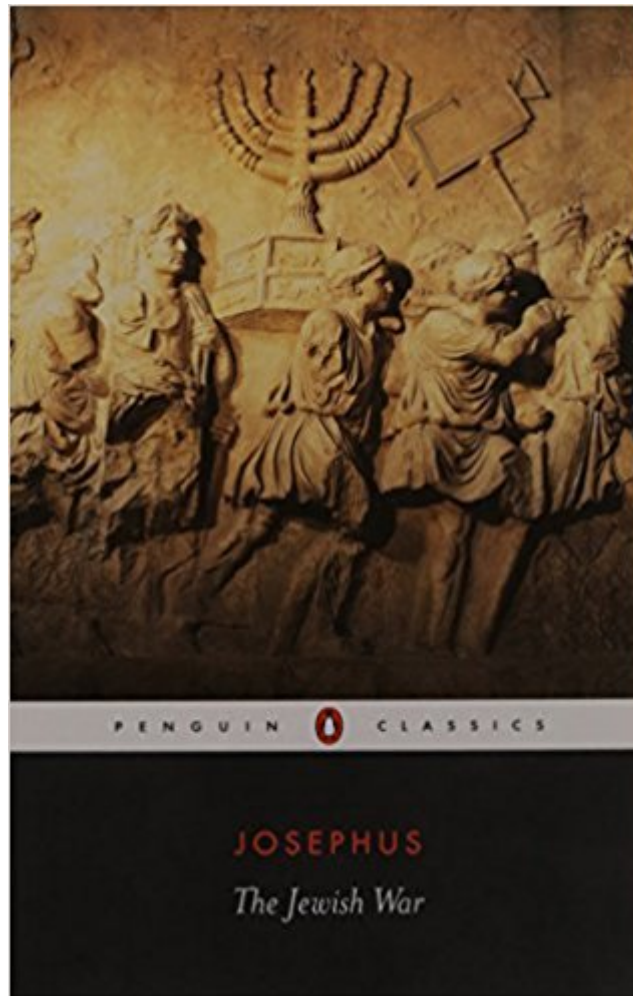




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The Jewish War: Revised Edition (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Josephus's account of a war marked by treachery and atrocity is a superbly detailed and evocative record of the Jewish rebellion against Rome between AD 66 and 70. Originally a rebel leader, Josephus changed sides after he was captured to become a Rome-appointed negotiator, and so was uniquely placed to observe these turbulent events, from the siege of Jerusalem to the final heroic resistance and mass suicides at Masada. His account provides much of what we know about the history of the Jews under Roman rule, with vivid portraits of such key figures as the Emperor Vespasian and Herod the Great. Often self-justifying and divided in its loyalties, *The Jewish War* nevertheless remains one of the most immediate accounts of war, its heroism and its horrors, ever written.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Greek (translation)

Josephus was born in 37 AD. He was one of the Jewish leaders at the time of the revolt of the Jews in the reign of Nero. His two most important works are *The Jewish War* and *The Jewish Antiquities*.

The book is a fantastic historical account of the Jewish struggle against The Roman Empire. It is my second time to read it . The first time was several years ago. I have enjoyed it more this time around

The Jewish people rose up against mighty Rome in 66 A.D.; and for seven improbable years, against all odds, they defied the seemingly invincible legions of the Roman Empire. It is an epic story – one of courage and folly combined – and Flavius Josephus tells it well in his book "The Roman-Jewish War." Josephus, who was born in 37 A.D. in what was then Roman Judea, was in his late twenties and early thirties when the events of the Roman-Jewish War unfolded; he wrote his history of the war around 75 A.D., shortly after the war's end, when his memories of the war's blood and horror were no doubt quite vivid. And he quite literally saw the war from both sides – initially a leader of the Jewish resistance, he decided after being captured by the Romans that the war was unwinnable, and spent the rest of the war as a sort of hostage negotiator, trying to convince his fellow Jewish rebels to lay down their arms. It was a turn of events that put him in a uniquely propitious position to tell this story. The early passages of "The Roman-Jewish War" go all the way back to Herod's predecessors in Judea, and Josephus quickly proceeds to a consideration of the rule of Herod himself – Herod I, or – Herod the Great, – as he no doubt liked to call himself. "Game of Thrones" fans may derive a familiar frisson from Josephus' chapters on Herod's murder of his wife Mariamme and various other family members including his heir Antipater. Small wonder, with the members of the ruling family scheming against each other and killing each other off, that little practical administration of Judea was getting done, or that the Judea of that time was a chaotic place; and when Rome instituted direct rule, the stage was set for a full-scale uprising by the Jewish people. The Roman-Jewish War began toward the end of the reign of the emperor Nero, and continued through the chaos of 69 A.D., the – Year of the Four Emperors, – when Galba, Otho, and Vitellius each ruled for a short time before being overthrown, until the emperor Vespasian finally established some stability at the capital. Josephus, who befriended both Vespasian and Vespasian's son Titus (leading Roman general throughout the war, and a future emperor himself), unsurprisingly speaks of both these Roman leaders in terms of the highest praise, as when he writes how wise it was, how divinely inspired, that during the political turmoil at Rome Vespasian and Titus – held up operations against the Jews, feeling that while they were so anxious about things at home the invasion of a foreign country would be inopportune – (p. 274). Josephus no doubt knew that he would be accused by some of his former fellow rebels of having turned traitor. It is almost certainly for that reason that Josephus emphasizes his attempts to keep the Jewish people from bringing destruction upon themselves, as when he remonstrates with the rebels during the Siege of Jerusalem: – Who doesn't know the writings of the old prophets and the oracle pronounced against this unhappy city and now about to be fulfilled? They

