

Fort Bend Christian Academy

**Insurrectionists, the Church, and the Resurrection:  
Historical Proof That the Disciples Believed in Jesus' Bodily Resurrection**

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Teacher and Students of the Advanced Apologetics Class

Department of Worldviews and Apologetics

by

**Trevor Jamison**

Sugar Land, TX

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## Introduction

In contemporary evangelical apologetics, the disciples' behavior after Jesus' death is one of the most common evidences advanced for his resurrection. As the reasoning goes, a bodily resurrection would be the only possible explanation for the disciples' radical transformation from fleeing at the first sign of trouble when Jesus was crucified to proclaiming the gospel boldly in the face of persecution after Jesus' death.<sup>1</sup> However, this argument is almost always put forth in a de-historicized context, failing to take into account the setting of their actions within the larger framework of Second Temple Judaism. Moreover, the way in which the argument is usually presented proves merely that the disciples believed that Jesus was alive in some way, failing to preclude the objections raised by Rudolf Bultmann and others that the disciples did not believe in a physical resurrection. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that in the context of Second Temple Judaism, particularly revolts and messianic movements, the disciples' actions after Jesus death could only be explained in terms of their belief in his bodily resurrection.

In order to demonstrate this thesis, there will first be offered a detailed history of Jewish revolts and messianic movements from the Maccabees through the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. All of the movements presented here will be analyzed to determine the specific mindset of these revolutionary groups within their Jewish context, and some common themes will be deduced. In Part II, the first century Church will be analyzed to determine how it fits into the context of other messianic movements. In Part III, the analyses from the preceding sections will be applied to the disciples' behavior after Jesus death to determine whether they believed that Jesus was alive, and if so, whether they believed that this was a bodily resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> A good example of one such argument can be found in: William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*, (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2010), 241-242.

## Part I: Insurrectionists

### Opening Remarks

Before one can examine the disciples' actions through the lens of historical psychology, one must first have a context within which to examine them. Second Temple Judaism would seem a good place to start, but this category is not so homogenous as its name would imply. Within this setting, one could find sects that held to central, historically Jewish dogma but were sharply differentiated from one another in subtle but distinct ways. Add to this that the three most prominent sects were themselves not well defined<sup>2</sup>, that one could consistently hold beliefs associated with multiple sects on different issues, and that Jesus' followers included members of multiple sects<sup>3</sup>, and any effort to definitively place Jesus and his followers within this context is ultimately doomed to failure. However, for the purposes of this thesis, such a grandiose effort is unnecessary. As it will be shown in Part II of this work, Jesus and his immediate followers saw themselves as part of a messianic movement. It would thus be expected that the movement that surrounded Jesus should be compared with other messianic movements and revolts.

In order to accomplish this goal, this thesis will explore revolutionary movements from the Maccabees in 167 B.C.E. to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. For reasons that will be explained further in the course of the thesis, this general epoch should give one the best idea of the shape which revolutionary fervor took during the time of Jesus' ministry. Even though there

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<sup>2</sup> These are the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. It is ambiguous whether or not a group commonly known as "the Zealots" could properly be called a sect or was just a term used of those involved in revolutionary activity. As N.T. Wright points out, while there may have been a specific Zealot "party," there were also many diverse groups in the first century that appropriated the tradition of Torah-centered revolutionary "zeal" set by such figures as the Maccabees, and it would be anachronistic to fabricate the kind of ideological divide between any two revolutionary groups engendered by using Zealot in the narrowest sense; thus the category will not be considered as some all encompassing revolutionary ideology. For a more thorough explanation of the debate on this issue, see: Wright, N.T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 177-181.

<sup>3</sup> One of the disciples, Simon, is specifically identified as a zealot. Matthew, on the other hand, was a tax collector, an occupation that would have most likely aligned him with the Sadducees.

are scanty historical data about most of these movements, one should be able to deduce some features common to all of these movements, particularly with regards to the course of the movement and what happened to these movements after the deaths of their leaders.

Additionally, one can deduce some distinctive features of the revolutionaries' worldviews.

Though there was not one unified movement of revolt in Palestine during the Roman occupation, one's involvement in an act of insurrection would necessitate at least some general commonalities of belief that would be evinced by one's actions. The combination of a common historical pattern, a common praxis, and a common mindset should provide a sound understanding of the revolutionary worldview.

### The Sources

Before one can fully delve into this task, however, one must first reckon with the deficiencies of the earliest sources. The accounts most contemporaneous with these movements are the book of 1 Maccabees and Josephus' *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*. Unfortunately, both the writer of 1 Maccabees and Josephus are notorious for the strong biases that affect their portrayal of the events, and these biases must properly be considered.

The book of 1 Maccabees was commissioned around 90 B.C.E. by King Alexander Jannaeus of the Hasmonean dynasty, which was the Jewish ruling line then currently in power.<sup>4</sup> Based on the historical evidence from this time period, it is apparent that there were many Jews who considered the Hasmonean regime corrupt for a variety of reasons, including the fact that its rulers claimed title of both high priest and king when those roles had always been separate, that they were not descended from the Zadokite line of high priests or the Davidic royal line, that they were seen as compromising with Hellenization, and that they made numerous alliances with

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, "How the Authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees Treated the 'Messianic' Promises," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, eds. Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 73

pagan nations despite the strong precedent in the Hebrew Bible against doing so.<sup>5</sup> Because of this disaffection, the Hasmoneans sought to establish the legitimacy of their right to rule over Israel by portraying the dynasty's origins as ordained by God and in accordance with similar Biblical movements. The author of 1 Maccabees thus, while keeping the events in line with the historical record, may have sought to portray them in a way that made the Maccabees look more impressive, by overestimating the size and strength of opposing armies and underestimating the strength of the Maccabees' own forces, for example.

While the biases present in the book of 1 Maccabees are fairly straightforward, the work of Josephus offers a more complex set of biases. First, Josephus came from an aristocratic Jewish family.<sup>6</sup> In the first century C.E., there were sharp economic divides in Palestine, and the economic problems of the lower quarters of society, particularly debt, engendered much hatred between the classes.<sup>7</sup> This context would have made more impoverished members of Jewish society more likely to struggle against the aristocracy as well as the Romans and would have made Josephus more likely to portray those seeking economic rectitude as common bandits instead of the revolutionaries they were.

Second, the Roman emperor Vespasian commissioned Josephus' writings. During the Jewish War, Josephus ultimately ended up siding with the Romans, even serving as a translator for Titus during the siege of Jerusalem. As a result of these efforts, Josephus was granted Roman citizenship and received a comfortable pension.<sup>8</sup> Because of this, Josephus' writings illustrate a more favorable view of the Romans than one would expect from a first-

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<sup>5</sup> See N.T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 159. On the resistance to Hellenism, see: Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ: First Division: Political History of Palestine from B.C. 175 to A.D. 135*, trans. Rev. John Macpherson, (1890; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 1:239.

<sup>6</sup> Josephus. *Life* 1.

<sup>7</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 169.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 25.

century Jew, even leading some, such as N.T. Wright, to claim that Josephus presented Vespasian as the promised messiah.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Josephus was motivated by a strong desire to exonerate the Jewish nation. During the late first century, Jews faced considerable persecution, both because of their beliefs which differed widely from the prevailing religions of the Roman world and because they were seen as traitors after the Jewish War. As a result, one of Josephus' goals in his writing was to address these objections. The first of these accusations Josephus attempted to address in such works as *Against Apion*. The second he addressed indirectly by placing the blame for the Jewish War on one of the many groups of revolutionaries.

