

# Julius Caesar

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An authoritative portrait of the iconic leader from ancient Rome evaluates him as a military strategist and ambitious conqueror, providing additional coverage of his lesser-known contributions as a priest, family man, and advocate for the working class. 25,000 first printing.

Philip Freeman is Qualley Professor of Classics at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and a former professor of classics at Washington University in St. Louis. He was selected as a visiting fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton for January 2012. He earned the first joint Ph.D. in classics and Celtic studies from Harvard University, and has been a visiting scholar at the Harvard Divinity School, the American Academy in Rome, and the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C. The author of several previous books including *Alexander the Great*, *St. Patrick of Ireland* and *Julius Caesar*, he lives with his family in Decorah, Iowa. Visit him at [PhilipFreemanBooks.com](http://PhilipFreemanBooks.com). X

#### CIVIL WAR

<blockquote> In all of life, but especially in war, the greatest power belongs to fortune.  
-- CAESAR </blockquote>

No one expected that Caesar would dare invade Italy with only a few thousand men, but once he crossed the Rubicon into Italy Caesar advanced south against all odds. His rapid advance caught Pompey and the optimates totally off-guard and threw Rome into a panic. It was precisely the effect Caesar had intended.

Caesar's first stop was the old Umbrian town of Ariminum (modern Rimini) just ten miles beyond the Rubicon. Sulla had sacked the town several decades earlier, but Caesar quickly occupied this strategic gateway to the south without any bloodshed. It was here that Mark Antony caught up with his sponsor after fleeing from Rome. Caesar played up his arrival for all it was worth to further motivate his army and justify his move against the Senate. Look at him, he cried, as he led Antony before his troops. This man is a sacrosanct tribune of the people, manhandled by the Senate and driven from Rome in defiance of all that is holy and just. Even Sulla, who had little respect for the common man, never dared to interfere with the rights of the tribunes. Will you allow this to stand? Will you let a small cadre of self-serving nobles who care nothing for the true welfare of the state destroy centuries of tradition and rob you of your freedom? As for me, Caesar exclaimed as he wept bitter tears and tore his robe in grief, will you let Pompey and the optimates destroy my dignity? We've fought bravely together for nine years against Gauls and Germans alike -- and we won! Are you afraid to face Pompey and his ragged band of cowards? Are you afraid to follow me to victory?

It was a beautiful performance. The soldiers declared that they were ready to follow Caesar anywhere to defend his honor and restore the rightful power of the tribunes. Part of their enthusiasm may have grown from a rumor that he would make all of them knights, but they doubtless would have risked everything for him in any case. He had lifted them from poverty and taught them to believe in their ability to accomplish the impossible. They had beaten Ariovistus and his ferocious Germans, they had sailed beyond the edge of the world to Britain and returned, they had conquered Vercingetorix and the whole army of Gaul. Caesar had also put more money in their pockets than they had ever dreamed of

back when they were struggling on the farm. Now they would restore the stolen honor of their commander and win undying glory for themselves, not to mention a tidy bit of loot.

Meanwhile in Rome, there was chaos in the streets. Countless frightened refugees were flooding into the city from the countryside, adding to the panic among the already terrified inhabitants of Rome. Stories flew among the crowds of dire portents -- blood had fallen as rain from the sky, lightning had struck the holy temples, statues of the gods were sweating, and a mule had given birth to a foal. Fights broke out between partisans of Caesar and Pompey, mobs raged violently through the streets, and no one seemed to be in charge. The optimates turned on Pompey and berated him for letting Caesar cross the Rubicon. Where are the armies you had only to stomp your foot to raise? What are you going to do now? they demanded.

Pompey had an answer for them, but they didn't like it. Their only chance was to evacuate Rome and regroup in southern Italy. From there, it would probably be necessary to withdraw further across the sea to Greece. Then, like Sulla years before, the senatorial forces could gather their armies and retake Italy. Pompey pointed out that holding Rome meant nothing in the long term. It was men that won wars, not empty buildings. His scattered forces were still ten times the size of Caesar's army and would crush the upstart general in the end as surely as Sulla had destroyed Cinna and Marius. Pompey then warned them darkly that he would consider anyone who remained in the city a traitor to Rome. With that, Pompey took the Appian Way south, followed by almost every magistrate and senator in Rome. The refugees and common people of the city would have to face alone whatever horrors awaited them from Caesar's troops.

