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## **BIBLICAL TOPICS FOR STUDY – THE JEWISH-ROMAN WARS**

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In this study we will discuss the three Jewish wars or revolts that occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD (CE), not only due to dissatisfaction on the part of the Jews after centuries of Roman oppression, but as a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies, especially the 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish-Roman War, which ended with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Titus. The other two that followed also concern His prophecies regarding many men who would come to deliver Israel, claiming to be the Messiah. His people never gave up hope of a Davidic Deliverer. The first Jewish revolt occurred during the reign of Vespasian of the Flavian Dynasty, the second and third occurred during the reign of two emperors of the Nerva-Antonine Dynasty: Trajan and Hadrian.

### **THE FIRST JEWISH-ROMAN WAR**

One of the most important events of Vespasian's government was the First Jewish-Roman War (66-73 AD), sometimes called the Great Jewish Revolt, the first of three great rebellions of the Jews in Judea against the Roman Empire. It began in 66 A.D, initially due to religious tensions between Greeks and Jews with protests against taxation and attacks on Roman citizens. Then, the Roman legions under the command of Titus (Titus Flavius Vespasian Augustus) besieged Jerusalem and destroying the center of rebel resistance on 1st August, 67 AD, culminating in the destruction of the temple sometime in August, 70 AD, defeating the Jewish remaining forces [3 ½ years]. There is a reference to August 30th, 70 AD [Bunson, Matthew (1995). A Dictionary of the Roman Empire. Oxford University Press. P. 212. ISBN 978-0-19-510233-8], but perhaps it is a little disconnected from what the Jews call Tisha B'Av (9th day of the month of Av).

There was a difference between Pompey's attitude when he entered Jerusalem in 63 BC, annexing the province of Judea to the Roman Republic, and Titus' attitude, in 70 AD. Pompey entered the Holy of Holies with his officers, which was a serious insult to the Jews. However, out of respect for the sanctity of the temple, he ordered that nothing should be removed or damaged. Perhaps, Pompey considered necessary to demonstrate his power by entering the temple, but showed his willingness to respect the Jewish faith and let their holy place inviolate, unless the Jews forced him to destroy it.

Titus, on the contrary, besieged the city with three legions (V Macedonica, XII Fulminata, XV Apollinaris) on the western side and a fourth (X Fretensis) on the Mount

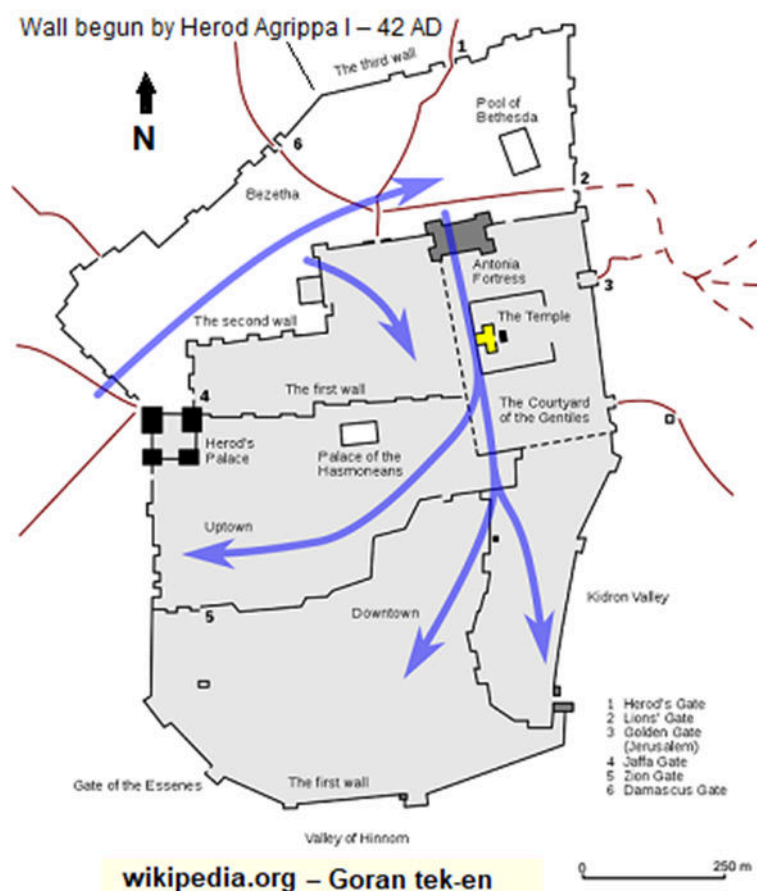
of Olives, to the east. He cut off the food and the water to the city; he allowed the entry of some Jews to celebrate Passover, and then, denying their exit. After unsuccessful attempts of negotiation between Jews and Romans, Titus entered with his legions, destroying the outer part of the walls and crucifying the Jews who deserted around the walls. The Jews were surrendering because of hunger. The Romans took advantage of this weakness, breaking the inner parts of the walls, and entering the city. They took the Fortress Antonia, which was not only a strong watchtower, but also the residence of the Roman procurator when he was in Jerusalem. More than one million people (according to Flavius Josephus), or nineteen-seven thousand (according to other historians), were killed during the siege, most of them Jews. Thousands of people were captured and enslaved. Many escaped to sites near the Mediterranean.



The first city wall, the innermost, was built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC by the early Hasmonean kings on the foundations of an earlier wall built by the kings of Judah, because after Nehemiah rebuilt the city in the time of the Persians, it was again invaded by the troops of Antiochus Epiphanes, and once again the integrity of its walls was lost during the time of the Maccabees. This wall surrounded the lower and upper city, forming the core of Jerusalem. Later, as the city grew, a second wall was built further north, extending protection to newer neighborhoods and commercial districts. By the 40s AD, the city had expanded further north, leading to the construction of a third wall (begun by King Herod Agrippa I around 42 AD) protecting the suburb of Bezetha, but its construction was interrupted by Emperor Claudius (41–54 AD) either out of fear of a Jewish revolt or because of Agrippa's death in 44 AD.

However, when the Jewish revolt began in 66 CE, the Jewish rebels completed the third wall to fortify the city against the impending Roman attack. Because of its hasty construction, the third wall was weaker than the previous ones, leaving a vulnerable spot in the city's defenses that the Romans would later exploit during the siege. The Romans

began their attack on the city from the newly completed third wall. Five days later, Roman battering rams breached the middle section of the second wall.