With these major biases in mind, one must adopt a cautious attitude toward the writings of Josephus and 1 Maccabees. It would simply be naïve to take absolutely everything in these texts at face value, particularly descriptions of some battles and revolutionary groups. This does not mean, however, that the texts cannot be considered useful. Any good propagandist knows that he or she cannot twist the truth too much lest the stylized retelling of the story be left unbelievable. Both the writer of 1 Maccabees and Josephus understood this principle, and thus one can reasonably assume that the works may deviate from the truth more in the way in which the events are presented than in the actual events themselves. By assuming that these texts are accurate about the generalities of events but critically analyzing the way in which these events are presented, one can reach a conclusion very close to the historical truth.

### **Historical Review**

#### *The Maccabees (167-165 B.C.E.)*

To begin a proper analysis of the revolutionary movements in Palestine at the time of Jesus and his followers, one must look back beyond the first century to the Maccabean revolt.

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<sup>9</sup> Wright, N.T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 199.



Even though this movement occurred almost two hundred years before Jesus' crucifixion, the Maccabean revolt would have been a great influence on any would-be revolutionary of Jesus' day. In spite of this great temporal difference, the Maccabees were the most recent figures in Jewish folk memory who had successfully overthrown their pagan oppressors and reestablished the observance of Jewish law in the Temple. Even though there were serious theological and practical changes from the time of the Maccabees that make any precise analogy difficult, the Maccabees may certainly be seen as the bellwethers of the violent manifestations of "zeal" for the Torah in the first century and may have even served as a direct model for some insurrectionary groups.

The Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes provided the impetus for the Maccabean revolt. After a successful campaign against Ptolemaic Egypt in 169 B.C.E., Antiochus came to the Temple in Jerusalem and plundered it, taking all of its valuable articles used in worship.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, one of Antiochus' tribute collectors plundered and razed Jerusalem, taking women and children captive, defiling the Temple, and using the city as a fortress. Antiochus decreed at this time on pain of death that the people of Judea adopt the Hellenized religion of the Seleucids and abandon the Torah by sacrificing to idols instead of YHWH, defiling the Sabbath and the traditional feasts, abandoning the traditional food laws, and leaving their sons uncircumcised.<sup>11</sup> There was great outrage due to these commands, and according to 1 Maccabees, many died because they circumcised their children and refused to eat unclean food.

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:20-24.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:29-35; 1:41-50. Though 1 Maccabees says that the decree was issued throughout the whole Seleucid kingdom, it is far more likely, as Henk Jagersma suggests, that the command was only issued in Judea: Henk Jagersma, *A History of Israel from Alexander the Great to Bar Kochba*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 50.

At this time, the priest Mattathias and his five sons moved from Jerusalem to the town of Modein, mourning over the desecration of the Temple. When an official enforcing Antiochus' decree came to Modein demanding that the people apostatize by sacrificing to pagan gods, Mattathias refused, even when offered wealth and position for his family.<sup>12</sup> When another Jew went to offer sacrifices to the gods, Mattathias "burned with zeal for the Torah," killing the Jew and the official and burning down the altar.<sup>13</sup> After this act of devotion, Mattathias and his sons fled into the wilderness and began organizing an army. They were joined by a group known as the Hasideans, or "the Pious," who showed similar zeal for the Torah<sup>14</sup>, and launched a campaign against the rulers in Judea, killing "sinners,"<sup>15</sup> destroying pagan altars, and forcibly circumcising all uncircumcised boys in the land. When Mattathias died of natural causes, the leadership of the movement passed to his son Judas, who was nicknamed Maccabeus, which means "the hammer."

Under Judas, the Maccabees continued their campaign against the Selucids and the Hellenized Jews. In short order, the Maccabees were able to win several major victories, routing a force of Greeks and Samaritans led by the general Apollonius and a much larger force from Syria led by Seron.<sup>16</sup> The news of the Maccabees' victories soon spread throughout the kingdom, which greatly disturbed Antiochus, causing him to give his army a year's pay in advance to be ready if the need should arise. This action, however, emptied the entire treasury and forced Antiochus to go to Persia to collect funds, leaving his official Lysias in command of

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Maccabees 2:15-22.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Maccabees 2:23-25.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the Hasideans are distinct from the Maccabees' own party, though the two groups here acted with common interest. Some, including Emil Schürer, have suggested that the Hasideans may have even constituted a nascent Pharisee movement. cf. Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ: First Division: Political History of Palestine from B.C. 175 to A.D. 135*, trans. Rev. John Macpherson, (1890; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 1:211-212.

<sup>15</sup> The "sinners" mentioned here are most likely apostate Jews; it would make more sense for the writer to note if Jews fled to the Gentiles than if Gentiles fled to their own. cf. 1 Maccabees 2:44.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Maccabees 3:11;23-24.

half the army with orders to wipe out the Jewish revolt and resettle the land with Gentiles.<sup>17</sup>

Lysias then appointed three generals, Ptolemy, Nicanor, and Gorgias, and sent them with forty thousand soldiers to carry out the king's orders. The victory of this expedition was seen as so certain that a large train of merchants came with the army to earn a profit by enslaving the Jews when they were defeated.<sup>18</sup>

When the Maccabees heard about the invasion, they prepared by consulting the Torah. They moved their forces to Mizpah, which was located near Jerusalem, tore their clothes and put sackcloth and ashes on their heads in mourning, and brought the priestly garments and tithes.<sup>19</sup> Then, he organized his forces in accordance with the Torah<sup>20</sup> and told them to trust that YHWH would deliver them.<sup>21</sup>

The next day, Gorgias took a force of five thousand to engage Judas and his force of three thousand. The Maccabees again routed the Gentile army and plundered the camp, which caused the rest of the expeditionary force to flee north to Philistia in fear.<sup>22</sup> The next year, Lysias himself returned with an even larger army to squelch the Jewish rebellion once and for all. Again, Judas routed the Selucid forces, and Lysias returned to Antioch to devise another plan of attack.<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime, Judas decided to take this lull in the fight as an opportunity to re-consecrate the Temple in Jerusalem, even though the city was still occupied by the Seleucids. While a detachment of soldiers guarded the Temple, Judas took several priests who were devoted to the Torah into the temple. They tore down the altar and removed some of the stones from the

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Maccabees 3:30-37.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Maccabees 3:41.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Maccabees 3:46-49.

<sup>20</sup> cf. Exodus 18:25 and Deuteronomy 20:5-8.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Maccabees 3:54-56; 4:6-11.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Maccabees 4:12-25.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Maccabees 4:34-35.

Temple because they had been defiled.<sup>24</sup> They then proceeded to build a new altar, new lampstands, and a new sanctuary and consecrated all of them. When they had finally completed all of the preparations, they offered a sacrifice on the new altar three years from the day that the Temple had been profaned, and the people celebrated for eight days.<sup>25</sup>

The rest of the Maccabean movement will here only be sketched in brief because after this point, the scale and direction of the movement began to differ significantly from the movements of the first century C.E. Over time, Judas and his descendants, known as the Hasmoneans, continued to win victories against the Jews' Gentile oppressors and reclaimed more of the land. Ultimately, with the help of an alliance with Rome, the Hasmoneans were able to establish peace in Palestine and maintain a relatively autonomous Jewish state. This rule continued until the Roman invasion of Palestine in 63 B.C.E.

### *Analysis of the Maccabean Revolt*

Of all the revolutionary groups that will be discussed in this text, the Maccabees by far left the biggest footprint in the historical record. Because so much is known about their actions, one can deduce more about this group than about any of the other groups discussed in the text. This is, in part, unfortunate because of the large temporal gap between Jesus and the Maccabees. There are, however, some major features of the Maccabean revolutionaries' mindset that are paralleled in later revolutionary movements that would be pertinent to the discussion here.