It wasn't long until Caesar received two visitors sent by Pompey himself. As Caesar writes, they came with a private message from the general expressing his regret to his former father-in-law that matters had reached such a sorry state. Pompey exclaimed that his recent actions were nothing personal against Caesar, but were merely the result of his lifelong desire to serve his country -- a desire that always took precedence over his own wishes. Caesar, likewise, should put the welfare of Rome before his own pride, no matter how unjustly he believed he had been treated. Pompey urged Caesar to be reasonable and not let his bruised dignity lead Rome into civil war.

Caesar felt insulted by Pompey's condescending tone, but sent the envoys back to him with an olive branch. Caesar declared that he, too, had always put the needs of the state above his own desires, but he was fighting for the rights of the Roman people as well as his own honor. He therefore proposed that the Italian peninsula be demilitarized. He and his army would leave Italy if Pompey would at the same time withdraw to Spain with his troops. Then the Senate and the popular assemblies could meet in peace to settle everything without the threat of armed force from either side. Finally, he urged that he and Pompey meet face-to-face to work out the details of the agreement without the tiresome interference of politicians.

Cicero, who was in Pompey's camp at the time, reports that the message from Caesar

arrived on January 23, 49 B.C. Whatever Pompey might have wished to do if left to his own devices, he was overruled by the optimates. They sent a letter back to Caesar agreeing that Pompey would go to Spain at some future date, but only if Caesar first withdrew from Italy. Until that time, they would continue to recruit and train their army to defend the state. And, of course, the optimates were not about to let Pompey meet privately with Caesar.

It's fascinating to see how the different parties viewed the negotiations. Caesar portrayed himself as an injured party: "It was an unfair offer," he exclaimed. But Cicero wrote to his friend Atticus that "Caesar would be mad not to accept, especially as his demands were so impudent." The practical result was that the discussions went nowhere and communications between the two parties ceased.

Caesar now sent Mark Antony to hold the mountain passes north of Rome while he himself continued his advance south along the Adriatic coast. By early February, he had peacefully taken all of Picenum -- an especially galling development to Pompey as it was his home region. Throughout the wider area of north central Italy, towns were flocking to Caesar's banner, much to the consternation of the optimates. Caesar portrays this support as sincere patriotism and affection for his just cause, though most townspeople cared little who won the war as long as they were left alone. The towns knew they were facing Caesar's army on their doorsteps while most of Pompey's troops were far away, thus the sudden swell of support. At Iguvium in Umbria, Pompey's lieutenant Thermus withdrew his few troops from the town in the face of open hostility. Even more telling was Caesar's reception at the ancient hill town of Auximum. There the local town council met with Attius Varus, the governor of Roman Africa, who was occupying their town with a garrison of Pompey's soldiers. The councilmen explained that they had no interest in imperial politics, but they felt it most unwise to resist the celebrated general Caesar and his veteran army. They urged Varus to consider his own safety and get out of town while he still could. Varus took the council's advice and quickly fled south. When Caesar learned of their actions, he warmly thanked the councilmen and promised he would not forget their support.

Pompey was near Naples at the time trying to rally his senatorial supporters, raise troops among the local farmers, and even recruit gladiators owned by Caesar from a nearby training camp, all to little avail. It was becoming clear to Pompey, if not to the optimates, that holding Italy was a lost cause. He would have to reach the fortified port city of Brundisium in Italy's heel as quickly as possible and from there sail to Greece. Pompey was confident he could win the war in the long run if he was allowed time to build an overwhelming force to return and invade Italy. Some of the optimates saw the good sense in this plan, but most detested the idea of yielding control of Italy to Caesar, even temporarily. The mood in Pompey's camp was accordingly contentious and dispirited as senators and soldiers alike packed their bags.

Meanwhile Caesar was having much better luck as he marched southward along the coast. Another legion from Gaul caught up with him near the town of Cingulum, doubling the size of his army. Cingulum itself threw open its gates and eagerly welcomed him, a

deed particularly pleasing to Caesar since the town had recently been founded by his former comrade Labienus.

Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus had been one of Caesar's most committed enemies for almost twenty years. He had watched Caesar's victories in Gaul with burning jealousy. His own grandfather had first beaten the Allobroges and Arverni seventy years before, thus he considered the northern lands by right a family fiefdom. The Senate had appointed Domitius the new governor of Gaul, but his plans had been ruined by Caesar's march across the Rubicon. Although Caesar had beaten him at every turn, Domitius would not back down, even if the rest of the optimates ran away to Greece. Promising rich rewards, he gathered a hearty band of local tribesmen and snakeworshipping Marsi warriors from the mountains of central Italy and set out to meet his nemesis. When Pompey ordered him to withdraw ...

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