#### Progress of the Roman army during the siege by Titus – 70 AD (three walls)

Thus, within three weeks, the Roman army breached the first two city walls, but Jewish resistance prevented them from penetrating the third, the thickest and the oldest of the three. It was the seventeenth of Tammuz (Tammuz = June-July), when the first breach was made in the wall by the Romans, and three weeks later, on the 9th of Av, their army managed to penetrate the Temple, plunder it and destroy it. [Flavius Josephus – The War of the Jews, book 4, chapters 1 to 4].

The Romans set fire to the Temple (there is disagreement as to whether this was on Titus' orders or merely a torch accidentally thrown by a soldier). Resistance continued until September, but finally the upper and lower parts of the city were also taken and the city was completely burned. Herod's palace fell on 7th September, and the city came completely under Roman control on 8th September. Titus spared only the three towers of the Herodian citadel (Phasaelus, Hippicus, and Mariamne) as a testament to the city's former power, as well as a large part of the wall that surrounded the city on the west side. According to historians, this wall was spared to provide a camp for those in the garrison [in the Upper City]; the towers [the three forts] were also spared, in order to demonstrate to future generations what kind of city Jerusalem was, how well fortified, and which the valiant Romans had subdued; but the other parts of the walls and the city were completely destroyed.



With the destruction of the temple complex, the Romans began to systematically destroy Jerusalem, from the lower city to the Pool of Siloam; it was completely set on fire. The city was plundered and the sacred objects taken to Rome. In the south wall of the temple, the Roman soldiers sacrificed eagles to their gods.

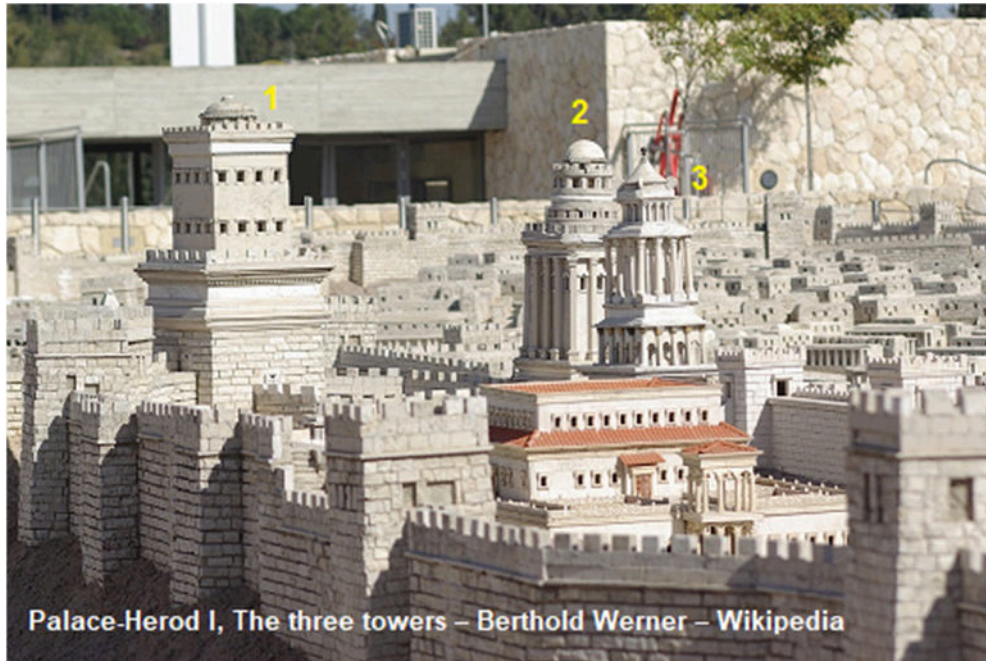


Image above: Model of Herod's Palace in Jerusalem showing the First Wall and, from left to right, its three towers: Phasaelus or Phasael, and Hippicus, and Mariamne.

On the north side of Herod's Palace, next to the wall, were the three great towers that protected it:

1. Phasael Tower was the largest and was named after Phasael, Herod's brother, and was 45 meters high;

2. Hippicus Tower was named after a friend of Herod and was 40 meters high; it was rebuilt on its original foundation and became known as the Tower of David.

3. Mariamne Tower – it was 23 meters high; it was the most beautiful and was built in honor of Mariane I, Herod's second wife, whom he had killed.

Three Zealot leaders dominated Jerusalem at the time, opposing the other two religious-political parties (the Sadducees and the Pharisees) and other extremist groups such as the Sicarii. These leaders were Simon bar Giora, John of Gischala, and Eleazar ben Simon. Although they were Zealots, the three leaders had separate groups that also rivaled each other, taking control of different parts of the city and the temple. It is not known how Eleazar ben Simon died. After Titus' invasion, Simon bar Giora and John of Gischala surrendered to the Romans. They were taken as captives in chains to Rome to glorify Titus' triumph. John of Gischala was sentenced to life imprisonment. Simon bar Giora was executed; he died with a rope around his neck, dragged to the Forum, and thrown under the Tarpeian Rock (a rock on the Capitoline Hill). Other historical sources say that he was hanged in the Mamertine Prison (the medieval name given to a prison built around 640–616 BC). It is not known exactly whether the apostle Peter was imprisoned there. Paul awaited his trial by Nero in a house south of the Campus Martius.



After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the city and its temple, there were still a few strongholds in which the rebels continued to hold out: Herodium, Machaerus, and Masada. Both Herodium and Machaerus fell to the Roman army within the next two years, with Masada remaining as the final stronghold of the Jewish rebels.



Location of Herodium, Machaerus and Masada

Herodium (Latin: Herodium; Hebrew, herodion: הֶרֹדִיּוֹן) is a circular hill 6.9 miles (11.1 km) south of Jerusalem in the Judean Desert (the actual distance is a little over 7.8 miles (12.5 km) and 5 km (3.1 mi) southeast of Bethlehem. It was a fortified palace built



between 22–15 BC by Herod the Great, and where he was also buried in 4 BC. During the First Great Jewish Revolt, Jewish rebels hid there from the Roman legions, but were defeated in 71 AD. They had converted Herod's dining hall into a synagogue. Sixty years later, at the beginning of the Third Great Jewish Revolt (132–135 CE), Bar Kokhba and other Jewish rebels (131–132 CE) retook it and hid in its ruins and turned them into an impenetrable fort, defending it for three years from Rome's best soldiers. Simon Bar Kokhba made Herodium his secondary headquarters, under the command of Yeshua ben Galgula. Archaeological evidence for the revolt has been found throughout the site, from the outbuildings to the water system beneath the mountain. Within the water system, support walls built by the rebels were discovered, and another cave system was found. Inside one of the caves, charred wood was found that dated to the time of the revolt [source: Wikipedia].



