

## Why Did the Jews Rebel Against Rome in 66 C.E.? *Hurban Bayit Sheni* in Its Historical Context

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### Historical Outline

- 63 BCE: Conquest of Judea by Pompey  
37: Herod assumes the throne  
4: Herod dies, and his son, Archelaus, is appointed as ruler of Judea  
6 CE: Archelaus is deposed; Romans assume direct rule; Judas the Galilean declares his opposition to Rome  
41-44: Agrippa I appointed king  
44-66: Rule of procurators  
48-52: Procuratorship of Cumanus
- A Roman soldier exposed himself to the crowd assembled in the Temple for Passover, causing a riot and leading to the deaths of more than 30,000.
  - Group of Samaritans killed a Galilean Jew on his way to Jerusalem. Cumanus refused to punish the perpetrators, prompting large crowds to go from Jerusalem north to avenge the Galilean's death. Cumanus then went with armed Samaritans to kill and disperse the attacking Jews. Eventually, the matter was taken before the emperor, who found in favor of the Jews and exiled Cumanus.
- 52-60: Procuratorship of Felix
- Widespread brigandage, with the perpetrators "looting the houses of the wealthy, murdering their owners, and setting the villages on fire."
  - Rise of the *sicarii*: "subservient to other men for money."
  - Rise of false prophets, including one Egyptian who, leading a charge of 30,000, led them to Mount of Olives and proposed to enter Jerusalem, overpower the Roman garrisons, and set himself up as king.
  - Gentile-Jewish Violence at Caesarea
- 60-62: Procuratorship of Festus
- Brigandage became "the principal plague of the country."
- 62-64: Procuratorship of Albinus
- Took bribes and was only interested in enriching himself
  - Emergence of internecine strife
- 64-66: Procuratorship of Florus
- Conflict between Jews and Greeks in Caesarea
  - Florus takes 17 talents of gold from temple treasury
  - Florus unleashes his soldiers on Jews in Jerusalem
  - Agrippa II pleads with the Jews to resume allegiance, but is shouted down and forced to leave Jerusalem
  - Cessation of sacrifices on behalf of the Romans

- Butchering of Roman garrison in Jerusalem
- Fighting breaks out between Jews and gentiles in both the Diaspora and in mixed cities in Israel
- Cestius Gallus attacks Jerusalem, but his army is decimated
- War council is appointed

**Antiquities 20.118-36 (narrating a dispute that took place during the procuratorship of Cumanus, 48-52)**

Now there arose a quarrel between the Samaritans and the Jews on the occasion following: It was the custom of the Galileans, when they came to the holy city at the festivals, to take their journeys through the country of the Samaritans; and at this time there lay, in the road they took, a village that was called Ginea, which was situated in the limits of Samaria and the great plain, where certain persons thereto belonging fought with the Galileans, and killed a great many of them. But when the principal of the Galileans were informed of what had been done, they came to Cumanus, and desired him to avenge the murder of those that were killed; but he was induced by the Samaritans, with money, to do nothing in the matter; upon which the Galileans were much displeased, and persuaded the multitude of the Jews to betake themselves to arms, and to regain their liberty, saying that slavery was in itself a bitter thing, but that when it was joined with direct injuries, it was perfectly intolerable, And when their principal men endeavored to pacify them, and promised to endeavor to persuade Cumanus to avenge those that were killed, they would not hearken to them, but took their weapons, and entreated the assistance of Eleazar, the son of Dineus, a robber, who had many years made his abode in the mountains, with which assistance they plundered many villages of the Samaritans. When Cumanus heard of this action of theirs, he ... marched out against the Jews, and caught them, and slew many of them, and took a great number of them alive; whereupon those that were the most eminent persons at Jerusalem, and that both in regard to the respect that was paid them, and the families they were of, as soon as they saw to what a height things were gone, put on sackcloth, and heaped ashes upon their heads, and by all possible means besought the seditious, and persuaded them that they would set before their eyes the utter subversion of their country, the conflagration of their temple, and the slavery of themselves, their wives, and children, which would be the consequences of what they were doing; and would alter their minds, would cast away their weapons, and for the future be quiet, and return to their own homes. These persuasions of theirs prevailed upon them. So the people dispersed themselves, and the robbers went away again to their places of strength; and after this time all Judea was overrun with robberies.

2. But the principal of the Samaritans went to Ummidius Quadratus, the president of Syria, who at that time was at Tyre, and accused the Jews of setting their villages on fire, and plundering them ... But the Jews affirmed that the Samaritans were the authors of this tumult and fighting, and that, in the first place, Cumanus had been corrupted by their gifts, and passed over the murder of those that were slain in silence; - which allegations when Quadratus heard, he put off the hearing of the cause, and promised that he would give sentence when he should come into Judea, and should have a more exact knowledge of the truth of that matter ... but still he sent away Ananias the high priest [from 47 until at least 49, and possibly until 59] and Jonathan b. Ananus the commander [of the temple], in bonds to Rome, to give an account of what they had done to Claudius Caesar.

**Antiquities 20.177-78 (narrating a dispute that took place during the procuratorship of Felix, 52-60)**

But when Felix saw that this quarrel was become a kind of war, he came upon them on the sudden, and desired the Jews to desist; and when they refused so to do, he armed his soldiers, and sent them out upon them, and slew many of them, and took more of them alive, and permitted his soldiers to plunder some of the houses of the

citizens, which were full of riches. Now those Jews that were more moderate, and of principal dignity among them, were afraid of themselves, and desired of Felix that he would sound a retreat to his soldiers, and spare them for the future, and afford them room for repentance for what they had done; and Felix was prevailed upon to do so.

