

INTRODUCTION: THE MAIN WITNESS

because they happened, is reasonable. As a result, the story of Jerusalem in the years up to 70 CE can be told in far more depth than that of any other city in the Roman empire at this time, apart from the story of Rome itself.

Prologue: The Destruction of Jerusalem, 66–70 CE

In May 66 CE, on 16 Iyyar, the Roman governor of Judaea, Gessius Florus, who had been appointed to his post some two years earlier by the emperor Nero, let loose his troops onto the upper market in Jerusalem with instructions to kill all they met. The description of the ensuing mayhem, written just a few years later by Josephus, is chilling: 'The troops . . . not only plundered the quarter which they were sent to attack but plunged into every house and slaughtered the inmates. There followed a stampede through the narrow alleys, massacre of all who were caught, every variety of pillage . . . The total number of that day's victims, including women and children – for they did not even abstain from infants – amounted to about three thousand six hundred.' It was the beginning of a cycle of increasing violence that would end, just over four years later, in the destruction of the whole city.¹

Florus demanded that the inhabitants of Jerusalem should demonstrate their submissiveness to his rule by going out in procession from the city to greet two cohorts of Roman troops as they approached. It was political theatre, designed to humiliate, and when some of the Jews began to shout abuse of the governor, the soldiers lashed out, with devastating consequences:

In an instant the troops were round them, striking out with their clubs, and on their taking flight the cavalry pursued and trampled them under their horses' feet. Many fell beneath the blows of the Romans, a still larger number under the pressure of their own companions. Around the gates the crush was terrible; as each strove to pass in first, the flight of all was retarded, and dreadful was the fate of any who stumbled; suffocated and mangled by the

crowds that trod them down, they were obliterated and their bodies so disfigured that their relatives could not recognize them to give them burial.²

The leading Jewish moderates were led by Agrippa II (27–c. 93 CE), great-grandson of Herod the Great (c. 73–4 BCE), who had been appointed by the Romans both as king over various small territories north and east of Judaea and as overseer responsible for the upkeep and operation of the Jerusalem Temple. They tried to stem the flood of protest, but without success. As Jerusalemites polarized between a peace party and a war party, the captain of the Temple, a priest named Eleazar, described by Josephus as ‘a very daring youth’, forced the issue by persuading those officiating in the Temple to refuse any further gifts or sacrifices brought by a foreigner. ‘This action’, wrote Josephus, ‘laid the foundation of the war with the Romans’, for it required an end to the longstanding custom of demonstrating loyalty by offering sacrifices in the Temple on behalf of the emperor and Rome.³

In the first months of the ensuing conflict in Jerusalem the Romans themselves were not directly involved. Factional strife within the Jewish population led to heavy loss of life and the spectacular destruction of the large town houses of some of the rich Jerusalemites who opposed revolt. Among those in the peace party who were murdered was the former High Priest Ananias, father of Eleazar. A Roman cohort of six hundred men, garrisoned on the western edge of the city, struggled to provide support for those still striving to avert a full-scale war, but they were besieged by the rebels and confined to their headquarters in the former palace of Herod the Great. By late August or early September, they were finally overcome, and agreed to surrender their weapons in exchange for free passage out of the city. Josephus, aware of the enormity of what happened next, named the (otherwise unknown) Jews who gave on oath the necessary assurances: Gorion son of Nicomedes, Ananias son of Sadok, Judas son of Jonathan. Oaths taken, the Roman commander Metilius marched his men down from their stronghold:

So long as the soldiers retained their arms, none of the rebels molested them or gave any indication of treachery; but when, in accordance with the covenant, they had all laid down their bucklers and swords and, with no

suspicion remaining, were taking their departure, Eleazar’s party fell upon them, surrounded and massacred them; the Romans neither resisting nor suing for mercy, but merely appealing with loud cries to ‘the agreements’ and the ‘oaths’. Thus, brutally butchered, perished all save Metilius; he alone saved his life by entreaties and promises to Judaize, even to the point of being circumcised. To the Romans this injury – the loss of a handful of men out of a boundless army – was slight; but to the Jews it looked like the prelude to their ruin. Seeing the grounds for war to be now beyond remedy, and the city polluted by such a stain of guilt as could not but arouse a dread of some visitation from heaven, if not of the vengeance of Rome, they gave themselves up to public mourning; the whole city was a scene of dejection, and among the moderates there was not one who was not racked with the thought that he would personally have to suffer for the rebels’ crime.⁴

