



VIEW NORTHWEST: JOTAPATA SITS ATOP THE BROWN HILL IN THE UPPER CENTER OF THE PHOTO. THE VALLEY LEADS SOUTHEAST TO KHIRBET QANA, OR CANA OF GALILEE, WHERE JESUS TURNED WATER INTO WINE (SEE JOHN 2).

BELOW (VIEW WEST): THIS PHOTO LOOKS BACK AT THE VALLEY LEADING FROM JOTAPATA TO KHIRBET QANA (SEE THE PHOTO ABOVE). I TOOK IT STANDING ATOP KHIRBET QANA AFTER HIKING THE TRAIL FROM JOTAPATA.





VIEW SOUTH: TEL YODFAT (UPPER RIGHT). THE DIRT ROAD LEADS TO A TRAIL THAT WINDS TO THE TOP OF THE TEL AND THE EXCAVATIONS. FROM THERE YOU HAVE A WONDERFUL VIEW OF THE VALLEY THAT RUNS TO CANA OF GALILEE.

JOTAPATA (YODFAT)

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 89)

The ancient city was established during the Hellenistic period (fourth–third centuries BC). It became a Jewish city after the Hasmoneans began extending their influence into Galilee (see “Historical Sketch” in *Blessed Pilgrimage*, vol. 2).

FIRST JEWISH REVOLT AGAINST ROME (66 AD)

The oppressive acts of the Roman procurator Gessius Florus (64–66 AD) led to events that signaled the start of the Jewish-Roman War. In retaliation for the killing of “above twenty thousand Jews” at Caesarea, “the whole nation was greatly enraged . . . and laid waste the villages of the Syrians, and their neighbouring cities.”¹ The effects of the revolt reached as far as Damascus and Alexandria (Egypt). After suspending the daily sacrifice for the emperor in Jerusalem, an act “tantamount to an open declaration of revolt against the Romans,”² Jewish rebels destroyed the Roman garrison and set up their own government. The defense of Galilee was given to Josephus son of Matthias, the future historian.³ The emperor Nero gave the task of subduing the revolt to the Roman General Vespasian.

VESPASIAN IN LOWER GALILEE

After Vespasian arrived at Acco (named Ptolemais by Alexander the Great), emissaries from Sepphoris came *asking* for a Roman garrison. Sepphoris, “the strongest city of Galilee,”⁴ was only 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) north of Nazareth. It had been pro-Roman since the rebellions that followed the death of Herod the Great (see “Sepphoris” on page 119). The German historian Emil Schürer provided the following background:



VIEW NORTH: JOSEPHUS AND SOME OF HIS FOLLOWERS ESCAPED THE ROMANS BY HIDING IN CAVES LIKE THIS ONE ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF JOTAPATA.

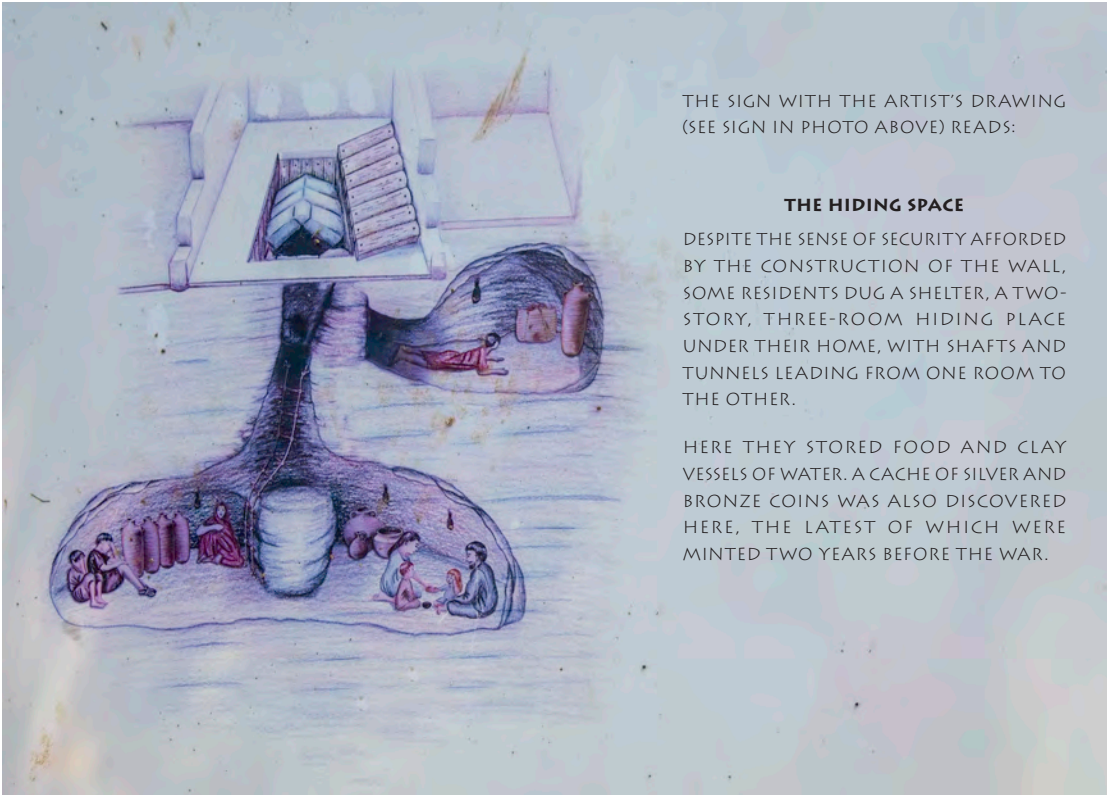
[The governor of Syria, Publius Quinctilius] Varus⁵ dispatched a division of his army [to Sepphoris], set fire to the city and sold the inhabitants into slavery. With this, it reached the most important turning-point in its history. From being a Jewish city, it became loyalist, presumably with a mixed population.⁶