Herodium



Machaerus – Panorama

Machaerus (In Greek, Machairoús, Μαχαιρούς, from Ancient Greek: μάχαιρα, lit. 'makhaira' [a sword]; Hebrew: מכור; mechver) was a fortified hill located in present-day Jordan, 24 km southeast of the mouth of the Jordan River, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. The fortress was built by the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus around 90 BC and destroyed by Aulus Gabinius, a general of Pompey, in 57 BC. It was then rebuilt by King Herod the Great in 30 BC as a military base, controlling the territories east of the Jordan River. After his death, the fortress passed to his son Herod Antipas, who during this period imprisoned John the Baptist there and beheaded him. After Antipas' death in 39 AD, the fortification was under the command of Herod Agrippa I until 44 AD, and then under direct Roman control. In 66 AD, it was a stronghold of Jewish rebels during the First Jewish-Roman War. The fortress fell after Herod the Great, to the Roman general Lucilius Bassus.



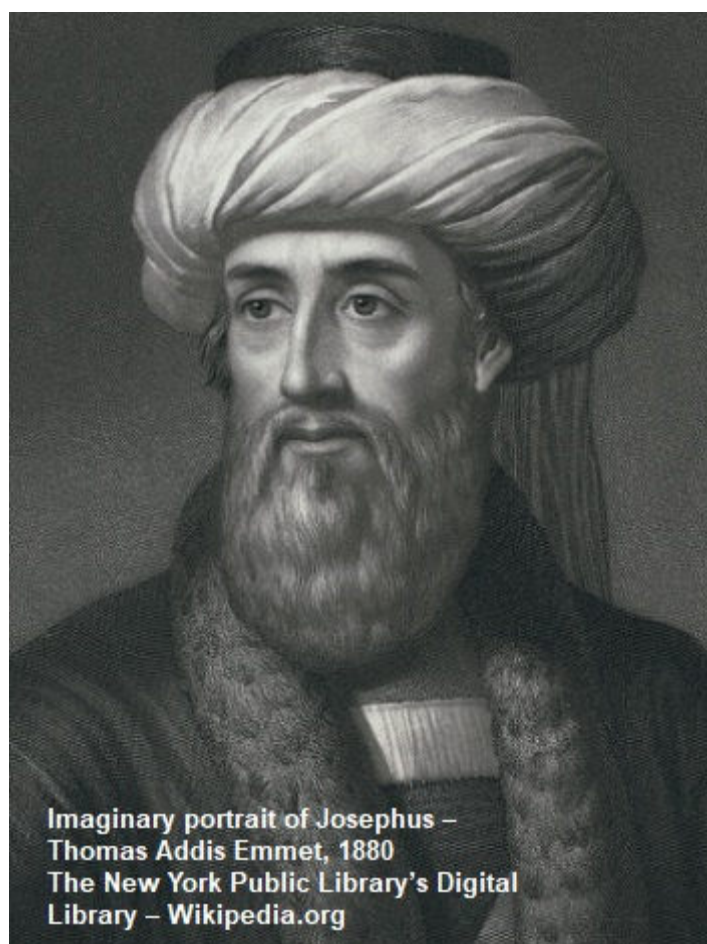
Aerial view of Masada with the Dead Sea in the background

One of the last acts of this war [the last 3 ½ years] was the destruction of the Masada Fortress on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 73 AD, a steep plateau southwest of the Dead Sea, a natural fortress built by Herod the Great between 37 and 31 BC as a palace and a place of refuge in case of revolt. Masada (מצדה, metzada), means 'safe place' or 'fortress.' The fortress also contained storehouses with an abundant supply of food, barracks, an arsenal, and a series of cisterns (with a capacity of about 40,000 cubic meters) that were replenished with rainwater. Masada was occupied by the rebellious Sicarii at the time of its destruction by the Romans. The Sicarii were an extremist group within the Zealot party. According to Flavius Josephus, before the Roman troops entered the fortress, the 960 Sicarii set fire to

all the buildings except the food stores and killed each other so as not to be taken prisoner. Only two women and five children were found alive. However, other scholars say that there is other archaeological evidence for this account, and Josephus may have been mistaken, referring to a similar event during the Siege of Yodfat in lower Galilee in July 20<sup>th</sup>, 67 AD, when he himself surrendered to the Romans so as not to die along with his only remaining rebel companion inside the cave where they were hiding.

## FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

The First Jewish-Roman War was documented by the writer Flavius Josephus. Let's read a little about his biography.



Imaginary portrait by Thomas Addis Emmet, 1880  
New York Public Library's Digital Library – Wikipedia.org

Flavius Josephus (Ancient Greek: Ἰώσηπος, Iósēpos; 37/38 – 100 AD, at 62-63 years old, in Rome), born Yosef ben Matthyahu (Hebrew: יוֹסֵף בֶּן מַתְתִּיָּהוּ), Joseph, son of Matias, variant of Matatias, Matthew, was a Jewish-Roman historian and military leader. After becoming a Roman citizen, he became known as Titus Flavius Josephus. He was born in Jerusalem into one of the wealthy elite families. His mother was an aristocratic woman, descended from the royal Hasmonean dynasty. His father was Matthias, a Jewish priest and, according to Flavius Josephus himself, of the priestly order of Jehoiarib (1 Chr 24:7),



which was the first of the 24 orders of priests in the Temple in Jerusalem, descended from Eleazar son of Aaron. Hence Josephus calls himself a 4th generation descendant of the ‘High Priest Jonathan’, referring to Alexander Jannaeus. But this is a bit odd, since Alexander Jannaeus, of the Hasmonean line, was of the line of Mattathias, father of Judas Maccabeus, who was not of the line of Eleazar, son of Aaron, unlike Jehoiarib (1 Chr 24:7). Josephus’s older brother was also called Matthias.

Josephus was a Jewish scholar and he defined himself as a traditional aristocratic leader.

In AD 64, at the age of about 27, Josephus was sent on an embassy to Rome to secure the release of a number of Jewish priests who were being held prisoner. Nero freed them, and Josephus successfully accomplished his mission. Upon his return to Jerusalem in 66 AD, he witnessed the outbreak of the First Jewish–Roman War.