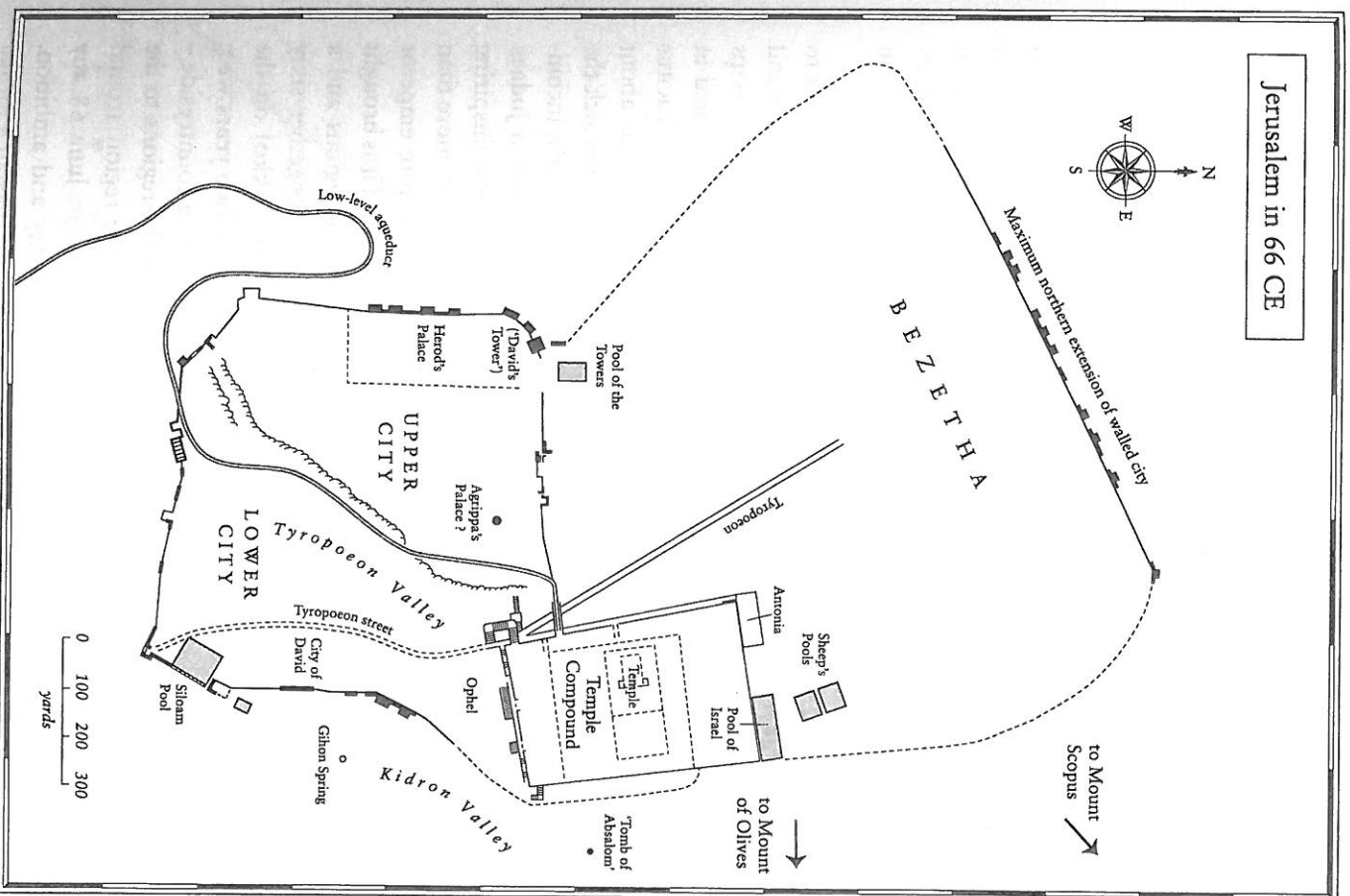
This much had occurred by the time that the Roman governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus, arrived from Antioch with a sizeable force at the feast of Tabernacles in the early autumn, a month or so later. Casual slaughter of civilians in his path, such as the fifty individuals left in Lydda after the rest of the population had gone to Jerusalem for the festival, and the burning of villages, made it clear that he intended to inflict corporate punishment on the Jews in retaliation for Roman losses. The rebel forces responded by rushing to attack him, with considerable success, killing five hundred and fifteen enemy for the loss of only twenty-two. Even at this late stage Agrippa tried to mediate a peaceful solution. He sent two friends to offer a treaty on behalf of Cestius. The terms (so Josephus claimed) were generous, reflecting Roman discomfiture in this first engagement and the Jews’ control of the heights above the valleys where the Romans had taken up their temporary quarters. The rebels were offered pardon for their misdeeds if they would disarm and return to their allegiance. It was too late. The offer was greeted with such violence that one of Agrippa’s emissaries was killed and the other wounded. Cestius therefore went on to Jerusalem, pitched his camp on Mount Scopus, which overlooked the Temple from the north-east, and eventually marched into the city, capturing the suburbs, setting fire to the ‘New City’ of Bezetha to the north of the Temple precincts, and camping opposite the royal palace in the upper city in order to besiege the inner city and the

PROLOGUE: THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM, 66-70 CE

Temple. Under the protection of a tortoise of shields, the soldiers began to undermine the wall and to set fire to the gate of the Temple. The besieged began to panic, and some, it was said, offered to open up the city to him.

