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# Did A Jewish General Destroy the Temple?

by David Sielaff, March 2026

Read the accompanying "[March 2026 Newsletter](#)"



**When the Jewish people rebelled in Judea against the Roman Empire, there were other significant political and military uprisings by Jews in other parts of the Roman Empire. One important person opposing these rebellions against Rome was a Jewish man: TIBERIUS JULIUS ALEXANDER. His first two names honored two Roman emperors. His third name honored Alexander the Great, the Macedonian king who unified Greece and conquered the Persian Empire.**

In this article I refer to him as "Tiberius Alexander." He was born a Jew but the loyalty of his father, brother, and Tiberius himself were focused on Roman culture, Roman peace, and the Roman empire of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Tiberius Julius Alexander and his family were trusted by Roman emperors and other leaders. He was richly rewarded for his loyal (and bloody) service to Rome.

I focus on the actions of Tiberius Alexander because he was an important historical figure during the period of the Jewish rebellions against Rome, both in Egypt, and in Judea. That historic Jewish rebellion in Judea died with the siege of Jerusalem, its capture, and destruction of the Temple. He may have advocated for the destruction of the Temple. Certainly he did not oppose it.

The "Jewish voice" of Tiberius Alexander in the war councils and administrative councils meant that he was highly regarded as being honest to Roman traditions at a time when loyalty was very important. His voice as an experienced military commander in those councils was heeded by his Roman superiors. They fully understood his first loyalty was to Rome (and to the person of his commander and later "Emperor" Vespasian). Tiberius Alexander was rewarded with promotions to high levels of command, honor, and Roman society. He was also welcomed by Vespasian's son Titus who followed his father on the imperial throne. Nor was Tiberius Alexander ever criticized by Vespasian's second son, Domitian, who also became Emperor of Rome.

## *Historical Sources about Tiberius Julius Alexander*

Tiberius Alexander is mentioned most often by two contemporary Jewish sources. The first source is the Jewish historian Josephus, who was the son of a Levitical priest, schooled in Jerusalem, and was an early leader of the Jewish rebellion in Galilee. Josephus came to see the futility of the Jewish rebellion, surrendered

to the Romans, and joined them as an advisor. He was accepted by Vespasian and by son Titus, and they sponsored his writings when each became Emperor. Josephus was present at the siege of Jerusalem, its conquest, and the destruction of the Temple. The history by Josephus titled "[The Wars of the Jews](#)" was promoted by both emperors. Josephus died in Rome as a friend of Rome.

Lesser mention is given by Philo, a famous Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. He was the brother of Alexander and therefore Tiberius Alexander's uncle.

Note how Josephus criticized Tiberius and his father for abandoning his Jewish religion:

**"Then came Tiberius Alexander ... [he] was the son of Alexander, the alabarch [a high ranking customs and trade official] of Alexandria, which Alexander [the father] was a principal [leading] person among all his [Jewish] contemporaries, both for his family and wealth; he was also more eminent for his piety than his son [Tiberius] Alexander, for he did not continue in the religion of his country."**

*Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 20:100*

The last two lines in the above quote mean that Tiberius Alexander abandoned any outward observance of God's Law given to Moses, even though he was fully educated in the details of the history, traditions, and practices of Judaism derived from the Law of Moses.

### *Biography of Tiberius Julius Alexander*

Tiberius was born during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, hence the name chosen by his father Alexander. His father was a devout Jew, but he was also loyal to Rome, and was perhaps one of the richest people in the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> The high position he held in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, was that of "Alabarch," the top leadership position of the Jewish community. The position also had some responsibility to collect customs revenue from trading ships. See the interesting Wikipedia article about the father of Tiberius Alexander, "[Alexander the Alabarch](#)."

The father of Tiberius is mentioned by Josephus of doing a devout contribution to the Temple by paying for silver plating on doors of the Herodian Temple:

**"Now the sizes of the other gates were equal one to another; but that over the Corinthian gate, which opened on the east opposite the gate of the holy house itself, was much larger; for its height was fifty cubits<sup>2</sup>; and its doors were forty cubits; and it was adorned after a most costly manner, as having much richer and thicker plates of silver and gold upon them than the other. These nine gates had that silver and gold poured upon them by ALEXANDER, the father of TIBERIUS."**

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 5:204–205*

This passage by Josephus seems to contradict other statements about the father of Tiberius Alexander. He mentions Tiberius and his father Alexander, because the son was a major participant in the 70 AD conquest of Jerusalem, and the burning and destruction of the Temple.

Tiberius was raised in the city of Alexandria, after Rome, the second largest city in the Roman Empire. It was located on the northwestern shore of the Nile Delta flowing into the Mediterranean Sea. The city was vital to the security of the Roman Empire. At Alexandria huge quantities of grain were collected for shipment to Rome in Italy, and other areas of the Empire. This reliable source of grain cannot be overestimated. It was due to the regular flooding of the Nile River and delta.