One of the most prominent features is the centrality of the Temple to the revolutionaries. When the Maccabees are first introduced, they are mourning over the loss of the Temple. When they heard that a massive Seleucid army was coming to destroy them, they chose to camp at Mizpah, a location near Jerusalem and, consequently, near the Temple. When there was a lull in

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Maccabees 4:42-46.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Maccabees 4:52-58. This is the precedent for the festival of Hanukkah.

the fighting after the defeat of Lysias, the Maccabees chose to re-consecrate the Temple before doing anything else. It is significant that they chose to post guards to protect their work on the Temple instead of recapturing Jerusalem and *then* working on the Temple. This highlights the cardinal role the Temple played within their worldview, so much so that Jerusalem derived its significance from the presence of the Temple.

To the Maccabees and the later revolutionaries, the Temple would have been seen as a place of cosmic significance. To the Jews, it was the place where YHWH dwelt with his people, the place where heaven and earth met.<sup>26</sup> Through the sacrifices offered in the Temple, the people, both individually and as whole, could make restitution for impurity and sin.<sup>27</sup> These actions were central to the life of the Jewish people as a whole, and association with the building and dedication of the Temple would accord major political significance, which likely accounted in part for the longevity of the Hasmonean dynasty in Palestine. As E.P. Sanders famously declared, “I think it is almost impossible to make too much of the Temple in first century Jewish Palestine.”<sup>28</sup>

Another especially prominent aspect of the Maccabean revolt is the notion of violent zeal for the Torah. There is a long tradition in the Hebrew Bible of figures who acted violently against those Jews who would profane the Torah in a way that would bring reproach on the people of Israel by their apostasy, including such figures as Phineas and Elijah.<sup>29</sup> The Maccabees’ actions under Mattathias serve as evidence that they saw themselves as continuing in that tradition. By killing Jews who had accepted Hellenization and destroying altars to the Greek gods, the Maccabees were trying to purify the people of Israel of those who would continue the

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<sup>26</sup> cf. 1 Kgs. 8:10-13.

<sup>27</sup> A helpful summary of the sacrificial system and its significance may be found in: N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 407-11.

<sup>28</sup> E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, (New York: Penguin, 1993), 262.

<sup>29</sup> Num. 25; 1 Kgs. 18.

exile from YHWH's presence caused by the Seleucid's profaning of the Temple. The imposition of circumcision is also a particular manifestation of this type of zeal for the Torah. To Jews, circumcision was seen as the sign of Abraham's covenant with YHWH that they would be the chosen people of god; this was so central to the Jews' identity that the uncircumcised were no longer considered part of the nation of Israel.<sup>30</sup> By not circumcising their children, these Jews were relinquishing their children's place in the people of YHWH; by circumcising them, the Maccabees were reinstating them and restoring the covenant.

This kind of zeal also motivated the Maccabees' resistance against the Seleucids. Because the Seleucids forced the Jews to forsake the Torah and their national identity, they were enforcing apostasy on the Jews. The Maccabees sought to overthrow them so that the Torah could be reestablished as the law in Israel and communion with YHWH in the Temple could be restored. This motivation for revolutionary activity can be seen later on in the resistance movements against the Romans.

In addition, the Maccabees' actions show a belief that YHWH would vindicate his people. In 1 Maccabees, this notion of vindication appears closely connected to military victory. Even though the Temple had been desecrated and pagans occupied the land, the Maccabees believed that YHWH would vindicate their faithfulness by granting them success in their campaign against the Seleucids to expel them from the land and re-consecrate the Temple. The notion of YHWH granting military victory to those who are faithful and zealous and defeat to those who are not is so central to the Hebrew Bible that it would have been accepted as almost axiomatic to first century Jews.<sup>31</sup> Often, this victory would be incredible if not outright miraculous, defying all odds as in the fall of Jericho or David's defeat of Goliath. The emphasis

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<sup>30</sup> Gen. 17:1-14; see also E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, (New York: Penguin, 1993), 35.

<sup>31</sup> On the correlation between victory and faithfulness, see Ex. 17, Ex. 23:20-22, Josh. 1:7. On the correlation between defeat and unfaithfulness, see Num. 14:39-45, Josh. 7, Judg. 2:11-15.

on the vast numerical superiority of the Seleucids in all of the battles recorded in 1 Maccabees was likely intended to make such a point: because the Maccabees were faithful and zealous for the Torah, they were rewarded by God through victory against a much larger force.

Though the idea of vindication by YHWH as military victory as presented in 1 Maccabees is certainly plausible based on the Hebrew Bible and would have been universally accepted by Jews, this view does not offer a full picture on the issue. Because 1 Maccabees was written as propaganda to establish the legitimacy of the Hasmonean regime, one would expect this particular view alone to be offered. In this vindication schema, whoever is the victor is favored by God. Since the Maccabees were the ultimate victors, it would follow that they and their descendants have YHWH's favor, legitimizing their re-consecrated Temple and their right to rule. In the view presented in 1 Maccabees, because all of those faithful to YHWH are rewarded in this life, there is no need for any semblance of an afterlife. Unfortunately, this notion of vindication would have left many unsettling questions for Jews to wrestle with. For example, such a view does not give any indication of how YHWH would vindicate those who died in the struggle against the pagans or were martyred because of their steadfast observance of the Torah. One would thus expect to find in other contemporary texts some other way of YHWH vindicating his people, most likely through some sort of afterlife, that would work in concert with the view offered in 1 Maccabees.

Such a complementary view can be found in the book of 2 Maccabees, a later recounting of the Maccabean revolutionaries' exploits. In this work, the actions of individual martyrs are examined in greater detail than in 1 Maccabees, and whether or not the conversations recorded are apocryphal, they do offer a different strand of Jewish thought on vindication. Perhaps the most famous and telling example is that of the mother and her seven sons who are brutally

tortured and killed for refusing to violate the food taboos. As they die, several of the brothers make specific allusions to some form of an afterlife:

And when [the second brother] was at his last breath, he said, “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.”<sup>32</sup>

...[the third brother] quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, “I got these hands from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.”<sup>33</sup>

And when [the fourth brother] was near death, he said, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!”<sup>34</sup>

[The youngest brother said,] “You [Antiochus] have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of everflowing life under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance.”<sup>35</sup>

Based on these verses, one can gain a picture of this new vindication schema. In this system, the righteous who die as martyrs because of their zeal for YHWH and for the Torah will be vindicated by a resurrection to eternal life. When this resurrection happens, the wicked will not participate in the eternal life, but will receive judgment from YHWH. As evidenced by verse 11, this resurrection is not some metaphor for a state of Platonic, disembodied spiritual bliss, but is physical, in which the righteous will receive renewed bodies. As evidenced by the last brother’s response, this resurrection is a future reality that has yet to be realized. It would seem natural that this event of cosmic vindication would coincide with the vindication of Israel in the former sense, that is, when the pagans are overthrown from the land and communion with YHWH is reestablished in the Temple. After YHWH had vindicated his people as a whole, he would vindicate those who had died because of their faithfulness to him. This type of

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:9

<sup>33</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:10-11

<sup>34</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:14

<sup>35</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:35-36



vindication, however, obviously did not happen when the Maccabees and their descendants accomplished vindication in the former sense, which would likely explain why the writer of 1 Maccabees would suppress the notion of resurrection of the dead.

At this point, it would also be pertinent to point out that a belief in the resurrection of the dead, when combined with the other elements from the book of 1 Maccabees, is a view naturally geared toward insurrection. Those who believe in resurrection have no fear of facing an insurmountably superior military power because they have no fear of death: they will either win a miraculous victory or be resurrected when the struggle is eventually successful. Obviously, it would be entirely possible to find Jews in this period who opposed belief in the resurrection of the dead still involved in revolutionary activity because they believed that YHWH would vindicate their faithfulness. However, belief in the resurrection would still make one more likely to participate in revolutionary activity.