And then, suddenly, Cestius stopped and, 'without having suffered any reverse and contrary to all calculation, retired from the city'.⁵ Josephus alleges bribery, the natural explanation of inexplicable behaviour: Cestius' camp prefect had been corrupted by Gessius Florus and as a result diverted Cestius from the rapid victory he could so easily have obtained. Florus' motives were not mentioned, but Josephus gives the impression that the wicked governor was keen on any mayhem that might cover up the evidence of his crimes. In any case, the result was terrible: 'Hence it came about that the war was so long protracted and the Jews drained the cup of irretrievable disaster.'⁶ In other words, a quick victory for Cestius Gallus then would have had far less serious consequences for the Jews than their eventual fate.

Perhaps Cestius thought he could stop because he had already achieved enough. He had demonstrated clearly the power of Rome by marching right up to the gates of the Temple, spreading devastation around him. The rebels were in disarray. There was no need to create further havoc, with the danger of further Roman losses. He could return to safer, more comfortable, quarters, where his supply lines would be more secure, and negotiate from there. If that was the calculation, it proved hopelessly misguided. Heavy infantry withdrawing through the narrow defiles leading from the hills round Jerusalem down towards the Mediterranean coast were extremely vulnerable. The light-armed Jewish rebels caused increasing casualties until the orderly march degenerated into a bloody rout. Cestius lost not only five thousand three hundred infantry and four hundred and eighty cavalry but also his heavy artillery – catapults, battering rams and other siege machines were abandoned along with the rest of the baggage train. After such a reverse there could be no more offers of peace. The Roman empire could counter so public a humiliation only by a full and thorough punishment of the rebellious city. Among the Jews who up to this juncture had gone on hoping for compromise and had stayed in Jerusalem to help broker a peace were included, remarkably,

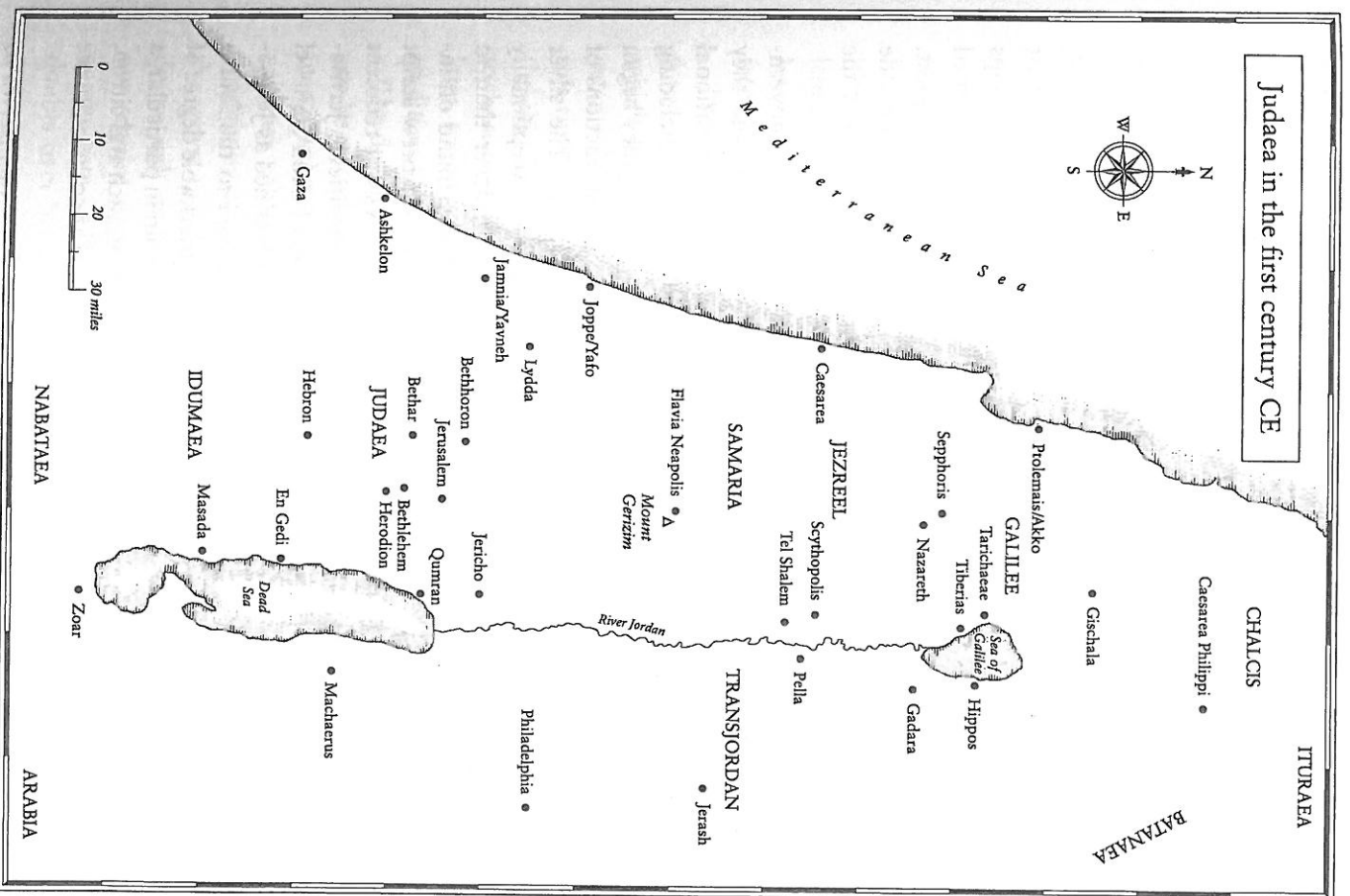


PROLOGUE: THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM, 66-70 CE

relatives and employees of King Agrippa. Now they fled to the Roman side.

