the treasury of the Jewish temple; and it will be called...the Colosseum of Rome.

(music plays as they exit stage right together, Vespasian's arm around Titus shoulder)

Scene 11:

(Stones stand up)

STONE 1: And thus the walls of Jerusalem fell down again.

STONE 2: And here we have sat for 2000 years – through the dark ages, and the crusades, and the Islamic empires

STONE 1: But now, finally, the Jews have retaken Jerusalem.

STONE 2: And history has shown that whenever the Israelites are in Jerusalem, the wall is rebuilt. We seem to rise and fall with the spiritual state of Israel.

STONE 1: It sure isn't spiritual now.

STONE 2: But it will be again...and soon! When the kings of the earth will bring their glory and honour into it, instead of stripping it away.

STONE 1: And all those that are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter in.

STONE 2: So let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

(Stones go back down)

(Pray for the peace of Jerusalem plays quietly while stage is cleared)

Closing Hymn: *Jerusalem of Gold*