### **Antiquities 20.162-63**

Felix also bore an ill-will to Jonathan, the high priest, because he frequently gave him admonitions about governing the Jewish affairs better than he did, lest he should himself have complaints made of him by the multitude, since he it was who had desired Caesar to send him as procurator of Judea. So Felix contrived a method whereby he might get rid of him, now he was become so continually troublesome to him; for such continual admonitions are grievous to those who are disposed to act unjustly. Wherefore Felix persuaded one of Jonathan's most faithful friends, a citizen of Jerusalem, whose name was Doras, to bring the robbers upon Jonathan, in order to kill him; and this he did by promising to give him a great deal of money for so doing. Doras complied with the proposal, and contrived matters so, that the robbers might murder him after the following manner: Certain of those robbers went up to the city, as if they were going to worship God, while they had daggers under their garments, and by thus mingling themselves among the multitude they slew Jonathan and as this murder was never avenged, the robbers went up with the greatest security at the festivals after this time; and having weapons concealed in like manner as before, and mingling themselves among the multitude, they slew certain of their own enemies, and were subservient to other men for money; and slew others, not only in remote parts of the city, but in the temple itself also; for they had the boldness to murder men there, without thinking of the impiety of which they were guilty.

### **Antiquities 20.204-14**

Now as soon as Albinus was come to the city of Jerusalem, he used all his endeavors and care that the country might be kept in peace, and this by destroying many of the *Sicarii*. But as for the high priest, Ananias he increased in glory every day, and this to a great degree, and had obtained the favor and esteem of the citizens in a signal manner; for he was a great hoarder up of money: he therefore cultivated the friendship of Albinus, and of the high priest [Jesus], by making them presents; he also had servants who were very wicked, who joined themselves to the boldest sort of the people, and went to the thrashing-floors, and took away the tithes that belonged to the priests by violence, and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them. So the other high priests acted in the like manner, as did those his servants, without any one being able to prohibit them; so that [some of the] priests, that of old were wont to be supported with those tithes, died for want of food.

But now the *Sicarii* went into the city by night, just before the festival, which was now at hand, and took the scribe belonging to the governor of the temple, whose name was Eleazar, who was the son of Ananias the high priest, and bound him, and carried him away with them; after which they sent to Ananias, and said that they would send the scribe to him, if he would persuade Albinus to release ten of those prisoners which he had caught of their party; so Ananias was plainly forced to persuade Albinus, and gained his request of him...

...And now Jesus, the son of Gamaliel, became the successor of Jesus, the son of Damneus, in the high priesthood, which the king had taken from the other; on which account a sedition arose between the high priests, with regard to one another; for they got together bodies of the boldest sort of the people, and frequently came, from reproaches, to throwing of stones at each other. But Ananias was too hard for the rest, by his riches, which enabled him to gain those that were most ready to receive. Costobarus also, and Saulus, did themselves get

together a multitude of wicked wretches, and this because they were of the royal family; and so they obtained favor among them, because of their kindred to Agrippa; but still they used violence with the people, and were very ready to plunder those that were weaker than themselves. And from that time it principally came to pass that our city was greatly disordered, and that all things grew worse and worse among us.

#### **Jewish War 2.272-76 (summarizing the procuratorship of Albinus, 62-64)**

The administration of Albinus, who followed Festus, was of another order; there was no form of villainy which he omitted to practice. Not only did he, in his official capacity, steal and plunder private property and burden the whole nation with extraordinary taxes, but he accepted ransoms from their relatives on behalf of those who had been imprisoned for robbery by the local councils or by former procurators; and the only persons left in prison as malefactors were those who failed to pay the price. Now, too, the audacity of the revolutionary party in Jerusalem was stimulated; the influential men among their number secured from Albinus, by means of bribes, immunity for all their seditious practices; while of the populace all who were dissatisfied with peace joined hands with the governor's accomplices. Each ruffian, with his own band of followers grouped around him, towered above his company like a brigand chief or tyrant, employing his bodyguard to plunder peaceable citizens. The result was that the victims of robbery kept their grievances, of which they had every reason to complain, to themselves, while those who escaped injury cringed to wretches deserving of punishment, through fear of suffering the same fate. In short, none could now speak his mind, with tyrants on every side; and from this date were sown in the city the seeds of its impending fall.

#### **Jewish War 2.280**

And truly, while Cestius Gallus was president of the province of Syria, nobody did so much as send an embassy to him against Florus; but when he came to Jerusalem, upon the approach of the feast of unleavened bread, the people came about him not fewer in number than three millions who besought him to commiserate the calamities of their nation, and cried out upon Florus as the bane of their country.

#### **Jewish War 2.293-95**

Florus sent some to take seventeen talents out of the sacred treasure, and pretended that Caesar wanted them. At this the people were in confusion immediately, and ran together to the temple, with prodigious clamors, and called upon Caesar by name, and besought him to free them from the tyranny of Florus. Some also of the seditious cried out upon Florus, and cast the greatest reproaches upon him, and carried a basket about, and begged some spills of money for him, as for one that was destitute of possessions, and in a miserable condition.

#### **Antiquities 20.201-202**

As for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.