

The First Edition of the Letters of Paul

The First Edition of the Letters of Paul

By

Charles Vergeer

Translation:

Elizabeth Harding and Rens Zomerdijk

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



The First Edition of the Letters of Paul

By Charles Vergeer

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2022 by Charles Vergeer

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7803-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7803-6

Original title:

De eerste editie van Paulus.

Gompels & Svacina, Oud Turnhout /'s Hertogenbosch 2021.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Prising Open	

A

Chapter One.....	12
Fragments of a missing whole	

Chapter Two	24
Behind the signs of her existence	

Chapter Three	39
Meeting Paul	

Chapter Four	59
The trial before the Proconsul	

B

Chapter Five	78
The First Editions	

C

Chapter Six	120
Frays and fringes	

Chapter Seven.....	132
A thorn in the flesh	

Chapter Eight.....	135
The victory over death	

Chapter Nine.....	148
The last words	

Chapter Ten	153
The four categories	

D

Chapter Eleven	158
A crack in the self-evident	

Chapter Twelve	168
Ephesus	

Chapter Thirteen	173
The tempo of the text	

Chapter Fourteen	194
Scratching, tearing and scribbling	

Chapter Fifteen	204
Gossamer in the breeze	

Chapter Sixteen	226
Until the night	

Chapter Seventeen	233
Breath of words	

E

Chapter Eighteen	244
Titus	

Chapter Nineteen	249
A glimpse	

Chapter Twenty	253
Not the map but the landscape	

Chapter Twenty-One	260
A final attempt	

F Apostolikon - Dispatches

Letter One.....	266
Letter Two	273
Letter Three	291
Letter Four.....	304
Bibliography	323
Index of Bible texts	327
Index of persons	335

INTRODUCTION

PRISING OPEN

a. Prising open

Texts are rarely crystal clear. Language is often regarded as just a means of communication and then comes the requirement that a text must be transparent. ‘Let’s be totally clear’ is often followed by an explanation containing an obscure threat.

Is it possible to read Paul’s letters as clear announcements, as transparent texts?

I was recently listening to some music by Louis Couperin (around 1650). The notes can be read, but only the performer can interpret it in such a way that it is made clear that a *courante* of Couperin, who was French should be slow and elegant, filled with many quavers and other decorative elements whereas a *corrente* of Frescobaldi should be played in a playful and rapid Italian manner; while a *Courante* by Froberger should be German-like, stiff and full-bodied. The same dance takes one into three totally different worlds.

Suites by Couperin were performed at this concert, but he did not write them as such. He composed about two hundred separate dances. A century later under the influence of J.S. Bach, the then current fashion rearranged them into suites. They were put together by their key, C-major or a-minor. Keys that did not yet exist in the time of Couperin. The result is an amalgamation of dances that do not belong or fit together and were sometimes composed with a difference of twenty years in time.

The order was also changed to *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande* and *gigue* – completely contradicting previous arrangements. They now began with a prelude, a prelude that was not intended as such. They are *preludes non mesuré*, as Couperin wrote them, who left the performance to the player and omitted the bars and length of notes.

The same music sounds so completely different on an Italian spinet, or on a German cembalo or on a French *clavecin*, with a deep sound box and in the mean tone temperament and not with the overstretched modern $a = 442$.

Does something similar also apply to Paul's letters? Definitely. Those who are of the opinion that they 'know' the author, Paul: his style, letters, his time, the fifties of the first century and his intention, the proclamation of the Christian faith, are creating a void reverberating with hollow sounds.

The philosopher Peter Lamarque contrasts transparency with opacity¹. 'Reading for opacity' means trying to figure out what is behind a text, why a writer writes precisely this, using those words and styles. The writer is telling his story, but does that automatically imply that we have to follow his course like a dog on a leash? In what manner and with what skills does the writer tell his story? What is the construction, the structure of the story and how does the author manage to guide the reader, direct his gaze and stimulate his feelings? How are the reader's eyes opened and how do the texts manage to avoid certain aspects? That is how we intend to read Paul.

When the editors allow Paul to speak at the beginning of the first letter to the Corinthians, he starts to complain at length about the disputes between the various factions at Corinth. These were disputes from the fifties of the first century AD, in the harbour city of Corinth, disputes which in Ephesus, half a century later no one was interested. The text does not clarify what these disputes were actually about, just as we are unable to discover what it was precisely that Peter and Paul clashed so violently about in Antioch.