Those who remained in Jerusalem set about organizing its defence, under the leadership of a former High Priest, Ananus son of Ananus. Generals were appointed for the different regions of the country, including Josephus, to take command of Galilee. In the capital, as Josephus reports, 'all the powerful men who were not pro-Roman were busy repairing the wall and getting together much military equipment. In every part of the city missiles and suits of armour were being forged, masses of young men were undergoing training, and everything was full of uproar.'⁷ There were plenty of omens which could be taken by the pessimistic as evidence of the coming destruction, but those who had kindled the war found ways to interpret them favourably.

A full-scale siege of a city as well defended as Jerusalem was not to be undertaken lightly and, in the event, it was to be another three and a half years after the failure of Cestius Gallus before Roman troops again attacked the city walls. Cestius himself seems to have died in Syria quite early the following year – the Roman historian Tacitus (c. 56-c. 120) remarks unsympathetically that his death came about 'in the course of nature or from vexation', although if he was sick the previous autumn that might help to explain his apparently incompetent generalship.⁸ In any case, the command of the war in Judaea was entrusted instead by the emperor Nero to a reliable if uninspiring soldier, who had made his name in the conquest of Britain more than twenty years earlier. Titus Flavius Vespasianus, the future emperor Vespasian, spent months collecting a huge force. His son Titus brought a legion from Alexandria. The complement of three legions and a large body of auxiliary and allied troops, totalling altogether sixty thousand men, was gathered in Ptolemais (modern Akko) on the Mediterranean coast in early spring 67 CE. The next two years were spent cautiously gaining full control of the surrounding countryside – in 67 Galilee, Samaria and northern Judaea; in 68 the regions to the east and south of Jerusalem, including Idumaea (the region around Hebron) and the environs of the Dead Sea. But from June 68 any further progress was slowed by political uncertainty and ambition. The death that month of Nero threw into doubt Vespasian's formal



right to prosecute the campaign. Then, in a year of political turmoil at Rome, two aspirants to imperial power each died in the early months of 69, a third was proclaimed by the legions in the German provinces, and in July Vespasian himself was acclaimed by his own troops. The siege of Jerusalem would have to wait.

It is hard to know to what extent news of these ramifications of Roman politics percolated to the rebels in Jerusalem. They were unlikely to appreciate the significance of such upheavals in the capital, not least because nothing like them had been experienced in the past hundred years. To the more optimistic, the failure of Roman troops to return to the city after the rout of Cestius Gallus may have seemed evidence that Rome had lost interest in or the will for reconquest, although the stories of devastation brought by refugees from the countryside served to remind the defenders of the terrors that the invading force might inflict.

The best evidence of the political ethos of the revolutionary government in Jerusalem can be gauged from the plentiful coinage they produced. It suggests a state proud of its independence and national freedom: although the rebels had access to Roman coinage, including the most valuable denominations (the *aurei* made of gold), they began to mint early in the conflict silver coinage of shekels and fractions of shekels and their own distinctive bronze small change. The silver content of the rather thick coins they produced was exceptionally pure. The legends on all the coins were in Hebrew rather than in Greek or Aramaic, the two languages most commonly found on inscriptions in Jerusalem in this period, and the palaeo-Hebrew script used was archaic, unfamiliar to most first-century Jews but redolent of antiquity. The slogans selected by the minting authorities – ‘Jerusalem is holy’, ‘Freedom of Zion’, ‘For the redemption of Zion’, ‘Shekel of Israel’ – proclaimed a political entity variously identified as Jerusalem or Israel or, on the bronze coins from the second to the fourth year of the revolt, as Zion. There was in general a remarkable degree of variation in types over the five-year period of the revolt: in particular, a chalice (referring to the Temple service) and a palm branch and citron, as carried in the celebration of the festival of Tabernacles, were frequently reproduced.⁹

It is clear that the authorities in Jerusalem believed themselves to

be living in an independent and distinctive Jewish state centred on the Temple, for which the catchwords were ‘freedom’ and ‘holiness’. The coins contain no image reminiscent in any way of Rome, even in emulation or antagonistic opposition. The regular record on the coins of the progress of the new era (‘Year One’, ‘Year Two’ and so on) proclaimed a self-consciously new state, with a self-consciously new name: not ‘Judah’, which was too close to *Judaea* (the Roman name for the province), but ‘Israel’.¹⁰

