

The Jewish War (AD 68-70) by Flavius Josephus A Summary

Josephus says in the introduction of *The Jewish War* that he wishes to present facts accurately and without bias. He is troubled by his country's decline from prosperity to misery and writes, "*For our misfortunes we have only ourselves to blame.*" Josephus begins his history of the Jewish War by going back to Syrian **King Antiochus Epiphanes** (215 BC-164 BC). Antiochus was king of the Seleucid Empire and ruled over the Jews from 175 BC until his death in 164 BC. The revolt against his rule was led by the Jewish Maccabees, and in 165 the Maccabees took back the Temple where Antiochus had dedicated an altar to Zeus and sacrificed pigs. This Temple rededication is what the Jews celebrate during Hanukah. Josephus goes on to describe the next century when Israel came under Roman domination, conquered by the Roman leader Pompey. 12,000 Jews die fighting the Romans. Pompey appoints a new High Priest and the beginning of the joint *Roman and Jewish* rule begins (the iron and the clay toes of Daniel 2:43). Rome faces a civil war from 49 BC to 31 BC. Julius Caesar is assassinated in 44 BC, and in 40 BC Antony appoints Herod (74 to 4 BC) as King of the Jews. Julius Caesar's adopted son, Octavianus (63 BC AD 14), becomes the first Caesar. Luke 2 describes Caesar issuing a decree. Matthew 2 describes King Herod.

Herod the Great, King of the Jews, His Rise and His Downfall (40 BC - 4 BC)

Herod begins a remodel of the Temple in 23 BC, including enlarging it. The remodel is taking place throughout the time of Jesus and is not completed until AD 64. Herod builds for himself palaces and other shelters throughout the land of Israel. Caesarea by the Sea is built in honor of Octavianus. Israel prospers economically. However, Herod is a vicious man. He executes his wife's grandfather, his brother Joseph and his eventually his wife Mariamme (29 BC). He puts on trial his own sons. He is visited by the wise men from the east who say, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews" and Herod decides to kill all newborn Hebrew children under the age of two. Shortly after his brutal butchery of Jewish boys (which Jesus escapes by being brought south to Egypt by Mary and Joseph), Herod himself dies.

The Rule of Tetrarchs in Judah and Procurator Pontius Pilate (4 BC – AD 37)

Herod's son Archelaus is declared King after Herod's death, but the Jews rebel, and the Roman governor of Syria marches to Jerusalem to crush the rebellion. The Jewish Kingdom is divided and ruled by four "tetrarchs" (4 leaders) - Archelaus, Philip, Herod Antipas, Alexander. Throughout the life of Christ, Judea (Israel) is ruled by various men who served as tetrarchs of the different regions of Judea. Eventually, in AD 26, the Roman **Caesar Tiberius** appoints **Pontius Pilate** as Roman "procurator." Pilate would hold this position a decade. Civil rule was the responsibility of the tetrarchs. Religious rule fell to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Nothing could be done without the procurator's permission (Pilate).

The Growing Tension between the Jews and the Romans (AD 37 - AD 54)

Seven years after Calvary, Caesar Tiberius dies (AD 37). Gaius "Caligula" becomes Caesar. Caligula attempts to force placement of statues in the Temple. There is strong Jewish resistance. Eventually Rome relents and Caligula dies (AD 41). The new Roman emperor Claudius faces stiff resistance from the Jews when an indecent gesture by a Roman soldier at the Temple in Jerusalem leads to Jewish riots and over 30,000 deaths. A sacrilegious soldier is executed to placate the Jews. A great conflict arises between the Jews and the Samaritans. Claudius dies in AD 54 and is succeeded by Emperor Nero. According to Josephus, when Nero takes the throne, many false Messiahs enter Jerusalem, great natural disasters take place (earthquakes, famine, etc...), and "the great tribulation" of the Jews begins.

Nero Rules from Rome and Begins to Persecute both Jews and Christians (a Jewish sect).

Nero appoints his own procurators of Judea, and the Jews once again have their “King.” This time it is King Agrippa II, the great-grandson of King Herod the Great of Jesus’ day. Local war breaks out in **May-June AD 66** in Caesarea. King Herod Agrippa II gives an impassioned speech to the Jews counseling them against any war against the Romans, for it would be a futile war. They must submit to the tyranny of Rome. He cites the Athenians, the Britons, the Gauls (French), the Germans, the Spanish, the Black Sea and Asian Minor inhabitants, the Thracians, the Illyrians, the Carthaginians, the Egyptians, and other conquered peoples now ruled by Rome. No one will come to aid of the Jews. God is on the side of the Romans, for otherwise, so vast an army could have never been built! Play it safe, don't sail into a hurricane. Soon, however, the mob forces King Agrippa II out of Caesarea by the Sea. War has begun.