These things had for years been irrelevant, but the editor himself had a great deal of disputes with his 'brothers in faith' about the relationship of the Jewish Law and the belief in God's Anointed. And that clash was characteristic for the period following the catastrophic war of the Romans against the Jews resulting in the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, and the suppressing of the people. But those were not yet the tensions and feuds of the days when Paul was active.

In order to take part in those party disputes the authors of the first edition needed authority, apostolic authority. Therefore they began their

¹ P. Lamarque: *The opacity of narrative*, London/New York, 2014.

edition with the statement Paul had presented at the time he came to Ephesus: the agreement reached between him and the leading apostles in Jerusalem on preaching and caring for the poor. The legitimacy of Paul's preaching was based on that agreement. Also in two important texts – the one about the Last Supper and the other about victory over death² – the editors explicitly invoke the authority given to Paul: 'Now I would remind you brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, in which you stand (...) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received (...).'³

But fifty years later it was obviously considered annoying that the authority had been bestowed by the apostles of Jerusalem and Judea, so the text was extensively altered and as a result was partly turned upside down⁴, with vindictive outbursts against those lying Arch-Apostles. In addition another text of Paul was taken out of context and added after the previous account. The result was that the breach between Peter, who was acting cowardly and insidiously, and Paul, acting heroically and determined, seemed an established fact.

The letters, as they were composed and structured by the editorial staff, conclude with appeals for unity. The faithful are urged not to give in to internal disagreement but to preserve unity. These edited texts, whether or not written by Paul, can only be understood against the background of the conflicts which took place around 100 AD. Conflicts between the original, Jewish members of the faith community who wanted to preserve the Law, commandments and writings, and the newer, Greek members of the same community living under a new and unencumbered Christian faith. The later disagreements had nothing to do with the disputes about the proclamation of the new faith of half a century earlier, i.e. between the followers of the apostles of Jerusalem, the baptist group around Apollos and the group around Paul with its own appeals to preserve the unity of the Church.

What I endeavour to do in this study which concerns the first edition of what would later be called the 'Letters of Paul' is to follow a method postulated by Umberto Eco: learning to see texts as *opera aperta*. To prise open a text to uncover its meaning.

² I Corinthians 11 and 15.

³ I Corinthians 15, 1-3.

⁴ Galatians 1, 13 – 2, 14.

The *Corpus Paulinum* cannot be seen as one interconnected unit. Only those who are willing to face the fact that more than a century after Paul's death later editors added as a kind of second appendix later editors added both letters to Timothy and the one to Titus (of which not a word was written by Paul) and that the same editorial board included the three 'collection letters', will discover how this cluster of texts was constructed.

None of the fund raising, planning travels and appointing women their insignificant and silent place in the church reflects the truth and reality of Paul. What we can see is the developing Christian church in the second-century.

b. Paul

'Success lulls to sleep while grief and failures leave deeper traces,' writes Tolstoy in the beginning of his *Anna Karenina*.

The Jewish belief in the Eternal and Only went together with a long history of fleeing, being enslaved, driven out of the homeland and doomed to live in slavery or exile; this is also what happened to her daughter, Christianity. We could give credence to the story of Acts, where the Spirit frees the apostles from their fear and their hiding place in Jerusalem and drives them to Rome to proclaim the faith in all the world.

In the story of the Acts of the Apostles Paul was a successful man: it began on the road to Damascus with his conversion through a revelation from God; then followed the successful great missionary tours in Asia Minor, the vision instructing him to cross over to Europe and to found communities of faith in various Greek cities; this he did, chalking up successes in Antioch, Ephesus, Thessaloniki and Corinth. Then he returned to Jerusalem before embarking on his journey to Rome; it is a triumphal procession, the faith being proclaimed everywhere, in Jewish and Greek regions and cities, and finally, the jewel in the crown, in Rome, the capital of the world itself. But the truth and the reality were so very, very different.

Paul was born around 12 BC, probably in Gischala, the northernmost town of Galilee near Damascus. During the rebellions which took place following the death of King Herod the Great, he and his family were captured and sold at the slave market. During his childhood in Jerusalem he had a strict Orthodox law-abiding education and training. By the age of

forty, he belonged to the majority party, a confidant of the Pharisee Gamaliel and of the high priest Joseph Bar Kaiphas.

He had an important role in putting down the Nazarene uproar in AD 27 and persecuted its partisans in Jerusalem and Judea, he was in charge of executions as far reaching as to Damascus. And then suddenly he sided with the former insurgents and just as suddenly believed in the resurrection of God's Anointed. He had to flee from the revenge of those in power. After three years, he went to the counter-high priest Simon Kèphas, who sent him in exile to Tarsus, to the relief of the followers of God's Anointed who knew him only as their persecutor.