One notable omission from the account of the Maccabees is the notion of a Davidic messiah. This datum alone, however, should not serve as grounds to assert that there was no belief in some sort of messianic hope during this time period. The Hasmoneans were not descended from the Davidic kingly line, and any notion of reestablishing the Davidic monarchy would have been seen as a threat to their rule. The pro-Hasmonean account offered in 1 Maccabees, then, should be expected to suppress any notion of a coming Davidic king who would end the exile by defeating the pagans, reestablishing communion with YHWH in the Temple, and beginning the age to come in which the Gentiles would come to worship YHWH and Israel would be a priestly nation to the world. In the Hasmoneans' view, the first two of these had already been accomplished, and there would be no reasonable need to expect a messianic figure. One would also expect that if the Hasmonean dynasty were to be deposed by

the Gentiles, there would be a general resurgence of revolutionary fervor and some figures who would claim the title of messiah, which is exactly what is found in the historical record.

The final characteristic feature of the Maccabean revolutionaries is the succession of leadership within the family. This type of power structure is consistent with that of a royal dynasty, indicating that perhaps even early in the movement they viewed themselves as kings. In many of the later movements, this general power structure may also be observed, which would imply that they also viewed themselves as nascent royal dynasties, through whom YHWH would vindicate and, ultimately, rule his people.

Ultimately, the Maccabean revolutionaries provide a helpful introduction to the Jewish mindset and what would have motivated these groups to engage in revolutionary activity. The belief that YHWH would vindicate their efforts (in some cases even if they failed) combined with the rich Jewish tradition of zeal for the Torah had the potential to yield violent rebels against the ruling powers with little to no fear of death. As the Hasmonean dynasty's rule came to a close in Palestine, this revolutionary undercurrent would soon have a new target for its discontent.

### *The Roman Invasion of Palestine*

For around one hundred years after the Maccabean revolt, the Hasmoneans ruled over Israel and successfully enlarged their territory to include almost all of the land that had been ruled by David. This brief respite from foreign rule, however, came to an abrupt end due to power struggles within the royal family when the brothers Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II both laid claim to the throne. In the course of their brief civil war, both contenders appealed to the Roman general Pompey for military support. In response, Pompey seized the opportunity to invade Palestine and take over the Hasmoneans' territory in 63 B.C.E., appointing Hyrcanus II as

“ethnarch” and high priest and appointing the Idumean Antipater as a military governor.

Aristobulus and his son Antigonus were obviously unhappy with this settlement, and they allied themselves with the Parthians, Rome’s principal enemy at the time. In 40 B.C.E., the Parthians overran Palestine and established Antigonus as high priest and king. Antipater’s son, Herod, was able to flee to Rome, and, with the support of Roman troops, was able to retake Palestine and establish his rule as a Roman client king.<sup>36</sup>

To Jews during this period, the Roman occupation of Palestine would have been a devastating event. Even though Rome did not rule Palestine directly most of the time<sup>37</sup>, the mere fact that the land promised by YHWH to his people was no longer being ruled by his people would have signified that YHWH had abandoned them to judgment because of their sin and that his presence was no longer in the Temple (if it had ever been there in the first place). In short, it meant that the Jewish people were still in exile and that YHWH had not been inaugurated as king. Based on the model of the Maccabees, some Jews would have been motivated to engage in violent revolution against Rome to reclaim the land. Even with Rome’s overwhelmingly superior military might and the often-brutal suppression of its client rulers like Herod the Great, revolts still did boil over from time to time because of the firmly entrenched elements of the Jewish worldview previously discussed. Most Jews, however, would have been content to live peaceably so long as Rome did not interfere with their practice of the Torah, which the Romans and their client rulers usually made very scrupulous efforts to do. Affairs in Palestine would continue in this state with alternating periods of revolt and peace until the beginning of the Jewish War.

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<sup>36</sup> These events are described in more detail in: Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 109-111.

<sup>37</sup> E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, (New York: Penguin, 1993), 18.

Hezekiah the Archilestes and Judas ben Hezekiah

One of the earliest of these revolt movements recorded by Josephus during this period was led by Hezekiah, who is called an *archilestes*, or brigand leader.<sup>38</sup> According to some sources, Hezekiah was descended from Hasmonean nobility, but this information is uncertain.<sup>39</sup> What is known, however, is that Hezekiah led a somewhat sizeable band of brigands that terrorized parts of Galilee and neighboring areas in the Roman province of Syria. When Herod became military governor of Galilee under Antipater, one of his first actions was to put down the revolt, killing Hezekiah and a number of his followers, for which, “[Herod] was greatly beloved by the Syrians.”<sup>40</sup> This action would ultimately cause strife between Herod and the Sanhedrin because he had violated the Torah in killing Hezekiah without a proper trial.

Around the time of Herod the Great’s death, Hezekiah’s son Judas organized a revolt in Sepphoris, a city in Galilee, in which he and “no small multitude” overran a palace, raided the armory and stole all of the money there, and led organized attacks against “those that were so earnest to gain dominion.”<sup>41</sup> He sought to become the king of Israel, according to Josephus, “...not of his virtuous skill in war, but of his extravagance in doing injuries.”<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, Quintilius Varus, who was the Roman governor of Syria at the time, put down this revolt brutally, crucifying more than two thousand revolutionaries.

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<sup>38</sup> The Greek word *lestes* has been traditionally translated as “robber.” This interpretation, however, appears to be somewhat lacking in many circumstances, such as the *lestai* who were crucified with Jesus (crucifixion was a punishment reserved for traitors, not common robbers). Following N.T. Wright, for the majority of the usages in this text, *lestes* and its derivatives will be translated as “brigand.” See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 419-420.

<sup>39</sup> Eugene J. Mayhew, *Encyclopedia of Messianic Candidates & Movements in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Islam*, (St. Claire Shores, MI: Cardieux and Maheux Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>40</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 14, Ch. 9, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch. 4, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 17, Ch. 10, 5.

*Analysis of Hezekiah and Judas ben Hezekiah*

Because there is scanty information on both Hezekiah and his son, there is not very much that can be deduced directly from Josephus about why exactly they revolted. There are, however, some interesting features to note. One is the hereditary secession of leadership: Hezekiah started the movement, and Judas continued to operate in the same area. It is notable that Josephus seems to emphasize that Herod did not kill *all* of Hezekiah's followers. It is entirely possible that some of Judas's company included some veterans of Hezekiah's campaign. This makes it unsurprising that Judas had royal aspirations. While the notion of a messiah is not specifically mentioned in conjunction with either of these figures, they certainly were seen by themselves and others as would-be contenders for the throne, which, to their followers, would have meant that they had been anointed by YHWH to rule over Israel. There is no evidence that after the movement's dissolution, any of Judas' followers continued to accord him messianic status.<sup>43</sup>

*Revolts Surrounding the Death of Herod the Great*

Historically, it always seems that potential revolutionaries are always emboldened by a power vacuum. This was no truer in first century Palestine than it is today. Around the time of Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C.E., a number of revolts and insurrections began in addition to the one raised by Judas ben Hezekiah. The first of these happened in Jerusalem when several young men, at the urging of two respected teachers of the Law, Judas ben Sepphoris and Matthias ben Margalus, cut down the golden eagle that had been erected by Herod over the Temple gate. In one of his last actions, Herod had some these men burnt alive and had others

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<sup>43</sup> Eugene J. Mayhew, *Encyclopedia of Messianic Candidates & Movements in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Islam*, (St. Claire Shores, MI: Cardieux and Maheux Press, 2009), 112.