The Outbreak of the Jewish War

The fortress Masada is attacked by the Sicarii (“the dagger men,” so named because of the dagger carried in their bosoms) in **AD 66**. Eleazar son of Ananias at the Temple provokes the Romans by abolishing sacrifices offered for Rome or Caesar (the Romans call Eleazar’s followers “The Zealots”). There are seven days of mutual slaughter. High priest Ananias is murdered. There is a slaughter of Jews at Caesarea and destruction of cities throughout the land. Jews are killed in Syria. Jews attack Jews that they feel are not supportive of the revolt. There are anti-Jewish purges in Scythopolis, Ascalon, Ptolemais, Tyre, and throughout Judea. Roman soldiers attack Jews in Alexandria. Cestius (legate in Syria) attacks in Galilee, plundering and pillaging at Ptolemais, Caesarea, Joppa, etc. **The war advances toward Jerusalem.** King Agrippa II fails at negotiation with the Jews to avert war with the Romans. Cestius pauses outside Jerusalem, delays attacking, then calls off his men and retreats ignominiously. Jews capture Roman machines and celebrate a victory. The Jews elect Joseph, son of Gorion and Ananus, to lead in the City. Eleazar, son of Simon, and his Zealot followers gradually rise to power. **Josephus** (the author) is appointed commander in the Galilee region and organizes the military.

Emperor Nero (AD 54 to June AD 68) Sends General Vespasian to Quell Jewish Revolt

Vespasian is sent by Nero to assume command of armies in Syria, and Vespasian calls on his son Titus to lead the 15th Legion. Vespasian arrives in Antioch, capitol of Syria, and meets King Agrippa II. Vespasian issues order to march on Galilee. Josephus's troops flee when confronted by the approaching army. Josephus knows failure is inevitable and writes Jerusalem urging them to sue for terms of surrender. Josephus contemplates escape but decides against it. Josephus hides in a cave with his men. Josephus agrees to a plan for two men to slit everyone’s throats until there are the only 2 men left alive. Josephus is one of the throat slitters, but he and his friend decide to remain alive after all! Josephus is brought before Vespasian, and Titus argues that he should be spared. *Josephus prophesies that Vespasian and Titus will become emperors.* Josephus also successfully prophesies that Jotapata would fall after 47 days of siege. Vespasian becomes impressed at Josephus’ prophetic abilities and makes him historian.

Vespasian Continues to Move South toward Jerusalem

Vespasian marches toward Caesarea. The Jews build a pirate fleet, begin raiding the Syrian and Phoenician waters, and disrupt shipping. Vespasian sends troops. Joppa is destroyed. Jews are angry to discover Josephus is alive and collaborating with the Romans. Hebrew rebel John of Gischala flees Gischala and arrives in Jerusalem. Confusion and lawlessness reign. Two groups of Jews begin to fight one another over control of the Temple. One group, led by John, retreats into the Temple to take up

defensive positions. The other group is led by high priest Ananus and the priest Jeshua. John calls for Idumaeans from the south to help him, and when they are admitted to Jerusalem they kill the high priests Ananus and Jeshua. The bodies are desecrated. Josephus states that the fall of Jerusalem began with the slaying of Ananus. He writes *"God had sentenced this polluted city to destruction and willed that the Sanctuary should be purged by fire, and so cut off those who clung to them and loved them so dearly."*

Savagery, butchery, and torture continue. There is a reign of terror, sham courts, and people being put to death for treason. The Idumaeans regret coming and also participating in this unparalleled savagery. Some depart. Vespasian hears of the internal dissension and civil war of the Jews and views this as a godsend. The Jews are occupied fighting each other rather than preparing weapons to fight the Romans. Many deserters flee Jerusalem. Burial is forbidden and the bodies rot in the streets.

Vespasian Becomes Emperor of Rome

News arrives of the uprising in Gaul against Nero. Vespasian foresees the upcoming Roman civil war. He marches to subdue Jerusalem by encircling the city. Vespasian learns of Nero's suicide in June of 68. He suspends war actions against Jerusalem, and sends his son Titus to pay homage to the new emperor Galba. But Galba is assassinated in AD 69, and Otho follows as emperor. Simon son of Gioras leads another faction among the Jews and is training an army to take Jerusalem from John and the Zealots. The Idumaeans ally with Simon.

Emperor Otho commits suicide and Vitellius follows as Emperor of Rome. John's forces in Jerusalem commit more atrocities. Simon surrounds Jerusalem and is invited to overthrow the Zealots by the high priest Matthias. Simon, once inside, assumes supremacy over all and disdains those who invited him in, as well as the Zealots he conquered. Simon launches an assault on the Temple.