It was not until about 40 AD that he was recalled and received approval from the leading apostles of Jerusalem to lead the faith community in Antioch. However, this led to conflicts with the authority of Jerusalem. Paul left for journeys visiting Jewish communities, first in Asia Minor and then in Macedonia and Greece. After a short time he was whipped out of several cities, Philippi, Thessaloniki and Berea; in Athens he was ridiculed and only in Corinth was he able to stay for a year and a half. Right at the beginning of his sojourn in that harbour town he was expelled from the meetings at the synagogue by the Jewish community, and after the arrival of the new Roman governor, Gallio, he was accused and expelled from the town and its region in the summer of 51.

Having fled to Ephesus he taught at the sports school of Tyrannos for some time, but after a popular uproar he barely escaped with his life. He ended up in prison, and was subsequently exiled from this city as well. After these failures he was recalled to Jerusalem to give account of his deeds. The judgment of James, brother of Jesus and leader of the faith community of Jerusalem and Judea, was harsh and practically as severe as a death sentence.

After being attacked and charged by the people and the high council, Paul disappeared from the scene: first he was imprisoned for two years at Caesarea, then he was sentenced to death by Porcius Festus. Two more years of imprisonment in Rome followed, his appeal to the emperor was rejected and the sentence was carried out. He was beheaded just outside Rome in year 59 AD. Possibly he was buried further out of town on a side road of the Via Ostiensis near the second milestone. In 846 that grave was looted by the Saracens. Nothing now exists of Paul's earthly remains.

Not much was left of his spiritual legacy either. About half a century after his death fierce debates were held in Ephesus because of the growing

contrapositions between the Jewish and Christian members of the faith community. Now that Jerusalem had been conquered and destroyed, what apostolic authority was to be recognized? What was the value of God's promise to Israel and the covenant that the Eternal had made with His people? What was the value of the Law of Moses? Two men whom we do not know by name and will refer to in this book as Anonymous A and B made speeches on these issues: What is the meaning of the Law and of Israel? What does belief in God's Anointed mean?

These sermons of Anonymous A were published, supplemented with other texts, including surviving letter fragments from Paul that had been sent to Corinth from Ephesus sixty years earlier. Now they were used, and partly misused, to enhance the bundle of texts by claiming apostolic authority and pastoral counsel. The collection was apparently quite successful and was followed-up with additions, with no new texts by Paul, but with letters attributed to him. As early as the summer of 144 AD, a second edition of what was then still called the *Apostolikon* appeared in Rome; later on these texts would subsequently be published as 'letters of Paul'.

These heavily edited, corrected and editorially augmented texts went down over the centuries as the spiritual legacy of Paul. As early as 245, Origen of Alexandria wrote a commentary on the letter to the Romans, of which he was quite aware that it was not in fact addressed to the Romans. In the Latin west Paul became known through Aurelius Augustine and eleven centuries later the interpretation of the letters by Martin Luther became important. During the Second World War, in 1940/41 Karl Barth gave lectures in Basel about the letter to the Romans. In 1956 that text appeared as *Kurze Erklärung des Römerbriefes*⁵. An extraordinary book, but a text in which Paul himself would have recognized or acknowledged very little.

c. On a pristine sheath in the morning light

In recent decades Paul has occupied a major place in modern philosophy. Whereas in the beginning of the nineteenth century he was still not mentioned by Hegel for instance, at the end of the same century he was very much present in the works of Nietzsche. He was, bypassing Christ

⁵ K. Barth: *Kurze Erklärung des Römerbriefes*. Hamburg 1967.

himself, even more-or-less proclaimed to be the true founder of Christianity. As such he became one of the main interlocutors of some recent philosophers, whereas within the Christian church he was virtually silenced by the monotonous repetition of the same worn-out words and ideas. The book *The Soul of the World* by Roger Scruton ends with a confrontation with Paul⁶.

One of the most fascinating conversations with Paul is *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* by Giorgio Agamben⁷. Word by word, Paul is spoken to in a most intensive and thoughtful way. In six days, as in the six-day work of creation, the first ten words of the Letter to the Romans are read and pondered *ad litteram*. They are colloquia that Agamben held successively at the universities of Paris, Verona, Evanston and Berkeley. There is a time in which Paul endures.