Documents in Hebrew and in Aramaic drawn up during this period of independence and discovered over the past fifty years in caves in Wadi Murabba‘at in the Judaean desert, set out in some detail the terms of land sales between 67 and 69 in expectation of a settled future. The dating formulas follow a similar pattern in each document: ‘the fourteenth of Elul, year two to the redemption of Israel in Jerusalem’, ‘on the twenty-first of Tishri, year four to the redemption of Israel in Jerusalem’, ‘on the . . . day of Marheshvan, year three to the freedom of Jerusalem’.¹¹

This Jewish state was sufficiently untroubled by Roman attacks from 68 to early 70 for the city to be plagued by faction struggles, which were all the more violent because each faction was armed, ostensibly in readiness against the Romans. It seems to have been at this time, if not earlier, that the Christians of Jerusalem abandoned the city, ‘commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it’ (so, two and a half centuries later, wrote Eusebius, historian of the Church). According to one later tradition, they took refuge in the gentile city of Pella in Transjordan.¹²

The detailed history of this internal strife in independent Jerusalem can be traced only in the account of Josephus, who was not a wholly trustworthy witness of events inside the city, since by 68 he was a prisoner of Vespasian and knew about them only from rumours brought by deserters or prisoners. He will have been inclined to believe the worst of all those Jews who had not, like him, recognized the divine will and accordingly stopped opposing Rome, and it does not require sophisticated psychological analysis to suggest that his antagonism to his erstwhile fellow rebels was prompted by residual doubts over his own behaviour. In any case, by spring 68 the rebel government to which Josephus had attached himself in October 66

when he accepted appointment to the command in Galilee had lost power to rival groups. Josephus' former commander-in-chief, the ex-High Priest Ananus son of Ananus, on whom Josephus lavished inordinate praise as 'a man on every ground revered and most just', was murdered by a coalition made up of insurgents from Idumaea and the Zealots, a faction based (by 68) in the inner court of the Temple; they were led by a group of priests, and built on the support both of refugees from the countryside of northern Judaea and of the Galileans who had followed to Jerusalem a certain John of Gischala, who a year earlier had been a political rival of Josephus when Josephus had held his Galilean command.¹³ Hence the virulence of Josephus' description of the Zealots, full of abusive clichés standard in Roman political discourse in his day:

With an insatiable lust for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy; the murder of men and the violation of women were their sport; they caroused on their spoils, with blood to wash them down, and from mere satiety unscrupulously indulged in effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and attiring themselves in women's apparel, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to enhance their beauty. And not only did they imitate the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of lasciviousness unlawful pleasures and wallowing as in a brothel in the city, which they polluted from end to end with their foul deeds. Yet, while they wore women's faces, their hands were murderous, and approaching with mincing steps they would suddenly become warriors and whipping out their swords from under their dyed mantles transfix whomsoever they met.¹⁴

Josephus' judgements about specific Jewish rebel groups such as the Zealots may be of dubious value, but his general depiction of a city divided between competing factions with shifting allegiances is echoed in the account of Jerusalem just before its destruction written by his younger contemporary, Tacitus:

There were three generals, three armies: the outermost and largest circuit of the walls was held by Simon, the middle of the city by John, known as Bargioras, and the Temple was guarded by Eleazar. John and Simon were strong in numbers and equipment, Eleazar had the advantage of position: between these three there was constant fighting, treachery and arson, and a

great store of grain was consumed. Then John got possession of the Temple by sending a party, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to slay Eleazar and his troops. So the citizens were divided into two factions until, at the approach of the Romans, foreign war produced concord.¹⁵

Josephus himself distinguished the factions most clearly in his bitter retrospective summary of their violent characteristics, which he blamed for the disaster to come:

Not only did he [John] put to death all who proposed just and salutary measures, treating such persons as his bitterest enemies among all the citizens, but he also in his public capacity loaded his country with evils innumerable, such as one might expect would be inflicted upon men by one who had already dared to practise impiety even towards God . . . Again, there was Simon, son of Gioras: what crime did not he commit? Or what outrage did he refrain from inflicting upon the persons of those very freemen who had created him a despot? Yet even their infatuation was outdone by the madness of the Idumaeans. For those most abominable wretches, after butchering the chief priests, so that no particle of religious worship might continue, proceeded to extirpate whatever relics were left of our civil polity, introducing into every department perfect lawlessness. In this the so-called Zealots excelled, a class which justified their name by their actions; for they copied every deed of ill, nor was there any previous villainy recorded in history that they failed zealously to emulate. And yet they took their title from their professed zeal for virtue, either in mockery of those they wronged, so brutal was their nature, or reckoning the greatest of evils good. Accordingly these each found a fitting end, God awarding due retribution to them all.¹⁶

These political divisions inside Jerusalem ended in spring 70, when a Roman army under Titus, son of the new emperor, finally arrived outside the walls of Jerusalem. In marked contrast to the hesitant policy of the previous year and a half, the siege, once begun, was prosecuted with exceptional speed and vigour. The force deployed by the Romans was huge. A fourth legion was added to the three earlier deployed by Vespasian, the contingents sent by allied kings were greatly strengthened and a large number of Syrian auxiliaries were drafted in. The change in Roman behaviour took the Jews by surprise. Men, women and children had gone up to the city from the surrounding

villages to celebrate the Passover festival and were trapped by the surrounding army. Within days the squabbling Jewish factions agreed to place themselves under the command of a single general, Simon son of Gioras, who was to direct the defence of the city with great energy and skill over the coming months.

