

Vespasian Begins the War

Jewish War Chronology (Part 1)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Aug 4, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Well, here we are for another round of historical studies, to help us learn from the past, and build a better worldview for the future.
- B. Let's pray before we begin --
Infinite and Eternal God of the universe, possessor of immortality and giver of light and life to all your chosen ones: We worship You and bless your Holy Name for saving us Gentiles and grafting us into your holy people. We seek Your face and ask for your Truth to light our way so that we can follow you all the days of our life, both here and in the heavens above. Be with us here as we study the Bible and history, and enable us to understand it, so that we can apply it to our lives in a way that lets Your light shine through us to enlighten the pathway of others. We pray this in the Name of Our Glorious Savior and Lord, Jesus. Amen.
- C. Last time we looked at the **early months of the rebellion** (August through December AD 66). We saw how the Zealots quickly organized their government and prepared for the Roman attack. The Roman Legate in Antioch, Cestius Gallus, did not waste any time responding to the rebellion, but his attack on Jerusalem was mismanaged from start to finish. His failure to squash the rebellion, only strengthened and emboldened the Zealot cause, and made the carnage, misery, and destruction seventy times worse than it would have been otherwise.
- D. This time we want to look at Vespasian's and Titus' preparations for the war, and their attack upon Galilee. Vespasian eventually eliminated all of the resistance in the north, and pushed all the rebels to the south toward Jerusalem. Just as Vespasian was preparing to attack Jerusalem, Nero died and plunged the whole Roman empire into a state of instability and uncertainty. After a year of civil wars and strife by would-be emperors, Vespasian was hailed by the legions as the new emperor.
- E. One of the things that we need to point out, in case we have not already noticed it, is that the **Christians totally disappeared from the historical narrative** right after the war broke out in the summer of AD 66. Neither Josephus, Tacitus, Yosippon, or Hegesippus mention any activities of any Christians during the war (AD 66-70). There are no more New Testament books being written, no more missionary journeys, and no participation in the Zealot war effort. Josephus mentions Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Hellenistic Jews, proselytes, Babylonian and Persian Jews, Idumaeans, Galileans, Samaritans, and all other Jews from all over the Roman empire coming back to Judea to help fight the war. But there is no mention of any Christians whatsoever. There is a **strange absence**

of Christians at this time. Jewish historians like Graetz do not mention the presence and activities of Christians again until a couple of decades after the war, and even then it is not the kind of Christians that we saw before the war. The Christians that the rabbis in Yavneh encountered and interacted with in their synagogues after the war, according to Graetz, were only "half-Judaeen and half-Christian" [Graetz, vol. 2, p. 259]. This sounds more like the Ebionite and Nazarean Unitarian Judaizers who would have felt comfortable congregating in the synagogues. The statements of Graetz about this are particularly interesting:

To suppress this opposition [of his rivals and other heretics such as the Christians] Rabban Gamaliel resorted to excommunication, which he used with the recklessness of deep-seated conviction. ... Actuated by his determination to prevent any schism in Judaism with its evil consequences, particularly because **so many half-Judaeen and half-Christian sects were already in existence**, Rabban Gamaliel did not hesitate to proceed with severity on the slightest occasion, and he had the courage to punish with excommunication even the most eminent persons, and even his own brother-in-law, R. Eliezer ben Hyrcan. ... As a result of the energetic administration of the patriarch, the Sanhedrin of Jamnia became the very heart, the center of activity of the Judaeen nation in all the lands of its dispersion. The patriarch himself, as a member of the house of Hillel, and thus a descendant of the royal house of David, was given princely honor and homage. The people were proud of the fact that the princely dignity still remained in the house of David, thereby fulfilling the prophecy that "the sceptre shall not depart from the tribe of Judah." The patriarch had charge of the internal administration of the community, and had the right to appoint judges and other communal officers. [Graetz, vol. 2, pp. 258-259, Fifth Edition]

Notice also what Josephus says about the condition of Christianity twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem:

...and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, [*for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him;*] and **the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.** [*Antiq.* 18:64 (18.3.3)]

The Jewish Encyclopedia talks about the encounters that the Yavneh rabbis had with Christians two or more decades after the war:

Especially interesting are the accounts of the debates which the [rabbinical] scholars held with unbelievers in Rome, and in which Gamaliel II was the chief speaker in behalf of Judaism (*ib.* p. 85). Elsewhere also Gamaliel had frequent opportunities to answer in controversial conversations the questions of unbelievers and to explain and defend the teachings of the Jewish religion (*ib.* p. 76). At times Gamaliel had to meet the attacks of confessors of Christianity; one

of these was the "min," or philosopher, who maliciously concluded from Hosea v. 6 that God had completely forsaken Israel (Yeb. 102b; Midr. Teh. to Ps. x., end; most completely reproduced from the old source in Midr. ha-Gadol to Lev. xxvi. 9, in Bacher, "Ag. Tan." 2d ed., i. 83). There is a satirical point in a story in which Gamaliel with his sister brings a fictitious suit concerning an inheritance before a Christian judge and convicts him of having accepted bribes; whereupon Gamaliel quotes Jesus' words in Matt. v. 17 (Shab. 116a, b). The sect of believers in Jesus, which was ever separating itself more distinctly from all connection with Judaism, and which with other heretics was classed under the name of "minim," led Gamaliel, because of its tendencies dangerous to the unity of Judaism, to introduce a new form of prayer, which he requested Samuel ha-Katon to compose, and which was inserted in the chief daily prayer, the eighteen benedictions (Ber. 28b; Meg. 17b). This prayer itself, which together with the Shema' forms the most important part of the Jewish prayer-book, likewise owes its final revision to Gamaliel (*ib.*). It was Gamaliel, also, who made the recitation of the "eighteen prayers" a duty to be performed three times a day by every Israelite (see "Monatsschrift," xlv. 430). [Source: Jewish Encyclopedia article on Gamaliel II, found here: <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6495-gamaliel-ii>>]

We will have a lot more to say about all this when we get into the history of the next generation after the destruction of Jerusalem. For now, it is enough to note that for some reason, there were not very many Christians on the scene for anyone to notice until almost two decades after AD 70.

Nero Sends Vespasian -- Zealots Prepare for the War (AD 66)

Dec - 66 – Big War Council in Jerusalem to select leaders and organize the government for the coming war effort. After Cestius was defeated, the Zealots believed they were invincible, and had God on their side. They met together with the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem over the winter months (Dec through March) to organize their government and enact laws to control the new independent nation. Graetz thinks that the **Eighteen Benedictions** were made obligatory at this time, forced into law by Eleazar b. Ananias at a synod held in his personal residence [Graetz, vol.2, p. 194]. Graetz says several times that it was Eleazar b. Ananias "who gave the first impetus to the mighty struggle" (Graetz, vol. 2, p. 195). The fundamental purpose behind the *Eighteen Benedictions*, according to Graetz, was "nothing short of a **total separation**, or the erection of an **insurmountable barrier, between Judaeans and heathens**. Judaeans were forbidden to learn the language of the heathens, to accept gifts from them for the temple, and even to **buy wine, oil, bread, and other food from them**. These decrees became known under the caption of Eighteen Benedictions" (Graetz, vol. 2, p. 194). Notice that last prohibition (no buying from Gentiles). It was designed to keep their coinage from getting into the hands of Gentiles, and to prevent Judeans from any commercial dealings with the Gentiles. **No buying and selling** with the Gentiles. It was evidently about this same time that they

selected **ten governors** to oversee the **seven regions** of Palestine [*Wars* 2.20.3-4 (2.562ff) and *Wars* 3.3.5 (3.54)]. There may have been **twelve governors** selected, since Josephus admits later in his autobiography (*Life* 29) that there were two other priests (Joazer and Judas) selected to serve either alongside him or underneath him in the management of affairs in Galilee. It appears that the Sanhedrin, largely composed of moderates, was in control of approving these governors. The president of the Sanhedrin at this time was supposedly **Simon b. Gamaliel**, son of the same Gamaliel who taught Apostle Paul. His two main associates in the leadership of the Sanhedrin were **Ananus II** and **Joseph b. Gorion**. Here is the list of governors that they chose to oversee the seven regions of Palestine:

