

The Great Jewish Revolt of 66 AD: Conflicts Within Conflicts

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The Great Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 CE was not a simple conflict between a united Jewish people and the legions of Rome. The revolt was, in fact, a segmented conflict that included hostilities between Romans and Jews, the Greek-speaking population of the East and the Jews, and even Jews against their own brethren. These conflicts greatly changed the character of the war; for example, in the initial stages of the revolt, the Jews did not face any large Roman force, but instead the population of cities across the provinces of Syria and Judea. The Greek-speaking urban dwellers and the Jewish population fought a bloody cultural conflict against each other during the initial outbreak of the revolt. For both sides the confusion and chaos of the revolt brought into the open their long-standing hatred. This “Judeo-Syrian war” sapped Jewish strength in the East and supplied the Romans with allies and safe havens for their armies. The Romans also recruited many of their auxiliaries from the Greek-speaking population, thus supplementing their legions with a local force that were already consumed with hatred for the Jews.¹

The other conflict that exhausted the Jewish ability to wage a successful revolution against the Romans was their internal conflicts. The “Jewish Civil War” contained two elements: first was the tension between southern Judea, with its revolutionary fever and the dominant elite, and the North, characterized by a more moderate approach to revolt and even an inclination to submit to Rome. Josephus himself illustrates this aspect of the Jewish civil war during his tenure as a revolutionary general who attempted to prepare the North for Roman invasion and kept the northern cities fighting. The other aspect of the inter-Jewish struggle took place in Jerusalem itself and involved several powerful warlords fighting each other for control of the ancient city. The result was the slaughter of civilians and, in Josephus’ opinion, the conflict between these “tyrants” constituted a major drain on the effectiveness of the Jewish war effort.² Therefore, exegeses of both these conflicts--the Jewish civil war and the Judeo-Syrian conflict--will allow a greater understanding of the revolt and the course that it followed.

A) The Judeo-Syrian War

The seeds for the conflict that would erupt at the outbreak of the revolution between the Jews and the Greek-speaking eastern population were planted centuries before 66 CE. Much of the resentment that flourished in this period of violence had its origin in the Greek rule of the Jews under the Greco-Macedonian dynasty of Antiochus of Syria. As a direct result, the Jews launched a desperate revolt, led by the Maccabees, to free themselves from the Greeks. From the period of the Maccabees to the arrival of Rome, the hostilities did not cease and remained in the collective memory of the citizens of these ancient eastern cities. Occasionally, violence would erupt and the pressure would be released in an orgy of violence. Once Rome ruled the cities containing both Jewish and Greek-speaking populations, both sides had to answer to Caesar when violence occurred. Often the attitude of the current Emperor would determine if the Romans would protect the Jews or if their requests for protection would be refused. This is not to imply that the Greeks were always the aggressors, however because the principal sources for these period, Philo and Josephus, were Jewish, their accounts could be biased against the Greek-speaking population. Also, since the Jews held a unique position in regards to their religious needs it was important for them not to anger the Emperor. An example of the vacillation of the Roman rulers in regard to the Jews is clearly seen in the successive reigns of Caligula and Claudius. Under Caligula, Jewish appeals for assistance and protection against their Greek-speaking neighbors in Alexandria went unanswered, while in the rule of Claudius imperial protection was granted and he even issued an edict defending the rights of Jews under Roman rule.³

An incident in the Judaeian city of Caesarea clearly illustrates the pressure that the hatred between the two cultures produced just before the revolt. During the last years of Nero’s rule, an argument raged between the Greeks and the Jews of Caesarea in early 66 CE. The Jews claimed ownership of Caesarea because the Jewish king Herod first constructed the city. However, the Greeks countered by stating that the

¹ Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 66.

² Josephus, *The Jewish War* Preface, 9 (William Whiston, Nashville, 1998).

³ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 19.5.1 and Tacitus, *Annals* 12.54, in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, volume II (Jerusalem: Lubrecht & Cramer Ltd, 1981), 76.

city was clearly Greco-Roman because there were temples and statues dedicated to the Greek gods in the city and the city was the Roman provincial capital of Judea.⁴ This conflict illustrates the antipathy of these two peoples, who both wanted to make it clear that the other culture was the foreigner intruding into their city. The argument quickly led to violence and the streets erupted in bloodshed. Josephus claims that the Jews had superior numbers and wealth but the Greeks were aided by the “assistance of the soldiery,” which for a greater part were “raised out of Syria.”⁵ This fact put the Jewish population in a dangerous position, since the Jews were exempt from military service and, as Josephus illustrates, the Greeks made up the majority of the Roman auxiliaries in the city. Thus the Jews could face a trained auxiliary unit or a Roman-peace keeping force that stood aside as their fellow Greco-Syrians assailed the Jews and it is even likely that the Syrian auxiliaries started many of these conflicts.⁶ Yet, in this street battle the Jews prevailed and, as they were closing in on the last of their enemies, the Roman procurator Felix stepped in and halted the violence, with threats of great reprisals for disobedience.⁷

Small outbreaks of violence would erupt periodically, but the full extent of the animosity between these two peoples could not be unleashed while the Romans enforced peace. Thus the hatred and the violence remained temporarily under control. The Great Jewish Revolt against Rome would allow the pent-up violence to be released. With the Jews at war with Rome, the Greek-speaking natives had nothing to stop them from engaging in open warfare with the Jews. Not only the Greeks, but also the Jews used the revolt as a time to unleash a war on their enemies and, in a sense, to enact revenge on their neighbors. Josephus describes the attitudes for both the Jews and the Greeks at the outbreak of the revolt perfectly, stating “every city was divided into two armies encamped against each other.”⁸

At the outbreak of the revolution, even before the Romans could react by mobilizing legions or appointing generals, there was a full-scale war in the province of Syria, with each side instituting an ethnic pogrom against the other. The Greeks could now release their hatred in violent action, with no chance of Roman retaliation against them. The Jews, also, could act upon their intense hatred, for the die had been cast and the chaos and freedom that the revolt allowed was also an opportunity for war with the Greek-speaking population. Josephus claims that as a result of the violence “it was not uncommon to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied.”⁹ The war was not isolated to Syria, for in Alexandria violence also erupted. The Jews had now become an enemy to the empire; an entire people had revolted. This was, at least, the defense that the Greeks would have claimed. For according to Josephus’ account, the violence in Alexandria was a result of a deep Greek animosity for the Jews, dating back to Alexander the Great and his positive treatment of the Jews. Although Josephus states that the hatred of the Greek-speakers towards the Jews was “perpetual,” the revolt allowed for violent action without political or legal consequences.¹⁰

When Rome went to war their armies were not composed entirely of legions; in fact, about half of their armies consisted of supporting units, or auxiliaries, that played specific roles in war. These non-citizen auxiliaries were raised from the provinces and in the case of the Jewish revolt, many of the auxiliaries came from the Greek-speaking population of the East. The same Greeks that were locked in a bloody cultural war with the Jews were used in the Roman army. The Roman practice of recruiting auxiliaries, in the case of the Jewish revolt, not only swelled the Romans’ ranks, but also supplied the Roman generals with troops who were motivated by hatred and possessed knowledge of the province that would aid the Roman reconquest. Josephus speaks of this in *The Jewish War*, stating that the auxiliaries “indeed had not the same skill in martial affairs [as the Romans], but made up in their alacrity, and their hatred of the Jews.”¹¹

Before Rome’s legions marched into Judea, the conflict was between Greek-speaking Syrian auxiliaries and a hastily constructed Jewish militia. This meant that the “Jewish-Syrian war” that began as urban conflict between two factions spread into actual organized warfare, with the bitter personal violence that characterized the urban conflict. This was illustrated early in the revolt when the Roman commander Cestius led auxiliaries into combat and defeated various Jewish brigands. However, when Cestius retired with his regular Roman units to Ptolemais, he left the Syrian auxiliaries behind, where they continued to

⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.13.7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rajak, 71.