The Jews of Judea, incited by the fanatical Zealots, expelled the Roman procurator and established a revolutionary government in Jerusalem. Josephus and other priests advised a compromise, but were reluctantly drawn into the rebellion. Despite his moderate position, he was appointed military commander of Galilee, but was opposed by John of Gischala and his Zealot supporters. Although he did not support armed resistance, Josephus began to fortify the northern cities against the coming Roman invasions. Josephus fortified several towns and villages in Lower and Upper Galilee. It’s interesting to quote some of them:

Lower Galilee:

- Tiberias (in Hebrew: טְבֵרְיָה, transl. Tveryah; Arabic: Ṭabariyyah), is a city in the Northern District of Israel, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which is also called Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 6: 1) or Lake of Gennesaret (Lk. 5: 1) or Sea of Chinnereth (Num. 34: 11; Deut. 3: 17; Josh. 11: 2; Josh. 12: 3; Josh. 13: 27; Josh. 19: 35; 1 Kin. 15: 20, Kinaroth, Kinneroth, Kinnereth, Chinnereth – Strong #3672, in Hebrew, כְּנֶרֶת), which, in turn, comes from the word kin·nō·wr, כְּנֹר, Strong #3658, meaning harp, lyre. It’s really interesting to notice the harp-shape of the lake. Antipas built the capital of his tetrarchy in the year 20 AD, giving it the name Tiberias in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius. The city was built on the ruins of a small village called Rakkath or Rakkat (Josh. 19: 35). Today it has a population of around 39,900 inhabitants.

- Bersabe today is identified with Khirbet es-Saba or Khirbet Abu esh-Sheba; known as Beer Sheba of the Galilee or Khirbet Beersheba, a ruin on the top of a hill 1 km from the village of Kafr ‘Inan or Kefr ‘Anan, east of er-Rameh and southwest of Safed.

- Selamin is the Hebrew name of the village, also known as Tzalmon, Selame, Salamis, Zalmon, and Khurbet es Salâmeh (the Ruin of Salameh), today the ruins of a Jewish village in Low Galilee during the Period of the Second Temple, and captured by the Roman Imperial Army 64 AD.

- Japha: in Arabic: Yafa an-Naseriyye or Jaffa of Nazareth, or simply Yafa, Kfar Yafia; or in Hebrew, Yafi, is an Arab town in Israel. It forms part of the metropolitan area of Nazareth, also an Arab locality. In 2022 it had 19,704 inhabitants, 70% Muslim and 30% Christian. In 67 AD it was the biggest village in Galilee and was conquered by Titus and the future Emperor Marcus Ulpius Traianus (98-117 AD), who was a 23 years old soldier at the time [‘Vita’ by Flavius Josephus (n. 37 e 45) and ‘the Jewish War’ (Book 3, chapter 7, verse 31)].

- Tarichaea or Tarichaia (Ταριχαία), in Greek, which literally means ‘the place of fish processing’, was located by the Sea of Galilee. The correct historical location site is uncertain. Tarichaia was one of the first villages in Galilee to suffer an attack from Rome, during the First Jewish-Roman War. Today only ruins can be seen. Tarichaea is

mentioned in the writings of Josephus ('Antiquities of the Jews' 14.120; 20.159; 'The Jewish War' 1.180; 2.252; 'Vita' 32, et al.).

Upper Galilee:

- Jamnith or Jabnith [in Hebrew, Yavnit (יבְנִית)], was another city in Galilee, today the archaeological site of Tel Yavne, which lies southeast of the modern city, Yavne (יבְנֵה). The Greek name was Iamneith (Ἰάμνειθ). In arabic, 'Yibnah.' In Latin, 'Iamnia.' In the Roman Period, it was known as 'Iamnia' or 'Jamnia.' Under the Late Roman and Byzantine rule, Yavne had a mixed population of Christians, Jews and Samaritans. In the medieval period, it was known as Ibnit / Abnit / Ovnit. During the Crusader period, it was known as 'Ibelin.' During the Ottoman and British periods, it was known as 'Yibna.'

- Seph or Sepph (Σέπφ), a fortified town in the Upper Galilee mentioned in the writings of the Roman Jewish historian Josephus, today is the city of Safed (Arabic: Şafad), in Hebrew: צֶפַת, Tzfat, romanized: Şəfāt (it means 'hope'), in the Northern Galilee, the highest in Galilee, located at an elevation of up to 937 m (3,074 ft) above sea level.

- Mero or Meroth is identified by some historians with a more northern site, present-day Marun er-Ras in southern Lebanon. Others identify it with Marus or Meron (מֵירוֹן) or (Herbôubar Meron), a moshav in northern Israel. It is located on the slopes of Mount Meron in the Upper Galilee, near Safed. The association of Meron with the ancient Canaanite city of Merom or Maroma is generally accepted by archaeologists. In the Second Temple period, Merom was known as Meron. Moshav is a type of rural Israeli community, where each family has its own farm, each rural worker receives an individual plot of land and makes a profit from what they produce. In kibbutz, production is collective, and income is divided according to production and the needs of each individual. It is based on the principles of Labor Zionism (a combination of socialism and Zionism); goods and means of production are collectively owned. The word 'kibbutz' means 'gathering' or 'together' in Hebrew. The plural of kibbutz is kibbutzim. Many kibbutzim have changed their traditional collective approach and moved towards privatization.

- Achabare refers to the village of Khirbet al-'Uqeiba, identified as the Roman village of Achabare, or Acchabaron. Khirbet al-'Uqeiba was inhabited until 1904. During the Second Temple period, Josephus Flavius noted the rock of Acchabaron among the sites in Upper Galilee that he fortified in preparation for the First Jewish Revolt, while he was leading the rebel forces against the Romans in Galilee. This site is identified with caves situated along the cliffs south of 'Akbara, an Arab village 2.5 km south of the Israeli municipality of Safed or Safad. The present village was rebuilt in 1977, close to the one that was destroyed in 1948 during the 1947–1949 Palestine War.

In 67 AD, under the command of General Vespasian, the Romans reached Galilee and in 47 days quickly broke Jewish resistance in the north and at Yodfat, where Josephus was.

While being confined at Yodfat, Josephus claimed to have experienced a divine revelation that later led to his speech predicting Vespasian would become emperor. He wrote that his revelation had taught him three things: that God, the creator of the Jewish people, had decided to punish them; that fortune had been given to the Romans; and that God had chosen him 'to announce the things that are to come.'

After the city of Yodfat fell, the Romans invaded, killing thousands; the survivors committed suicide. According to Josephus, he took refuge in a nearby cave with 40 of his companions in July 67 AD. The Jewish rebels voted to perish rather than surrender. Josephus, showing them the sin of suicide before God, proposed that each man in turn should kill his neighbor, and this would be determined by casting lots. Josephus chose to

stay last, and so only he and one of his companions were left. They then surrendered to Vespasian and Titus and became prisoners.