1. *Jerusalem* - Joseph b. Gorion and Ananus II (who had killed James four years earlier)
2. *Idumaea* - Jesus b. Sapphias, Eleazar b. Ananias, and Niger the Perean
3. *Jericho* - Joseph b. Simon
4. *Peraea* - Manasseh
5. *N.W. Judea* (i.e. Thamna, Lydda, Joppa, Emmaus) - John the Essene
6. *N.E. Judea* (i.e. Gophnitica and Acrabattene) - John b. Matthias (or son of Ananias?)
7. *Far North* (i.e. two Galilees and Gamla) - Josephus b. Matthias (with two priests, Joazar and Judas, underneath him. *Life* 29)

Dec - 66 – Vespasian went to Antioch to gather two legions there, while Titus went to Alexandria to fetch the legion there. Over the winter months they assembled their troops and prepared for the war. They would bring the legions together at Ptolemais in the Spring (67).

Dec - 66 – Nero was in Achaia (Greece) competing in the games at the time of the revolt. *Wars* 2.558 (2.20.1); 3.1-8 (3.1.1-3) Vespasian and Titus were nearby. The prime sources for Nero's life and reign are Tacitus' *Annals* 12-16, Suetonius' *Life of Nero*, and Dio Cassius' *Roman History* 61-63, written in the early third century. Additional valuable material comes from inscriptions, coinage, papyri, and archaeology. In July of AD 66, Nero took a trip to Greece, where he participated in each of the great festivals and won hundreds of contests (none of the judges were willing to vote against him). He did not return to Rome until the Fall of AD 67 (over a year of visitation in Greece). This extended presence or visitation of Nero in Greece is a good illustration of the meaning of the Greek word **Parousia**. It does not mean just a one-day event. It means an **extended visit** of weeks, months, or even a year or more, as in this case of Nero.

Vespasian and Titus had traveled along with Nero on his visit to Greece as his protectors and body-guards. When Nero heard about the humiliating defeat of the 12th Legion (under Cestius Gallus) in the Fall of AD 66, he commissioned Vespasian to put down the rebellion, even though Vespasian had been for a short time before that in Nero's disfavor, according to Suetonius, for "either leaving the room during the

Emperor's song recitals, or staying and falling asleep." (*The Twelve Caesars*, Vespasian 4). It was in Greece that Vespasian offended the Emperor during one of Nero's recitals. Luckily, Vespasian only incurred banishment from the court. In fear for his life Vespasian fled to a small out-of-the-way township. Meanwhile, the revolt had begun in Judaea, so Nero recalled Vespasian, his most able commander, from banishment, granting him a special command to crush the revolt. Nero suspected the cause of Cestius' defeat was the incompetence of Cestius, so he appointed Vespasian to lead the forces against Judaea (in place of Cestius Gallus). Vespasian was 57 years old at the time.

Vespasian sent his oldest son Titus (24 years old) by fast boat to Alexandria in Egypt to fetch the Fifteenth Legion (*XV Apollinaris*) from there [*Wars* 3.8 (3.1.3)] and march them quickly along the coast to Caesarea for the winter, and then on to Ptolemais in early Spring. Meanwhile, Vespasian traveled through Greece to cross the Hellespont near Troas [*Wars* 3.8 (3.1.3)], and then traveled on the major trade routes through Turkey to reach Antioch (the capital of Syria) by February 67, where the fifth and tenth legions, *V Macedonica* and *X Fretensis* (the latter commanded by M. Ulpius Traianus (Trajan), father of the future emperor) would be gathered. Some have suggested (Mills, Jessie E. *Revelation Survey and Research*, pp. 13-15) that as Vespasian traveled with his troops through the cities of Asia that he may have killed any Christians or Jews that he encountered on his way to Antioch. But there is no evidence that any Christians were affected by that. They had already been killed in the Neronian persecution or raptured by that time. If there were any Jewish communities still left in those cities through which Vespasian passed, they would most likely have been taken captive or killed. In Antioch, Vespasian spent the winter (Nov. 66 to Mar. 67) meeting with his military advisors (including Agrippa II), planning his battle strategy, and assembling the two legions along with Agrippa's whole army [*Wars* 3.29 (3.2.4)], as well as the other auxiliaries and mercenaries sent from the surrounding nations which were allied with Rome. [*Wars* 3.64-69 (3.5.2)] In the Spring (AD 67), Vespasian then marched those assembled forces to Ptolemais to meet Titus' forces there. This was a massive fighting force of almost 60,000 soldiers. [*Wars* 3.8 (3.1.3); *Wars* 3.29 (3.2.4); and *Wars* 3.64-69 (3.5.2)]

