



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Jewish peasants block construction of statue of Gaius Caligula in Galilee, 40 CE

Time period notes: *The year of 40 C.E. given is a guess as to when the protests would have occurred. The guess is based upon a variety of factual evidence given in primary and secondary sources including: it being towards the end of the reign of Roman Emperor Gaius Caligula, reference to the sowing season of farmers in Spring, and mentioning of a drought which would have only taken place during the dry Summer season in Palestine.*

Spring of 40 C.E.

0's

to: Summer/Fall of 40 C.E.

0's

Country: Israel

Country: Palestine

Location City/State/Province: *Ptolemais and Tiberias, Galilee*

Location Description: *The first nonviolent action took place at the port city of Ptolemais upon the arrival of Petronius. Most of the campaign however took place in Tiberias, close to the Sea of Galilee.*

Goals:

To stop the messenger of Gaius Caligula Petronius from erecting a statue within the Temple of Jerusalem.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 038. Marches › Tens of thousands of Jewish peasants flocked to Ptolemais to show opposition.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 038. Marches › The movement of Petronius from Ptolemais to Tiberias forces the Jewish peasants to follow and even more to join them there.
- 064. Withdrawal from social institutions
- 099. Peasant strike › All peasants withdrew from everyday life to oppose the potential erecting of the statue.
- 100. Farm workers' strike › A great number of the peasants who took part in the protests were agricultural workers.
- 162. Sit-in › Jewish peasants remain in Tiberias for forty days offering to be slain rather than to break Jewish law.

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 064. Withdrawal from social institutions
- 099. Peasant strike

- 100. Farm workers' strike › The economic noncooperation that took place resulted in unsown fields and only the "harvest of banditry".
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 4th segment:

- 064. Withdrawal from social institutions
- 099. Peasant strike
- 100. Farm workers' strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 5th segment:

- 064. Withdrawal from social institutions
- 099. Peasant strike
- 100. Farm workers' strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

- 064. Withdrawal from social institutions
- 099. Peasant strike
- 100. Farm workers' strike
- 162. Sit-in

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Notes on Methods:

Due to the time period which this case took place in, many details of other strategies and methods employed during the approximate 40 day 'sit-in' are unknown.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Jewish peasants

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Aristobulus (king Herod Agrippa's brother), Helcias the Great (influential personage at the time), and others advocated in favour of Petronius writing to Gaius Caligula of the peasants strong resolve to oppose the statue, and willingness to die for the cause.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Jewish peasants

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- social elites

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Gaius Caligula (Roman Emperor)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Towards the end of the reign of Gaius Caligula, a proclamation was sent out for a statue of the Roman Emperor to be built within the Temple walls in Jerusalem. This command broke the Jewish law of idolatry and was therefore rejected and strongly

opposed by Jews in Palestine, most notably the large peasant population.

To institute this proclamation newly appointed President of Syria Petronius was sent along with two legions of soldiers to complete the task. It is important to note that this was the first time in the history of Roman occupation that the religious autonomy of the Jewish people was defied. It was a direct challenge to their ethnic and religious identity motivated by clashes and religious disobedience by Jews in Alexandria. With this in mind, the emperor's proclamation was to be put in place by any means necessary – an explanation for the Roman legions that accompanied his messenger Petronius and the strong action that was to be taken by Jewish peasants.

A time after Petronius' arrival in the port city of Ptolemais he was met by tens of thousands of Jews who travelled from the countryside to petition him not to violate the laws of their forefathers. The resolve of the Jewish people was so strong that if Petronius was intent on erecting the statue of Caesar, they would willingly bare their necks and die rather than break their traditional laws. Noting the incredible dedication of the peasant crowds, Petronius elected to travel inland to Tiberias along the Sea of Galilee to survey the resolve and convictions of Jewish peasants there.

There he was met with an even larger contingent of Jewish peasants willing to give their lives for their faith. They also proved unwilling to coax into war with Rome. For forty days they stayed in Tiberias, risking death before Petronius to prevent the construction of the monument. In addition to the dramatic sit-in, Jewish peasants across Palestine chose to withdraw from society both economically and socially. Farmers completely abandoned planting fresh crops in spring creating both economic and social strain and a dilemma situation for Petronius. Narratives based on the writing of Jewish historian Josephus speak often of the struggle faced by Petronius in the opposition of the Jewish peasants. Influenced by Aristobulus (king Herod Agrippa's brother), Helcias the Great (influential personage at the time), and others Petronius eventually wrote to Gaius Caligula of his inability to erect the statue and his willingness to face the consequences. This would have meant death for his incompetence. Gaius Caligula's death early in the next year, along with the success of protests by Jewish peasants ended the threat of the emperor's order, maintaining Jewish religious freedom in the short-term.

Research Notes

Influences:

Jewish peasants may have been influenced by a successful sit-in protest in opposition of Pontius Pilate's installing of Roman Standards in Jerusalem. This successful nonviolent action would have occurred within the same decade.(1)

Sources:

Hanson, J.S. & Horsley, R. A. (1985). *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*. Minneapolis: Winston Press.

Horsley, R. A. (1985). *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Whiston, W. (1987). *The Works of Josephus*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Yoder, J. (1994). *The Politics of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Jonah Langelotz, 02/03/2013

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/17/2019 - 02:25): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/jewish-peasants-block-construction-statue-gaius-caligula-galilee-40-ce>