⁷ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.13.7.

⁸ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.18.2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.18.9

plunder the Jewish lands and slaughter the population.¹² When the Jews saw that the Roman commander had withdrawn and witnessed their enemies sacking their towns, they engaged the Syrian auxiliaries in battle and soundly defeated them. The Jews attacked both because the Syrians were vulnerable without their Roman commander, and also because of their hatred for the Syrians. The Syrians overextended themselves for similar reasons. They reveled in their ability to strike at their ancient enemies, and their excitement allowed them to let their guard down and be defeated. This battle characterized the conflict that occurred in the early stages of the revolt: small pitched battles between Roman-raised Greek-speaking Syrian units and Jewish citizen-soldiers.

Another example of Jewish soldiers fighting against Syrian auxiliaries occurred in front of Josephus' own eyes. When Josephus commanded the Jewish forces of Galilee, the Romans sent a large force of auxiliaries to assist the pro-Roman Jewish town of Sepphoris. It appears that the Romans realized the success and motivations of their auxiliaries in fighting the Jews. The Roman auxiliaries defeated Josephus and his force in a pitched battle outside the city of Sepphoris and after Josephus' defeat, he claims that the Syrian auxiliaries did not act "according to the laws of war."¹³ They raped and pillaged the Jewish countryside, stealing food and killing farmers. They even captured and enslaved much of the population. Though this was sometimes military practice in antiquity, the severity of the actions by the auxiliaries must account for Josephus' outrage.

Once the legions arrived in Judea the Romans used the Greek-speaking population of Syria to assist their military efforts in a less direct but equally efficient manner. Since the Greeks of the East were loyal to the Romans, they could use their cities as bases of operation and places to safely rest and refit their armies. This was a great advantage and made the reconquest of the Jews less difficult, since there was no concern of vulnerable supply lines and lack of safe havens. However, Josephus claims that the loyalty and rejoicing expressed by the Greeks at the arrival of the Roman legions in Judea was "only partly out of good will they bore to the Romans, but principally out of the hatred they bore [to the Jews]."¹⁴ The Romans not only used their loyal Greek subjects as auxiliaries but also in more subversive roles, of which the Greek's knowledge of local customs and the area combined with the hatred they bore for the Jews was essential. Josephus describes an action during the siege of Gamala that illustrates the Greek's value as guerilla fighters. During a particularly fierce attack by the Romans, a group of Roman soldiers, whom Josephus claims were Syrian, infiltrated the house of a Jewish man. At nightfall the Greek-speaking Syrian soldiers slit the throats of the Jewish man and his guests.¹⁵ Josephus does not tell us who these Jewish victims were or if they had any important role in the Jewish defense of the city. Yet, by leaving the man unnamed the action appears even more brutal, displaying vicious attacks on the citizens of Gamala by Roman soldiers of Syrian descent who knew the area and could thus infiltrate the city.

The Greeks were not alone in their vicious attacks during the revolt, for the Jews also used the chaos of the revolt to launch similar attacks against their Greek-speaking enemies. In the beginning of the revolt the Jews sent an army to the ancient city of Ascalon whose population, according to Josephus, had long been enemies of the Jews. Josephus states, "out of anger [the Jews] marched much faster."¹⁶ The Jews, like their Greek neighbors, used the revolt as a time of revenge and a fulfillment of the ancient enmity that the Roman occupation had repressed. However, the citizens of Ascalon surprised and crushed the Jews in battle, slaughtering most of the army. The Jews let the hatred that they felt for their neighbors outweigh the importance of conserving manpower for the defense of Judea against the invading legions.