Stability of the grain shipments from Alexandria impacted the economy and the political stability of the city of Rome, all Italy, and even the stability of the greater Roman Empire. Read the interesting article "[Why](#)

<sup>1</sup> See "[Alexander the Alabarch: Roman and Jew, Summary](#)" by Katherine G. Evans, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The measure of a cubit varies, but 18 inches is a consensus length cubit. A gate of Fifty cubits would be about 75 feet tall and would require a number of men to open and close them.

### [Alexandria Was the Most Important City in the Ancient World.](#)

Alexandria had a large Jewish population, likely the second largest in the Roman Empire. Tiberius Alexander, his father, and brother Philo were at the top of that Roman/Greek/Jewish city's political hierarchy. They were trusted and promoted by society and the political hierarchy of Imperial Rome.

### *Historical Background Before Tiberius Alexander's Birth in Egypt*

In 53 BC, 50 years before Jesus was born on September 11, 3 BC,<sup>3</sup> a Roman army under the leadership of Crassus invaded the borderlands of Parthia (Iraq and Iran today) to attack their empire. The Roman troops were annihilated and Crassus<sup>4</sup> was killed at the Battle of Carrhae. That part of the world endured centuries of war between the two empires of Rome and Parthia.

Thirteen years later, in 40 BC, Parthia attacked west into Armenia, eastern Anatolia, Syria, and Judea.<sup>5</sup> Antigonous II, son of Aristobulus II was put on the throne of Judea. This began the Roman-supported wars of Herod (later "Herod the Great," an Idumean, not a Jew) to fight for the kingship of Judah.

King Orodes II led Parthian troops south into Syria, and into Judea in 40 BC. They captured Jerusalem in 37 BC, and placed the Hasmonean Antigonous II Mattathias, on the throne of Judah.

The Roman general Publius Ventidius Bassus was dispatched to counter the invasion. He launched a successful campaign, over a number of years defeating the Parthians, who retreated eastward. Publius reclaimed lost territories, including the lands of Syria and Judea, by 35 BC.

After King Herod died in 1 BC, Rome insisted that governors of the Roman Empire, in addition to Herod's successors, "administer" Judea. Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor for 10 years, from 26 to 36 AD. During that time the ministry, crucifixion, resurrection of Jesus took place, and the Gospel began to be spread across the world.

See Dr. Ernest Martin's 1983 article, "[The Importance of First Century History](#)" for background information that is relevant to the New Testament from a different perspective than I present here. He gives the history of Roman Emperor Caligula attempt to put a statue of himself inside the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Not only did he want to put it in the Temple; he insisted it go in the Holy of Holies.

Immediately, high Jewish officials (who were loyal to Rome) mobilized to gather an "embassy" to present peaceful initiatives by Philo, Agrippa of Judea (a friend of Caligula), and other Jewish leaders to dissuade the Emperor from going through with his demand to place his statue in the Temple. God intervened; Caligula was assassinated, and the order was postponed (news of Caligula's death reached the Roman army commander in Syria. Soon after, Emperor Claudius canceled Caligula's order.

### *Famine in Judea, 45 to 48 AD*

Luke tells us in the Book of Acts that a great famine was prophesied to occur in the entire world:

<sup>27</sup> **"Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.**

<sup>28</sup> **Now one of them, named Agabus, rising, signifies through the spirit, THE GREAT FAMINE which is about to be on THE WHOLE INHABITED EARTH, which occurred under Claudius.**

<sup>29</sup> **Now according as any of the disciples thrived, each of them designate something to SEND TO THE BRETHREN dwelling in JUDEA, for dispensing;**

<sup>30</sup> **which they do also, dispatching to the elders through the hand of Barnabas and Saul [the Jewish name for Paul]."**

• Acts 11:27–30 CLV

<sup>3</sup> See Dr. Ernest Martin's 1996 book "[The Star That Astonished the World](#)."

<sup>4</sup> Crassus with two other powerful Romans formed the "First Triumvirate," along with Julius Caesar and Pompey "the Great." The three planned to divide the Roman Republic, each ruling a portion. Julius Caesar died in March 40 BC.

<sup>5</sup> The Parthian homeland was east of the Euphrates River, where the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires rose to power.

*A NET Bible* textual note about Acts 11:28 gives a perspective on this famine: **“This famine is one of the firmly fixed dates in Acts. It took place from A.D. 45–48. The events described in chap. 11 of Acts occurred during the early part of that period.”**

It seems the famine was not as severe in the ancient city of Antioch in Syria (north of Lebanon today). Paul and Barnabas collected financial relief from believers in Antioch in Syria, and delivered the funds to believers in Judea who suffered from the famine. Tiberius Alexander was one of the “good” administrators of the Roman Empire that used his authority to help those suffering.

