

NO PLACE TO HIDE

POMPEI and HERCULANEUM

Pompei and Herculaneum were two cities south of Rome in the Bay of Naples. They are the archaeologist's and scholar's dream because life of the first century AD has, by a catastrophe been 'frozen' and left largely untouched for nigh 2,000 years.

Herculaneum

Unlike Pompei, Herculaneum was buried with mud and lava. The mud (in some places up to 65 feet deep) has encased life as it was in ancient times. The city had a population of 4-5,000 and the houses appear more well-to-do than at Pompei. But unfortunately, much of the ancient city still lies under the streets of the modern town of Resina, so its treasures still await seeing the light of day. This is also true of some other towns whose location is not yet known - Sora, Tora, Taurania, Cossa and Leucopetra.

Pompei

The ancient city of Pompei, 12 miles south of Naples, was held in turn by Greeks, Etruscans, Samnites and after 89BC, by the Romans. At this time, it was an important port and centre of agriculture, wine and perfume production. It is a mile and a half wide, by a mile broad, and is surrounded by a wall just over 2 miles in length that has 8 gates. It was a city of approximately 20-25,000 inhabitants who lived in 2 or even 3 storey houses and villas.

Along with its sister cities of Herculaneum and Stabiae, Pompei was damaged by an earthquake in 63AD. The cities were repaired, but none were aware of the danger building beneath the ground of Mount Vesuvius; till 1:00 pm on August 24th 79AD, the mount called "unextinguishable" erupted and buried Pompei in hot ashes (lapilli) to a depth of 7 metres and covered Herculaneum in lava and mud up to 30 metres deep.

The buried city was not completely forgotten. Peasants living in the area did tunnel into the deposits searching for treasures. In 1594 workers were tunnelling to change the course of the Sarno River and they found remains of the amphitheatre, forum and a temple. Then in 1748 a peasant digging a vineyard struck a buried wall which came to the attention of local authorities who haphazardly excavated until Giuseppe Fiorelli started a systematic uncovering of the whole city, block by block. Up to date four fifths has been resurrected from the grave.

The fair blue skies attracted many wealthy Romans. They built great villas near the Mediterranean shore often in the Roman style with rooms grouped around the Atrium (reception room). In one such place we know that Cicero had his 'domus' so too did Pliny. The largest is called the House of the Faun (named after a bronze statuette found in it) and covered an entire block (3,150 square metres).

Many of the more luxurious houses contain fine mosaics and wall paintings dating back to between 280 and 200BC. Grecian influence has caused many scenes of Homer to be painted and a fine example of a mosaic is the "Triumph of Alexander the Great over Darius the Persian." The Grecian beauty in architecture, statues of cupids, gods and mythological beings are to be seen everywhere.

Pagan religions thrived. Many temples give evidence of the more ancient Egyptian, Babylonian and Grecian influences and teachings. The mark of the "evil eye" is still to be seen on many homes of superstitious owners. The temple of Jupiter, in its prime position next to the Forum, declared above its Corinthian pillared entrance "TO CAESAR THE DIVINE, MOST EXCELLENT EMPEROR, SUPREME PONTIFF."

The beautiful temple of Isis, the pagan "Mother God" was, according to George Sampson (historian of Pompei) "The Egyptian goddess whose worship prepared the way for a form of religion that was to later triumph over paganism, a mother figure, who was revered together with her son, this anticipated a later female, the object of devotion that we find in Italy today." Here in this temple was found the carbonised remains of the Priests dinner of hard-boiled eggs and lentils.

The Apostle Paul, prior to the destruction, was brought to Puteoli (now called Pozzuoli) on his way to Rome for execution. Here for one week, he was able to preach, and Pompei was only 13 miles away. Christianity had visited the area and the words of Christ would have been heard in her streets such as that found in Matthew 24.

One of the most weird aspects of the finds at Pompei were the way the dead were found. As archaeology did its work removing the ash, they kept finding large unusual holes. To find out what they were, they filled the next one with plaster. As the ash was removed from the set plaster they found a cast of a man. Over 2,000 were found, many had suffocated, some were killed by the hot ash and some had their wealth with them as they tried in vain to escape. There was no place to hide that day.

No place to hide - Pompei stands as a warning to our generation. Once it was said “For as the days of Noah were ... before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and KNEW NOT until the flood came and took them all away.” So, it will be before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The end of the world, like Pompei will come unexpectedly.

The New Testament alone, has over 360 references to the happenings of the LAST DAYS; passages which not only describe events but also give us signs that we might know when the end is near. Therefore, we need not be caught out as did the populations of Pompei and Herculaneum etc, if we heed the counsels of Jesus (Matthew 24:17,18).

From Matthew 24 we can list many of the signs that Jesus gives:-

1. WARS (v.6,7)
2. FAMINES (v.7)
3. PESTILENCE (disease and even pollution!) (v.7)
4. EARTHQUAKES (v.7)
5. when the GOSPEL goes to the world (v.14)
6. FALSE CHRISTS AND PROPHETS (v.5,11)

These are but a few. A careful study will highlight many more. Study these: Luke 21:7-28; Revelation 6:14-17 (cf. Matt.24:29,30); 2 Peter 3:10-13.

We are also given a very clear picture that Jesus’s second coming will be literal and visible. From Matthew 24:24-27; 25:31; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:10,11; 1Thess. 4:16,17; Revelation 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, we can list some of the physical, audible and visible attributes of His appearing: CLOUDS; LIGHTNING; ANGELS; GREAT GLORY; POWER; TRUMPET; SHOUT; etc.

He is surely soon to come back. We do not know the day nor the hour, so we need to be people watching, watching and ready (Matt. 24:42 et al.) On that day, like Pompei, we will also have ‘**no place to hide**’ (Rev. 6:16), but if we are watching and ready, we will be rescued - that is Jesus’s promise (Hebrews 9:28; John 14:1-3).