The Jews again showed their willingness to wage a cultural war against their Greek-speaking neighbors in the area of Caesarea. Once the Jews had controlled the city through brutal urban conflict, they decided to divide their forces into several units and attack various Syrian cities. Josephus describes the results of this Jewish cultural pogrom against the Greek-speakers by stating that the Jews "laid waste the villages of Syrians, and their neighboring cities [of] Philadelphia, Sebonitis, Gerasa, Pella, and Scythopolis."¹⁷ Josephus himself admits that he took part in the shameful warfare between the Jews and the Syrians. In his *Vita* he confesses "I too took part in the spoils of those Syrians which inhabited the cities that adjoined to us, when I conquered them."¹⁸ Josephus, writing his autobiography, probably left out

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 3.4.1.

¹⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 3.9.1.

¹⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.1.5.

¹⁶ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 3.2.1.

¹⁷ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.18.1.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Vita* 15 (William Whiston, Nashville, 1998).

even gorier details of his forces occupation; however, the fact that he feels compelled to admit that his forces took part in the “Jewish-Syrian war” illustrates the important position this conflict had in the mind of the Jewish general. Josephus shows us in his writing that the Jews met the intensity of the Greek violence with equal violence in the initial period of the revolt.

As a result of the severity of the violence during the “Jewish-Syrian war” the Greek-speaking population essentially fought the first part of the war for the Romans. The Greeks, fighting as Roman auxiliaries, wore down or defeated the first Jewish combat units that were put together. The “Jewish-Syrian war” was characterized by flowing combat, quick sieges, pitched battles, and violent pillaging of enemy cities and villages. Also, the bloody urban conflict quickly made it apparent where a city’s loyalties lay. If the cities’ Jewish population was wiped out then the city was obviously pro-Roman; if, however, the Jewish community defeated the Greek inhabitants the legions and auxiliaries of Rome could attack the Jewish population. This polarization of the cities allowed for an organized Roman reconquest and Roman commanders could assume that their Syrian cities that acted as safe havens were truly secure. The “Jewish-Syrian war” and the casualties that were caused by it decimated much of the Jews’ ability to face Rome in an open battle, and resulted in the series of sieges that would characterize the Great Revolt.

B) The Jewish Civil War

At the outbreak of the revolt of 66 CE, there were few Jewish political structures, save the pro-Roman king Agrippa. There was, therefore, a power vacuum left in the wake of the Roman procurators’ administration. In an attempt to fill this void the priests of Jerusalem, who saw themselves as spiritual and political leaders, stepped in and assumed control. This control, however was quickly fragmented among powerful Jewish aristocrats who each controlled their “own body of followers.”¹⁹ These aristocrats battled across Judea to gain control of specific towns or regions. The “central authority” in Jerusalem opposed the conflicts between these local aristocrats and at the beginning of the revolt deployed generals and governors across Galilee and Judea and thus endeavored to control the revolt from the capital. This worked in some cases, but when the local aristocrats or the native citizens did not share Jerusalem’s revolutionary ferment or felt their own power threatened, then a rejection of Jerusalem’s control would occur and lead to violence.

There were two flash points for the “Jewish civil war” during the revolt. First was the North’s attempt to throw off southern rule. This conflict was characterized by Josephus’ attempts to solidify the revolution in Galilee and keep the North from submitting to the Romans. According to Tessa Rajak it was “Jerusalem, without consultation, which had declared war on Rome” and as a result Galilee was neither prepared nor necessarily willing.²⁰ The second was the battle for control of Jerusalem. Aristocrats fought bloody conflicts each vying for control of the city and in the process exhausted the supplies and manpower of their city before the Romans even arrived. Both aspects of intra-Jewish fighting undermined the Jewish ability to wage war and successively defend Galilee and later Jerusalem against the Romans.

i) Galilean Resistance to Jerusalem

The origin of the conflict between Galilee and Jerusalem occurred during the reign of Augustus. After Herod the Great’s death in 4 BCE, Judea was thrown into disorder as Jews rioted both because of their delight over the death of Herod and their disgust that his son, Sabinus, might rule. The disorder turned to revolt. In this revolt, Galilee was full of revolutionary emotion while the South stayed loyal to Rome. The Romans moved to crush the disorder and laid siege to the principal city in Galilee, Sepphoris. The Romans utterly destroyed the city and, according to Josephus, the Romans “made its inhabitants slaves and burnt the city.”²¹ The Romans also burnt several other cities, but no population was punished like that of Sepphoris. The memory of the destruction of Sepphoris and much of Galilee had not been erased by the time of the Great Revolt, nearly half a century later. This memory of fire and slavery that the North alone experienced lingered and, when the Jews again revolted, Galilee was not once again ready to risk destruction in the hope of political independence.