Romans Subjugated Galilee (AD 67)

Mar - 67 – Vespasian assembles his army at Armageddon. Titus brought the fifteenth legion from Alexandria. Vespasian brought the fifth and tenth legions from Antioch. The assembled force in Ptolemais was now 60,000 strong (three legions plus Agrippa's forces, auxiliaries and mercenaries). And it was assembled and organized for attack in Ptolemais, the coastal city on the edge of the Plain of Megiddo (Heb. Har-Mageddon). The Romans began their assault upon the Jewish rebels from their camp at Armageddon!

May - 67 – Vespasian began military operations in Galilee. Gadara is attacked and falls right away. The Sea of Galilee was turned into a pool of blood. Josephus and his forces retreat to Jotapata, where he holds out for 47 days. Just as the Romans were

about to break through, Josephus and the other leaders join in a mutual death pact. However Josephus was the last man standing, and he decided not to kill himself, so he was taken alive.

NOTE: I am not going to provide much detail here about the activities of Josephus in his struggle in the battles against Vespasian. Those details are readily available in Gary Goldberg's excellent *War Chronology* on the Josephus website (www.josephus.org). There is not much of significance for our Christian history to be found here in that period when Vespasian was eliminating the rebel forces from the Galilean region, and pushing them all toward Jerusalem. However, I do plan to give more details about the activities of the Zealots in Jerusalem after Galilee had been reduced to subjection. That was a very significant period which shows many fulfillments of Jesus' predictions in the Olivet Discourse. There are a few statements about how much bloodshed there was in Galilee at this time when Jotapota fell and Josephus was captured, which echo the words of the Apocalypse about blood flowing in the rivers and lakes, and dead bodies floating down the Jordan river all the way to the Dead Sea. We will not read all those statements here, since they are spelled out extensively on the Josephus website. However, we do need to point out that all of Josephus' descriptions of the bloodshed closely resembles the predictions in both the Olivet Discourse and the Apocalypse about the blood flowing like that. The following summary of Vespasian's Galilean campaign can be found at the Josephus website, where there are a lot of details about this part of Vespasian's activities in Galilee: <http://josephus.org/FlJosephus2/warChronology5Pg2.htm>

Terror Tactics

Martin Goodman writes, in *The Ruling Class of Judaea*, "...the Roman commander surely knew that Jerusalem's walls would be exceptionally difficult to breach. Any technique that could avoid a direct assault with the danger of the loss of thousands of soldiers must be avoided. So he, like Cestius Gallus before him, chose a strategy of terror." (p. 182) Thus Vespasian's first strategic goal became the subjugation of Galilee. Josephus' men refused to face the combined legions in the field; as a result, their activities in Galilee were purely defensive. The cities Josephus had fortified waited their turn for Vespasian's army to come to them; but several of them gave formidable resistance that infuriated the Roman soldiers.

Josephus Captured

Josephus was captured at Jotapata, under extraordinary circumstances, after a siege of forty-seven days. When brought before Vespasian and Titus, Josephus predicted that Vespasian would become emperor. He was not believed, and spent the next two years in chains in the Roman camp, during which he began to write about the war. After four emperors died in quick succession, and Vespasian became Emperor himself, Josephus was freed and adopted into Vespasian's family, the Flavians, and so became Flavius Josephus.

Aug - 67 – Josephus was captured by Vespasian and held in chains. He then made the prediction that Vespasian would become emperor. His life was spared by Vespasian to see if this prediction would ever materialize. Josephus was kept alive as a hostage and interpreter. Vespasian continued crushing all Zealot resistance in Galilee as he prepared for his advance to Jerusalem (scorched earth policy). He left no resistance behind him to cause trouble later. He pushed everything ahead of him toward Jerusalem.

