

2.THE START OF THE JEWISH REVOLT

WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

The Jews longed for the coming of the Messiah. They thought He would deliver them from the rule of the hated Romans and restore the ancient kingdom of David to its former glory. The hearts of the Jewish people beat with impatience and desire for a future with no arrogant Roman soldiers marching through the streets of Jerusalem.

They also longed for a future where they could call the tax collectors to account. The Jews saw the collectors as traitors who worked for the enemy at the cost of their fellow Jews. When, oh when, would the moment come when, under the command of their King, they could drive the Romans out of their country? With these thoughts in mind, hatred against the Roman oppressors flared up in their hearts: *those foreign intruders!*



Roman soldiers marching through Jerusalem.
<https://ferrelljenkins.blog/>

Jesus of Nazareth? *He* was not the Messiah! He was a deceiver, and they rightly delivered Him to the Romans. The Jews witnessed His humiliating death on the cross and persecuted the followers of this Jesus with fire and sword. Away with Him! When a Jew heard the name 'Jesus', they would spit on the ground with contempt.

Most people thought this during those early years after Christ's death and resurrection. They refused to believe that the despised Jesus of Nazareth was

the Messiah. They refused to admit that they had rejected their King, their Redeemer. The thought of God's severe punishment for killing His beloved Son did not even enter their heads. They were unaware that this harsh punishment of an angry God was swiftly drawing near. No, the *true* Messiah still had to come, of course! They were still expecting Him and earnestly longed for Him!

During Roman rule, the Jews enjoyed great wealth and prosperity. There was no poverty, and food was abundant. However, the yoke of Roman oppression soured their lives. As long as the Romans were in power, the Jews could not, or would not, be happy.

The Jewish people were often surprised by strange rumours about the Messiah appearing in a particular place. This would raise hope in their hearts for a moment: 'Could this be true?'

Often, a group of Jews would follow a leader who claimed to be the Messiah and would participate in a revolt against this self-proclaimed Messiah. The uprisings were not successful, as the Romans ruthlessly suppressed them. The hated Romans reigned supreme.

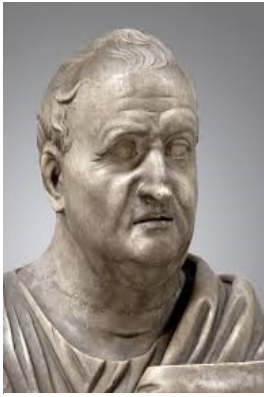
Another time, the Messiah was said to have appeared in a different area. Again, it raised hope and expectation but ended in further disappointment. Many Jews became impatient waiting for the Messiah.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He told His audience this would happen, but the blinded Jewish people refused to hear Him. Jesus had said:

"For many shall come in My Name, saying, 'I am Christ', and shall deceive many: 'Jesus' prophesy was fulfilled as the false Messiahs deceived many Jews, but they did not realise it.

GESSIUS FLORUS

"Can you spare something for the poor governor?" Many Jews walk the streets of Jerusalem with boxes and plates. From house to house, they knock at every door and everywhere;



Gessius Florus was the 7th Roman procurator (Minister of Finance) of Judea from 64 until 66. Wikipedia

the same question is heard: "Can you spare a donation for the poor governor?"

A contemptuous smile is on their lips, and their words are full of mockery and contempt. Various Jews walk along with the beggars. Everywhere, there is laughter and mockery.

What is this all about?
Why are the Jews doing

that? Who is this poor Governor?

Don't you know? The begging Jews know it very well; yes, all of Jerusalem knows. The Jews clench their fists, and their eyes are full of hatred.

During this time, Roman Governor Gessius Florus rules the Jewish nation. He makes the Jewish people pay much more tax than they need to. He is not a nice person; he is a cruel man.

So, it is no wonder that the Jews hate him. He only has himself to thank for that! Instead of trying to win the love of the Jews, he is so cruel and wicked that the Jewish people rebel against him.

One day, he even has the temple treasury robbed. This has never happened before, and the Jews become extremely angry. In a helpless rage, they clench their fists and plot revenge. Does this heathen dare to steal that which is holy? They *must*, and they *shall* take revenge, but how to go about it? A revolt will not work because the Roman soldiers will cruelly beat them. So, the Jews reach for the weapon of mockery.

Does Gessius Florus need money? They will help. They will go and beg for him.

Many Jews walk the streets of Jerusalem with boxes and plates. Everywhere they go, they ask: "Please, could you

spare a donation for the poor governor?" This is a blatant insult to the proud Roman Governor. They try to upset him in the worst possible way, making him the subject of Jewish scorn and ridicule.

When Gessius Florus hears what is happening in Jerusalem and learns how openly the Jews mock him, he turns white with rage and, gnashing his teeth, he gives his commands.

Soon, a detachment of Roman soldiers, swords drawn, march from the encampment. Without any warning, they attack the begging and mocking Jews. Screaming and crying suddenly fill the air, and soon, dead bodies cover the streets. Without pity, the angry Romans kill anyone they see. Three thousand Jews lose their lives in that horrible massacre.