### ***Tiberius Alexander Appointed Procurator of Judah for 46–48 AD***

The Roman Emperor Claudius appointed Tiberius Alexander as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Procurator of Judea. Claudius was a close friend of Alexander, the father of Tiberius. A “Procurator” was a position with greater authority, and prestige than the rank Pontius Pilate held, which was a designation of “Prefect.” A Procurator collected taxes but had greater autonomy to spend some tax revenues to benefit the province as well as sending the funds to Rome. Procurators were trusted political and military officials, but also were experienced administrators.

44–46 AD	2 years	Cuspius Fadus, Procurator
46–48 AD	2+ years	<b>TIBERIUS JULIUS ALEXANDER</b> , Procurator
48–52 AD	4 years	Ventidius Cumanus, Procurator

It appears that the term of Tiberius was some months longer than 2 years. This may have been due to the famine. Josephus tells of an act by Tiberius to arrange “famine relief” to people of Judea. I quote again a passage by Josephus. This is the same famine mentioned in the Book of Acts. The shortage of food was well known. It began under the administration of the Procurator Fadus, but continued into the administration of Tiberius Alexander as Procurator according to Josephus, with some repetition:

“Then came **Tiberius Alexander** as successor to Fadus [as Procurator of Judea]; he was the son of **Alexander, the alabarch of Alexandria**, which Alexander [the father of Tiberius] was a principal person among all his contemporaries, both for his family and wealth; he was also more eminent for his piety than his son [Tiberius] Alexander, for **he did not continue in the religion of his country.** [ Now about the famine ... ]

Under these procurators **THAT GREAT FAMINE** happened in Judea, in which **QUEEN HELENA** bought grain in Egypt at a great expense, and distributed it to those who were in want, as I have related already; and, besides this, the sons of Judas of Galilee were now slain; I mean that Judas **who caused the people to revolt**, when Quirinius came to take an account of the estates of the Jews, as we have showed in a foregoing book. The names of those sons were **James and Simon**, whom Alexander commanded to be crucified. But now Herod, king of Chalcis, removed Joseph, the son of Camydus, from the high priesthood, and made Ananias, the son of Nebedeus, his successor; and now it was **that Cumanus came as successor to Tiberius Alexander** [as governor].”

*Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 20:100–103*

Queen Helena was a royal convert to Judaism. Josephus refers to “That Great Famine” as an event that many of his readers (and listeners, as books were always read aloud) would recognize as a major event and a time of great difficulty. This is interesting because the intended (and most likely) audience for the writings of Josephus were Gentiles and not Jews. Professor Jacob L. Wright explains in his excellent article [“Tiberius Alexander: The Jewish General Who Destroyed Jerusalem”](#):

**“From 46-48 C.E., he served as the procurator (or governor) of Judea. During his tenure, Judea suffered from a famine, and Helena, the queen mother of the Parthian vassal state of Adiabene (who had converted to Judaism), generously paid for grain to be brought from Egypt and figs from Cyprus (although the Talmud ascribes this deed to her son Monobaz II).”**

• *Jacob L. Wright, “Tiberius Alexander”*

Josephus indicates that Tiberius Alexander as procurator was a responsible administrator and an effective peacekeeper by Roman standards. He worked diligently for the good of the people of Judea for the 2+ years responsible for the peace of Jerusalem during the Jewish feasts, when political and religious rivals frequently fought each other, causing civil unrest. We do not know why he left Jerusalem and returned to Alexandria in Egypt, where he held an administrative position.

### *Tiberius Alexander's Military Service in the Roman-Parthian War of 58–63 AD*

Tiberius Alexander next appears in history as a warrior against Parthia. The Parthians attacked Roman provinces, captured significant territories, and again threatened Judea and Jerusalem. Parthia supported Antigonos II Mattathias, who sought to reclaim the Hasmonean throne to be King of Judea. Instead Rome and Parthia agreed to a compromise king for Armenia (shown below). When a peace treaty was agreed to, Tiberius Alexander was chosen to escort Tiridates of Armenia to Rome for an official crowning ceremony. Armenia to be a vassal state of Parthia, but the Roman Emperor had to approve and place the crown on the king of Armenia. Then Parthia withdrew from Syria and Judea, but this peace did not last long.

**Background:** The war of 58–63 AD between Rome and Parthia was initially about control of Armenia, a “buffer” land between and below the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The Roman general Publius Ventidius Bassus was sent to counter the invasion by Parthia into Armenia. He launched a successful campaign, defeated the Parthian forces and reclaimed lost territories by 39 BC.

A later war with Parthia broke out between 58 to 63 AD. Tiberius Alexander fought in that war. *DWS*

*Map by Wikipedia*



See the website: “[The Roman-Parthian War 58-63 CE - World History Encyclopedia](#)” for background of the causes and details of this war between Rome and Parthia. This was one of many wars fought over centuries between two large and powerful empires — Rome and Parthia.

### *Tiberius Alexander Returns to Egypt as Procurator*

After his tenure as Procurator in Judea, and after his service in the Roman-Parthian war of 58–63 AD, Tiberius Alexander was appointed the same political and social position of “Alabarch” that his father once held in the city of Alexandria.