Josephus gives us a first hand account of the conflict between Galilee and Jerusalem. He was chosen, by Jerusalem, along with two other priests--later dwarfed in Josephus’ egocentric narrative--to be sent to prepare Galilee for revolution and warfare. Jerusalem was already attempting to exert control over Galilee by appointing commanders to the North, where a structure of local rulers already existed. In fact,

¹⁹ Shaye Cohen, *Josephus In Galilee and Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 196.

²⁰ Rajak, 145.

²¹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 17.10.1 (William Whiston, Nashville, 1998).

these rulers composed the resistance to Josephus and his attempts to exert Jerusalem's control over the Northern revolution. This resistance manifested itself in Josephus' inability to control Galilee, where he only had support in the countryside and was unable to maintain the loyalties of the cities.²² This was a result of the long-established aristocrats of Galilee that resented the foreign intrusion into their cities. Josephus begins his account as general of Galilee by stating that his reason for being sent there was Jerusalem's fear that "Galilee had not yet revolted from the Romans [and] some parts were still quiet."²³ This would have been alarming to the revolutionary center at Jerusalem because without complete support of all of Galilee they would be in danger of being isolated, like Sepphoris had been years earlier.

Josephus discharged his duty and prepared Galilee for the coming Roman assault. His first action, he said was to "gain the good will of the people."²⁴ Josephus was aware of the people's fear of revolt and, if he could reassure them in his leadership and calm their fears of Rome, then perhaps he could keep them active in the revolt. As an attempt to gain the good will of the people of Sepphoris, Josephus allowed them to build a wall around their city because he perceived that they "were rich and wealthy and ready for war."²⁵ Apparently the Sepphorians were tricking Josephus, because they would later use the same wall to defend themselves from Josephus' assaults once they declared loyalty to Rome. Josephus was disappointed in his hope that Galilee, if properly defended, would succumb to the revolutionary zeal that raged in Jerusalem. However, as a general Josephus could not convince the citizens of Sepphoris to overcome their fear of Rome and join the revolt. Once Josephus subdued Sepphoris by force, intra-Jewish fighting erupted in the city. In his *Vita*, Josephus claims he had to trick his troops to leave Sepphoris after they had stormed it. For if he did not, then Sepphoris would have been razed twice in one century, first by the Romans, then by the Jews themselves.²⁶

During Josephus' command most of his efforts and resources were devoted to subduing Jewish cities that were pro-Roman or attempting to convince cities that were hesitant to join the rebellion. The key to understanding the northern fear of committing to the revolt was their fear of Roman reprisal. Josephus, in his *Vita*, recounts a telling incident during his attempt to keep the city of Tiberias fighting. The city was prepared to support Josephus, until they saw "a few Roman horsemen" and then immediately expelled Josephus and declared loyalty to Rome.²⁷ The task given to Josephus by the revolutionary center at Jerusalem appears to posterity to be impossible. Perhaps Josephus recounts it this way purposely, to excuse his failure. Yet, even excluding the questions of Josephus reliability, it is clear that Galilee was not ready to revolt. Though Jerusalem and the South were attempting to push them into the revolt, there were still memories left by the last revolt and this fear kept Galilee from fully joining the revolt.

When Josephus first arrived in Galilee to assume his command, he encountered a bitter aristocrat who saw Josephus and his command as a threat to his authority. This man was John of Gischala and his struggle to strip Josephus of his command and assert his control in Galilee represents an important factor in the "Jewish civil war." This conflict, however, was not over the issue of revolt itself, but rather who would control the course the revolt; the fight centered on "personal factors and the desire for power."²⁸ Therefore this conflict was waged by revolutionaries against revolutionaries, which contrasted with the struggle between Galilee and Josephus, which was between counterrevolutionaries and revolutionaries.