Vespasian hastily responded by sending a detachment of six thousand men and thereby gained possession of one of the most important and heavily fortified towns in Galilee.⁷ Josephus's troops were camped at Garis, 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) east of Sepphoris. When his men learned that the Romans were "near them" and ready to battle, they "dispersed themselves and fled, not only before they came to a battle, but before the enemy ever came in sight."⁸ Josephus took the few men that stayed with him and fled to Tiberias. From there, he joined his army at Jotapata to take charge of the city's defense in person. Vespasian, in the meantime, marched to Gabara, 5.5 miles (8.8 kilometers) north of Jotapata, and "took it upon the first onset, because he found it destitute of any considerable number of men grown up and fit for war." He also "set fire not only to the city itself, but to all the villas and small cities that were round about it."⁹ Vespasian finally arrived at Jotapata the evening of the next day after Josephus.

Vespasian resorted to a regular siege of Jotapata after the first assaults brought little success. The siege lasted forty-seven days. He ordered his men to cut down "all the trees on the mountains that adjoined to the city" for wood to construct earthworks that supported the catapults and ballistae (projectile throwers). Although the outcome of the siege was at first uncertain, time was on Vespasian's side. A deserter informed him fatigue was great among Josephus's men, and even the sentries could no longer stay awake. In silence one morning, Vespasian's son Titus scaled the walls and struck down the sentries. The legions followed into the city, killing or enslaving all its inhabitants. The Roman army razed the city and its fortifications to the ground.¹⁰



VIEW NORTH: THIS IS THE ENTRANCE TO A TWO-STORY, THREE-ROOM HIDING PLACE UNDER A HOME AT JOTAPATA. SEE THE DRAWING AND EXPLANATION BELOW.



THE SIGN WITH THE ARTIST'S DRAWING (SEE SIGN IN PHOTO ABOVE) READS:

THE HIDING SPACE

DESPITE THE SENSE OF SECURITY AFFORDED BY THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL, SOME RESIDENTS DUG A SHELTER, A TWO-STORY, THREE-ROOM HIDING PLACE UNDER THEIR HOME, WITH SHAFTS AND TUNNELS LEADING FROM ONE ROOM TO THE OTHER.

HERE THEY STORED FOOD AND CLAY VESSELS OF WATER. A CACHE OF SILVER AND BRONZE COINS WAS ALSO DISCOVERED HERE, THE LATEST OF WHICH WERE MINTED TWO YEARS BEFORE THE WAR.



VIEW NORTH: THIS PHOTO GIVES YOU A GOOD IDEA OF THE SIZE OF TEL YODFAT. THIS IS THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF THE TEL WITH EXCAVATIONS.

BELOW (VIEW NORTH): THE WESTERN WALL PROTECTED JOTAPATA AGAINST INVASION. TO CONSTRUCT THE WALL, THE BUILDERS HAD TO DESTROY A KILN THAT PRODUCED COOKING POTS, STORAGE JARS, AND BOWLS (SEE INSET DRAWING).





ONE OF THE ON-SITE MAPS ON TEL YODFAT DENOTING THE AVAILABLE HIKES. IF YOU START IN THE MORNING, YOU CAN EXPLORE ALL THE HIKES AND STILL WALK THE 2.5-MILE (4-KILOMETER) TRAIL THROUGH THE CANYON TO CANA OF GALILEE (SEE THE PHOTOS ON PAGE 98).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Flavius Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, in *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus the Jewish Historian*, trans. William Whiston (London, 1737), 2.18.1, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus>.
- 2 Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (175 BC–135 AD), vol. 1, rev. ed. (London: Edinburgh T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1973), 486.
- 3 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 2:20:3.
- 4 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 2:18:11.
- 5 Publius Quinctilius Varus was governor of Syria from 7–6 BC. With four Roman legions under his command, he is remembered for imposing harsh rule and high taxes.
- 6 Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 173.
- 7 Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 175 n. 492. “The Sepphorites only pretended to be ready for the cause of the revolution in order to keep the whole revolutionary party at arm’s length; they fortified their city, not against, but for the Romans.”
- 8 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 3:6:3.
- 9 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 3:7:1.
- 10 Vespasian granted Josephus a private interview in which he predicted Vespasian’s ascension as emperor. Vespasian did not “set Josephus at liberty from his bands, but bestowed on him suits of clothes, and other precious gifts; he treated him also in a very obliging manner.” Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 3:8:9. After a brief rest at Caesarea Philippi, Vespasian took the battle to the Sea of Galilee region, where the final outcome of the Galilee campaign was decided at Gamla (see “Gamla” on page 275).