foretold the day of her fall. And aren't the City and Temple full of your dead bodies? It is God then, God Himself, who is bringing with the Romans fire to purge the Temple and is blotting out the City, brimful of corruption, as if it had never been. (p. 345). It is scarring to read the passages from "The Roman-Jewish War" that chronicle the final fall of Jerusalem to the Romans and the destruction of the Second Temple: "As the flames shot into the air the Jews sent up a cry that matched the calamity and dashed to the rescue, with no thought now of saving their lives or husbanding their strength; for that which hitherto they had guarded so devotedly was disappearing before their eyes." (p. 357). It is comparably painful to read of the looting of the Temple, with its irreplaceable and sacred artifacts of what was already, in 70 A.D., a millennia-old faith. "Most of the spoils that were carried were heaped up indiscriminately, but more prominent than all the rest were those captured in the Temple at Jerusalem." (p. 359). And then there is Josephus' account of the mass suicide of the last Jewish defenders in the fortress at Masada. Like Herodotus and Thucydides before him, Josephus will quote at length a masterpiece of rhetoric, whether he was there to hear a particular speech or not. In this case, the speaker is one Eleazar; and after acknowledging that the Jewish war against Rome failed in part because of infighting among the Jewish rebels, he speaks as follows: "For those wrongs let us pay the penalty not to our bitterest enemies, the Romans, but to God: it will be easier to bear. Let our wives die unabused, our children without knowledge of slavery: after that, let us do each other an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious winding-sheet. One thing only let us spare: our store of food: it will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished, not through want but because, as we resolved at the beginning, we chose death rather than slavery." (p. 399) When I read this passage, I thought of how, for many years, members of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) swore at Masada an oath that "Masada shall not fall again. And it never has, and I don't think it ever will." For this Penguin Books edition of "The Roman-Jewish War," E. Mary Smallwood of Cambridge University has provided helpful footnotes, along with appendices, maps, and a chronological table of events of that time. It was 1,878 years, it occurs to me, between the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948. Josephus' "The Roman-Jewish War" captures well the unconquerable spirit that sustained the Jewish people through two thousand years of exile and persecution, until their homeland could be restored.

Highly recommended to understand the current crises of the middle east and prophecy of the biblical book of Revelation. Josephus was a soldier and historian after the fact. He does a good job in keeping as neutral as one could at that time and to his credit by the survival and popularity of his writings at that time and even to this day. A must read by any student of biblical history.

As I stated the print was way too small. Perhaps people with better eyesight might enjoy it but I don't have the time or patience to try to struggle with print this small.

This was recommended to me during the height of the turmoil in Lebanon in the late 70's, early 80's, by a friend who lived parttime in Beirut. He'd said it would do a great deal to explain the antagonism and tension between Israel and the Palestinians and Arabs. And, it did! Fascinating to read. BTW, this was a replacement for me, since I'd loaned my first copy to someone and they liked it so well that they kept it!

Josephus was one of the greatest Jewish historians of all time. He tells the true story. The numbers used and the casualty figures are greatly exaggerated. In fact the numbers are in the range of one to ten in scope. However, the rich history and detail is amazing. It is what really happened in Jerusalem and surrounding area in the Roman war against the Jews in 70ad.

haven't finished reading this one - can only read a few pages at a time to absorb everything being said and relate to what I had already known - but very interesting reading more than what the Christian Bible states and as written by a considered Jewish/Roman historian

I had read the book in my youth and wanted to read it again though I am now middle aged. However, I have given up on it as the type is so small that reading it gives me a headache. I am going to have to get a kindle.

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