This also goes for Augustine, the father of Western Christianity, in his *Confessiones*. His book starts off with the idea that man is not just an object, accidentally thrown somewhere in this immense void of space and time, but that we were created by Him, emanate from Him and are created to return to Him (...) *quia fecisti nos ad et et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*. ‘You have created us unto You, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in You.’ And the book ends with *Dies autem septimus sine vespera est nec habet occasum*, ‘the seventh day which is without evening and has no downfall.’⁸

Paul, too does not consider this world and reality as accidental or fatal, but as – *klêsis* – created. *Paragei gar to schêma tou kosmou toutou*, ‘For the present form of this world is passing away.’⁹ ‘But we have to live in it *hōs mē*, ‘as if it were nothing’. That, according to Agamben, has nothing to do with Greek philosophical wisdom, the philosophy of the street and the market, the Stoa, taught: let it go, it is not important. It touches the nucleus of the good news, the gospel, Messianism, the proclamation of the coming of God’s Anointed and the Kingdom of God.

The earliest gospel, that of Mark, begins with that statement: ‘And a voice came from heaven, You are My beloved son, with you I am well

⁶ R. Scruton: *The Soul of the World*. Princeton 2014.

⁷ G. Agamben: *Il tempo che resta: Un commento alle Lettere ai Romani*. Turin 2000.

⁸ Augustinus: *Confessiones* I 1 en XIII 51.

⁹ I Corinthians 7, 31.

pleased.¹⁰ And the first word that the Anointed speaks is *Peplèrōtai ho kairos*, ‘the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,’ *èngiken*.

Paul expresses the same thing in his letter to the Corinthians. This world, in which men and women marry, in which there is sorrow and joy, longing, buying and selling, possession and property – all that will pass and it is over, now. He stresses it five times in a row: *hōs mè, quasi non*, it’s over, it’s like nothing. The passing has passed, the time has come.

The coming of the kingdom and God’s Anointed resulted in a triumphal entry into the holy city; the temple was taken and the new king was anointed, but only a few hours later it turned out to be a complete failure and ended in what was, in fact, the execution of a criminal on the cross. Everything was lost: *Eloï, Eloï, lama sabaktani*, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’¹¹ But the faith in Him remained. After three days He had accepted the sacrifice and, according to the scriptures, kept His promise, He raised the crucified one from the dead and took him up to heaven.

This was the gospel Paul was proclaiming: the Eternal will never abandon His people and covenant. The Living One had sent His son. His presence - *parousia* - is permanent. ‘We live to the Lord (...) we die to the Lord.’¹² ‘The expression of that belief is, according to Agamben, the *hōs mè*, do not live and die as if you belong in this world order of and for people but for the coming of the kingdom of God. But once again, whatever came, it was not the kingdom but the failure.

Paul was persecuted and driven out by the Jews in Philippi and Thessaloniki, he was molested in the port of Corinth, imprisoned in Ephesus and exiled. And in Jerusalem he suffered condemnation by the brethren, attempted murders by the Jews, imprisonment by the Romans and finally the execution of the death sentence with the sword. As if that was not enough, his followers deserted him¹³.

But worse, seven years after his beheading just outside Rome, war broke out between Romans and Jews. In September 70, the holy city was taken and the temple destroyed. Had the Lord abandoned His people? His kingdom, would that still come? The situation in which the editors found

¹⁰ Mark 1, 11.

¹¹ Mark 15, 34.

¹² Romans 14, 8. (Elsewhere in this book I will state that this is not one of Paul’s text himself.)

¹³ Acts 20, 29-30 and 37-38 en II Timothy 4, 16.

themselves at the time of the first edition of Paul's revived letters is painfully clear from the two letters – from Paul allegedly –to the congregation of Thessaloniki.

Apart from a few verses, both letters are practically identical, the author of the second letter copied the first letter and attempted to add new elements to it. Even sentences such as 'we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you' were neatly repeated¹⁴. The author was only concerned with one thing: the second coming of the Lord. The first letter describes with great certainty that the second coming will be very soon. The sounding of the trumpets by the angels is described as if they really can be heard. The second letter urges patience because as it stands the kingdom will not yet come; much remains to be done in the meantime.

This is what the editors of Paul's letters considered a problem that was difficult to solve. Paul proclaimed the coming and presence of the kingdom and God's Anointed. The editors realized that for the time being this was not quite imminent. It is cruel that owing to this edition of letters, Paul's actual proclamation was renounced. Paul himself yearned for salvation and he vehemently preached about the coming and presence of the kingdom and God's Anointed, with the provocative advise to live and die *hōs mè*; to live as if wife and friend, child and home, property and strivings no longer mattered, they were mere human affairs of a vanishing world now that God Himself had established His kingdom. Instead, Paul was just given some room for counsel and proscribing guidelines concerning dietary laws; how to deal with women, meat for sacrifice, and the like.