Josephus, from his vantage point in the Roman camp, was able to describe the siege of Jerusalem in gory detail, although his own part in the action was confined to pleading unsuccessfully with the defenders for them to surrender. In the course of the siege Titus ringed the city with a continuous stone wall manned by armed guards to cut off supplies and starve the population, a tactic reflected in a prophecy of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke: 'And when he was come near, he saw the city, and wept over it... For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will cast a trench about you, and compass you round, and keep you in on every side.'¹⁷ Josephus' descriptions of the horrors of famine are lurid:

Many clandestinely bartered their possessions for a single measure – of wheat, if they were rich, of barley, if they were poor; then shutting themselves up in the most remote recesses of their houses, some in the extremity of hunger devoured the grain unground, others so baked it as necessity and fear dictated. Nowhere was any table laid; they snatched the food half-cooked from the fire and tore it in pieces. Pitiful was the fare and lamentable the spectacle, the stronger taking more than their share, the weak whimpering. Famine, indeed, overpowers all the emotions, but of nothing is it so destructive as of shame: what at other times would claim respect is then treated with contempt. Thus, wives would snatch the food from husbands, children from fathers, and – most pitiable sight of all – mothers from the very mouths of their infants, and while their dearest ones were pining in their arms they scrupled not to rob them of the life-giving drops... The famine became more intense and devoured the people by households and families. The roofs were thronged with women and babies completely exhausted, the alleys with the corpses of the aged; children and youths, with swollen figures, roamed like phantoms through the marketplaces and collapsed wherever their faintness overtook them. As for burying their relatives, the sick had not the strength, while those with vigour still left were deterred both by the multitude of the dead and by the uncertainty of their own fate. For many fell dead while burying others,

and many went forth to their tombs before fate was upon them. And amidst these calamities there was neither lamentation nor wailing: famine stifled the emotions, and with dry eyes and grinning mouths these slowly dying victims looked on those who had gone to their rest before them.

The stories told by deserters to the Roman camp may well have been exaggerated:

Mannaes, son of Lazarus, who sought refuge in those days with Titus, reported that there were carried out through a single gate, which had been entrusted to him, one hundred and fifteen thousand, eight hundred and eighty corpses, between the fourteenth of the month Xanthicus [the Hebrew month Nisan, in April], on which the general encamped before their walls, and the new moon of Panemus [the Hebrew month Tammuz, in June]... This refugee was followed by many eminent citizens, who reported that the corpses of the lower classes thrown out through the gates amounted in all to six hundred thousand; of the rest it was impossible to discover the number. They added that... a measure of corn had been sold for a talent, and that later when it was no longer possible to gather herbs, the city being all walled in, some were reduced to such straits that they searched the sewers and for old cow dung and ate the offal therefrom, and what once would have disgusted them to look at had now become food... Necessity drove the victims to gnaw anything, and objects which even the filthiest of brute beasts would reject they condescended to collect and eat: thus in the end they abstained not from belts and shoes and stripped off and chewed the very leather of their bucklers. Others devoured tufts of withered grass...¹⁸

The most appalling story of all involved a woman named Mary, daughter of Eleazar, who had fled to Jerusalem with the rest of the people from her home village of Bethzuba in Transjordan. Impelled by hunger and rage, wrote Josephus, she killed her son, 'an infant at the breast', and roasted him. She had eaten part of the body and stored the rest for later consumption when she was betrayed by the smell of roasted meat.¹⁹

It might have seemed sufficient simply to wait for the resulting deprivation to take its toll and force the defenders to sue for peace, and Titus did indeed allow the public crucifixion of those caught when they were driven by hunger to try to escape the city, in 'the hope that

the spectacle might perhaps induce the Jews to surrender for fear that continued persistence would involve them in a similar fate. The soldiers out of rage and hatred amused themselves by nailing their prisoners in different postures.²⁰ Titus opted not to wait for surrender but to seek a more rapid victory by direct assault. He began with an offensive against the northernmost wall of the city, which, in contrast to the precipitous approaches on the other three sides, lay on reasonably level land. On 7 Iyyar, in late April 70, after fifteen days of siege, intensive fighting with heavy artillery, including catapults and ballista balls, and the construction of three towers to enable archers, javelin-men and stone throwers to harass the defence, the wall was breached by a battering ram, which the Jews (according to Josephus) nicknamed (perhaps ironically) *Níkon*, 'Victor'.²¹ The northern suburb of Bezetha, which had been destroyed four years earlier by Cestius Gallus, was now razed again. The Jews withdrew to a second wall which protected the rest of the city against assault from the north, only for that wall also to be breached after five days. Titus, with a thousand legionaries, entered the narrow alleys where the wool-shops and clothes-market of the city were to be found.