Tiberius Alexander was also a military leader of the Roman army in Egypt. He was in command of two Roman legions plus auxiliary units that were usually foreign troops with special skills, such as archers. It was necessary for him to deal with conflicts between Greek and Jewish populations in Alexandria. He dealt with these chashes by shedding much blood.

### *Jewish Riots in Alexandria, Egypt*

In 66 AD riots broke out between Greek residents and the large Jewish population of Alexandria. The violence was connected to unrest by Jews against Rome in Judea and particularly in Jerusalem. Greeks in Alexandria attacked public assemblies of Jews. Many were injured or killed. Tiberius Alexander as governor took quick action and when the violence increased, he mobilized the two legions and attacked the Jewish rioters. Let us examine this Jewish uprising and riot in Alexandria:

- **Context:** The riots coincided with the outbreak of the First Jewish–Roman War close in time with events in Judea and Jerusalem.

- **Conflict:** Tensions escalated when a public assembly of Jews was attacked by Greeks, leading to mass violence. The battle progressed to the Jewish sector of Alexandria. The Roman governor, Tiberius Alexander, attempted to quell the unrest but ultimately he was forced to mobilize the two legions of troops (ideally numbering 4,500 men in each legion).
- **Casualties:** Josephus says the heaps of corpses numbered 50,000 dead in this conflict, mostly Jews. It was one of the deadliest events in the city's history. Whatever the number of casualties, the Jewish population was still large. Due to the area of Alexandria's large expansion in ancient times, some estimates place population of the city at that time at 500,000 people, a population second only to the city of Rome.

<sup>495</sup> **“These soldiers rushed violently into that part of the city that was called Delta, where the Jewish people lived together, and did as they were bidden, though not without bloodshed on their own side also; for the Jews got together, and set those who were the best armed among them in the forefront, and made a resistance for a great while; but when once they retired they were killed unmercifully;**

<sup>496</sup> **and their destruction was complete, some being caught in the open field, and others forced into their houses, which houses were first plundered of what was in them, and then set on fire by the Romans; wherein no mercy was shown to the infants, and no regard had to the aged; but they went on in the slaughter of persons of every age,**

<sup>497</sup> **till all the place was overflowed with blood, and FIFTY THOUSAND OF THEM LAY DEAD upon heaps; nor had the remainder been preserved, had they not betaken themselves to supplication. So Alexander pitied their condition, and gave orders to the Romans to retire ...”**

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 2:495–497*

Whatever the true death numbers were, Josephus made his point: many Jews were slaughtered in Alexandria and when the news spread, tensions increased everywhere Jews lived.

### *The Jewish Rebellion Begins in Judea, Galilee, and Jerusalem*

The Jewish rebellion in Judea and Jerusalem began with rebels seizing the Temple and Fort Antonia in Jerusalem. The Roman general and proconsul of Syria, Cestius Gallus, assaulted Jerusalem with 30,000 men (some sources say 40,000). He entered through the outer wall of Jerusalem from Mount Scopus to the northeast of the city, but was unable to go further into the city toward Fort Antonia and the Temple. His supply line from outside Jerusalem was threatened by roving bands of rebels. Cestius had his troops retreat back to the coast. They made a fighting retreat from Jerusalem to safety. The retreat became a rout and the Jewish rebels had achieved a major victory over a Roman army.

Cestius died suddenly, possibly by suicide. Emperor Nero called on the experienced General Vespasian to mobilize a substantial force.

<sup>20</sup> **“... the war broke out in the twelfth year of Nero, with what happened to Cestius; and what places the Jews assaulted in a hostile manner in the first sallies of the war.**

<sup>21</sup> **As also [Josephus shall relate] how they built walls around the neighbouring cities; and how Nero, upon Cestius' defeat, was in fear of the entire event of the war, and thereupon made Vespasian general in this war; and how this Vespasian, with the older of his sons [Titus], made an expedition into the country of Judea.”**

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 1:20–21*

Vespasian gathered and organized his troops. He concentrated on pacifying, securing, or conquering the north country and then focusing on a siege of Jerusalem. Troops were called from all over, including the legions from Egypt commanded by Tiberius Alexander.

The fighting continued in Judea. Then more news came from Rome.

## *The Year of the Four Emperors*

Emperor Nero reigned for 15 years. He committed suicide in 68 AD. This left a power vacuum for the Roman Empire. The year 69 AD saw four different generals struggle for power. For details see the informative but brief 2024 “History Tools” website “[Rome in Chaos: The Year of the Four Emperors.](#)” These following events occurred in sequence ... Remember, all this is going on while the rebellion continues in Judea and Galilee.