Led in chains before Vespasian, Josephus claimed the Jewish messianic prophecies (probably Dan. 9: 24, 26) that initiated the First Jewish-Roman War made reference to Vespasian becoming Roman emperor. In response, Vespasian decided to keep him as a slave and presumably interpreter. For the next two years he remained a prisoner in the Roman camp. After Vespasian became emperor in AD 69, he granted Josephus his freedom. Josephus interpreted the destruction of the Temple as a sign that God had turned to the Romans due to Jewish sins, urging submission to Roman authority. He became an advisor and close associate of Vespasian's son Titus, serving as his translator during Titus's protracted siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, during which time his parents were held as hostages by Simon bar Giora.

Josephus' first wife died at the siege of Yodfat, but according to other sources, she died along with Josephus' parents at the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. His second wife was a captured Jewess who soon abandoned him in Judea.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, in AD 71 he went to Rome in Titus' entourage, and took up residence in Rome, where he received Roman citizenship and a pension; he enjoyed the income from a tax-free property in Judea. Although he only ever calls himself 'Josephus' in his writings, later historians refer to him as 'Flavius Josephus', confirming that he adopted the name Flavius from his patrons, as was the custom amongst freedmen.

In Rome, Josephus wrote all of his known works: 'The Jewish War' (75 AD), where he recounts the Jewish revolt against Roman occupation (66-70 AD), including the siege of Masada; and 'Antiquities of the Jews' (94 AD), where he recounts the history of the world from a Jewish perspective for a Greek and Roman audience. These works provide insight into first-century Judaism and the context of early Christianity.

In 71, Josephus accompanied Vespasian to Alexandria, and met his third wife, an Alexandrian Jewess, with whom he had three children, of whom only Flavius Hyrcanus survived infancy. Later, he divorced her.

In 75 AD, he married a Cretan Jewess who was a member of an aristocratic family. They had two sons, Flavius Justus and Flavius Simonides Agrippa.

He was viewed with suspicion by the Romans as a Jew and hated by the Jews for his apostasy. According to contemporary sources, there was no heroism in his character, but rather flattery that earned him his freedom and the trust of the Jews' enemies.

He was described by Harris in 1985 as a Hellenistic Jew, who found Judaism compatible with Greco-Roman thought. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the scholar Nitsa Ben-Ari says that his work was avoided by many, because it was controversial, like that of a traitor to his people, since he did not commit suicide in Galilee and, after his capture, accepted Roman patronage. According to his critics, as a writer and historian, Josephus is especially biased when his own reputation is at stake. Personally, he was vain, insensitive and selfish. But he remained true to his Pharisaic beliefs and did what he could for his people. Even his work 'Antiquities of the Jews,' written for Greek and Roman audiences, from his point of view sought to bring to them an honorable view of the Jewish people.

The scholars had traditionally identified him as a Pharisee. Some authors portrayed him as a member of the sect and as a traitor to the Jewish nation. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars reformulated the modern concept of Josephus. They consider him a Pharisee but describe him in part as patriot and a historian of some standing. In his 1991 book, Steve Mason argued that Josephus was not a Pharisee but an orthodox Aristocrat-Priest who



became associated with the philosophical school of the Pharisees as a matter of deference, and not by willing association. He defined himself as a traditional aristocratic leader.

He died in Rome around 100 AD at the age of 62-63.

Research source: wikipedia.org; crystalinks.com and Encyclopedia Britannica.

## THE SECOND JEWISH-ROMAN WAR

The Second Jewish-Roman War (called in Hebrew, מרד הגליות, mered ha'galoyot, 'rebellion of the exile'; or מרד התפוצות, mered hitpotzot, 'rebellion of the Diaspora'), in Latin: 'Tumultus Iudaicus', refers to a series of revolts involving Jewish communities of the Diaspora, that is, Jews living in Babylonia, Cyprus and Africa, for example, Egypt (Alexandria, Memphis and Leontopolis – in the province of Heliopolis) and in Libya (called Cyrenaica), during the final years of the reign of Trajan (115-117 AD), when his departure for Mesopotamia favored the rebel movement. After the suppression of the revolt in Mesopotamia in 116 AD, Trajan appointed the Roman general Quintus Lusius Quietus as consul and governor of Judea; and in this climate, Israel also joined the revolt. Hence, it came to be known as 'The Kitos War', which defeated the revolt in Judea. Kitos was a misspelling of the name of the Roman general Quintus Lusius Quietus. In other words, 'The Kitos War' is restricted to the battles fought in Judea, as a result of the Jewish revolt in the Diaspora.

Several causes are suggested for this Second Jewish Revolt, but one prevails as the most likely. After the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, the Roman government transformed the annual contribution that the Jews of the Diaspora sent for the maintenance of their Temple into a tax destined for the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, on the Capitoline Hill, in Rome. Many Jews refused to pay the tax and a climate of revolt spread through the Jewish communities of several cities of the Hellenistic world: Alexandria, for example. The Jewish temple at Leontopolis (in the province of Heliopolis), at the southern tip of the Nile Delta, was closed by Emperor Vespasian for fear of revolts there.



In 115 AD, during Trajan's reign, Roman troops in Africa fought the Parthians in Mesopotamia, but as soon as they withdrew from Africa, Jewish revolts returned in different parts of the empire: in Cyrenaica (now Libya), Egypt and Cyprus. Although he

gradually defeated the Parthians and advanced eastward, Trajan had to retreat because Jewish rebels in the territories he had just conquered attacked the Roman garrisons left there by the emperor. The Jews of Cyrenaica, Egypt and Cyprus began to attack Roman soldiers and slaughter the Greco-Roman inhabitants of these regions. In Turkey and Mesopotamia, other Jews joined the rebellion; in Cyrenaica, several Greco-Roman temples were destroyed and the rebellion spread to Alexandria, Hermopolis and Memphis (in Egypt).

In Cyrenaica (modern Libya), Jewish forces launched attacks against Greek and Roman populations under the leadership of either Andreas, also known as Lukuas (it seems that it was Cassius Dio who later gave him this different Greek name, instead of 'Andreas'). The narrative of the revolt under Lukuas is told by Eusebius of Caesarea, Cassius Dio and two other historians. Very little is known regarding his life and political career beyond these passing references. There is no real evidence of a religious connection with Lukuas and the title of 'King' (given by Eusebius of Caesarea) or 'King of the Jews' attributed later. This was invented. Supposedly, his arrival from Cyrenaica had some influence on the clashes between Jewish communities and their Greek neighbors, but there is no irrefutable evidence as for this. The Greeks, supported by Egyptian peasants and Romans, retaliated, massacring the Jews of Alexandria.