executed by the Romans.<sup>44</sup> At the feast of Passover that year, when Jews from many towns came to Jerusalem, a riot began over these events, which prompted Herod's brutal son Archelaus to send his army to disperse the rioters, killing three thousand Jews.<sup>45</sup> At this time, Archelaus and his brother, Antipas, left Jerusalem for Rome to petition their rights to rule Palestine, which prompted Quintilius Varus to put his subordinate Sabinus in charge of Palestine for the interim. Sabinus was oppressive to the Jews, which prompted a great riot at the feast of Pentecost, during which there was a great battle in which the Romans looted the Temple treasury, further fanning hostilities.<sup>46</sup>

The situation in the rest of Israel at this time was just as tense as it was in Jerusalem. Along with the previously discussed revolt led by Judas ben Hezekiah, two other noteworthy revolts took place at the time. The first was led by Simon, one of Herod's former servants. Because he saw a power vacuum and possessed stately features, Simon gathered a small army of supporters and took for himself the title of king. After this self-coronation, Simon and his followers proceeded to destroy a number of Herod's palaces in the Judean countryside, plundering whatever they could find. Ultimately, the Roman general Gratus was able to defeat the disorganized revolt and behead Simon as he fled from battle.<sup>47</sup>

The other major revolt was led by a shepherd named Athronges, who, like Simon, was tall and unusually strong. Athronges gathered a large following who named him king and made his four brothers commanders subordinate to him. For a while, Athronges and his forces had great success in raiding strongholds of both the Romans and the Herodian regime, killing many Romans and supporters of Herod in the process. Over time, however, their forces became more

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<sup>44</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 1, Ch. 33, 2-4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Ch. 1, 3

<sup>46</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 17, Ch. 10, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 6

and more brutal, both against the ruling powers and against everyone else. Athronges and his followers continued fighting for several years until finally Archelaus captured him.

Ultimately, the majority of the revolts ended when Varus brought two legions of soldiers and four companies of cavalry from Syria to Palestine to restore order. The Jewish leaders ended up equivocating their way out of trouble with the Romans, claiming that they were not involved with the revolt in any way. In total, Varus had two thousand revolutionaries crucified. The purge ended when a force of ten thousand Jews surrendered to Varus. He ultimately pardoned the regular troops and sent the leaders to Caesar, who pardoned all of them except for those from Herod's family.<sup>48</sup>

#### *Analysis of the Revolts Surrounding the Death of Herod the Great*

Even though there is not much historical information available about any one of the revolts in 4 B.C.E., these movements considered together can offer a cohesive picture of the revolutionary mindset during this time period. One major commonality among several of these movements is the idea of popular kingship. Judas ben Hezekiah, Simon, and Athronges all were crowned as king by their followers at various points in their reign. Many scholars, such as Roger Horsley, would attempt to drive a wedge between these movements of popular kingship and the belief in the messiah because the references to a messiah in writings from this period are few and far between.<sup>49</sup> This argument, however, does not carry much weight historically. All of the writings that have survived from this period were written by individuals from wealthier backgrounds, not by those from the lower orders of society who would have been involved in these movements. Just because the literate elite were not writing about a messiah does not mean

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<sup>48</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 17, Ch. 10, 10.

<sup>49</sup> R.A. Horsley, "'Messianic' Figures and Movements in First Century Palestine," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 277.

that there was not a popular belief in the messiah or a messianic hope. Also, within the Jewish mindset, there does not seem to be any way to get around viewing any Jewish kingly figure in this context as messianic. By affirming an individual's right to kingship, the followers of these movements were affirming that their leaders were anointed by God. Following the Maccabees, the mission of such a movement would be to drive out the Romans and everyone else oppressing God's people in order to reestablish communion with YHWH in the Temple.

Another theme that is common to the events of 4 B.C.E. that is not seen in the Maccabees is the correlation between revolutionary activity and the Jewish festivals. Major riots occurred in Jerusalem at both the feasts of Passover and Pentecost, both precipitated by the harsh treatment of Roman and Herodian authorities toward the Jews. These feasts would have been a natural time for revolutionary activity, since Jews from all over Judea and beyond would come to Jerusalem, filling the city with people and giving them more confidence in numbers that they could overthrow their oppressors. In addition to these more practical concerns, one can also see a purpose for this timing in the symbolism of the feasts. Passover was celebrated to commemorate YHWH's miraculous deliverance of Israel from slavery and exile in Egypt; Pentecost was celebrated to commemorate the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. By choosing these times to revolt, the Jews were reflecting their desire that YHWH would end their exile and that the Torah would be established as the law of Israel over and above Roman law.

A theme that remains consistent through almost all of these movements is the belief in vindication by YHWH. The most explicit expression of this occurs in Josephus' account of the destruction of the eagle in the Temple in *Jewish War*. The view of vindication presented here, however, differs from that of a bodily resurrection of the dead, but appears as a more Hellenized, spiritual afterlife in which the souls of the dead do not receive bodies: "[The youths told Herod]



that the soul was immortal, and that an eternal enjoyment of happiness did await such as died on account [of the Torah], while the mean-spirited and those that were not wise enough to show a right love of their souls, preferred a death by a disease before that which is the result of virtuous behavior.”<sup>50</sup> This presentation by Josephus, however, should not be taken as an authoritative account of the beliefs of these revolutionaries about their vindication. It is key to remember that one of Josephus’ goals was to marginalize the revolutionaries and show them to be a small minority distinct from the rest of the Jews. Elsewhere in the same work, Josephus offers an account of the resurrection that is consistent with that offered in 2 Maccabees and by the Pharisees, the Jewish party who was identified by their belief in the resurrection.<sup>51</sup> It is entirely plausible, then, that this account of vindication was offered by Josephus to present the revolutionaries to his Jewish contemporaries as heterodox compromisers with Greek ideas who should not be emulated. This would make sense with Josephus’ biases and explain the passage in light of other data.

### Judas the Galilean

For ten years after the 4 B.C.E. revolt, there were no major revolts in Palestine. This period of relative peace ended abruptly when the Roman senator Cyrenius came to Palestine to impose a tax for Caesar, ascertaining the value of everyone’s property. When the tax was announced, there was a great uproar among the people, but the high priest Joazar was, according to Josephus, able to persuade the vast majority of the people to peaceably pay. In spite of this, Judas the Galilean and Sadduc, who Josephus identifies as a Pharisee, started teaching that accepting taxation was tantamount to accepting slavery and riled up a revolt with the hope of reviving their prosperity, stating that YHWH would be with them and lead them to victory. They

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<sup>50</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch. 33, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Ch.8, 5. On the Pharisaic belief in resurrection, see N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 190-200.

were able to convince a number of people to join in their revolt. Ultimately, the revolt failed, and Judas was crucified by the Romans.<sup>52</sup>

### *Analysis of Judas the Galilean*

Even though less is known about Judas' revolt than even some of the others discussed in this text, the information that is available about this movement is very valuable to understanding the mindset of Jewish revolutionaries around the time of Christ. This revolt is also important to consider because Judas' descendants would continue the revolt, with one of them becoming a major player in the Jewish War. One of the more interesting portions of this section is the mention of the Pharisee Sadduc as one of the leaders of the revolt. This is the main instance where the Pharisaic movement is explicitly linked with revolutionary activity prior to the Jewish War. Because the Pharisees are primarily identified by their belief in a bodily resurrection of the dead, this information provides another link between the belief in vindication by YHWH as resurrection and revolutionary activity. The movement also shows how the two senses of vindication discussed in connection with the Maccabees could simultaneously coexist: one could believe that YHWH would vindicate their zeal for the Torah with military victory as well as bodily resurrection from the dead for all of the righteous when YHWH is made king.