From the beginning of Josephus' attempt to establish his power in Galilee, John of Gischala fought to sabotage and destroy his reputation. Before Josephus could fortify his position John launched a direct assault against his forces. According to Josephus, John's hope was to "overthrow Josephus [and] himself obtain the government of Galilee."²⁹ This was a battle for power amongst revolutionaries, one that was debilitating the Jews' capacity to fight and Josephus' attempts to keep Galilee in the revolt. Once Josephus had repulsed John's attack, the two settled into a stalemate. Both had enough power in the area not to be ousted, but it was divided: John in upper Galilee and Josephus in lower Galilee. Shaye Cohen has even conjectured that John was one of the official governors in Galilee but was not appointed general because "he was not a priest and not a native of Jerusalem."³⁰ John's lack of appointment and the reason

²² Cohen, 214.

²³ Josephus, *Vita* 7.

²⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.20.5.

²⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.20.6.

²⁶ Josephus, *Vita* 73.

²⁷ Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 2.21.8.

²⁸ Cohen, 206.

²⁹ Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 2.21.3.

³⁰ Cohen, 222.

for it again reinforces Jerusalem's attempt to control the revolt and even hints at eschatological reasoning behind the appointment of generals. How better to ensure divine aid than be led by a priest? However, John of Gischala would not stand for Jerusalem's decision and was determined to seize power himself and to lead the revolt against Rome in Galilee.

Josephus' work in Galilee was severely crippled by John's various actions against him. Often John would use thieves as shock troops against Josephus and cities loyal to him. This spread chaos and frightened the people. Also Josephus had to hunt the thieves down with valuable resources that would have been better used preparing for the Roman assault. John of Gischala exerted all possible effort into removing Josephus and gaining control of Galilee. There was no question that John's desire for personal power surpassed his desire for Jewish political independence from Roman rule. In fact John paid Jewish cities to revolt against Josephus and declare loyalty to Rome.³¹ John used Galilean fear of Roman reprisal and unwillingness to revolt as tools to weaken Josephus and make him appear incompetent. Even though Josephus did recover these cities, it is obvious that John's actions to secure personal power, combined with other aristocrats across Judea who were fighting for personal gain, relentlessly destabilized the Jewish resistance to Rome.

Once John had been foiled by Josephus, he turned to a new method. Instead of violence, John appealed to the source of Josephus' power, Jerusalem. He sent commutations to the priests of Jerusalem denouncing Josephus as a tyrant. John was appealing to the very source of power that he earlier resisted. However, once again he was overlooked by Jerusalem, either because he was lay or because Josephus was successfully holding Galilee. Even though John always appears the aggressor in Josephus' works, it can be assumed that Josephus was also part of the power struggle that was engulfing Galilee and Jerusalem.³² With Rome temporarily absent, Jewish aristocrats could flex their muscles and gain power, prestige, and wealth in the chaos of the revolt.

ii) Warfare Inside the Capital

Vespasian was methodical as he approached Jerusalem. By the time the Romans encircled Jerusalem most of Judea had already been subdued. However, before the Romans arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, vicious fighting occurred inside the city for political control and personal gain. The Romans had already captured Josephus, so his writings on the strife in Jerusalem are even less credible than before. This is combined with Josephus' hatred of John of Gischala and all the pro-war elite that were active in Jerusalem. According to Josephus, the citizens of Jerusalem were ready for surrender once the Romans conquered Galilee. However, Josephus' archenemy came to Jerusalem after the fall of Gischala and persuaded much of the population to continue fighting. John of Gischala attempted to persuade the Jews that the Romans were inadequate warriors and the Jews had saved their strength to defend their metropolis.³³ John was lobbying for the creation of a last stand against the Romans. The issue divided the city, but much of the youth rallied to John and his "hawk" party, which immediately engaged the "dove" party for control of Jerusalem.

