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of

Tacitus

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TACITUS HISTORIES

(Vol. III)

Book V

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1 ¹ At the beginning of this same year ¹ Titus Caesar, who had been selected by his father to complete the subjugation of Judea, ² and who had already won distinction as a soldier while both were still private citizens, began to enjoy greater power and reputation, for provinces and armies and vied with one another in enthusiasm for him. Moreover, in his own conduct, wishing

to be thought greater than his fortune, he always showed himself dignified and energetic in the field; by his affable address he called forth devotion, and he often mingled with the common soldiers both at work or on the march without impairing his position as general. He found awaiting him in Judea three legions, Vespasian's old troops, the Fifth, the Tenth, and the Fifteenth. He reinforced these with the Twelfth from Syria and with some soldiers from the Twenty-second and the Third which he brought from Alexandria; these troops were accompanied by twenty cohorts of allied infantry, eight squadrons of cavalry, as well as by the princes Agrippa and Sohaemus, the auxiliaries sent by King Antiochus,³ and by a strong contingent of Arabs, who hated the Jews with all that hatred that is common among neighbours; there were besides many Romans who had been prompted to leave the capital and Italy by the hope that each entertained of securing the prince's favour while he was yet free from engagements. With these forces Titus entered the enemy's land: his troops advanced in strict order, he reconnoitred at every step and was always ready for battle; not far from Jerusalem he pitched camp.

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2 ¹ However, as I am about to describe the last days of a famous city, it seems proper for me to give some account of its origin.⁴

It is said that the Jews were originally exiles from the island of Crete who settled in the farthest parts of Libya at the time when Saturn had been deposed and expelled by Jove. An argument in favour of this is derived from the name: there is a famous mountain in Crete called Ida, and hence the inhabitants were called the Idaei, which was later lengthened into the barbarous form Iudaei. Some hold that in the reign of Isis the superfluous population of Egypt, under the leadership of Hierosolymus and Iuda, discharged itself on the neighbouring lands; many others think that they were an Egyptian stock, which in the reign of Cepheus was forced to migrate by fear and hatred. Still others report that they were Assyrian refugees, a landless people, who first got control of a part of Egypt, then later they had their own cities and lived in the Hebrew territory and the nearer parts of Syria. Still others say that the Jews are of illustrious origin, being the Solymi, a people celebrated in Homer's poems,⁵ who founded a city and gave it the name Hierosolyma, formed from their own.

3 ¹ Most authors agree that once during a plague in Egypt which caused bodily disfigurement, King Bocchoris⁶ approached the oracle of Ammon⁷

and asked for a remedy, whereupon he was told to purge his kingdom and to transport this race into other lands, since it was hateful to the gods. So the Hebrews were searched out and gathered together; then, being abandoned in the desert, while all others lay idle and weeping, one only of the exiles, Moses by name, warned them not to hope for help from gods or men, for they were deserted by both, but to trust to themselves, regarding as a guide sent from heaven the one whose assistance should first give them escape from their present distress. They agreed, and then set out on their journey in utter ignorance, but trusting to chance. Nothing caused them so much distress as scarcity of water, and in fact they had already fallen exhausted over the plain nigh unto death, when a herd of wild asses moved from their pasturage to a rock that was shaded by a grove of trees. Moses followed them, and, conjecturing the truth from the grassy ground, discovered abundant streams of water. This relieved them, and they then marched six days continuously, and on the seventh seized a country, expelling the former inhabitants; there they founded a city and dedicated a temple.⁸

4 ¹ To establish his influence over this people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor. They dedicated, in a shrine, a statue of that creature whose guidance enabled them to put an end to their wandering and thirst,⁹ sacrificing a ram, apparently in derision of Ammon.¹⁰ They likewise offer the ox, because the Egyptians worship Apis. They abstain from pork, in recollection of a plague, for the scab to which this animal is subject once afflicted them. By frequent fasts even now they bear witness to the long hunger with which they were once distressed, and the unleavened Jewish bread is still employed in memory of the haste with which they seized the grain.¹¹ They say that they first chose to rest on the seventh day because that day ended their toils; but after a time they were led by the charms of indolence to give over the seventh year as well to inactivity.¹² Others say that this is done in honour of Saturn,¹³ whether it be that the primitive elements of their religion were given by the Idaeans, who, according to tradition, were expelled with Saturn and became the founders of the Jewish race, or is due to the fact that, of the seven planets that rule the fortunes of mankind, Saturn moves in the highest orbit and has the greatest potency; and that many of the heavenly bodies traverse their paths and courses in multiples of seven.¹⁴