The mocking and laughing of the Jews have changed into cries of distress. Everyone tries to save their life by running away, but it doesn't help.

Soon, there is a strange silence in the ordinarily bustling streets of Jerusalem. It is the silence of death! Gessius Florus grins wickedly. He plans to teach those despised Jews another lesson. He sends a messenger to Caesarea, and soon more Roman soldiers enter Jerusalem.

King Agrippa, the same King who visited Festus and wanted to hear the Apostle Paul, fears a general revolt. He understands the Jewish people well and senses their deep-rooted frustrations.

His sister Bernice goes to the angry Governor Gessius Florus and begs the Jewish people to be pardoned. The Governor responds: "Very well, because you ask it, I shall forgive them. But only

on one condition: the leaders of Jerusalem must go and meet the Roman soldiers who are on their way from Caesarea to Jerusalem. They must sincerely promise to be obedient from now on."

Do the Jewish rulers agree to that? Yes! They leave Jerusalem, and when they meet the approaching Roman soldiers, they bow before them with humility and show true meekness and



Money Collection box

submission. However, the Roman soldiers proudly ignore their humble greetings and promises. They remain standing and look at the Jewish leaders with eyes full of contempt.

This is too much for the Jews. Once more, anger and rage rise within them. They yell and scream angrily at the soldiers. Their cries of disappointment and rage fill the air.

The commander shouts a short order, and with uplifted swords, the Roman soldiers attack the defenceless Jews again. For the second time, a bloody massacre takes place. For the Jews, this drop causes the bucket to overflow. In Jerusalem, all the Jews revolted and took up arms. Everywhere they go, they cry out: "Death to the Romans! Death to the Romans!" It becomes so bad that the Roman Governor, Gessius Florus, can't handle it anymore. He escapes from the Jewish capital and flees to Caesarea. Some Roman soldiers stationed at Jerusalem escaped to fortified towers to save their lives.

THE JEWISH REVOLT

Much more happened during those turbulent days, but this is how the Jewish revolt began. Not

only the Jews in Jerusalem rebel, but the entire country takes up arms.

When King Agrippa hears about all this, he quickly visits the rebellious city to calm the Jews and save the situation if possible. But his good intentions fail. He must flee, too, and behind his back, the angry Jews set fire to his beautiful palace.

At first, the Jews gain one victory after another. Cestius, the Roman Governor, marches with a large army to Jerusalem but suffers a resounding defeat. The Jews kill thousands of Romans. The Roman soldiers, who had withdrawn into fortified towers, surrendered when the Jews promised to spare their lives and allow them to march out freely. But the Jews shamefully break their promise! It was cruel and false, for the Jews had sincerely promised the Romans a safe retreat. As soon as the Romans open the gates and surrender their weapons, they are murdered by the Jewish attackers. Disgraceful!

When the news of this mass murder spread around the Roman Empire, the Romans murdered thousands of innocent and defenceless Jews who lived in other Roman cities.

Meanwhile, the Romans are driven out of Palestine. The Jews think they have achieved victory and are exuberant and ready to celebrate. Sadly, they are greatly mistaken because...

Before continuing this story, there is something else to tell you.

THE CHRISTIANS

The Lord Jesus said: *'Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, let those in Judea flee to the mountains.'* This was a warning to the Christians. The Lord Jesus had foretold that dark days would come. He predicted Jerusalem would be so completely destroyed that not one stone would be left upon another. This 'abomination of desolation' was the sign for the followers of Christ to flee Jerusalem and escape to the mountains, as Christ had commanded them.

Many Christians still lived in Jerusalem during the Jewish revolt. Remember, the first Christian church was instituted there. Due to the violent



The Christians left in Jerusalem fled to Pella. A little place in the mountains, across the Jordan.

persecution, many Christians had already fled, but not *all* of them. But now they saw that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, as Jesus had said.

The fighting between the rebellious Jews and the Roman armies was fierce. Not one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. The Christians, who were still in Jerusalem, decided to leave the city because they remembered the warning of the Lord. They fled beyond the Jordan and lived in a little place in the mountains called Pella. The Lord preserved them from that terrible misery! They were safe in Pella, for the Romans did not go there to fight.

ROMAN EMPERORS



*Nero, 37-68 AD.
Wikipedia*

In the great city of Rome, a wicked, cruel emperor lives in his beautiful palace: Nero. Later, we will learn more about him. Nero thought only of parties and feasting. However, he hears reports about the Jewish revolt and the thousands of Roman

soldiers who were murdered in a humiliating defeat.

These bad tidings make him worried. That could be dangerous! He imagines the other nations in his empire hearing about it and revolting too! That could be the end of his power, even the end of the mighty Roman Empire!

