



The Jews Against Rome: War in Palestine AD 66-73

Susan Sorek

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This is the first book to examine the causes, events and consequences of a major conflict in ancient Palestine, and assess the accounts of its star witness, Josephus.

The Jewish war, culminating in the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, can be called the most significant event in Roman military history. The war demanded a massive concentration of forces and was the longest siege in the whole of the Imperial period. Lasting roughly five months it took four legions, twenty infantry cohorts, and eighteen thousand men supplied by four independent kings to affect a victory. In fact, the forces committed to the siege, were larger than those deployed for the invasion of Britain in AD 43.

The Jewish revolt was not inspired by any ideological objection on the part of the Jews toward Rome, nor any Roman anti-Semitism: instead a variety of underlying causes helped spark the revolt including social tensions, the divisions amongst the ruling class, the rise of banditry and poor harvests, and, perhaps most significantly, the apocalyptic storm brewing over 1st century Palestine.

All revolutions change history, whether they are successful or not, and the Jewish war against Rome in AD 66-73 was no exception - the ramifications were enormous and still have an impact on the world today. The revolt had a profound influence on the development of Judaism and Christianity. If this revolt had not occurred, two major religions would simply not exist, certainly not in their present forms. The other exceptional fact about the Jewish war is the extraordinary amount of information that has survived. For that we have to thank one man, Flavius Josephus, a Jew of Pharisaic origin and eyewitness to the events he describes. Born Joseph ben Mattiyahu, he held a command in Galilee during a pivotal stage of the revolt and was captured by the Romans. Eventually, through his skillful manipulation of events, he became a client and friend to the future Roman emperors, Vespasian and Titus and worked as a translator and mediator during the fateful siege of Jerusalem. To the Jews, he became a traitor.

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