

02-25 Lecture: Gamla, Zealot Ideology, and the 67 AD Siege

Duration: 14m 24s | Date: February 25, 2026

SITE OVERVIEW

- **Location:** Gamla (Hebrew: “camel”), modern Golan Heights region — known as “the Masada of the North”
- **Biblical References:** Acts 5:37 — “Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt.” Luke 19:42–44 — Jesus’s prophecy concerning the destruction of the city

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Gamla served as the headquarters of the Zealot movement, founded by Yehuda of Gamla (son of Ezekias)
- Roman General Vespasian besieged and destroyed Gamla with three legions (30,000 soldiers) on October 12, 67 AD; second assault October 20, 67 AD
- During the siege: 4,000 men killed by the sword; ~5,000 men, women, and children cast themselves over the city walls
- Gamla’s destruction intended as psychological blow to encourage surrender of other Jewish towns
- **Key Figures:** Ezekias (guerrilla leader, executed 47 AD), Yehuda of Gamla (Zealot leader), Charis and Simeon (sons, crucified 46/48 AD), Eleazar (grandson, led Masada), Vespasian, Simon the Zealot, Matthew the tax collector

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

- Synagogue excavated, visible on lower-left portion of the site
- Several staircases and buildings partially excavated
- Circular watchtower structure at corners of city wall
- Majority of city remains unexcavated and largely collapsed
- Site closed at time of visit due to muddy conditions; normally requires ~90-minute walk

DR. SCHILLING’S KEY POINTS

- **Zealot Philosophy:** No authority but God, no tax but the temple tax, no friend but a fellow Zealot

- **Military Messianic Expectation:** First-century Jewish concept of Messiah was fundamentally military — a leader to overthrow Rome
- **Simon vs. Matthew:** Deliberately provocative juxtaposition within the twelve disciples — Zealot and tax collector side by side
- **Judas Iscariot Theory** (speculative): Betrayal may have been a calculated attempt to force Jesus into open rebellion against Rome
- **Luke 19:42-44:** Interpreted as direct foreshadowing of Roman assault on Gamla (and Jerusalem)
- **Gamla's Strategic Value:** Its apparent impregnability made its fall a powerful psychological weapon

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

- Connected to Masada (south), Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi (next stop), Zippori (surrendered without resistance)
- Vespasian's route: across the Jezreel Valley toward Gamla
- Terrain: steep hillside, naturally defensible, terraced urban architecture
- Griffon vultures observed circling over the ruins during visit

QUOTABLE MOMENTS

- “No authority but God, no tax but the temple tax, and no friend but a fellow Zealot.”
- “Isn't it interesting that Jesus chose a Zealot as one of his twelve — Simon the Zealot. What was Matthew's occupation? Yeah. So no tax but the temple tax, and we have a tax collector in the group.”
- “What Judas did was try to push Jesus into that rebellion, so he betrayed him thinking that Jesus would then defend himself and start the counter-revolution.”
- “If this city fell — this city was believed to be impenetrable — just the lay of the land made it almost impossible to attack.”

PERSONAL NOTES

- Confirm crucifixion dates of Charis and Simeon (46 and 48 AD) against Josephus's Jewish War
- Connection between Judas Iscariot and Zealot theology: see Brandon, S.G.F., *Jesus and the Zealots* (1967)
- Confirm Eleazar's lineage in Josephus's *Jewish War*, Book VII
- Verify Josephus quotation against standard Penguin or Loeb Classical Library translations