Fall - 67 – Armed groups of bandits and rebels plunder and pillage the moderates and pro-Romans in the Judean countryside to the south, while Vespasian is up north subjugating Galilee. Simon b. Giora was deposed from his command at Acrabattene by Ananus II, so he went not too far away to Masada to take refuge with the Sicarii there.

Nov - 67 – Vespasian subjugated all Galilee. Vespasian then wintered the troops in Caesarea until Spring (Nov 67–Mar 68)

Nov - 67 – John of Gischala fled from Gischala and went to Jerusalem with his band of followers.

Winter 68 – More join the rebel forces in Jerusalem. Refugees from Galilee flee to Jerusalem to join the rebels there. Plus more folks from the Judean countryside and even outside Palestine begin arriving in Jerusalem to help in the fight. They are welcomed by the populace in Jerusalem.

Winter 68 – Famine in Rome was worsened by Nero's use of the grain ships to bring in sand for the arena.

Winter 68 – Struggles for supremacy between the various Jewish factions in Jerusalem, which left their preparations and defenses for the upcoming siege a lot weaker than they should have been if they had united together against the Romans.

Winter 68 – Zealots chose a new High Priest, Phannias b. Samuel, who was not related to the previous Herodian appointees, nor to any of the most prestigious families of priests who had held the office since the days of Herod the Great. According to Josephus, he was the last of the high priests, and the eighty-third High Priest counting from Aaron as the first [*Antiq.* 20.224-251 (20.10.1-5)].

Phannias was chosen by lot from the priestly family of Eniachim from the village of Aphthia (VanderKam 488). He was uneducated and untrained in the temple ritual, so he had to be coached on everything he did [*Wars* 4.153-157 (4.3.7-8)]. He is also mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma* 1:6-7)

The men of power and moderates (led by Ananus II, Jesus b. Gamla, and Simon b. Gamaliel) were upset at the Zealots for this disenfranchisement of their priestly power, so they urged the populace to drive the Zealots from the Temple. This stirred up a lot more internal fighting in Jerusalem between the moderates and the Zealots.

Jan - 68 – During all this factional fighting, the Zealots under the control of Eleazar killed some of the moderate leaders whom they suspected of being Roman sympathizers. Ananus II and his moderate forces then counter-attacked and bottled up the **Zealots in the inner temple**, and took control of the rest of the city. Ananus II placed a guard of six thousand men around the outer temple porticos to keep the Zealots inside. The injured Zealots retreated back into the temple, defiling those sacred courts with their blood. [*Wars* 4.196-201 (4.3.12)] **Ananus II foolishly trusted John of Gischala** to become his ambassador to the Zealots, to try to negotiate with them from a position of strength. But once John got into the temple he betrayed Ananus II and claimed that Ananus had invited Vespasian to take the city, and that Ananus was planning to destroy the Zealot leaders once they came out of the Temple. This was all the Zealots needed to hear. The Zealots immediately dispatched two fast **messengers to the Idumaeans**, begging them to come and help them overpower the moderates, and free them from their temple imprisonment.

Feb - 68 – The Idumaeans came immediately. But they had to camp outside the city, since Ananus II was in control of the city and would not let them in (because he knew why they had come to Jerusalem on such short notice). Ananus had his friend Jesus b. Gamaliel speak to the Idumaeans and try to clear up their big misunderstanding of this whole situation. The Idumaeans had been misinformed. Ananus II was not in league with the Romans, as he had been accused by the Zealots. So the Idumaeans should instead support the cause of Ananus II and help him get rid of the abominable rebels who were polluting the temple and destroying the country. These words of Jesus b. Gamaliel were simply not believed by the Idumaeans. So they remained outside the gates overnight trying to decide what to do.

