

MOUNT VESUVIUS: FIRST CENTURY VOLCANO

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An eruption of a volcano will cause serious problems and disruptions over a wide area. You might recall the eruption of Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington in 1980. Such a catastrophe reminds us of how truly small and weak we are in the face of the power God put in nature. To see molten rock spewing forth from the inner regions of the earth and the atmosphere being filled with tons of volcanic rock and ash is quite amazing, and more than a little frightening.



Volcanoes have been blowing their tops all throughout history, even in Bible times. The most famous volcano of the first century AD is not mentioned in the Bible but is well known in history. In the tragic hours of August 24 and 25, AD 79, **Mount Vesuvius**, located in southern Italy, suddenly erupted, destroying and entombing the city of *Herculaneum* to the northwest, and the larger, more famous city of *Pompeii* to the south. For almost 18 hours the mountain erupted, burying these cities under rock and ash as deep as 25-30 feet. Time stopped for these Roman cities, preserving their history and splendor which was buried for centuries until excavations began in the 1700's. These archaeological sites are now virtual museums of first century Roman life and culture.

In the Bible timeline, this natural disaster took place just nine years after the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. The apostle John was still living at this time. The apostle Paul was not alive at the time of the eruption, but most likely could see Mount Vesuvius on his way to Rome several years earlier when his ship sailed past it to land some 30 miles north at Puteoli (Acts 27-28). There was a church at Puteoli (Acts 28:13-14), and some of these brethren might very well have been eyewitnesses of Vesuvius' terrible eruption almost 20 years later.