

## The Legions Proclaim Vespasian Emperor

Source: Tacitus: Histories, Book I1., 49-51, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. Slightly adapted. Full text online at <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/histories.html>.

*Vespasian emerged victorious from the "Year of Four Emperors" (69 CE). He was created emperor by the legions, and away from Rome. Eventually this was to become a pattern.*

The initiative in transferring the Empire to Vespasian was taken at Alexandria under the prompt direction of Ti. Alexander, who on the 1st of July made the legions swear allegiance to him. That day was ever after celebrated as the first of his reign, though the army of Judaea on July 3rd took the oath to Vespasian in person with such eager alacrity that they would not wait for the return of his son T., who was then on his way back from Syria, acting as the medium between Mucianus and his father for the communication of their plans. All this was done by the impulsive action of the soldiers without the preliminary of a formal harangue or any concentration of the legions.

While they were seeking a suitable time and place, and for that which in such an affair is the great difficulty, the first man to speak, while hope, fear, the chances of success or of disaster, were present to their minds, one day, on Vespasian quitting his chamber, a few soldiers who stood near, in the usual form in which they would salute their legate, suddenly saluted him as Emperor. Then all the rest hurried up, called him Caesar and Augustus, and heaped on him all the titles of Imperial rank. Their minds had passed from apprehension to confidence of success. In Vespasian there appeared no sign of elation or arrogance, or of any change arising from his changed fortunes. As soon as he had dispelled the mist with which so astonishing a vicissitude had clouded his vision, he addressed the troops in a soldier-like style, and listened to the joyful intelligence that came pouring in from all quarters. This was the very opportunity for which Mucianus had been waiting. He now at once administered to the eager soldiers the oath of allegiance to Vespasian. Then he entered the theatre at Antioch, where it is customary for the citizens to hold their public deliberations,

and as they crowded together with profuse expressions of flattery, he addressed them. He could speak Greek with considerable grace, and in all that he did and said he had the art of displaying himself to advantage. Nothing excited the provincials and the army so much as the assertion of Mucianus that Vitellius had determined to remove the legions of Germany to Syria, to an easy and lucrative service, while the armies of Syria were to have given them in exchange the encampments of Germany with their inclement climate and their harassing toils. On the one hand, the provincials from long use felt a pleasure in the companionship of the soldiers, with whom many of them were connected by friendship or relationship; on the other, the soldiers from the long duration of their service loved the well-known and familiar camp as a home.

Before the 15th of July the whole of Syria had adopted the same alliance. There joined him, each with his entire kingdom, Sohemus, who had no contemptible army, and Antiochus, who possessed vast ancestral wealth, and was the richest of all the subject-kings. Before long Agrippa, who had been summoned from the capital by secret dispatches from his friends, while as yet Vitellius knew nothing, was crossing the sea with all speed. Queen Berenice too, who was then in the prime of youth and beauty, and who had charmed even the old Vespasian by the splendor of her presents, promoted his cause with equal zeal. All the provinces washed by the sea, as far as Asia and Achaia, and the whole expanse of country inland towards Pontus and Armenia, took the oath of allegiance. The legates, however, of these provinces were without troops, Cappadocia as yet having had no legions assigned to it. A council was held at Berytus to deliberate on the general conduct of the war. Thither came Mucianus with the legates and tribunes and all the most distinguished centurions and soldiers, and thither also the picked troops of the army of Judaea. Such a vast assemblage of cavalry and infantry, and the pomp of the kings that strove to rival each other in magnificence, presented an appearance of Imperial splendor.