The focal point of the first draft of the edition of what in later centuries would be called 'the letters of Paul' is given right in the beginning, following the opening scene with the agreement Paul made with the Arch-Apostles in Jerusalem and the legitimacy of his mission, followed by the conflict concerning Law and Jewish dietary laws in Antioch. Paul openly turns against Kèphas (Simon Peter) and lectures him: 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?'¹⁵

¹⁴ I Thessalonians 2, 9 and II Thessalonians 3, 8.

¹⁵ Galatians 2, 14.

The other pivot is the editors' parallel comment in the expositions on Law and belief in the final chapters of the letter to the Galatians: 'Tell me, you who want to be justified by the Law, are you not listening to the Law?' The text is rather compelling: 'tell me!' The words *ouk akouete* are also quite sharp: you read the Law but do not understand any of it.

A

CHAPTER ONE

FRAGMENTS OF A MISSING WHOLE

The Lord is the One and Eternal. The Greeks and other peoples have many gods and here in Rome are many statues and temples of gods. But in our congregations we recognize only the Living, the Only One, who does not tolerate images.

He delivered Abraham and his people from Ur of the Chaldees, He led them away from the images of fertility and motherhood, into the land.

He delivered Moses and his people from the bondage of Egypt. He led them out of the wilderness and liberated His holy land under Joshua.

He delivered the holy city, Jerusalem, and gave the kingship to David. The son of David built the house of the Lord, the temple in Jerusalem.

Once more he brought them out of exile and slavery in Babylon and gave them the land.

He liberated the country from Syrian rule and ungodliness and restored the royal house. And King Herod the Great restored the temple in the holy city.

The king died and uprisings broke out in Judea which were suppressed by the Romans. The king's sons, Archelaus and Agrippa, came to Rome – 5 years before our era – so that the emperor would settle the disputes about the succession and inheritance. But after Caesar Augustus had given his verdict, a delegation of fifty Jews appeared on behalf of eight thousand men of Judea to complain about the great king and his eldest son, Archelaus, cruel exploiters and brutal murderers of their people. They spoke out against the House of Herod and for more independence.

These Jewish representatives were supported by many Jews living in Rome¹. Augustus summoned the magistrates and his advisors to the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill. There the fifty Jews first walked through the Porticus of the Danaids, with fifty statues out of Numidian yellow marble depicting the naked daughters of Danae and opposite them their fifty lovers. In front of the temple stood the colossal statue of Apollo and in the temple itself they were confronted by an overwhelming wealth of art and religious objects such as the Sibylline books.

The charges of the Jews impressed Augustus. After several days of deliberation, he came up with a statement that harshly rejected Archelaus' claims to his father's kingdom. He was appointed only to the post of *ethnarch* of Judea, the wilderness of Idumenea, and a district in Samaria. In addition, some Greek cities were separated from the kingdom and added to the province of Syria.

It was a severe humiliation for the king, a cruel and lecherous man.



*Coin from Judea with in Greek the name: Herod Archelaus.
(Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem)*

Archelaus neither forgave nor forgot these insults and took bloody revenge in his kingdom. After receiving another Jewish delegation, Augustus deposed him in 6 AD and exiled him to Vienne in Gaul.

¹ Flavius Josephus: *Bellum Judaicum* II. 80-100.

Augustus robbed the country of its independence and made it into a Roman province. He placed Judea under the direct rule of a Roman knight, Coponius².

For the first time in centuries there was no longer a Jewish king in Judea and Jerusalem, and the land of the Eternal was no longer administered in His Name. Coponius ordered a census to impose heavy taxes.

A revolt broke out against these measures, led by Judas the Galilean and the rightful Royal House of David. Judas 'called them cowards if they agreed to pay taxes to the Romans and if they would recognise these new rulers, mortals, instead of the Eternal.'³ During this rebellion, Johosu'ah ben Pandera, in Greek *Jesus Nazoraios*, was born while his parents were fleeing the city of David, Bethlehem, in the mountains of Judea.

After the death of Augustus, Caesar Tiberius did not change Rome's attitude. In 26 AD Tiberius withdrew from Rome and settled on Capri. The actual power was in the hands of Lucius Aelius Seianus, the prefect of the Praetorians.



Coin of Caesar Tiberius. The name of Seianus was removed following the damnatio memoriae in October AD 31.