Something should also be said here about Josephus' treatment of the tendency toward revolution. In the account of Judas the Galilean in particular, one can very clearly see Josephus' tendency to drive a wedge between what could be considered "mainstream" Judaism and the Judaism of the revolutionaries by carefully emphasizing how the vast majority of the people (in his account) and the high priest all supported peacefully paying taxes to Rome. While there no doubt were those who took this stance, one cannot deny that a large number of Jews were upset

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<sup>52</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 18, Ch. 1, 1.

about this measure. To many of the Jews, registering their property with Rome was enrolling in the Roman system and abandoning the Torah. Such an action would have provoked violent zeal from many quarters, including Judas the Galilean. The tendency toward revolution here is thus probably more central to the consciousness of Second Temple Judaism than Josephus would like to admit.

### *Uprisings Under Pontius Pilate*

After the revolt of Judas the Galilean, there were no recorded instances of revolutionary activity until Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea. The first major incident occurred when Pilate brought effigies of Caesar into Jerusalem when his army was quartering there for the winter. This event was extremely offensive to the Jews because of the prohibition on making images in the Torah. When the people found out about this, they came in droves to Pilate's court at Caesarea to petition the removal of the images. On the sixth day of the petition, Pilate had his judgment seat set up in an open portion of the city. When the Jews came to him, he had his soldiers come and surround them and threatened to kill all of them if they would not go home and leave him alone. The Jews, however, were willing to accept death without protest, which so moved Pilate that he ultimately removed the images from Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup>

Around the same time, Pilate also built an aqueduct into Jerusalem using funds from the Temple. Again, a great multitude of people came to Pilate to make a petition. This time, Pilate commanded his soldiers to conceal daggers on themselves. When the unarmed crowd of Jews refused to go away, Pilate gave a signal to the soldiers, who were more brutal toward the crowd than Pilate had commanded, killing both, "those that were tumultuous and those that were not." Ultimately, many of the Jews were killed, and the movement was dispersed.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 18, Ch.3, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

*Analysis of the Uprisings Under Pontius Pilate*

Even though the recorded incidents under Pontius Pilate did not have any obvious leaders and did not necessarily reflect a violent revolutionary tendency, they still provide insight into the mindset of revolutionary movements and what incited them. The first obvious component is zeal for the Torah. Like the Maccabean martyrs, those who protested the effigies in Jerusalem were willing to sacrifice their lives rather than see the Torah flaunted. Even though it is not explicitly stated in the text, this alacrity toward death would seem to imply a belief in the resurrection of the dead as vindication by YHWH instead of some sort of miraculous military victory or something of the like. The incidents also indicate the centrality of the temple to the Jewish mindset. The large crowd that came to protest the aqueduct illustrates the view of the Temple as the place of communion between YHWH and his people, so much so that they risked a similar violent reaction by Pilate to see the funds for the Temple recovered.

*Revolts Prior to the Jewish War*

In the years after Pilate was procurator in Palestine, there were a number of revolts and uprisings that provide a prelude to the Jewish War. In the mid-40s C.E., Josephus records that the brigand leader Tholomaeus was executed by Crispus Fadus, who launched a campaign against brigand activity in Palestine.<sup>55</sup> Around the same time, a man named Theudas, claiming to be a prophet, convinced a great crowd of people to take all of their possession and follow him, telling them that if they came with him to the Jordan River, he would part it and they would cross on dry land. Fadus, felt threatened by the movement and sent a troop of cavalry after them, killing a number of people. Theudas was ultimately captured alive and beheaded by the Romans.<sup>56</sup> A few years later, when Tiberius Alexander had replaced Fadus as procurator,

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<sup>55</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 20, Ch.1, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 5, 1.

Josephus records an uprising led by James and Simon who were the sons of Judas the Galilean. The revolt was unsuccessful, and the Romans crucified both of them.<sup>57</sup>

Under the next procurator, Felix, there was another purge of brigands in Judea in the late 50s C.E., during which the *archilestes* Eleazar was finally captured and sent to Rome after twenty years of brigandage and many others were crucified.<sup>58</sup> In spite of the purge, a group known as the Sicarii soon started operating in Judea. The Sicarii were known as adroit assassins, hiding in crowds during festivals and killing their opponents with daggers. They gained great notoriety during this time for assassinating the high priest Jonathan, so much so that people were afraid of their neighbors.<sup>59</sup> At this time, there was also a rebellion led by an Egyptian Jew who gathered a following of several thousand people. After leading his followers through the wilderness, the Egyptian took the people to the Mount of Olives, preparing to drive the Romans out of Jerusalem. Felix heard about this, however, and attacked the group, at which point the Egyptian and a few of his most devoted followers escaped, some others were captured alive, and the rest returned to their homes.<sup>60</sup>

After Felix was procurator, there were several more revolts in the early 60s C.E. prior to the Jewish War. In the first few years of the decade, the Sicarii became more prominent, and the procurator Porcius Festus put down a rebellion led by one who promised “deliverance and freedom from miseries.”<sup>61</sup> When Festus suddenly died, he was replaced by Lucceius Albinus, who launched a campaign against Sicarii, who in turn took one of the high priest’s servants as ransom in return for prisoners taken by the Romans.<sup>62</sup> At the end of his time as procurator,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>58</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch. 13, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch. 13, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>61</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 20, Ch. 8, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Ch. 9, 3.

Albinus sought to empty the prisons by executing some of the prisoners who had committed grievous offenses and releasing all of the others. Because most of these prisoners had been involved in brigand activity, the number of operating revolutionaries greatly increased.<sup>63</sup> This event and the arrival of Gessius Florus as procurator effectively mark the start of the Jewish War.

*Analysis of Revolts Prior to the Jewish War*

Based on the information available about these revolts in Josephus, much can be deduced about the mindset of these revolutionaries. One of the major features of several revolts in this section is the emphasis on going into the wilderness. Both Theudas and the Egyptian led or attempted to lead their followers into the wilderness before going into battle. This event is highly symbolic, alluding to the Israelites' wandering in the desert for forty years before YHWH led them into the land he had promised them. This allusion is made even more concrete with Theudas, who speaks of parting the Jordan River just as it was parted by Joshua.<sup>64</sup>

This allusion to the original conquest of Canaan is indicative of the worldview of these revolutionaries. To them, they were returning from exile just as their ancestors returned from slavery in Egypt. By their actions, they were hoping to symbolically illustrate that they were bringing about the end to exile by driving out the Romans and all of those who would oppress the people of YHWH. This provides solid evidence for the Jewish hope that the exile would be ended and for a messianic figure who would bring this about.

The revolt of the Egyptian messiah also highlights the focus on the Temple that was illustrated in the Maccabees. By camping his army opposite of Jerusalem, the Egyptian was likely trying to be as close to the Temple as possible, most likely in order to be as close as possible to the presence of YHWH. This emphasis highlights the centrality of the Temple to the

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<sup>63</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 20, Ch. 9, 5.

<sup>64</sup> See Joshua 3.

mindset of many Jews during this time period and illustrates how some viewed it as central to revolutionary activity.

Finally, the revolts in this period set the stage for the Jewish War. The general increase in brigand activity, evidenced by the frequent purges, emphasizes the increasing hostility amongst the Jews against the ruling powers. Revolution was rife in the air, and it seems that everyone wanted a piece of the spoils when YHWH vindicated his people. In addition, it is significant that the descendants of Judas the Galilean were leaders of another revolt. This provides evidence that Judas and his descendants viewed themselves as members of a royal house, classifying them as a popular kingship/messianic movement. This is also significant because some of Judas' other descendants would become major leaders in the Jewish War. The introduction of the Sicarii is also a major step toward the Jewish War. The Sicarii ended up becoming a major party in the Jewish War, and they were the party that Josephus blamed for the war.