5 ¹ Whatever their origin, these rites are maintained by their antiquity: the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples,¹⁵ renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity. They sit apart at meals, and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference. Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice, and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account. However, they take thought to increase their numbers; for they regard it as a crime to kill any late-born child,¹⁶ and they believe that the souls of those who are killed in battle or by the executioner are immortal: hence comes their passion for begetting children, and their scorn of death. They bury the body rather than burn it, thus following the Egyptians' custom; they likewise bestow the same care on the dead, and hold the same belief about the world below; but their ideas of heavenly things are quite the opposite. The Egyptians worship many animals and monstrous images; the Jews conceive of one god only, and that with the mind alone: they regard as impious those who make from perishable materials representations of gods in man's image; that supreme and eternal being is to them incapable of representation and without end. Therefore they set up no statues in their cities, still less in their temples; this flattery is not paid their kings, nor this honour given to the Caesars. But since their priests used to chant to the accompaniment of pipes and cymbals and to wear garlands of ivy, and because a golden vine was found in their temple, some have thought that they were devotees of Father Liber, the conqueror of the East, in spite of the incongruity of their customs. For Liber established festive rites of a joyous nature, while the ways of the Jews are preposterous and mean.

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6 ¹ Their land is bounded by Arabia on the east, Egypt lies on the south, on the west are Phoenicia and the sea, and toward the north the people enjoy a wide prospect over Syria.¹⁷ The inhabitants are healthy and hardy. Rains are rare; the soil is fertile; its products are like ours, save that the balsam and

the palm also grow there. The palm is a tall and handsome tree; the balsam¹⁸ a mere shrub: if a branch, when swollen with sap, is pierced with steel, the veins shrivel up; so a piece of stone or a potsherd is used to open them; the juice is employed by physicians. Of the mountains, Lebanon rises to the greatest height, and is in fact a marvel, for in the midst of the excessive heat its summit is shaded by trees and covered with snow; it likewise is the source and supply of the river Jordan.¹⁹ This river does not empty into the sea, but after flowing with volume undiminished through two lakes is lost in the third.²⁰ The last is a lake of great size: it is like the sea, but its water has a nauseous taste, and its offensive odour is injurious to those who live near it. Its waters are not moved by the wind, and neither fish nor water-fowl can live there. Its lifeless waves bear up whatever is thrown upon them as on a solid surface; all swimmers, whether skilled or not, are buoyed up by them. At a certain season of the year the sea throws up bitumen, and experience has taught the natives how to collect this, as she teaches all arts. Bitumen is by nature a dark fluid which coagulates when sprinkled with vinegar, and swims on the surface. Those whose business it is, catch hold of it with their hands and haul it on shipboard: then with no artificial aid the bitumen flows in and loads the ship until the stream is cut off. Yet you cannot use bronze or iron to cut the bituminous stream; it shrinks from blood or from a cloth stained with a woman's menses. Such is the story told by ancient writers, but those who are acquainted with the country aver that the floating masses of bitumen are driven by the winds or drawn by hand to shore, where later, after they have been dried by vapours from the earth or by the heat of the sun, they are split like timber or stone with axes and wedges.

7 ¹ Not far from this lake is a plain which, according to report, was once fertile and the site of great cities, but which was later devastated by lightning; and it is said that traces of this disaster still exist there, and that the very ground looks burnt and has lost its fertility. In fact, all the plants there, whether wild or cultivated, turn black, become sterile, and seem to wither into dust, either in leaf or in flower or after they have reached their usual mature form. Now for my part, although I should grant that famous cities were once destroyed by fire from heaven, I still think that it is the exhalations from the lake that infect the ground and poison the atmosphere about this district, and that this is the reason that crops and fruits decay, since both soil and climate are deleterious.²¹ The river Belus also empties into the

Jewish Sea; around its mouth a kind of sand is gathered, which when mixed with soda is fused into glass. The beach is of moderate size, but it furnishes an inexhaustible supply.²²