(Found during excavations of Bibilis, Spain)

² Dio Cassius: *Historia Romana* LV, 27, 6; Flavius Josephus: *Antiquitates Judaicae* XVII, 342-348; Flavius Josephus: *Bellum Judaicum* II, 111.

³ Flavius Josephus: *Bell Jud.* II, 118.

Seianus pursued an anti-Semitic policy: four thousand Jews and adherents of Eastern religions were exiled from Rome to Sardinia in 19 to perish. All eastern influences were cast in a bad light, the images of Isis were thrown into the Tiber under Tiberius. And in AD 26 he sent Pontius Pilate to Judea.

Having arrived there Pilate immediately was tough on the Jews, this provoked three revolts: to start off with he brought images of Caesar Tiberius into the holy city, according to some even within the grounds of the temple of the One.

He also plundered the *Korban*, the temple's treasury, money devoted to the Eternal, to pay for the construction of an aqueduct. And finally he had Joshu'ah han Nosri, God's Anointed, who had entered the holy city as the Son of David and had purified the temple, crucified as a slave⁴.

At the time that the Romans humiliated and executed the Jewish king of the House of David in the spring of 27, the power of King Herod's grandson, Marcus Julius Agrippa, by the Jews commonly referred to as Herod Agrippa, grew in Rome. He was a grandson of Herod the Great.

Seven years before our era his father, Aristoboulos, was killed by Herod. His mother, Berenice, fled with her three-year-old son to Rome and raised the child in the home of Drusus and Antonia. Drusus was the elder brother of Caesar Tiberius. Antonia minor was the grandmother of the future Emperor Caligula. Julius Agrippa received a Hellenistic education. He lived lavishly and from time to time had to flee the city to evade his creditors.

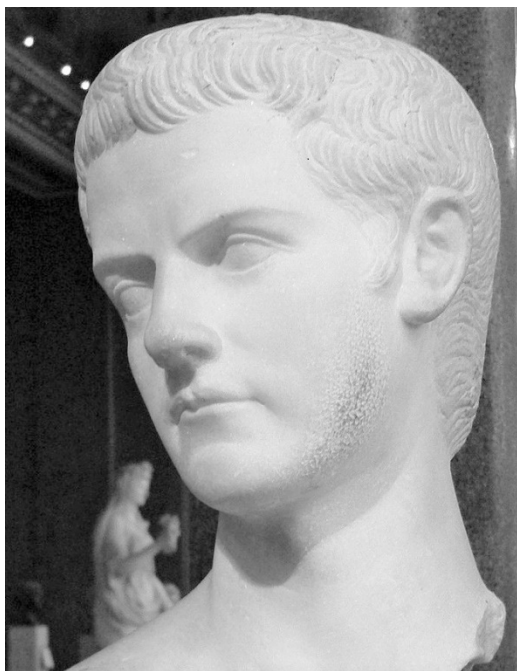
Influential Romans, such as Capito, came to his aid and Antonia also lent him large sums of money. He followed Caesar Tiberius as a friend and advisor to Capri.

In October AD 31, Tiberius re-seized power and had Seianus executed. On the 16th of March AD 37 Tiberius died on Capri and was succeeded by Caesar Gaius Caligula who was a close friend of Julius Agrippa. He bestowed him with some Jewish territories and the title of King of the Jews. Subsequently Caligula sent him to the holy land via Alexandria.

In Alexandria, Agrippa by his defiant attitude stirred up the Alexandrians, they persecuted and murdered many Jews and proclaimed a

⁴ Flavius Josephus: *Bellum Judaicum* II, 169-177 and *Antiq. Jud.* XVIII 3, 3.

naked fool, Karabas, as king of the Jews in the summer of 38. ‘They dragged the wretch to the gymnasium and put him on a stage so that everyone could see him properly. They put a flattened papyrus sheet on his head to serve as a diadem and put a carpet on him as a royal robe. Someone saw a stem of an indigenous plant, papyrus, lying in the street and pushed it into his hand, which was supposed to represent his sceptre. (...) And the surrounding crowd cheered him, addressing him as *Marin* (...)’⁵,’ an Aramaic word for lord or king, by which they intended to mock king Agrippa.



Gaius Caligula, around AD 40. He did not shave himself as a sign of mourning for his sister Drusilla. Louvre, Paris.

The Roman governor did not intervene, on the contrary, he encouraged the riots. Massacres of the Jewish population in Alexandria took place.

⁵ Philo Judaeus: *In Flaccam* II 25-40.