- First was a general name GALBA, 70 years old. He was assassinated by the command of Otho.
- OTHO, a friend of Nero, was voted to be Emperor by the Roman Senate.
- The Germanic Roman general VITELLIUS marched his troops to Rome, and defeated Otho’s army. Otho committed suicide. Vitellius declares himself to be Emperor.
- Legions in the Eastern part of the empire (including Egypt) declared VESPASIAN to be Emperor. One of the first to support Vespassian’s bid for the crown of Emperor of Rome was Tiberius Alexander who convinced the legions in Alexandria to support Vespassian. The troops trusted both men. Vespassian ruled for 10 years until 79 AD. Quoting from “The Year of the Four Emperors” website noted above:

**“Meanwhile, the legions in the eastern provinces had proclaimed their own commander, Titus Flavius Vespassian, as emperor. Vespassian, a successful general who had distinguished himself in the Jewish-Roman Wars, had the support of the governors of Syria, Judaea, and Egypt, as well as a significant portion of the Roman army.**

**Vespassian’s forces, led by his ally Gaius Licinius Mucianus, marched on Rome and defeated Vitellius’ troops at the Second Battle of Bedriacum in October 69 AD (Tacitus, “Histories”, III.82-85). Vitellius was captured and executed, and Vespassian was recognized as the sole emperor by the Senate in December.”**

Tiberius Alexander was Procurator of Egypt and the city of Alexandria when Vespassian first notified him about his decision to be Emperor. Tiberius immediately declared his loyalty to Vespassian with the two legions under his command. His troops were some of the earliest to support Vespassian to be Emperor of Rome. They trusted Tiberius Alexander who trusted Vespassian. Vespassian was always grateful and commanded his son Titus to listen to the advice of Tiberius Alexander, an experienced soldier and leader.

Led by Vespassian (with his son Titus), Tiberius Alexander was with the Roman army that gathered with Jerusalem as its goal. Josephus tells of Vespassian’s early progress against the Jewish rebels:

**“As also [I shall relate] how they built walls around the neighbouring cities; and how NERO, upon Cestius’ defeat [and fleeing Jerusalem with the remains of his army], was in fear of the entire event of the war, and thereupon made Vespassian general in this war; and how this Vespassian, with the older of his sons [Titus], made an expedition into the country of Judea; what was the number of the Roman army that he made use of; and how many of his auxiliaries were cut off in all Galilee; and how he took some of its cities entirely, and by force, and others of them by treaty, and on terms.”**

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 1:21*

For a summary of Vespassian and his troop movements in Judea from the Fall of 67 through December of 69 AD, see the table and maps at “[The Judaeian Campaign, 68-69 CE & Emperor Vespassian, 69 CE.](#)”

## *Vespassian’s Support by the Legions Builds His Support to be Emperor*

Vespassian began to rule toward the end of 69 AD. He left the campaign in Judea to the army commanded by Titus and advised by Tiberius Alexander. Vespassian never went back to Judea. He knew that Titus, Tiberius Alexander, and the other experienced military commanders were capable to be victorious. Yes, at the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, Titus was almost killed even though he led a troop of 600 cavalry. He was ambushed in the Kidron Valley when a large mass of infantry came out of Fort Antonia and almost

surrounded Titus and his men. Outnumbered, they all were near death.

That incident showed the carelessness that the 29 year old Titus displayed perhaps thinking he was another Alexander the Great (who was a genius and a commander at that young age). After that incident the Romans cut down all the trees around Jerusalem and built wooden walls with spikes that faced Jerusalem. The idea was to keep the rebels inside. Once it was finished, very few rebels escaped Jerusalem.

<sup>616</sup> **Justly, therefore, did Vespasian desire to obtain that government [as Emperor], in order to corroborate his attempts upon the whole empire; so he immediately sent to TIBERIUS ALEXANDER, who was then governor [1] of Egypt and [2] of Alexandria, and informed him what the army [in Judea] had put upon him, and how he, being forced to accept the burden of the government, was desirous to have him for his confederate and supporter.**

<sup>617</sup> **Now as soon as ever ALEXANDER had read this letter, he readily obliged the legions and the multitude [of civilians?] to take the oath of fidelity to Vespasian, both of whom willingly complied with him, as already acquainted with the courage of the man [Vespasian], from that his conduct in their neighbourhood. [Vespasian was Procurator in Alexandria during the Parthian Wars.]**

<sup>618</sup> **Accordingly, Vespasian, looking upon himself as already entrusted with the government, got all things ready for his journey [to Rome]. Now fame carried this news abroad more suddenly than one could have thought, that he [Vespasian] was emperor over the east, upon which every city kept festivals, and celebrated sacrifices and oblations [offerings] for such good news;**

<sup>619</sup> **the legions also that were in Mysia and Pannonia, who had been in commotion a little before, on account of this insolent attempt of Vitellius, were very glad to take the oath of fidelity to Vespasian, upon his coming to the empire.**

<sup>620</sup> **Vespasian then left Caesarea [off the coast of Judea] for Berytus, where many embassies came to him from Syria, and many from other provinces, bringing with them from every city crowns, and the congratulations of the people.**

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4:616–620*

### *The Roman Siege of Jerusalem*

Tiberius Alexander was the day-to-day commander of all the troops besieging Jerusalem. Originally he commanded two legions, but his responsibilities expanded. He was second in command to Titus, the son of the soon-to-be Emperor of all Rome. The trust of Vespasian for 10 years as Emperor and Titus for his 2 years as Emperor, show their confidence in the judgment of Tiberius. We do not know if Vespasian's youngest son Domitian had Tiberius serve him when he was Emperor for 15 years.