8 ¹ A great part of Judea is covered with scattered villages, but there are some towns also; Jerusalem is the capital of the Jews. In it was a temple possessing enormous riches.²³ The first line of fortifications protected the city, the next the palace, and the innermost wall the temple.²⁴ Only a Jew might approach its doors, and all save the priests were forbidden to cross the threshold. While the East was under the dominion of the Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, the Jews were regarded as the meanest of their subjects: but after the Macedonians gained supremacy,²⁵ King Antiochus endeavoured to abolish Jewish superstition and to introduce Greek civilization; the war with the Parthians, however, prevented his improving this basest of peoples; for it was exactly at that time that Arsaces had revolted.²⁶ Later on, since the power of Macedon had waned, the Parthians were not yet come to their strength, and the Romans were far away, the Jews selected their own kings.²⁷ These in turn were expelled by the fickle mob; but recovering their throne by force of arms,²⁸ they banished citizens, destroyed towns, killed brothers, wives, and parents, and dared essay every other kind of royal crime without hesitation; but they fostered the national superstition, for they had assumed the priesthood to support their civil authority.

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9 ¹ The first Roman to subdue the Jews and set foot in their temple by right of conquest was Gnaeus Pompey;²⁹ thereafter it was a matter of common knowledge that there were no representations of the gods within, but that the place was empty and the secret shrine contained nothing. The walls of Jerusalem were razed, but the temple remained standing. Later, in the time of our civil wars, when these eastern provinces had fallen into the hands of Mark Antony, the Parthian prince, Pacorus, seized Judea, but he was slain by Publius Ventidius, and the Parthians were thrown back across the Euphrates:³⁰ the Jews were subdued by Gaius Sosius.³¹ Antony gave the throne to Herod, and Augustus, after his victory, increased his power. After Herod's death, a certain Simon³² assumed the name of king without waiting for Caesar's decision. He, however, was put to death by Quintilius Varus, governor of Syria; the Jews were repressed; and the kingdom was divided into three parts and given to Herod's sons.³³ Under Tiberius all was quiet. Then, when Caligula ordered the Jews to set up his statue in their temple,

they chose rather to resort to arms, but the emperor's death put an end to their uprising. The princes now being dead or reduced to insignificance, Claudius made Judea a province and entrusted it to Roman knights or to freedmen; one of the latter, Antonius Felix, practised every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of king with all the instincts of a slave;³⁴ he had married Drusilla, the grand-daughter of Cleopatra and Antony, and so was Antony's grandson-in-law, while Claudius was Antony's grandson.

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10 ¹ Still the Jews' patience lasted until Gessius Florus became procurator:³⁵ in his time war began. When Cestius Gallus, governor of Syria, tried to stop it, he suffered varied fortunes and met defeat more often than he gained victory. On his death, whether in the course of nature or from vexation, Nero sent out Vespasian, who, aided by his good fortune and reputation as well as by his excellent subordinates, within two summers occupied with his victorious army the whole of the level country and all the cities except Jerusalem. The next year was taken up with civil war, and thus was passed in inactivity so far as the Jews were concerned. When peace had been secured throughout Italy, foreign troubles began again; and the fact that the Jews alone had failed to surrender increased our resentment; at the same time, having regard to all the possibilities and hazards of a new reign, it seemed expedient for Titus to remain with the army.

11 ¹ Therefore, as I have said above,³⁶ Titus pitched his camp before the walls of Jerusalem and displayed his legions in battle array: the Jews formed their line close beneath their walls, being thus ready to advance if successful, and having a refuge at hand in case they were driven back. Some horse and light-armed foot were sent against them, but fought indecisively; later the enemy retired, and during the following days they engaged in many skirmishes before their gates until at last their continual defeats drove them within their walls. The Romans now turned to preparations for an assault; for the soldiers thought it beneath their dignity to wait for the enemy to be starved out, and so they began to clamour for danger, part being prompted by bravery, but many were moved by their savage natures and their desire for booty. Titus himself had before his eyes a vision of Rome, its wealth and its pleasures, and he felt that if Jerusalem did not fall at once, his enjoyment of them was delayed. But the city stands on an eminence, and the Jews had defended it with works and fortifications sufficient to protect even level ground; for the two hills that rise to a great height had been included within