To prevent that from happening, he sends a massive army of 60,000 soldiers to the land of the Jews. He *must*, and he *shall* subdue the Jews. One of his best generals, Vespasian, commands that immense army. Vespasian and his army march to the border of Palestine as fast as they can. The Jews in Jerusalem hear about this powerful army coming their way. They send the Jewish General Josephus with a much smaller army to Galilee. He will defeat Vespasian's army and try to prevent the Roman soldiers from entering the country.

Soon, the armies approach each other. The fighting is fierce. The Jews defend themselves with desperate courage, but they are defeated.

Josephus rallies what is left of his defeated army as quickly as possible and recommences the battle. But the Roman soldiers beat them for the second time.

Josephus flees with the remainder of his army to the city of Jotapata. However, the Roman general Vespasian pursues Josephus and immediately lays siege to the Jewish fortress.



*General Josephus
Wikipedia*

The fighting in the city of Jotapata is dreadful. The struggle lasted forty-seven days, almost seven weeks. At one stage, the Romans successfully force themselves into the fortress but are driven out again by the Jews. Hundreds of Roman soldiers are pushed down into a deep ravine by the desperate Jews and are smashed to pieces on the sharp rocks below.

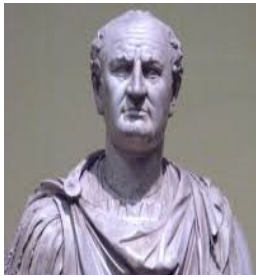
Finally, the Romans conquer Jotapata, and the embittered Romans take bloody revenge on the Jews. Some authors say they murdered more than 40,000 Jews — men, women, children and the elderly. Without mercy, the Romans kill both young and old. Rivers of blood flow down the streets.

Josephus, the Jewish general with forty soldiers, escapes to a cave close to the city. But the Roman soldiers find them. What will the Jews do? Surrender?

No, the majority do not want that. They would rather be dead than fall into the hands of the Romans.

And so, they decide to kill each other. They cast lots to choose whose turn it will be next. The last one must kill himself.

According to some writers, Josephus is the last survivor. However, he decides not to kill himself, and the Romans take him prisoner. Soon, Josephus is standing before the commanding Roman general, Vespasian. The general decides not to kill him but instead becomes friends with



Vespasian. Wikipedia

Flavius Josephus. Josephus stays with the Romans but refuses to fight against his people. Instead, he tries to convince the Jews that they will lose this conflict because they cannot hold out against the

superior weapons and powerful Roman army. He repeatedly tells them: "Surrender!"

But the Jews do not listen to him. Scornfully, they call him a traitor and denounce him as a deserter! What? Surrender? Never! The Jews would rather die than become prisoners of the Romans.

The war continues, undiminished. The skilled commander Vespasian conquers city after city. When the Romans penetrate the fortress Gamala, the Jewish defenders drag their wives and children to a deep ravine in the neighbourhood. First, they hurl their wives into the ravine, then their children, and finally, the desperate Jews jump after their wives and children down the steep cliff.

What terrible blindness and hardening of hearts have come upon the Jewish people. Although they valiantly defend themselves, they are defeated time and again. Soon, all of Galilee was conquered by the Romans.

Now, Vespasian marches to the capital, Jerusalem. The war is over once the capital is taken; the end of the Jewish revolt seems near.

But suddenly, Vespasian, the brave Roman general, leaves the army and travels back to Rome as fast as possible. Why? Has he become afraid? Is he fleeing? No, not at all!

On the contrary! He hears that a slave has murdered Emperor Nero. The army quickly proclaims their general Vespasian as emperor. However, the people of Rome have crowned another man as emperor. Now, there are two emperors at the same time! *That can't happen!*

So he hurries back to Rome. There is a brief battle when he arrives, and the other emperor is

defeated and killed. Vespasian succeeds the cruel Nero as the emperor of the vast Roman Empire.

Once he has secured his position as Rome's next emperor, he sends his son Titus to Jerusalem. Titus must continue to fight the Jews, conquer Jerusalem and put down the last opposition.

Because of the power struggles in Rome, Jerusalem enjoyed 18 months of peace. But instead of the Jews repenting or using those eighteen months to fortify the city and prepare themselves for the next battle, which will inevitably come, a terrible civil war rages in Jerusalem. It seems as if the Jews are completely blinded. And they are! They hasten their own downfall. But I will tell you about that in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS.

1. Give two reasons why the Jews longed for the coming of the Messiah.
2. Why did they reject Jesus?
3. What method did the Jews use to show their resentment of the Roman Governor, Gessius Florus? Why was he especially hated?
4. Why did the Jews revolt? Were they successful? Explain.
5. Describe what is meant by the 'abomination of desolation.'
6. How did the Lord provide for the preservation of the early Christian church? Where were the Christians to flee?
7. Who is: a) Vespasian b) Josephus
8. Why did the Jews consistently refuse to surrender?
9. What occurred at Jotapata?
10. Why did Vespasian suddenly return to Rome?

FOR FURTHER STUDY.

1. Give a brief history of King Agrippa, including all information given in Acts concerning him.