### *The Jewish War Through the Destruction of the Temple*

The Jewish War is possibly one of the most complex historical events ever to occur in Palestine if not the whole Near East. What makes the war so difficult for a historian is the sheer diversity of the groups on the Jewish side, many of whom fought against one another as well as the Romans. Add to this the fact that the various groups called one another and themselves by different names, and the confusion becomes almost insurmountable. Probably the easiest way to make sense of this historical quagmire is by exploring the causes of the war, the main groups on the Jewish side, and then exploring the war from the Roman perspective to gain an understanding of the overall course of the war.

According to Josephus, the Jewish War was caused in large part by the actions of the procurator Gessius Florus, who was brutal toward the Jews and would accept bribes from anyone.<sup>65</sup> After a riot in Caesarea that occurred when Gentiles profaned a synagogue, Florus had his soldiers kill and pillage the homes of Jews in Jerusalem who had responded unfavorably to his actions.<sup>66</sup> After this clamor had died down, Florus again provoked strife when a troop of Roman soldiers attacked Jews outside of the Temple. Ultimately, the Jews became so enraged that Eleazar, who was the son of the high priest, had sacrifices in the Temple for Caesar stopped, thus beginning the all out war.<sup>67</sup>

From here, a multiplicity of revolutionary groups arose and fought against the Romans as well as one another. Three groups deserve particular mention. The first was led by John of Gischala, who came from Galilee, who Josephus describes in the most vituperative terms, partly because he fought against John for control of Galilee.<sup>68</sup> As the leader of the Zealot party, John led an army to Jerusalem, where he and his forces attempted to set him up as ruler.<sup>69</sup> After gaining control of the Temple and using it as a base of operations, the Zealots were for a brief time in control of Jerusalem until they were contested by other parties and ultimately defeated by Titus. For his treason, John was condemned to life imprisonment.<sup>70</sup>

The next major figure in the revolt was Menahem, who was a descendent of Judas the Galilean and the leader of the Sicarii. Early in the war, he and his followers were able to capture Herod's armory at Masada and take all of the weapons for themselves. Menahem then started acting as though he were a king and proceeded to lay siege to Jerusalem. Even though the Sicarii

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<sup>65</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch.14, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>67</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch. 15, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Ch. 21, 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 5, Ch. 1, 1.

<sup>70</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 177.



were able to destroy a tower, they were unable to gain entrance to Jerusalem. After this, they found the hiding place of the high priest and killed him, which provoked the ire other revolutionary groups who in turn killed Menahem. After this, the Sicarii were never able to regain their former strength, although Eleazar, who was related to Menahem, continued to lead the group at Masada for much of the rest of the war.<sup>71</sup>

The final major party in the war was led by Simon ben Giora, who, according to N.T. Wright, “was regarded both by his followers and by the Romans as the most serious would-be ‘king of the Jews.’”<sup>72</sup> He was one of the main leaders of the revolt in Galilee, and he ended up contending with the Zealots for control of Jerusalem.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, Simon was paraded through Rome when Vespasian proclaimed his victory over Israel.

From a Roman perspective, the war was a relatively straightforward affair. At the outbreak of conflict, the Roman general Gallus brought a legion from Syria into Palestine and was quickly able to make his way to Jerusalem.<sup>74</sup> In spite of his early success, Gallus inexplicably retreated from Jerusalem, which caused the rebels to become more courageous and chase after the Romans, until they were finally able to defeat the legion at Beth Horon, inflicting one of the worst losses in Roman military history.<sup>75</sup> When Nero heard about this, he was furious and sent Vespasian and his son Titus to remedy the unfavorable state of affairs. Vespasian was very successful, quickly subduing rebellion in Galilee, but in the power vacuum after Nero’s death, he decided to return to Rome to claim the title of emperor for himself, leaving Titus in charge of the invasion of Palestine.<sup>76</sup> Titus then carried on the campaign, laying siege to

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<sup>71</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Ch. 17, 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 177.

<sup>73</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 5, Ch. 1, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Ch. 19, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Ch. 9, 2.

Jerusalem. After a long, drawn-out stalemate, Titus was finally able to enter Jerusalem, destroying and pillaging the city and the Temple and enslaving most of its inhabitants.

### *Analysis of the Jewish War Through the Destruction of the Temple*

One of the most striking aspects of the Jewish War is the insane amount of internecine fighting amongst the Jewish factions. At no point in the war was there a unified Jewish front ready to face the Romans. Each group believed that its leader was the true messiah and that all of the other groups' leaders were leading the people astray. The divisions between these groups did not have to be major theological differences, but enough for one group to say that the other was not the true leader of Israel.

Another key aspect to all of the movements in the Jewish War is the consistent theme of kingship amongst all of the leaders. Every one of the leaders discussed at some point or another proclaimed themselves to be the King of the Jews. One particularly interesting figure is Menahem, who continues the line of Judas the Galilean, indicating that Judas' other descendants and Judas himself all believed that they were a royal house. Ultimately, each one of these figures thought that they were the messiah who would drive out the Romans and reestablish YHWH's presence in the Temple. Because they were unable to unite, however, they were all doomed to failure.

### *Conclusions About Revolts and Messianic Movements*

In the foregoing section, a relatively thorough analysis has been given of all of the major revolts and messianic movements in the decades surrounding the life of Christ. It is now time to summarize the conclusions of this analysis. So far as the historical record shows, the vast majority of these movements had royal overtones. Succession of leadership usually occurred within a single family, as in a royal house, and the leaders often made royal claims of

themselves. Because of the frequency of these royal movements, there is good reason to accept a popular belief in some sort of messianic figure, anointed by YHWH to drive out the Romans and reestablish the presence of YHWH in the Temple, that may not have been shared by the more educated elite.

In general, these movements were centered upon the national symbols of Israel. Some of them were motivated by a zeal for the Torah to kill those who they saw as committing apostasy and bringing judgment upon the whole nation of Israel. Others showed a fixation on the Temple as the cosmic location where YHWH and his people would meet and have communion together. Still others alluded to seminal events in the history of Israel, taking their followers out into the wilderness to retake the Promised Land from the pagans as Joshua had done or staging revolts at the feasts of Passover and Pentecost to symbolize how they believed YHWH would deliver them from exile. All of these elements show a commitment and fidelity to the history of Israel that lends credibility to the accounts of the movements presented.

Most importantly to this thesis, all of these movements believed that YHWH would vindicate them. The two main views of vindication that seemed to be present at the time were vindication by military victory and vindication by a resurrection of the dead. These two views are not mutually exclusive. All of these revolutionaries would certainly have believed that YHWH would vindicate their faithfulness through success on the battlefield. However, it is apparent from the actions of some of these revolutionaries as well as what Josephus does and does not say that a relatively large proportion of the revolutionaries believed in a bodily resurrection of the dead. In this system, when YHWH was established as king of Zion, all of those who had died would be raised up, some to everlasting life ruling with YHWH, others to judgment. This belief seems to be a key element to many of these groups.

## Part II: The Church

### Opening Remarks

Now that some truths about the messianic movements of this era have been established, it is necessary to examine how the early church fits into this context. In order to do this, the writings of the New Testament will be examined to see how the church viewed itself. The purpose of this analysis is not to get back to the views of Jesus per se, but to see more importantly how the early church saw Jesus and themselves based on what the writers of the New Testament chose to include in their works. The information gleaned from this section would provide the rest of the tools needed to achieve the ultimate end of this thesis.