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walls that had been skillfully built, projecting out or bending in so as to put the flanks of an assailing body under fire.³⁷ The rocks terminated in sheer cliffs, and towers rose to a height of sixty feet where the hill assisted the fortifications, and in the valleys they reached one hundred and twenty; they presented a wonderful sight, and appeared of equal height when viewed from a distance.³⁸ An inner line of walls had been built around the palace, and on a conspicuous height stands Antony's Tower, so named by Herod in honour of Mark Antony.³⁹

12 ¹ The temple was built like a citadel, with walls of its own, which were constructed with more care and effort than any of the rest; the very colonnades about the temple made a splendid defence. Within the enclosure is an ever-flowing spring;⁴⁰ in the hills are subterraneous excavations, with pools and cisterns for holding rain-water. The founders of the city had foreseen that there would be many wars because the ways of their people differed so from those of the neighbours: therefore they had built at every point as if they expected a long siege; and after the city had been stormed by Pompey, their fears and experience taught them much. Moreover, profiting by the greed displayed during the reign of Claudius, they had bought the privilege of fortifying the city, and in time of peace had built walls as if for war. The population at this time had been increased by streams of rabble that flowed in from the other captured cities,⁴¹ for the most desperate rebels had taken refuge here, and consequently sedition was the more rife. There were three generals, three armies: the outermost and largest circuit of the walls was held by Simon, the middle of the city by John, and the temple was guarded by Eleazar.⁴² John and Simon were strong in numbers and equipment, Eleazar had the advantage of position: between these three there was constant fighting, treachery, and arson, and a great store of grain was consumed. Then John got possession of the temple by sending a party, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to slay Eleazar and his troops. So the citizens were divided into two factions until, at the approach of the Romans, foreign war produced concord.

13 ¹ Prodigies had indeed occurred, but to avert them either by victims or by vows is held unlawful by a people which, though prone to superstition, is opposed to all propitiatory rites.⁴³ Contending hosts were seen meeting in the skies, arms flashed, and suddenly the temple was illumined with fire from the clouds. Of a sudden the doors of the shrine opened and a super-

human voice cried: "The gods are departing": at the same moment the mighty stir of their going was heard.⁴⁴ Few interpreted these omens as fearful; the majority firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judea should possess the world.⁴⁵ This mysterious prophecy had in reality pointed to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, as is the way of human ambition, interpreted these great destinies in their own favour, and could not be turned to the truth even by adversity. We have heard that the total number of the besieged of every age and both sexes was six hundred thousand; there were arms for all who could use them, and the number ready to fight was larger than could have been anticipated from the total population. Both men and women showed the same determination; and if they were to be forced to change their home, they feared life more than death.

Such was the city and people against which Titus Caesar now proceeded; since the nature of the ground did not allow him to assault or employ any sudden operations, he decided to use earthworks and mantlets; the legions were assigned to their several tasks, and there was a respite of fighting until they made ready every device for storming a town that the ancients had ever employed or modern ingenuity invented.

The Loeb Editor's Notes:

¹ 70 A.D.



² Cf. II.4; IV.51.



³ Agrippa was prince of Trachonitis and Galilee; Sohaemus, king of Sophene and prince of Emesa in Syria; while Antiochus was king of Commagene and of a part of Cilicia. *Cf.* II.81.



⁴ Tacitus in this brief and somewhat confused account of the Jews apparently followed the Alexandrian historians, Chaeremon and Lysimachus.



⁵ *Il.* VI.184; *Od.* V.282.



⁶ King Bocchoris reigned in the eighth century B.C., whereas the exodus seems to have taken place about five centuries earlier. But the account of the exodus as given in the Old Testament requires much revision in the light of modern historical scholarship. *Vid. Cambridge Ancient History*, II, 352 ff.



⁷ The famous Egyptian oracle in the oasis Siwah, in the Libyan desert.



⁸ *Cf.* the story in *Genesis* with this fantastic account, which Tacitus took chiefly from Lysimachus.



⁹ That is, an ass. The same charge of worshipping an ass was frequently made against the Christians later.



¹⁰ The Egyptian god was represented in art with a ram's horns.



¹¹ Cf. *Exod.* xii.15-20, 34-39.



¹² Cf. *Deut.* v.15; *Levit.* xxv.4.



¹³ The seventh day being Saturn's day.



¹⁴ Cf. *Dio Cass.* XXXVII.18 f.



