

THE REMAINING HISTORY OF THE 1ST CENTURY



This marble tombstone and a sarcophagus has been venerated since the late 300s as the burial site of Paul. The bones in the sarcophagus have been radiocarbon dated to the 1st or 2nd century.

By the mid-60s, Christianity had lost its two most influential leaders, Paul and Peter. Both were incarcerated in Rome, both anticipated their approaching deaths (2 Ti. 4:6-8; 2 Pe. 1:13-14; cf. Jn. 21:18), and both were executed under Emperor Nero, Paul by beheading (c. AD 62-64) and Peter by crucifixion (c. AD 65). The death of neither apostle is described in the New Testament, but tradition also holds that both were imprisoned in the famous Mamertine Prison, part of which dates to several centuries before the time of Jesus.

The James Ossuary

Yet another prominent Christian was martyred a few years later, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, who according to Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.9.1) was stoned and clubbed to death in Jerusalem (c. AD 62). Rarely does a matter with biblical import make the front page of *The New York Times*, but the discovery in Jerusalem of an ossuary bearing the name of "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus" did just that in late October 2002.

The James ossuary was discovered in the private collection of Oded Golan, an antiquities collector in Israel, but its precise provenance was unknown. Andre Lemaire, a French scholar from the Sorbonne and one of the world's foremost epigraphers, was invited to examine it in the summer of 2002. Immediately, he recognized its significance and began procedures for ascertaining its authenticity. What set this ossuary apart, of course, was its inscription of twenty Aramaic letters on one of the long sides of the box:

יעקוב בר יוסף אחוי דישוע

Ya'akov bar Yosef akhui diYeshua

James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus



The James Ossuary

While it was common to mention a father's name in a pedigree, it was uncommon to mention a sibling's name. The mention of Jesus as James' brother probably means that this Jesus was well-known. All this converged toward a conclusion that the James ossuary was very likely the burial box of the James from the New Testament, the leader of the Jerusalem church.

There are several tests used by experts to determine the age of such an artifact, including epigraphy (character of the script) and electron spectroscopy (electron microscope examination of the patina

and soil traces). Initially, both tests confirmed a 1st century dating. In spite of the initial positive conclusion by several world experts, however, the Israel Antiquities Authority determined to do its own tests. On June 18, 2003, they issued a summary report that the inscription on the ossuary was likely a forgery. Their conclusion, in turn, was driven by their own experts' impressions of the patina, which they believed was modern and produced by artificial means (exactly the opposite conclusion reached by the experts of The Ministry of National Infrastructures Geological Survey of the State of Israel). The owner of the ossuary, Oded Golan, was arrested by the Israeli police upon recommendation by the IAA. His home was searched, his papers and computers confiscated, and his other artifacts impounded. After five days in jail, he was released without charge. Then commenced a 7-year forgery trial at the end of which there was no conclusive evidence of forgery. Oded Golan was exonerated. Still, there remains a "cloud" on the artifact, and the jury is still out. Many scholars won't touch it, because it is unprovenanced. Others are wary of peer censure.

The First Jewish Revolt and Its Aftermath

The First Jewish Revolt,¹ while it was not a Christian event, nevertheless had significant repercussions for Christians. Until the revolt, the general perception of Christianity, at least by the Romans, was that it was a sect of Judaism. This was the force of Gallio's ruling in Corinth (Ac. 18:12-13), and it may be taken generally as representative of the Roman point of view.

The Roman perception that Christianity was a sect of Judaism had huge implications, since Judaism was a legal religion recognized by the Roman Senate. It meant that Christians were free to worship and express their faith under the shelter of Roman law. The benefit of being viewed as a legal Jewish sect was important, since Jews, under Roman law, were allowed to meet weekly (unrecognized groups were not). Christians, therefore, were allowed to meet weekly as well.

The Jewish revolt in the 60s AD changed this picture radically. The Jewish Christians did not join their fellow zealots in the rebellion against Rome. In fact, when the Jewish revolt broke out in AD 66, the Christians from Jerusalem, according to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.3), abandoned the city and escaped to Pella in the Decapolis, thus signaling their lack of sympathy for the patriotic uprising. Afterwards, Christianity could no longer be considered simply a Jewish sect, and this, in turn, paved the way for the imperial persecutions to come, since Christianity would now be treated as *religio illicita*, an illegal religion.

As a symbol of their new-found freedom, the Jews in Jerusalem struck new silver coins during the second year of the revolt bearing the inscriptions "Shekel of Israel," "Holy Jerusalem" and "Year Two" (AD 68). In response, Caesar Nero appointed Vespasian to oversee the campaign against the Jews. From the Roman perspective, if the Jews were allowed to revolt, no province in the whole empire was safe.