In Cyprus, thousands of Greek citizens died at the hands of the Jews, but there was retaliation by a Roman legion (the Legio VII Claudia, also known as 'Legio VII Claudia Pia Fidelis', that is, 'Seventh Claudian Legion, Faithful and Loyal', whose symbol was a bull and had been founded by Pompey in Hispania in 65 BC. It remained until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD in the Danube region). Artemion led the revolt in Cyprus (he devastated the island and the city of Salamis).



Then in 116 DC, Trajan sent the Roman general Quintus Lusius Quietus to govern Judea and put down the revolt, which lasted until 117 AD. Quintus Lusius Quietus, called the 'Moorish Prince' was of Berber origin (barbarians living in the North of Africa, and called themselves 'free men'). Kitos was a misspelling of his name. Trajan had already appointed him commander of the cavalry, and he distinguished himself by his bravery in two fierce battles. He later became consul and saved the Roman army from destruction in the war against the Parthians, so he was adored by the legionnaires.

As mentioned by Rabbinic sources, Quintus Lusius Quietus was sent from Mesopotamia to Judea, besieging the city of Lydda, where the rebel Jews held out and had gathered under the leadership of Julian and Pappus. The distress became increasingly great. The Jews were completely decimated by Lusius. Many of the rebellious Jews (mentioned in the Talmud as the 'slain of Lydda') were executed. Pappus and Julian became martyrs among the Jews.

Trajan died during the campaign against the Parthians, and was succeeded by Hadrian. Quintus Lusius Quietus, whom Trajan had held in high regard, was quietly stripped of his command by Emperor Hadrian, who had him murdered in unknown circumstances in the summer of 118.

The situation in the country remained tense for them, and in the reign of Hadrian, that emperor transferred the Legio VI Ferrata permanently to Caesarea Maritima in Judea. In his government Judea would once again undertake the 3<sup>rd</sup> great insurrection: the Bar-Kochba revolt.

### THE THIRD JEWISH-ROMAN WAR

The Third Jewish-Roman War (or Bar Kochba Revolt) occurred after the journey of the Emperor Hadrian (117-138) to the east between 130 and 131 AD, making clear his intention to revive Hellenism in the region of Judea. He intended to rebuild Jerusalem as a Greek city, with statues, public baths and noisy centers of secular life.

The Holy City was rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian in 131 AD on the ruins left by the immeasurable destruction of Titus (70 AD), and according to his will, it was named Aelia Capitolina (in Latin: Colonia Aelia Capitolina). The word Aelia in Latin is derived from the Arabic term, Iliya, which the Muslims once used to Jerusalem (others say it is because of the emperor's birth name, Caesar Publius Aelius Traianus Hadrianus); 'Capitolina' because the new city was dedicated to Jupiter Capitoline (Zeus to the Greeks), to whom a temple was built in the place of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Next to Golgotha (where Jesus was crucified) he constructed a temple to the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Venus to the Romans).

The former province of Judea came to be called Syria Palaestina – a way of trying to erase the memory of the Jewish presence in that region, making them remember the Philistines, the ancient inhabitants of the region in biblical times. The Jews were forbidden to enter Aelia Capitolina under penalty of death, except on Passover.

In the Edict of Hadrian (r. 117-138) circumcision was forbidden (considered by the Romans as a mutilation) and, because of the Jewish resistance, the teaching of the Torah was also prohibited as well as the ordination of new rabbis.

Thus, at the end of his reign, the third Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire or 'The Third Jewish-Roman War' (from 132 to the end of 135 and beginning of 136 AD) arose within Judea. It is also known as the 'war of extermination' (מלחמת השמדה *milchamet hashmada*) or 'Bar Kochba Revolt' (מֶרֶד בָּר כּוֹכְבָּא, *Mered Bar Kōkḇā*).

Of the three revolts, this is the one that seems to have the least accurate historical information, both in relation to the leader himself and the accounts of the fighting; the Jewish apocryphal books are inconsistent and there are many rabbinical stories told differently, as Simon Bar Kokhba had many supporters but also many opponents. At least the little archaeological evidence that has been found recently assures us that he was a real character, that there was an extremely difficult and violent war on both sides, and that it left its clear mark on the history of the Jews and other nations. Detailed accounts



of certain torture methods, from both sides, end up becoming tendentious, however, it shows us the extent to which human cruelty can dominate someone's mind.



The city was occupied by Roman legionaries and guarded by the Legio X Fretensis or X Legion Fretensis (the 'Tenth Legion of the Strait'; 'Strait' in the geographical sense, for Fretensis means 'narrow passage'), created by Emperor Octavian (Caesar Augustus) in 41-40 BC to fight the civil wars of the Roman Republic and this legion lasted, at least, until the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely 410 AD.



Ancient Judean coin featuring a date palm, showing the revolt leader's name, Simeon bar Kokhba



In the image above, the silver denarius with two trumpets on the obverse with the writing “To the freedom of Jerusalem;” on the reverse: a lyre and the writing “Year 2 to the freedom of Israel” written in Paleo-Hebrew alphabet.

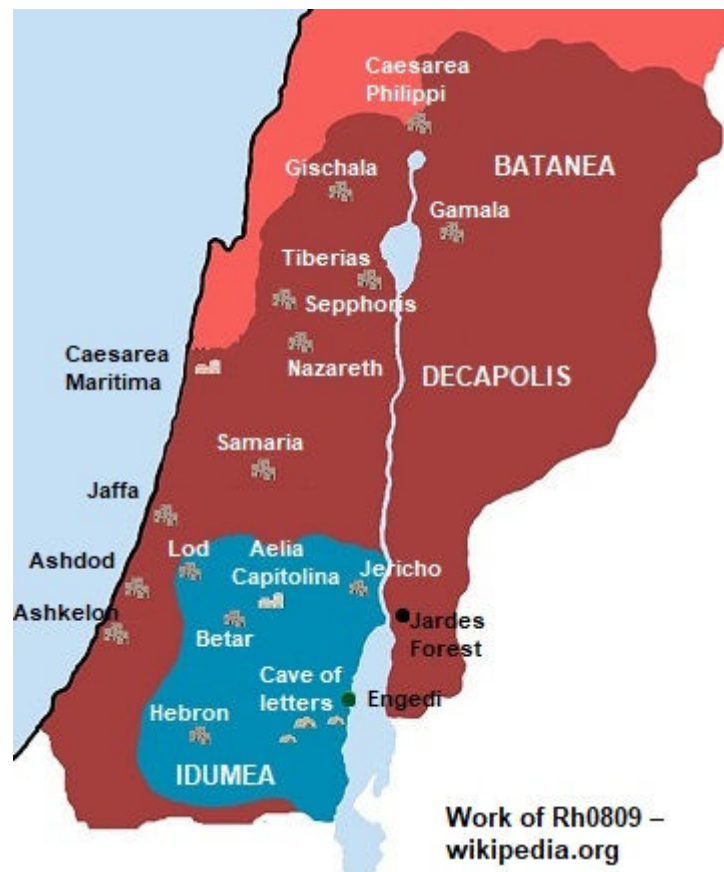
The revolt was led by Shimon ben Kozba (Simeon ben Kosba), who would later become known as Bar Kokhba or Kochba (in Aramaic meaning: ‘Son of the Star’), who the Jews believed to be the Messiah of Israel and ruled in Jerusalem for two and a half years. The newly independent state minted its own coins: 1) the silver tetradrachm on the obverse with the Temple on the obverse and the word ‘Jerusalem’; on the reverse, a lulav (לולב, a branch of date palm) and etrog (citron) together with the inscription “Year 1 to the freedom of Israel” and 2) the trumpets on the obverse with the writing “To the freedom of Jerusalem”; on the reverse: a lyre and the writing “Year 2 to the freedom of Israel silver denarius with two” written in Paleo-Hebrew alphabet.