The conflict in the city that started over the issue of war turned into class conflict. John and his fellow "hawkish" aristocrats obtained control of the lower classes that had nothing to gain from peace. John was also able to ally himself to the zealots, a militant group that stressed the necessity of resistance and the importance of divine aid. The poor rose up along with the zealots and attacked the pro-peace faction.³⁴ The violence of this conflict enraged the citizens and turned popular support against John and his followers. As a result the war party was pushed back and forced to take refuge in the temple. Once inside the people surrounded the temple and waited for the Romans to arrive so they could surrender the city.

To save themselves and make certain that Jerusalem stayed in the war, John and the Zealots enlisted the support of the neighboring Idumeans. Though the Idumeans were denied entrance to the city by the population, they overpowered the defenders through subterfuge and immediately fought their way to the temple to free the Zealots. Once free, John and the Zealots overpowered the citizens desirous of peace and killed the aristocrats leading them. The Zealots and their allies murdered the leaders of the peace party both openly and through mock trials that were staged publicly. With the aristocrats supporting peace destroyed, the Zealots and the other pro-war aristocrats were able to keep Jerusalem in the revolt. In fact,

³¹ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.21.7.

³² Rajak, 144.

³³ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.3.1.

³⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.3.4.

Josephus claims that the death of Ananus, an aristocrat who favored peace, “was the beginning of the destruction of the city.”³⁵ Certainly with all aristocratic opposition to war shattered Jerusalem was set on a path that would lead to its destruction.

As soon as John of Gischala secured his power, other aristocrats sought his position and gained support from portions of the population by labeling John a tyrant. This was another facet of elite conflict that occurred during the revolt. However, instead of aristocrats fighting over the political course of Jerusalem, this conflict was purely for personal gain. Soon Jerusalem was divided into three camps, each lead by one charismatic aristocrat who sought power through the annihilation of the others.³⁶ The population was on the outskirts of this conflict; occasionally killed in the fighting or forced into starvation by the battling warlords and the Roman siege. The conflict between these aristocrats surrounded the temple. Each faction fought to secure the temple and use it as a validation for their rule. The fighting was so severe that much of the city was burned, including “houses that were full of corn, and of all other provisions.”³⁷ The conflict between the aristocrats left the city open for Roman assault. With the city decimated from the inside there was no hope of a long siege that could wear down the Romans. Jerusalem itself was already war weary before the Romans constructed their first siege engine. Josephus claims that the city was like a “huge body torn to pieces” and much of the population wished for the Romans to arrive simply to draw the aristocrats’ focus away from internal conflict.³⁸ Only when Roman assaults intensified did the aristocrats cease their struggle. Vespasian and Titus knew of the internal divisions and purposely prolonged their activity to let the Jews destroy themselves. Josephus even goes as far to say that “the sedition destroyed the city, and the Romans destroyed the sedition.”³⁹

Although Josephus blames the defeat and destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem on the sedition, other sources, such as Tacitus and Cassius Dio, do not mention it.⁴⁰ There are multiple explanations for the lack of congruencies: first; Josephus’ proximity to the event gave him a better understanding, second; that Josephus’ animosity towards the Jewish elite clouded his writings and forced him to blame the revolt on them, or third; that the Greco-Roman authors did not see the importance of Jewish agitation within Judea. Regardless of the level of importance or questions of its multitude the existence of the intra-Jewish fighting must be assumed even without concurring sources because of the amount of attention it receives in Josephus’ works and historically other revolutions have often suffered from internal conflicts as groups attempt to control its course.

³⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 4.5.2.

³⁶ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 5.1.3.

³⁷ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 5.1.4.

³⁸ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 5.1.5.

³⁹ Josephus, *The Jewish War* 5.6.1.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Chronica* 2.30.3. in Stern, 64, and Cassius Dio, *The History of Rome* 66.4-7, in Stern, 374.