Feb - 68 – The Idumaeans got into Jerusalem under the cover of night and a terrible thunderstorm. [*Wars* 4.286-301 (4.4.5-7)] When night fell, there was a frightful storm (with severe lightning and torrential downpours with high winds) which drowned out the noise of some of the Zealots who escaped from the temple and opened a small gate for the Idumaeans to come in. Once they were inside, they killed the guards of Ananus and liberated the Zealots from the temple. Then they turned their wrath upon the two (former) high priests (**Ananus II** and **Jesus b. Gamaliel**) and the citizenry. **Ananus II and Jesus were killed along with about 8500 other soldiers and citizens.** “The whole outer courts of the temple were deluged with blood.” (Cornfeld translation) [*Wars* 4.313-325 (4.5.1-2)] The corpses of Ananus and Jesus were mocked and cast outside the city without a decent burial. This was a gross abomination by the Zealots. Ananus II was the son of the High Priest (Ananus b. Seth) who had arrested Jesus our Lord and before whom Jesus was tried. Ananus II was appointed High Priest for 3 months (AD 62) during which time he arrested James and some of his companions and put James to death (see under April 62 above). **Now the Zealots had control of the city**, thanks to the Idumaeans. The moderate party of Ananus II was crushed. Josephus lamented the death of Ananus II, and said that it sealed the doom of the city. [*Wars* 4.318 (4.5.2)]

Feb - 68 – Once the Zealots had control of the city, they began rounding up all the citizens of Jerusalem whom they suspected of being in sympathy with Ananus II and the moderates. Anyone who would not join them and support them, they arrested, gave them a mock trial, and then killed them and seized all their property and possessions. By the time they were through, 12,000 citizens had been killed, including most of the young nobility and the eminent Zacharias son of Baris. [*Wars* 4.326-344 (4.5.3-4)] The Idumaeans began to be uncomfortable with all this ruthless and unnecessary bloodshed, and one of the Zealots admitted to them that Ananus II was really not the traitor that the Zealots had accused him of being. Upon hearing this, the Idumaeans then opened the prison doors and released two thousand moderates who had been imprisoned there by the Zealots. Then the Idumaeans left to return to Idumaea. After the Idumaeans left, the Zealots had absolute control of the city, and they immediately took advantage of the opportunity to murder every person whom they suspected of having any opposition to them, including Gorion b. Joseph and Niger the Peraean. [*Wars* 4.354-365 (4.6.1)] The Zealots became so tyrannical that they trampled on every law and principle of decency. There was no abomination or lawlessness that they refrained from. Lots of people tried to flee the city at this time, but they were killed by the Zealots before they could get away, and **their bodies were left unburied** to putrefy where they had fallen. [*Wars* 4.381-388 (4.6.3)]

Mar - 68 – **John of Gischala** had now gained much influence among the Zealots through his treachery and intrigue. He now began gathering followers around himself and maneuvering to take over the leadership of the Zealots who were now in control of the city as a result of the help from the Idumaeans. So the Zealots now split into **two factions**, one led by **John of Gischala**, and the other led by **Eleazar b. Ananias** and Zacharias b. Phalek.

Mar 21, 68 – Vespasian and Titus begin their Spring campaign to clear out all the resistance in **Peraea** (east of Judea) on the east side of the Jordan river, western Judea, **Samaria** (to the north of Judea), and **Idumaea** (to the south of Judea), driving everything out of those areas toward Jerusalem. They bottled up the rebels inside Jerusalem. He also believed that once all the rebels fled to Jerusalem they would weaken themselves by internal fighting and make his task a lot easier. He was right. That is exactly what happened.

May - 68 – By the end of Spring (late May), Vespasian had subdued Peraea, western Judea, and Idumaea. All was now set for the siege of Jerusalem. **Then Nero died** (June 9, 68) and instantly everything was put on hold. Vespasian suspended his attack against Jerusalem until he could hear about matters in Rome.

I want to pick up here next time and talk more about the activities of Vespasian up until the time of Nero's death, and afterwards. But this has given us a quick overview of the first two years of the war, so that we can begin to get a handle on the sequence of events, what happened and when. We will see the value of this historical knowledge when we get more into the fulfillments of the book of Revelation. What we are looking at here in Josephus was definitely predicted in the Apocalypse. So, if we want to

understand the book of Revelation, we need to pay very close attention to all this history that Josephus provides for us.

That will wrap it up for this session. Lord willing, we will look at a lot more details on all this next time. Thanks so much for listening.

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