### *Events and Decisions Leading to the Destruction of the Temple*

The legions finally broke into and seized Fort Antonia. From there they began to attack the Temple. A 600 foot distance separated the southern wall of Antonia from the northern wall of the Temple itself.

Roman troops set fire to the GATES of the Temple — the same gates that the father of Tiberius Alexander embellished with silver and gold decades before; and the same gates he, as Procurator of Judea in 46-48 AD, protected as part of his duty to preserve the religious sanctity of the Jewish Temple.<sup>6</sup> Titus called for a strategy session about the circumstances of the fire in the Temple. They desired to preserve the Temple, but they also wanted to force the remaining rebels from the Temple:

<sup>236</sup> **But then, on the next day, Titus commanded part of his army to quench the fire, and to make a road for the more easy marching up of the legions, while he himself gathered the commanders together.**

<sup>6</sup> Roman administrators over Roman provinces took the sanctity of religion and religious buildings as an important part of their right to rule, both for practical and political reasons, but also for reasons of piety and respect toward all local "gods."

<sup>237</sup> **Of those there were assembled the six principal persons:**

- [1] **Tiberius Alexander**      **THE COMMANDER** [under Titus] **of the whole army;** with
- [2] **Sextus Cerealius,**      **the commander of the fifth legion; and**
- [3] **Larcus Lepidus,**      **the commander of the tenth legion; and**
- [4] **Titus Phrigius,**      **the commander of the fifteenth legion:**

<sup>238</sup> **there was also with them**

- [5] **Fronto Haterius,**      **the leader of the two legions that came from Alexandria; and**
- [6] **Marcus Julianus,**      **procurator of Judea; after these came together**
- [7] **all the rest of the**      **procurators and tribunes.**

**Titus proposed to these that they should give him their advice what should be done about the holy house [the Temple of God].**

<sup>239</sup> **Now, some of these thought it would be the best way to act according to the rules of war [and demolish the Temple]; because the Jews would never stop rebelling while THAT HOUSE was standing; at which house it was that they used to gather all together.**

<sup>240</sup> **Others of them were of opinion, that in case the Jews would leave it, and none of them would lay their arms up in it, he might save it [from burning]; but that in case they got upon it, and fought any more, [then] he might burn it; because it must then be looked upon not as a holy house, but as a citadel [a fortress]; and that the impiety of burning it would then belong to those who forced this to be done, and not to them.**

<sup>241</sup> **But Titus said, that *“although the Jews should get upon that holy house, and fight us from there, yet ought we not to revenge ourselves on things that are inanimate, instead of the men themselves”*; and that he was NOT in any case for burning down so vast a work as that was, [why?] because this would be a mischief to the Romans themselves, as it would be an ornament to their government while it continued [to remain unharmed].<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>242</sup> **So Fronto, AND [TIBERIUS] ALEXANDER, and Cerealius grew bold upon that declaration, and agreed to the opinion of Titus.**

<sup>243</sup> **Then was this assembly dissolved, when Titus had given orders to the commanders that the rest of their forces should lie still; but that they should make use of such as were most courageous in this attack. So he commanded that the chosen men that were taken out of the cohorts should make their way through the ruins, and quench the fire.**

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 6:236–243*

At this strategy session, Titus spoke out against a suggestion to destroy the Temple, and Tiberius Alexander agreed, and then the other senior commanders agreed with the motion of Titus (Wars 6.236–243). Or ... that is what Josephus says happened. We do not know if Josephus was present at the meeting, or whether he was reporting what others (including Titus) said took place at that council of military leaders. Josephus does not tell us the process.

The destruction of the Temple was said to be the work of one Roman soldier, not acting on orders but motivated by **“a certain divine fury”** a fate long ago decreed by God. The orders of Titus to extinguish the fires and regain control of his violence-possessed legions were to no avail (Wars 6.249–259). In this manner, Josephus exonerates both Titus and Tiberius from any culpability in the destruction of the Temple.

<sup>275</sup> **Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those who slew them;**

<sup>7</sup> In other words, Roman rule would look “good” if they did not burn down Temple. They would be respecting religion.

<sup>276</sup> for the ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of those bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them.