Historians do not know his real name. The name Shimon ben Kozba comes from the rabbinical sources. Another tangible piece of evidence of the revolt was a set of papyri containing Bar Kokhba’s orders during the last year of the revolt, found in the ‘Cave of Letters’ in the Judean Desert by Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin.

In fact, the person who gave him this new name (Bar Kokhba) was Rabbi Akiva (Akiva ben Yosef, 40-135 AD), because he had recognized in him the Davidic Messiah. He based himself on Num. 24: 17: “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” There is no clear evidence that he himself claimed to be the Messiah. Bar Kochba was named nasi (נָשִׂיא ‘prince’) of the provisional state of the rebels, and a large part of the population of Judea considered him the messiah of Judaism who would restore Jewish national independence. Nasi was the name given to the prince of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the leader of the Sanhedrin in the period of the Second Temple and in the Roman period. On the other hand, the Jewish faction that was against the confrontation with the Romans criticized Rabbi Akiva’s attitude. Bar Kochba wrongly suspected that his elderly uncle, Rabbi Elazar HaModai (also known as Eleazar of Modi’im), knew his military secrets. Enraged, he kicked and killed him [this reference is not historical, but from apocryphal books and rabbinical sources]. The Jews had their hopes frustrated and

his rivals called him 'Bar Kosiba', which means 'son of lies' (Kosiba is the Hebrew word for 'liar'). Akiva refused to obey Hadrian's Edict, continuing to lead the Jewish people. Caught by teaching the Torah, he was condemned and skinned alive.

The exact extent of Bar Kokhba's control remains unclear. It is widely accepted that the rebels held all of Judea, including the Mountains and Desert and parts of the northern Negev Desert. However, some scholars believe that rebel control may have extended beyond Judea, to the Galilee and Golan Heights. In 2015, 40 caves were identified that served as hiding places at the time of the revolt, some containing coins minted by Bar Kokhba, suggesting that Samaria was also included, as were the Jews of Perea.



Territory of Israel under the rule of bar Kokhba (in blue).

The Jewish rebels attacked Roman legionaries and civilians. The Roman general Sextus Julius Severus, with ten legions and auxiliary troops (about a hundred thousand men in all), used the same tactics as the Jewish guerrillas: he divided his forces into groups of small mobile units, commanded by tribunes and centurions, forming rapid reaction groups that could respond promptly whenever reports of guerrilla activity arrived. In addition, he located and surrounded rebel strongholds, forcing them to surrender or die by starvation. The Romans also suffered considerable losses.

Several Roman legions were mobilized throughout the territory of Israel: Legio X Fretensis (Judea), Legio II Traiana Fortis (Alexandria), Legio VI Ferrata (Caesarea Maritima), Legio III Gallica (Syria), Legio III Cyrenaica (Arabia Romana), Legio XXII Deiotariana (Alexandria), Legio X Gemina (Pannonia, region of the Danube, present-day



Austria), Legio XV Apollinaris (Turkey), Legio V Macedonica (Macedonia, Moesia and Dacia), Legio XI Claudia (in Lower Moesia, in the Balkans). Cohorts from Legio XII Fulminata (Turkey) and Legio IV Flavia Felix (Upper Moesia) are also mentioned. Legio XXII Deiotariana and Legio XV Apollinaris had many soldiers killed.

Bar Kokhba was killed in 135 AD by the Romans in his stronghold in Betar (Biblical Hebrew: בֵּיתר, Bēttar, a fortified city in the Judean Mountains, 9 km (6 Roman miles) southwest of Jerusalem; present-day Battir, West Bank). The siege force there is said to have numbered 10–12,000 soldiers. A stone inscription in Latin characters discovered near the city shows that the V Macedonian Legion and the XI Claudian Legion participated in the siege. They also killed around 580,000 Jewish civilians on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 135 CE, the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av.

In 1952 and 1960-61, several letters from Bar Kokhba to his lieutenants were discovered in the Judean Desert. It was a long and bloody war with many battles and more than two years of duration, and with victory for Rome.

The Romans enslaved and butchered many Jews of Judea and many of them were banned. Cassius Dio says that about 50 rebel hideouts were located and eliminated, 985 Jewish villages were destroyed in the campaign, and 580,000 Jews were killed by the sword (in addition to those who died of starvation). The slaves were brought to Rome; they were sold in slave markets, and the most unable to work were taken to the arenas, being killed by gladiators or wild animals. Lucius Cassius Claudius Dios (known as Cassius Dios or Dio Cassius) was a notable Roman historian of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and public servant. He wrote about eighty books in twenty-two years, showing the history of Rome.