¹⁵ The proselytes, whose contributions were important. The tribute amounted to two drachmae a head each year, according to Josephus, *Bell. Iud.* VII.218 (Niese).



¹⁶ The word here used, "**agnatus**," means a child born after the father had made his will, or one that was not desired. Cf. *Germ.* 19.



¹⁷ Looking from Lebanon, over Coele-Syria.



¹⁸ Famed for its medicinal qualities and fragrance. *Strabo* XVI 763; *Pliny*

XII.111.



¹⁹ The source of the Jordan is on Mt. Hermon, which Tacitus apparently identifies with Lebanon.



²⁰ The marshy Lake Merom, then Gennesareth, and finally the Dead Sea.



²¹ With this description compare that of Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* IV.8.4; Strabo XVI 763 f.; and Pliny, *N. H.* V.71 f., VII.65.



²² Cf. Pliny, *NH* XXXVI.190 ff. The river Belus (Naaman), which rises in the highlands of Galilee and empties in the Mediterranean near St. Jean d'Acre, really belongs to Phoenicia.



²³ It will be observed that Tacitus is writing after the destruction of the temple.



²⁴ Tacitus is somewhat inexact here, for the walls were not concentric.



²⁵ The Seleucid dynasty is meant.



²⁶ It was under Antiochus II (260-245 B.C.) that Arsaces revolted; but Tacitus may be confusing the revolt of Arsaces with the Maccabean war of 167-164 B.C.



²⁷ The Hasmonean line.



²⁸ This may refer to the war between King Alexander and the Pharisees that began in 92 B.C. and lasted for six years; or to the struggle for the throne that followed on the death of Alexander's widow, Salome, in 70 B.C.



²⁹ In 63 B.C.



³⁰ Pacorus advanced on Judea in 40 B.C., but two years later he was killed.



³¹ Both Ventidius and Sosius were lieutenants of Antony. Aided by Sosius, Herod defeated the last of the Maccabees in 37 B.C., and thenceforth the throne of Judea was held by princes friendly to Rome.



³² One of Herod's former slaves.



³³ Archilaus, as Ethnarch, ruled Judea, southern Idumea and northern Samaria; Herod Antipas, as Tetrarch, had Galilee and Perea; while Philip, as

Tetrarch, received the district east of the Jordan.



³⁴ Antonius Felix, the brother of Claudius's notorious favourite Pallas, was procurator of Judea 52-60 according to *Josephus, Ant. XX.7.1*, but seems to have governed the southern half before 52. Cf. *Tacitus, Ann. XII.54*.



³⁵ Procurator 64-66 A.D.



³⁶ In chap. i.



³⁷ The two hills meant are apparently Acra and Bezetha, which were included within Herod's wall.



³⁸ The outer circuit of fortifications had 90 towers; there were in all 164, according to *Josephus, Bell. Iud. V.4.3*.



³⁹ The palace stood on Zion, the temple on Moriah. At the north-west corner of the temple enclosure Herod built Antony's Tower.



⁴⁰ It is possible, but not probable, that Tacitus means the Pool of Siloam; for the context seems to show that he is thinking of the temple.



⁴¹ *i.e.* taken by Vespasian and Titus in 67 and 68 A.D.



⁴² Simon had carried on guerilla warfare east of the Jordan, but had been called in by the Idumean party in 68 A.D., when he was greeted as a saviour by the people; John of Gischala headed the Galilean zealots; and Eleazar led the patriotic war party.



⁴³ *Cf. Jerem. x.2:* Thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the heathen are dismayed at them.

The word **religiones** probably refers to the formal ceremonies by which the Romans warded off (**procurare**) the evil effect of prodigies; but it may have a wider connotation here.



⁴⁴ *Cf. Verg. Aen. II.351 f.; excessere omnes adytis arisque relictis / di quibus imperium hoc steterat;* and the remarks by *Macrob., Sat. III.9* on these verses. Josephus, *Bell. Iud. VI.299* (Niese) relates that at Pentecost the priests heard repeatedly a cry from the innermost part of the temple: μεταβαίνομεν ἐντε-
ῦθεν.



⁴⁵ *Cf. Dan. ii.44; Suet. Vesp. 4.*

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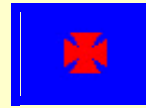
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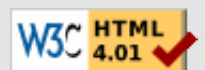
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