*Josephus, Wars of the Jews 6:275–276*

A different version by a 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian historian Sulpicius Severus says Titus ordered the destruction of the Temple. Severus may have had sources for this claim, and scholars have long embraced it, especially given the pro-Flavian slant in Josephus. If Titus did order the Temple's destruction, Tiberius may or may not have agreed to that decision. Jacob Wright wrote in his article, "[Tiberius Alexander: The Jewish General Who Destroyed Jerusalem](#)":

**"It might be tempting to blame Jerusalem's fate in 70 C.E. on a Jewish "turncoat." But there can be doubt about who the real culprit is: a vocal and belligerent faction of rebels and revolutionaries. Their members stood in a long tradition of imprudent resistance, going back to the days of Jeremiah. With an attitude of 'give me liberty, or give me death,' these radicals were willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of Jewish freedom, and they lost. The lessons for the present day are all too clear."**

Titus was commanding a force of many legions. Josephus always portrays Titus as a dynamic leader who controls events, yet Titus is barely 30 years old. This is why Vespasian wanted Tiberius Alexander to serve as the "second in command" to Titus, as well as a counselor, and chief-of-staff for the entire siege. Josephus gave two reasons. Professor Wright continues:

**"Tiberius had not only wisdom of years and proven competence in handling similar crises, but more importantly, he had been Vespasian's earliest ally, even 'when things were uncertain, and fortune had not yet decided in his favor'" ([Wright referencing *Wars of the Jews*] 5.45–46).<sup>8</sup>**

On one hand Josephus portrays Titus as merciful and wanting to "**spare a foreign temple**" even when it will mean casualties for his own soldiers. Wright continues ...

**"Josephus presents Titus witnessing how his endeavors to 'spare a foreign temple' brought about losses for his soldiers, and therefore orders the gates of the Temple to be burned (Wars 6.228) — the same gates that Tiberius' father Alexander had once paid to be plated with precious metals ([*Wars of the Jews*] 5.205). Yet after the fire spreads throughout the city for two days, Titus instructs his men to quench it ([*Wars of the Jews*] 6.243)"**

The Temple continued to burn. Later at a strategy council of his commanders, Josephus has Titus speak out emphatically against a suggestion to destroy the Temple, and Tiberius together with several others support the motion (Wars 6.236–243). That the Temple is nevertheless destroyed is said to be the work of a lone Roman soldier, acting not on any orders but propelled by "a certain divine fury" in keeping with a punitive fate long ago decreed by God. The insistent orders of Titus to extinguish the conflagration and his efforts to regain control of his violence-possessed legions were to no avail (*Jewish Wars* 6.249–259). In this manner, Josephus exonerates both Titus and Tiberius from any culpability in the destruction of the Temple.

### ***The Discussions About the Fate of the Temple***

On the other hand, Tiberius Alexander, a mature educated Jew, knew more than Josephus at that moment. As a commander, he was probably closer to the fighting in Jerusalem than Josephus, who likely was a distant observer. Furthermore, Josephus does not say he was present at the discussion, whether they should try to save the Temple, or let it be destroyed.

The combat experience of Tiberius Alexander in the Alexandria Jewish riot, taught him that total defeat of rebels was necessary. Destruction of the Temple would symbolize the impotence of Jews even to hope for

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<sup>8</sup> According to *Wars of the Jews* 5:46, Tiberius Alexander was an advisor to Titus in several ways, "**He [Tiberius] also followed Titus as a counsellor, very useful to him in this war, both by his age and skill in such affairs.**"

victory against Rome. It would present a clear message to all Jewish people in the Roman Empire, and even to Jews and Israelites scattered abroad that Rome is supreme. Even the Jewish God permits it to be so.

It was the duty of Tiberius Alexander to be present and participate in this important strategy discussion. The siege of Jerusalem was nearing its end. Rome would prevail. Tiberius Alexander knew the plans, because all tactical arrangements and all orders were **given through him** and **supervised by him**. All the Roman infantry, cavalry, and auxiliary troops, as well as foreign allied troops, all followed the orders of Tiberius Alexander as if they were from Titus himself.

The Temple was the focus of the religion of Jews and Israelites. An example had to be made for Jews all around the Roman Empire. And there were many Jews and Israelites in the land of Parthia, especially in Babylon, a large city still thriving in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Note what James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote at the beginning of his epistle to all Jews and Israelites roughly 60 or 61 AD, years before the deadly Jewish rebellion began:

**“James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. Rejoice! All joy deem it, my brethren, whenever you should be falling into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith is producing endurance.”**

• James 1:1–3 CLV

After the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem (as Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; and Luke 21:5–6), after the great city had been taken and there was **“no stone upon another”**; and after the Temple burned down (there were wood panels inside the Temple as well as heavy woven curtains at entrances to the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies). The heat of the fires caused the gold and silver to melt. This was why the Roman troops dismantled and separated every stone from another, down to the bedrock foundation.

The molten gold flowed through the cracks of the stones. It was recovered after it solidified. The Temple had a special floor. The Temple had openings for blood and water waste to flow to larger fluid channels, then into the Kidron Valley, and then down to the Dead Sea).