A delegation of the Jews, including Philo of Alexandria, left for Rome to complain to Caligula. In May 40 they stood before the emperor for the first time. The devout Jews were appalled at the insulting and threatening brutality of Caligula and the clique of young men around him. Later in that same summer of 40, Caligula ordered a statue of himself to be erected in the holiest of holies in the temple in Jerusalem.

In late summer, King Julius Agrippa arrived in Rome and succeeded in talking Caligula out of this unimaginable intention. In September, the Alexandrian Jews were at long last heard by the emperor. A few months later on January 24 AD 41 Caligula was assassinated.

Following the news of his death more murder attempts against the Jews took place in Alexandria, whereupon the Jews sent two embassies to the new emperor, Claudius. Claudius had been proclaimed emperor in the Senate.



*Bronze coin with Herod Agrippa and Herod of Chalcis honouring Caesar Claudius or indicating that they received their crowns from the emperor.
(British Museum, London)*

Claudius showed his gratitude by making Agrippa king over Judea, Samaria and Idumeneia as well. Herod the Great's kingdom was thus restored, and in the summer of 41 Agrippa I went to Jerusalem to rule as king of the Jews. However, he fell ill and felt his end approaching. Before his death, in the spring of 44 (or perhaps even later), he had the leaders of

the opposing party, from the House of David, killed. He had Simon and James nailed to the cross⁶. This rivalry stirred up riots throughout the Jewish world — in Judea, Greece, and Rome.

In Rome, Caesar Claudius issued an edict in 49, expelling many Jews from the city. ‘The Jews who were stirred up, driven by Anointed caused constant uproar (...)’.⁷

Around that time, an envoy of God’s Anointed travelled to various Greek cities. Unrest and uproar arose wherever they came. In the very first city, Philippi, where their leader, Paul, was speaking, the magistrate took action after an accusation: ‘These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful to us as Romans to accept or practice.’⁸ They were chased out of the city, but they repeated their insidious words in Thessalonica. They were also charged there: ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also! (...) They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.’⁹ They went on to Corinth but were also banished there following the arrival of the proconsul Gallio.

They also caused an uproar in the capital of Asia, Ephesus. Having been scorned and driven away from Macedonia, Greece, and Asia, they returned to Jerusalem in 55. It was the year that even the son of the high priest was murdered in broad daylight by the zealots. The magistrate imprisoned Paul for two years and then sentenced him to death, whereupon he appealed to the emperor.

For in October 54 Caesar Claudius had died in Rome and was succeeded by the young Caesar Nero, who was assisted by Seneca and Burrus. There was hope for a better regime. In the autumn of 57, this Paul came by sea to Rome and this second trial was led by Afranius Burrus. In 59 this led to the confirmation of the original sentence and the beheading of Paul just outside the walls, *ad aquas salvas*.

Following the death of the last Jewish king the Romans had returned to direct rule in Judea and the holy city of Jerusalem. Opposition against these foreign rulers grew fiercer and more murderous every day. In 62 things got out of hand, first in Jerusalem and two years later also in Rome.

⁶ Acts 12, 1-5 and Flavius Josephus: *Antq. Jud.* XX, 102.

⁷ Acts 18, 2 and Suetonius: *Divus Claudius* 25, 4: *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Romae expulit.*

⁸ Acts 16, 20-21.

⁹ Acts 17, 6-7.

After the unexpected sudden death of Festus, the Roman governor, and before the arrival of his successor Albinus, the high priest Hannan and the high priest of the people, James the Righteous, *Ja'aqob Saddika*, came into violent conflict.

James the Righteous, the brother of God's Anointed, entered the temple in full regalia as high priest. Hannan had him beaten to death in the square of the holy temple. When the new governor, Albinus, sent by Nero, arrived in Judea, he forced Agrippa II to discharge his high priest, Hannan, who had been appointed only three months earlier¹⁰. *Divide et impera* was the motto of the Romans. There was division and strife too among the Jews in Rome, between the followers of the House of Herod and those of the House of David. Moreover, the Roman Jews were also annoyed about the evil role the Romans played in all this.

For the Jews the murder of the Righteous One, brother of God's Anointed, was the last straw. Too many of their leaders had been executed: first the leader of the rebellion, Judas the Galilean; then the beheading of John the Baptist; the crucifixion of God's Anointed; the deaths of Simon the Kèphas and James; the beheading of Paul – alternately by the Romans and the kings of the House of Herod – and finally James the Righteous. It caused the rebellion, the war and the fall of Jerusalem and the temple of God¹¹.