Like Jerusalem, Rome is in disorder. Vitellius turns the city into a military camp. Vespasian is angered at Vitellius' accession as emperor. His soldiers talk of revolution and proclaim Vespasian as emperor, which he accepts. Vespasian marches to Alexandria, the lighthouse at Pharos, and is warmly received. The governor of Egypt swears allegiance to him (AD 69). Vespasian, remembering the prophecy of Josephus, frees him (AD 69). Vitellius's commanders abandon him for Vespasian. Vitellius's army is destroyed and Vitellius is slain in Rome. Vespasian is proclaimed emperor in Rome and he makes plan to return to Rome. ***Meanwhile, he sends Titus to complete the siege of Jerusalem.***

The Siege of Jerusalem

There is factional fighting with Jerusalem. Eleazar son of Simon seizes the inner court of the Temple, John and his men continue the plunder in the city, and Simon son of Gioras also fights to win the Temple. The Jews are effectively destroying the city. The grain that would feed them during the siege is destroyed in flames, the hunger that will follow thus being their responsibility. John purloins the sacred timbers to make engines of war. Titus "Caesar" advances on Jerusalem. He is trapped at one point and has to fight for his life. John seizes the inner court of the Temple from the Zealots and Eleazar son of Simon. Josephus is recruited by Titus to serve as an intermediary, to persuade his people to surrender.

Simon's partisans and John and his Zealots continue to fight each other, even when the Romans are closely encamped. Josephus states that Jerusalem's internal divisions destroyed the City, and the Romans destroyed the internal divisions. The siege begins and the factions unite. The Romans build

siege towers. The outer wall is breached and soon the second wall is broken down. Josephus makes more appeals to the people. He appeals to reliance on God and says they are fighting against God. He recounts past episodes of Jewish subjugation in which force of arms had not succeeded--the Egyptians, Babylonians, Antiochus Epiphanes [Antiochus IV, Syrian king 175 -164 BC], and Pompey the Great. The Jewish nation was never intended to bear arms. The Romans are only expecting the customary tribute. Josephus states he is willing to sacrifice his mother, wife, children, and even his own life in order to persuade the people to relent.

The Horrors of the Siege Includes Great Tribulation

There is famine. People torture others to find food. Some resort to drinking blood. The dead are discarded from the walls. Titus calls to the gods that this desecration was not his doing. The priests are killed and Josephus's father is imprisoned. Josephus is injured. Escapees are swallowing gold and the surrounding Arabs and Syrians eviscerate fleeing refugees to recover their gold.

Josephus foresaw that God would have taken further divine punishment on the sacrilegious behavior of the Jewish ruffians had the Romans delayed their attacks. The Antonia is entered. Titus gives his troops a pep talk. Josephus again appeals to the Jews to surrender. He lambastes John (the Hebrew rebel leader). Titus rebukes John, urging him to put a stop to the needless destruction. The Antonia is destroyed. The Jews burn the colonnade, killing some Roman soldiers. Josephus hears a report that a woman named Mary eats her baby. This abomination leads Titus to higher resolve to destroy the City.

The Temple Is Destroyed and the City Is Taken

Soldiers set fire to the Temple. Titus regrets this for he wanted to save the Temple. The sanctuary burns, "the most wonderful edifice ever seen or heard of," having lasted for 1040 years (built when Solomon was King of Israel). There is looting. Some are butchered. Jerusalem is on fire. The Romans bring their standards into the Temple area and erect them. The Temple is plundered by the Romans. Titus tries to slow the destruction. He berates the Jews for bringing this destruction upon themselves.

The Temple and the city of Jerusalem are totally destroyed (Matthew 24) and the Old Covenant comes to an end (AD 70). Josephus estimates that 97,000 prisoners were taken in the war, and that 1,100,000 perished during the siege (Tacitus estimates that there were 600,000 under siege). John and Simon, the Hebrew rebel leaders, are captured.

Titus orders that the whole City and Sanctuary be razed to the ground, leaving the towers and some of *the west wall*. Purges of Jews follow in Antioch. Vespasian arrives in Rome. He takes the spoils of the Jewish war back to Rome: golden table, lampstand, the Jewish Law. Simon is executed.

The last battle of the Jewish War occurs at the fortress Masada. Josephus recounts the history of Masada; how it was improved by King Herod and giving its layout and provisions. Romans employ rams and fire to conquer what the Jews had taken four years earlier. Josephus says God burns the walls for the Romans. Eleazar, son of Jairus, appeals to his followers for mass suicide to prevent their capture and enslavement. God himself has taken away all hope of survival. They burn their possessions. Eleazar speaks on the soul and sleep, the exterminations of Jews in Syria, how other Roman victims have been tortured or half-eaten by beasts but kept alive, etc. They choose 10 men to kill the others, the 9 are then killed by the one, and he kills himself. 960 are dead (AD 72 or 73). When the Romans arrive, they find only 2 women survivors, hiding in the conduits.