That special floor of the Temple had removable parts to minimize clogging and keep rivulets, pipes, and fluid flowing when cleaning water “flushed” the blood and unburnt gore from the sacrificed animals. It had to be kept clean to prevent flies and disease. A sacrificial site must be kept clean and washed away from the city. Yes, even the foundation stones of the Temple were dug up, as Josephus wrote as he viewed Jerusalem after its capture.

Initially, they had Jewish slaves do the work of cleaning, searching for precious metals and objects. Then there was body disposal. Of course, any hesitation on the part of slaves resulted in a death penalty. The situation was even worse when all the bodies of the dead had to be removed from Jerusalem and either burned or buried, probably in mass graves:

**“It [Jerusalem] was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was nothing left to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been inhabited.”**

**Josephus, Wars of the Jews 7:3**

In my 2021 Commentary, [“The Folly of Setting Prophetic Dates,”](#) I list horrific Jewish casualty figures from Roman records, compiled by Josephus. And those were only the Jewish casualties. We do not really know how many Roman and allied casualties there were. Josephus does not give those numbers.

Remember, each individual who was killed was cut down by a man in a face-to-face encounter with the killer and victim looking at each other. According to Roman records listed by Josephus, 1,284,700 people were killed in the Roman/Jewish War. The true number was probably larger.

### ***Tiberius Alexander In Later Life***

Tiberius Alexander returned to the city of Alexandria to serve as Procurator for a period of time. He went to Rome for the triumph to celebrate the victory of Rome over the Jewish rebels.

Later Tiberius was awarded a prestigious position and responsibility of a new job. It was as “Praetorian Prefect” in Rome — to directly serve Vespasian. Tiberius was elevated to command the Praetorian Guard, the military unit that personally guarded the Emperor of Rome.

He was still alive and served Titus as his Emperor after Vespasian died. There is no mention of Tiberius Alexander working or being alive during the reign of Domitian, the younger brother of Titus.

We do not know when or how Tiberius Julius Alexander died.

## Conclusion

Professor Wright summarized the impact of the life of Tiberius Alexander:

**“The most powerful Jew in antiquity, Tiberius Julius Alexander, served as procurator of Judea, governor of Egypt, and general in the Roman army. Without his support, Vespasian wouldn’t have become emperor, and his son Titus wouldn’t have led the siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Though his uncle Philo and Josephus Flavius may have disapproved of some of his choices, Tiberius acted out of loyalty to Rome, not apostasy from Judaism.”**

• **Jacob L. Wright (2024) website:**  
[“Tiberius Alexander: The Jewish General Who Destroyed Jerusalem”](#)

More precisely, Tiberius Alexander was the most powerful secular Jew of his time. On one point I think Professor Wright may be wrong, but I cannot prove it. Tiberius Alexander participated in every major decision of the siege of Jerusalem. Most every military command decision was made by him, down to the placement of the assault towers, the digging of underground tunnels to collapse Jerusalem’s walls, and placement of catapults that threw the large stones to break down other walls.

Yes, Titus very likely approved most everything Tiberius Alexander advised, and he likely approved most every order Tiberius Alexander sent to the troop commanders. Titus was barely 30 years old when the Jerusalem siege began. Tiberius Alexander was probably 20+ years older, and had that same 20+ years of experience as a commander. Titus still had much to learn from his “Chief of Staff” and second in command.

The truth is, even though Titus was “in charge” as commander of the troops putting Jerusalem under siege, he was not a commander of the brilliance of Alexander the Great or a young Julius Caesar or other heroes Titus probably admired when he was young.

Josephus gives little praise to Titus for his military prowess or clever strategy. Titus was a brave fighter and a capable leader of men, but he also took reckless chances that nearly cost his life during the siege of Jerusalem. Titus accepted his role in life and he became Emperor of Rome after Vespasian died. However, Titus served only two years as Emperor before his death.

One final point. Tiberius Alexander would have known that the burning of the Temple on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab was the Day of Atonement, the same day the Temple was destroyed by Babylonian destruction of the Solomonic Temple. It is doubtful that it was merely a coincidence, as Josephus seems to imply in his narrative about the burning of the Herodian Temple. Josephus mentions this fact in his book because his Jewish readers would have known that fact.

There is ambiguity in the texts of both *The Wars of the Jews* and *The Antiquities of the Jews* written by Josephus to give uncertainty that Rome purposely burned down the Jewish Temple on the same day the Babylonian army burned down the Solomonic Temple about 656 years earlier. Neither Tiberius Alexander nor Josephus wanted the blame for that action to be known. Vespasian and Titus would have been pleased with both of their Jewish friends.

David Sielaff, 2026

For more information on the true location of the Herodian Temple, see the following:

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| “ <a href="#">How the Siege of Titus Locates the Temple</a> ”      | by Marilyn Sams                     |
| “ <a href="#">Running Water in the Temple of Zion</a> ”            | by Professor George Wesley Buchanan |
| “ <a href="#">How the Jews Started to Lose the Temples' Site</a> ” | by Dr. Ernest L. Martin             |