

Meeting Jesus: His Life & Times

Worksheet for Week 4

Jewish Revolution¹

Provocation to Revolution

Often, Jewish resistance to Roman rule was provoked by some thoughtless action of the Roman governor. Sometimes the provocation was bad enough to incite outright revolt. The revolt led by Judas the Galilean in 6AD was provoked by a Roman census. To a Jew, a census implied admitting that the land and the people belonged to Rome, not the LORD God. As further examples, we know of at least seven provocations by Pontius Pilate:

- Pilate tried to bring Roman flags and emblems into Jerusalem, but backed down after a mass protest.
- He used money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct and crushed the resistance that this action provoked.
- He sent troops to kill some Galileans while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple, presumably because he feared a riot.
- He captured and condemned to death the leader of an uprising that had taken place in Jerusalem involving murder; he then released the man [Barabbas] as a gesture of goodwill during the Passover feast.
- At the same Passover, he faced a quasi-messianic movement, having some association with resistance movements; he crucified its leader [Jesus] along with two ordinary revolutionaries.
- He provoked public opinion by placing Roman votive shields, albeit without images, in the palace at Jerusalem, which according to Philo annoyed Tiberius almost as much as it did the Jews.
- Finally, he suppressed with particular brutality a popular (and apparently non-revolutionary) prophetic movement in Samaria. For this he was accused before the Roman legate in Syria, who had him sent back to Rome.

A gallery of Jewish revolutionaries – a century of violence

Emperor Gaius, incensed by an anti-Roman incident at Jamnia, tried to insist on a huge statue of himself being placed in the Temple in Jerusalem in deliberate contravention of Jewish law and scruple. Only his early death forestalled the blasphemous act and its horrendous possible consequences.

Tholomaeus, a “brigand chief,” was executed by Cuspius Fadus in the mid-40s, during the course of a large operation against brigandage in general. Around the same time a leader named Theudas, claiming to be a prophet, led a movement which aroused enough popular support to gain mention in Acts as well as Josephus. It too was put down by the Romans, and Theudas himself was executed.

We then hear of the two sons of Judas the Galilean, Jacob and Simon, being crucified under the governor Tiberius Alexander (46-48AD), and of subsequent revolts under his successor Cumanus (48-52), including a riot at Passover in which perhaps 20,000 Jews were killed. Cumanus overreacted to a subsequent incident, whose complexity nicely illustrates the problems of the time. Some Galileans were murdered on their way through Samaria to Jerusalem for a festival. The Jews took violent revenge on Samaria. Cumanus responded with even more violence, out of all proportion to the original incidents. The Jews then successfully accused Cumanus before Claudius the emperor of having favored the Samaritans. The ringleaders of the Jewish fighters, Eleazar ben Deinaeus and Alexander, were finally captured by Cumanus’ successor Felix (52-60), who proceeded, as Fadus had done in 44-46, to purge the country of *lestai* (rebels), crucifying a considerable number.

There was plenty more, but this brief list gives you a sense of the strife that plagued first-century Judea. In the late 60’s, things came to a full head. A large-scale Jewish revolt was decisively crushed by the Roman legions, under the leadership of Vespasian and his son, Titus. The temple was destroyed, as Jesus warned it would be unless the Jews gave up the sword. Vespasian carried the temple loot to Rome. Later, Rome built a large arch to commemorate this victory and you see this arch today, with a relief of a menorah, if you visit the Roman Forum. Finally, in 135AD, Rome ended the strife for all time. The Romans smashed a revolt led by Simon-bar-Kochba (son of the star) and displaced the Jews from all Judea.

¹ This material on Jewish revolutions was taken and adapted from the study guide to a series by N.T. Wright, *Jesus: The New Way*. The guide was prepared by Denise George and is copyrighted by the Christian History Institute.

Bible Readings for Week 4

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

<p>Day 1 Matthew 14 – 15 The fate of John the Baptist, Conflict over tradition and authority</p>	<p>Day 2 Matthew 16 – 18 Conflict with the Pharisees, the Transfiguration, taxes, the church</p>
<p>Day 3 Matthew 19 – 21 Jesus leaves Galilee, making his way to Jerusalem, where he enters and confronts the temple authorities</p>	<p>Day 4 Matthew 22 – 25 Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for what is to come</p>
<p>Day 5 Matthew 26 – 28 Jesus' death approaches; the trial; the crucifixion; the resurrection; the great commission to Jesus' disciples</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>