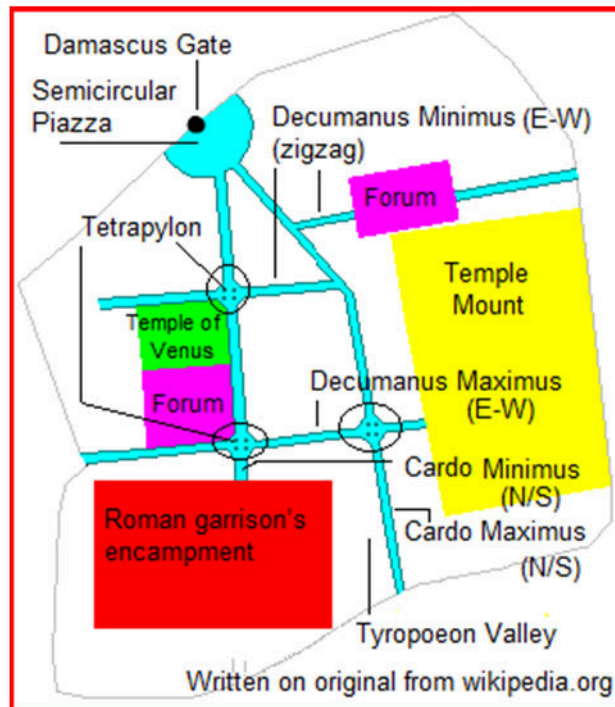
After the end of the revolt, most of the remaining Jews lived outside Israel, especially in Babylon, Galilee and the Golan Heights. Although the Diaspora has begun in the sixth century BC, after the Babylonian exile, and especially after 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, this war definitely eliminated any possibility of revival of a Judaism centered in the Temple of Jerusalem and in the line of Levitical priests. Judaism became an expression merely religious and cultural, no longer political, a situation that would perpetuate until the rise of Zionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The demographic devastation was so great that it took several years to repopulate Judea.

### **The urban plan of the city of Aelia Capitolina**

As I said at the beginning of the text, the new city was dedicated to Jupiter Capitolinus (Zeus for the Greeks), to whom a temple was built on the site of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Next to Golgotha (where Jesus was crucified) was built a temple to the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Venus for the Romans).

The city of Aelia Capitolina of Emperor Hadrian was built according to the urban plan of a Roman city, where large avenues intersected. The main street (Cardo Maximus) began in the north and ran through the city to the south and intersected with the central east-west route (the Decumanus).

As the Temple Mount blocked the eastward route of the main decumanus (Decumanus Maximus), a main cardo was built on the eastern side which descended into the Tyropoeon Valley, and two decumani ran just to the north of the Temple Mount, the northern one running in a zigzag line around the northern wall of the Temple. The other secondary (N/S) cardo on the western side was shorter and reached the Roman garrison's encampment (it was later removed by the Byzantines and the secondary cardo was extended over the former camp to reach the southern expanded margins of the city). The two cardos converged in a semicircular square before the Damascus Gate.



Aelia Capitolina – Jerusalem rebuilt by Hadrian



Current Damascus Gate

In this square was built a monument in the form of a column; a Roman victory column, and on it a statue of the Emperor Hadrian; hence the Arabic name for the Damascus Gate is Bāb al-‘Āmūd, meaning ‘gate of the column.’ On the lintel of the 2nd century gate, which has been made visible by archaeologists beneath today’s Ottoman gate, is inscribed the city’s Roman name after 130 CE, Aelia Capitolina, the name that Hadrian gave to Jerusalem when he turned it into a Hellenistic city. Hadrian’s Roman gate was built as a free-standing triumphal arch and only sometime later, in the end of the

3rd or in the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the protective walls were built around Jerusalem, connecting to the existing gate.



Remains of Roman-period gate under Damascus Gate. This was the only remaining Gate in Jerusalem's western-most wall of the Old City.

At the intersection of the decumanus maximus and the cardo minimus he built the temple of Venus, and at the intersection of the cardo minimus and the decumanus minimus he built the Forum. The temple of Venus was later demolished by the Roman Emperor Constantine to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

There is also another smaller Forum to the north of the city, on the second line of the decumanum minimus. At the intersections of the two decumanums with the cardo minimus, he placed two tetrapylons (In Greek: Τετράπυλον; Tetrápylon, plural tetrapyla; lit. 'Four Gates'), also known as quadrifrons (in Latin: quadrifrons, lit. 'four fronts'). There is another tetrapylum (3<sup>rd</sup>) at the intersection of the decumanus maximus and the cardo maximus. A tetrapylon is a rectangular form of monument with arched passages in two directions, at right angles, generally built on a crossroads. They appear in ancient Roman architecture, usually as a form of the Roman triumphal arch at significant crossroads or important geographical points.





The tetrapylon of the North in Jerash, Jordan

#### WHAT HAPPENED TO HADRIAN'S AELIA CAPITOLINA AFTER HIS DEATH?

A later generation of Jews from the time of Hadrian returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding it, but most of the remaining Jews lived outside Israel, especially in Babylon, Galilee and the Golan Heights. The region of Syria Palaestina became subordinate to the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and was subdivided into Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Secunda. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Palaestina Salutary was separated. In the time of Constantine I (306–337), Jews were allowed to enter the city, but until the 7<sup>th</sup> century (390–630, during the Byzantine period), Jews were again forbidden to enter. Palaestina Prima was composed of Judea, Samaria, the coast, Perea and that was the province of the Byzantine Empire in the period 390-630, but soon passed to the hands of Muslims. Second Palestine comprised Galilee, the lower Jezreel Valley, the Beth Shean Valley, the eastern Galilee region south of the Golan Heights, and the western portion of the ancient Decapolis, with its capital at Scythopolis. Capernaum and Nazareth were the principal capitals.

In 637, Caliph Omar, the Orthodox Caliphate (632–661) conquered Jerusalem and the Roman province of Palestine Prima (composed of Judea, Samaria, the Litoral, Perea), a province of the Byzantine Empire, and the Jews were allowed to return to the city. In place of the Temple, the Muslims built the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In 1099, the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and killed both Jews and Muslims. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim Turks (the Ayyubids) under Saladin expelled the Crusaders from Jerusalem and allowed Jews and Muslims to return and live in the city. In 1244, Jerusalem was plundered by other partisans of Islam (the Khwarazmian Tatars), who decimated the city's Christian population and moved the Jews away. The Khwarazmian Empire was a Sunni Muslim dynasty (orthodox Islam) that acquired Persian customs.

In 1516, the Ottoman Turks (Sunni Muslims, that is, orthodox) under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566) conquered the city, and many Jews exiled from



Spain in 1492 came to Jerusalem, increasing their numbers until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By 1846, Jews made up the majority of Jerusalem's population, and the walled Old City had become too small for them. In 1917, the city came under British rule, which divided it into four quarters: Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Armenian, but Muslims dominated the Western Wall ('Kotel' or 'Qotel', meaning 'wall'). In 1948, the Old City of Jerusalem passed from Great Britain to Jordan, and the Jews shared their city with the Jordanians, even with the declaration of the State of Israel on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948. In 1967, after the Six-Day War (involving Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq), Israel occupied East Jerusalem and asserted sovereignty over the entire city, reestablishing control over the western wall of the Temple Mount (the Wailing Wall) and creating a plaza there (Western Wall Plaza), today under Jewish jurisdiction. The Temple Mount remained under Islamic jurisdiction.



Remains of the city Aelia Capitolina

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