On the night of June 18, AD 64, the great fire of Rome was lit in the shops near the Circus Maximus opposite the Jewish quarter at the Porta Capena. The followers of God's Anointed were blamed. Nero, Vespasian, and Titus believed this and took severe measures against the Jews.

First came the great fire of Rome, then the brutal persecution of the followers of the Anointed in Rome by Nero. Then came the rebellion in Judea and Galilee and in Rome the call for the soldiers to follow Vespasian. Especially the tenth legion, with many soldiers from Rome and the surrounding area, would actively fight against the Jews. Young Jewish soldiers maimed themselves in order not to be sent against their own people. Mark, the evangelist, was known by the cognomen *Kolobodaktulos* the stump finger, the deserter¹².

¹⁰ Flavius Josephus: *Ant. Jud.* XX, 197-203.

¹¹ Hegesippus quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea: *Historia ecclesiastica* II xxiii 19.

¹² *Marcus (...) qui kolobodactylos est nominatus*, in the anti-Marcionistic prologue of the gospel.



Inscription of the tenth legion, Legio X Fretensis in the crusader's church in Abu Gosh, Israel.

During this war a revolt against Caesar Nero broke out. He committed suicide and four army commanders in succession became emperor. During this civil war due to arson, the temple of *Jupiter Maximus Optimus Capitolinus* burned down completely on December 19, AD 69.

Less than seven months later, in September 70, the holy city was taken and the temple of the Eternal went up in flames. On the night of the ninth to the tenth of the month of Loüs, the Romans heard how the god himself opened the gates of his temple with a loud noise and left his house on earth¹³. That is what the soldiers said, but the Eternal is faithful.

In December, the emperor Flavius Vespasianus returned to the capital of the Roman Empire as emperor. Together with his son Titus, he held a grandiose triumph in June 71, in which, alongside the leaders of the Jewish revolt and many, many Jewish prisoners of war, the torn veil of the temple, the golden table for the offered loaves, the golden seven-armed candlestick and the silver trumpets were blasphemously led through the streets and theatres of the city.

¹³ Tacitus: *Historiae*. V 13



The triumphal arch of Titus in the Circus Maximus as it is depicted on the later arch on the Velius.

The pompous triumphal procession drew all inhabitants of Rome and nearly a million spectators watched the wretched Jewish prisoners of war being whipped on. The procession led through the Circus Maximus, where the triumphal arch of Titus had been erected on the spot where the great fire of Rome had been started five years earlier, directly opposite the Jewish quarter behind Porta Capena. An inscription triumphantly stated that Caesar Titus 'subdued the Jewish people and destroyed Jerusalem.'¹⁴

¹⁴ The text of the inscription was included in the Itinerarium of Einsiedeln, CIL 6, 944: *Iudaeorum domuit et urbem Hierusolyman*.

Our Jewish brothers were sent to the mines to dig and die. Daily we saw them toiling as slaves rebuilding the temples, the one of Optimus Maximus the supreme Jovis Pater and on the temple of peace, that cruel peace, and at the nadir of cruelty, building the Amphitheatrum Flavianum, the Colosseum, where the last survivors would be fed ad bestias, murdered for the amusement of their rulers, as subjected slaves.

No longer were we Jews allowed to donate the annual didrachm for of the temple of the Eternal in the holy city, but we were forced to pay the fiscus judaicus for our enslavement by the Lord of rulers.

We Jews, we prayed and sang; '[We] will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness (...).'¹⁵ These were the plagues in Egypt with which the Eternal struck and saved us from slavery. This is what we sang about in slavery in Babylon, from which the Eternal delivered us. And now ...? We sang 'We (...) eat the bread of anxious toil,' but trusted in the Lord whose House stands for Eternity'¹⁶. But had He not left His House, the temple in the holy city, abandoned His land and people? Has his promise not been kept? The Eternal, the Faithful.

What were we to tell our sons at the approaching Passover, the feast of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt? 'Father,' they will ask, 'why are we celebrating this feast? Now, as we see our people daily in bondage, worn out and doomed to death. Now that the temple was destroyed and we have to build the temple of the vanquishers on the Capitol?'

But we Jews held on to the covenant and the promise: 'He has torn us that He may heal us; He has struck us down and He will bind us. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before His Presence.' Thus said the prophet Hosea'¹⁷.

¹⁵ Psalm 91, 5-6.

¹⁶ Psalm 127, 1-3.

¹⁷ Hosea 6, 1-3. In the liturgy on Good Friday.