Titus seems to have hoped that this demonstration of power and purpose would be enough to induce the defenders to surrender. He forbade his troops to kill indiscriminately or to set fire to the houses. The revolutionaries were given an opportunity freely to vacate the city and leave the general populace unharmed – or so, in retrospect, claimed Josephus, who asserts that Titus' paramount object at this stage of the siege was 'to preserve the city to himself and the Temple for the city'.²² The tactic failed through the intransigence of the Jewish militants, who rejected Titus' terms and counter-attacked, and it took a further four days of intensive fighting for the second wall to be recaptured by Roman troops and demolished.

To discourage further opposition in the rest of the city, Titus attempted to frighten the defenders by parading before them his impressive military strength, as Josephus (an eyewitness) describes:

The appointed day having arrived for the distribution of the soldiers' pay, he ordered his officers to parade the forces and count out the money to each man in full view of the enemy. So the troops, as was their custom, drew forth

their arms from the cases in which till now they had been covered and advanced clad in mail, the cavalry leading their horses which were richly caparisoned. The area in front of the city gleamed far and wide with silver and gold, and nothing was more gratifying to the Romans, or more awe-inspiring to the enemy, than that spectacle. For the whole of the old wall and the north side of the Temple were thronged with spectators, the houses across the wall were to be seen packed with craning heads, and there was not a spot visible in the city which was not covered by the crowd. Even the hardest were struck with dire dismay at the sight of this assemblage of all the forces, the beauty of their armour and the admirable order of the men...²³

A further weapon in psychological warfare was the deployment of Josephus himself to try to persuade the rebels to surrender, by talking to them in their native tongue, 'thinking that perhaps they might yield to a fellow countryman'. It must have been a hard speech to make. According to Josephus' own account, he had difficulty, as he went round the walls 'repeatedly imploring them to spare themselves and the people', in approaching close enough to be heard while keeping out of range of missiles. The noise of derision and execration heaped on him by those on the ramparts cannot have helped. Josephus claims that his tearful appeal moved some of the ordinary inhabitants to desert the city, and that Titus allowed most such deserters to go wherever they wanted in the Judean countryside, but the committed combatants were unmoved.²⁴ Preparation began for the next major assault against the central areas of the city.

In less than two weeks, the four legions had thrown up a rampart each, two against the upper city, on the western hill of Jerusalem, and two against the Antonia fortress, which lay to the north of the Temple enclosure, but the insurgents undermined them with tunnels and set them on fire. It was a serious setback for the Roman forces, not least because there was a severe shortage of local timber, but three weeks later four new wooden ramparts had been built. This time all four were directed against the wall around the Antonia. The battering rams got to work with devastating effect and in the middle of the night the wall subsided, only for it to become clear that the defenders had erected another wall behind it. As a temporary structure it would doubtless be far less strong than the wall that had just fallen, and the

way to its summit was facilitated by the mounds of rubble, but it would require a brave man to lead the assault with scaling ladders.

On 3 Tammuz (in late June), Titus appealed for volunteers. One Sabinus, 'a native of Syria, who showed himself both in might of hand and in spirit the bravest of men', was the first to rise to the challenge. Josephus describes his exploits with admiration:

Anyone seeing him before that day and judging from his outward appearance would not have taken him even for a common soldier. His skin was black, his flesh shrunk and emaciated; but within that slender frame, far too strait for its native prowess, there dwelt a heroic soul . . . With his left hand he extended his buckler over his head and with his right drew his sword and advanced towards the wall, almost exactly at the sixth hour of the day. He was followed by eleven others, who alone were found to emulate his gallantry; but the hero, impelled by some preternatural stimulus, far outstripped them all. From the ramparts the guards hurled their javelins at the party, assailed them from all quarters with showers of arrows, and rolled down enormous boulders which swept away some of the eleven; but Sabinus, facing the missiles and buried beneath the darts, yet never slackened his pace until he had gained the summit and routed the enemy. For the Jews, dumbfounded at his strength and intrepidity and, moreover, imagining that more had ascended, turned and fled. . . [But] at the moment when this hero had attained his object, he slipped and stumbling over a rock fell headlong upon it with a tremendous crash. The Jews, turning and seeing him alone and prostrate, assailed him from all sides. Rising upon his knee and screening himself with his buckler, he for a while kept them at bay and wounded many of those who approached him; but soon under his numerous wounds his arm was paralysed, and he was at length, before giving up his life, buried under the missiles: a man whose gallantry deserved a better fortune, but whose fall was in keeping with his enterprise.²⁵

Sabinus' comrades were also killed or wounded, but the Antonia did not hold out much longer. Two days later a silent assault at the dead of night captured both the wall and the fortress, which was soon razed to the ground.