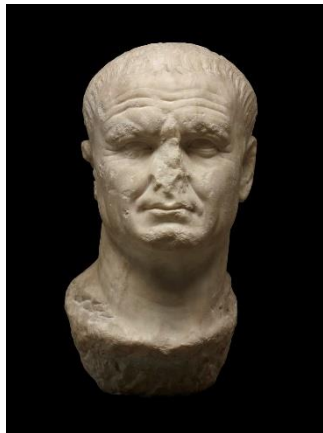


The revolt, which lasted from AD 66 until AD 70, was celebrated by the Jews striking new coinage, like this half-shekel.

¹ There were two major Jewish revolts against Rome, one in the 60s AD and one in the 130s AD.

NT ARCHAEOLOGY

The Roman campaign began with the mobilization of the legions in Syria. The Jews, for their part, began to strengthen Galilee, where the brunt of the attack was expected from the north. Gamla, the fortress to the east of the Sea of Galilee, they placed under the leadership of a young officer



Vespasian and his son, Titus, who put Jerusalem to siege and completely destroyed the temple and the city in AD 70.

named Flavius Josephus. Against Gamla, Vespasian brought three full legions plus auxiliaries—more than 30,000 troops. On October 20, AD 67, Gamla fell. By AD 68, all of Galilee, Perea and Judea were once more under Roman control, but with the death of Caesar Nero, the campaign against Jerusalem could not be immediately completed. By December AD 69, after considerable confusion, Vespasian himself was acknowledged as the new emperor, and the campaign against Jerusalem was renewed the next spring under Titus, Vespasian's son.

Now with four Legions, Titus put Jerusalem to siege. After breaching the walls, the Roman army destroyed the temple and burned the city, a direct fulfillment to the predictions of Jesus

some 40 years earlier (Mt. 24:1-2//Mk. 13:1-2//Lk. 21:5-6, 20-24; 19:41-44). Near the bottom of the southwest corner of the temple mount, archaeologists have discovered stones toppled from the temple complex nearly two millennia ago, and they have allowed them to remain just as they fell in AD 70. In the excavations of Second Temple Jerusalem, archaeologists discovered a burned house, buried and undisturbed, a mute reminder of the fury of the Romans. In the house they found the skeletal remains of a young woman, her arm reaching toward a doorway step when she died, a wrenching testimony to Jesus' words of warning (Lk. 23:27-31). The Romans destroyed not only the temple, but also the city's fortifications, public buildings and large residential homes. In the end, not a single important building remained standing. Those Jews who had not succumbed earlier in the siege were crucified, exiled, or sold as slaves.

The fall of Jerusalem was extremely important to the Romans. New coins were struck, the largest series in Roman history celebrating a military victory, depicting Judea as a shackled, weeping figure. In Rome's forum near the coliseum, a monumental arch celebrating Titus' victory was erected, and one of the relief panels shows the soldiers carrying away loot from the temple,



From the inside of the Arch of Titus in Rome, this relief of the spoils of war taken by the soldiers includes a bas-relief of the 2nd Temple's menorah.

including the menorah, among other things.

The Fall of Masada

Even after the fall of Jerusalem, the Jewish freedom fighters continued to hold the fortresses of Herodium, Machaerus, and Masada. The first two of these fell quickly, but Masada lasted until AD 73-4. The sheer cliffs of Masada, a nearly impregnable escarpment near the Dead Sea, rose more than 800' on the east and 600' on the west above the surrounding terrain. It may have been used as a hiding place as early as the time of David (1 Sa. 22:4; 24:22).² Herod the Great had carved twelve cisterns to retain rain water, built a palace on the north face, constructed storage rooms on the top, and built various other structures, including a casemate protection wall around the perimeter.



As the last vestige of resistance, the zealots fortified themselves on the top, managing to hold out until the Romans had constructed a huge earthen ramp in order to bring their battering rams near the perimeter wall. Though the defenders reinforced their wall against the battering rams with wooden beams scavenged from the buildings on the summit, the Romans set fire to the wood, and eventually, were able to breach the wall. Josephus records a lengthy account of the fall of Masada, and according to his description, when the Romans finally entered the fortress, they discovered the entire

company of defenders—960 of them—had committed mass suicide (*Jewish War*, 7.8.6-7). Ostensibly, the story was preserved by a half dozen people who slipped out of Masada just before its fall, and these refugees repeated it to Josephus. This intriguing account has been examined and re-examined, both from a literary standpoint as well as from the evidences of archaeology. While ostraca with (presumably) the names of the executioners have been found at Masada, the skeletal remains of the 960 have not been found. Various discrepancies and obscurities exist in Josephus' account, also. Hence, the accuracy of his history is disputed. Debates about Josephus' accuracy notwithstanding, with the fall of Masada, the last vestige of Jewish resistance had been extinguished.

² The Hebrew term **מצודה** (*matsudah* = stronghold) could refer to a number of places, but since David was in the desert of En Gedi just before he "went up to the stronghold" (2 Sa. 24:1), and since En Gedi is a short distance north of Masada, it is not unreasonable to speculate that this escarpment was the site of David's wilderness hideout.