### The Church and Messiahship

Based on the accounts offered in the New Testament, the notion of Jesus as the messianic king was central to early Christianity. As Luke records, within the first few years after Jesus' death, members of the movement were being called Christians, meaning little messiahs or followers of the messiah.<sup>77</sup> The written accounts of Jesus' life in the gospels do not shy away from this heritage. In Mark, the first gospel written, Jesus' first words are a messianic proclamation: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."<sup>78</sup> One could easily see Judas the Galilean or another messianic contender at the time making a similar proclamation to follow him as he inaugurated the kingdom of YHWH. It is apparent that the disciples and many of Jesus' contemporaries also thought that they were part of a movement like that of Judas or another kingly figure. The mother of James and John asks that her sons sit at Jesus' right and left hand, a very royal image.<sup>79</sup> The people of Jerusalem greeted

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<sup>77</sup> Acts 11:26.

<sup>78</sup> Mk. 1:15.

<sup>79</sup> Mt. 20:20-21.

Jesus as if he were a king coming to conquer.<sup>80</sup> While it is apparent that the disciples viewed themselves in this way at the time, it is also apparent that they saw Jesus as redefining what it meant to be the messiah. As N.T. Wright points out, Jesus radically reinterpreted the conflict that Israel was facing. To Jesus, the real enemy was not Rome, but sin and death.<sup>81</sup> To the early church, Jesus had in some paradoxical sense won victory over sin and death and was ruling over creation. This is why the church never waged war against Rome: Jesus had already won the real battle, which was never with Rome in the first place.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Church and the General Resurrection**

Aside from a belief that Jesus was in some sense resurrected from the dead, it is apparent from the New Testament that the early church also held a belief in the general resurrection of the dead like that held by many of the revolts and messianic movements discussed in Part I of the thesis. The belief held by the early church was similar to that of the Maccabees in that both the righteous and the wicked would be resurrected: the righteous to eternal life and the wicked to eternal judgment. This belief is clearly reflected in Revelation 20:11-15, which says:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The idea that YHWH will vindicate his people by resurrection is also paralleled in Paul:

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<sup>80</sup> Mt. 21:1-11.

<sup>81</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 448-449.

<sup>82</sup> In addition to the gospel accounts, the belief that Jesus is the messiah is prominent particularly in Paul: George MacRae, "Messiah and Gospel," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, eds. Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 170.

But someone will ask, “How are the dead to be raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable.<sup>83</sup>

This passage clearly reflects a belief in a bodily resurrection in which the righteous will live for eternity.

### **Conclusions About the Early Church**

Based on these elements in the New Testament, the first century church fits credibly into the context of revolts and messianic movements. It is obvious that the first Christians viewed themselves as a messianic movement based on the emphases of the gospels and their own self-identification. It is also apparent that they shared the belief in the resurrection of the dead that was held by a large proportion of the other messianic movements. For these reasons, the church can be analyzed in light of the other messianic movements and revolts in the texts.

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<sup>83</sup> 1 Cor. 15:35-38,42.

### Part III: The Resurrection

Now that it has been established that the church can be viewed in terms of messianic movements and revolts, it is time to consider the disciples' actions after Jesus' death in this light. Is it plausible to believe that the disciples thought that Jesus was in some way alive? If so, did they believe that Jesus' resurrection was physical? Both of these questions must be answered to fully understand the disciples' actions and the beliefs that motivated them.

Before these questions can be answered, however, the disciples' actions must be briefly outlined. When the servants of the high priest came and arrested Jesus, all of the disciples fled.<sup>84</sup> Even Peter, who had most ardently promised that he would never betray Jesus, denied Jesus three times on the night of Jesus arrest.<sup>85</sup> These accounts are unanimous in all of the gospels and are historically believable: people do not usually write unglamorous accounts of themselves unless they are true. The events of the fifty days between the feasts of Passover and Pentecost are not recorded in detail, but at Pentecost, the disciples boldly proclaimed the gospel in the Temple.<sup>86</sup> All of the disciples except for John ultimately ended up dying violent deaths proclaiming that Jesus is the messiah throughout the Roman world. Something must have happened in the intervening days to change the disciples' perspective so radically. The rest of this section will be devoted to determining what they believed this event to be.

The first of these questions can be answered through the fruits of Part I. In general, when a messianic movement was defeated, its members who were not captured by the Romans had two options. The first was essentially to give up, go home, and return to their previous lives. This appears to be what happened to the revolts led by Hezekiah and the Egyptian messiah, and it is

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<sup>84</sup> Mk. 14:50.

<sup>85</sup> Mk. 14:72.

<sup>86</sup> Acts 2.

paralleled at first by Jesus' disciples in John 21. Obviously, this cannot be the ultimate course of action for the early church.

The other option available to these groups was to find a new messianic leader and continue the revolt. Because these movements were messianic and therefore steeped in the symbolism of monarchy, this new leader without fail arose from the family of the dead messianic figure. The movements of the Maccabees, Judas ben Hezekiah, the sons of Judas the Galilean, and the Sicarii all illustrate this trend. When this historical trend is applied to the early church, it raises some interesting issues that are not typically addressed in this discussion. In this context, it seems perfectly natural, to be expected even, for at least some of Jesus' most ardent followers to start proclaiming James the brother of Jesus as the messiah. Yet the early church never makes this claim. James occupied a very prominent position in the early church as one of the bishops of Jerusalem, but neither he nor any other Christians in any era have claimed that James was the messiah. This is a historical anomaly, since the Christians appear to be the only messianic movement in the first century that continued to claim that their leader was the messiah after his death. Since the church did not take any of the options that would have been available to them in the Second Temple Jewish worldview, it must be concluded that the disciples believed that Jesus was alive in some way.

This brings up the second question. One of the major objections to the disciples' belief in a physical resurrection was raised by German scholar Rudolf Bultmann, who sought to interpret the New Testament in a way that would remove all elements of "myth" that would make the message of Christianity unpalatable to a modern audience. In Bultmann's view, the Christian story of the resurrection in the New Testament has nothing to do with the physical resurrection of Jesus, but with the rise of the faith of the early church that the cross was an event of cosmic



victory, not a tragic defeat.<sup>87</sup> While maintaining the view that the disciples believed in some sort of resurrection, this view removes anything tangible or miraculous from the stories of resurrection.

While Bultmann's theory is one of the most serious objections to the notion of Jesus' physical resurrection, it does not make sense of the historical data that have been offered thus far in this thesis. In the context of the movements described, a good proportion of them believed in vindication by YHWH in terms of a physical resurrection. As it was shown in the incident with the eagle in the Temple, Josephus even attempts to use the notion of a Platonic, spiritual resurrection to present the revolutionaries to his Jewish contemporaries as heterodox, further reinforcing the prevalence of the belief in a bodily resurrection. It seems apparent from the New Testament that the early church believed in a general bodily resurrection as well. It is also evident from these accounts that this resurrection is seen as a concrete eschatological event. The first century Church would not have used this term for something so amorphous and metaphorical as what Bultmann has described. In this context, it would also be entirely incongruous to state that the early church believed that Jesus was only raised from the dead spiritually. If one is to take the historical record and the New Testament seriously, there is no alternative but to accept that the disciples believed that Jesus was raised from the dead in a bodily resurrection.

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<sup>87</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: Rudolf Bultmann and Five Critics*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 41.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the preceding considerations, it can be concluded that the most reasonable explanation for the disciples' actions after Jesus' death in the context of Second Temple Jewish messianic movements and revolts is their belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection. If the disciples had believed that Jesus was dead, they would have disbanded the movement or found another leader to call the messiah. Based on the New Testament and the other revolutionary movements, the disciples would have believed in a bodily resurrection of the dead. In light of this evidence, one cannot both take the historical record seriously and hold that the disciples did not believe that Jesus was resurrected in any way, or that they merely believed in a spiritual resurrection.

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