The Temple itself now lay open to attack, but it too was protected by strong external fortifications on all sides and by further walls between the outer court and the inner. An attempt to repeat the

earlier tactic of a night attack with a small force was repulsed, and preparations were made for the erection of another four wooden ramparts and a full-scale artillery barrage. On 8 Ab, in late July 70, the final stages of the siege began. Great battering rams set to work on the western wall of the Temple enclosure but made no impression because of the size of the stones and their close fit. Attempts were made to undermine the foundations of the northern gate. It stood firm. 'Finally,' writes Josephus,

despairing of all attempts with engines and crowbars, the Romans applied ladders to the porticoes. The Jews made no haste to prevent this, but as soon as they mounted vigorously attacked them. Some they thrust back and hurled down headlong, others who encountered them they slew; many as they stepped off the ladders they cut down with their swords, before they could shield themselves with their bucklers; some ladders, again, laden with armed men, they tilted sideways from above and dashed to the ground; not, however, without suffering considerable slaughter themselves. The Romans who had brought up the standards fought fiercely around these, deeming their loss a dire disaster and disgrace; yet, eventually, these ensigns also were taken by the Jews, who destroyed all who had mounted. The remainder, intimidated by the fate of the fallen, then retired . . . Titus, now that he saw that his endeavour to spare a foreign temple led only to the injury and slaughter of his troops, issued orders to set the gates on fire.²⁶

Soon the porticoes around the outer court were ablaze.

A day later, on 9 Ab – a day filled with significance for the Jews since it marked the anniversary of the destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BCE of the first Temple, built by Solomon – a division of the Roman forces was deployed to extinguish the fire raging in the outer court and to clear a way to facilitate military access to the Temple for the final assault on the inner sanctuary. This day the insurgents remained behind the ramparts which protected the inner court, too exhausted and demoralized to venture out, but on 10 Ab some sallied forth to try to regain control of the outer precincts of the Temple, and were only forced to retreat back into the inner court through emergency assistance provided to the Roman troops by an elite cavalry unit.

Titus resolved that the following day he would attack the inner

sanctuary itself at dawn with his whole force, but the plan was pre-empted by the spread of fire from the outer court to the inner and as a result his troops could enter unopposed. Josephus describes vividly the panic and confusion among the defenders:

While the Temple blazed, the victors plundered everything that fell in their way and slaughtered wholesale all who were caught. No pity was shown for age, no reverence for rank; children and greybeards, laity and priests, alike were massacred; every class was pursued and encompassed in the grasp of war, whether suppliants for mercy or offering resistance. The roar of the flames streaming far and wide mingled with the groans of the falling victims; and, owing to the height of the hill and the mass of the burning pile, one would have thought that the whole city was ablaze. And then the din – nothing more deafening or appalling could be conceived than that. There were the war-cries of the Roman legions sweeping onward in a mass, the howls of the rebels encircled by fire and sword, the rush of the people who, cut off above, fled panic-stricken only to fall into the arms of the foe, and their shrieks as they met their fate. With the cries on the hill were blended those of the multitude in the city below; and now many who were emaciated and tongue-tied from starvation, when they beheld the sanctuary on fire, gathered strength once more for lamentations and wailing. Transjordan and the surrounding mountains contributed their echoes, deepening the din. But yet more awful than the uproar were the sufferings. You would indeed have thought that the Temple hill was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame, but yet that the stream of blood was more copious than the flames and the slain more numerous than the slayers. For the ground was nowhere visible through the corpses; but the soldiers had to clamber over heaps of bodies in pursuit of the fugitives.²⁷

The Temple site was now nearly empty of rebels and the Roman troops set up their standards within the court opposite the eastern gate and sacrificed to them, and 'with rousing acclamations' hailed Titus as *imperator* ('commander-in-chief').²⁸ Some of the Temple priests were still taking refuge on the sanctuary wall, although at least two of them had chosen to end their lives spectacularly by plunging into the flames. On the fifth day those who were left were too hungry to hold out any longer. They surrendered themselves to the Romans,

only to be put to death by Titus on the basis that 'it is fitting for priests to perish along with their Temple'.²⁹

The capitulation of the rest of Jerusalem was rapid. Those parts of the lower city already under Roman control were deliberately set on fire. The erection of new towers to break down the walls of the upper city was completed on 7 Elul (in mid-August), and the troops forced their way in. By 8 Elul the whole city was in Roman hands – and in ruins. In recompense for the ferocious fighting they had been required to endure, the soldiers were given free rein to loot and kill, until eventually Titus ordered that the city be razed to the ground, 'leaving only the loftiest of the towers, Phasaël, Hippicus and Mariamme, and the portion of the wall enclosing the city on the west: the latter as an encampment for the garrison that was to remain, and the towers to indicate to posterity the nature of the city and of the strong defences which had yet yielded to Roman prowess. All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely levelled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited'.³⁰

Why had this disaster come about? Was there anything intrinsic in Jewish and Roman society that made it impossible for Jerusalem and Rome to coexist? Were the tensions which had so dramatic an effect in August 70 already apparent in 30 when Jesus preached in Jerusalem and died there on the order of a Roman governor? And, as early Christians began to carry their faith out from Jerusalem to the wider Roman empire, what was the effect of the conflict between Jews and Romans on the relations between Jews and Christians in a Roman world? It will be the task of this book to seek answers to these questions.