

Abomination and Lawlessness (AD 66)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- June 30, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Here we are for another episode of *Then and Now* where we learn from the past to shape a better future.
- B. Let's pray before we get into our studies --
Lord of all that is in the heavens above, on the earth, and under the earth. We exalt and adore You. We thank you for creating us and saving us. May You work in our lives to shape us according to Your Holy Will, to bring You much glory and honor among all the nations for all generations of the age of the ages. May your Spirit be with us and in us to guide us as we study your sovereign acts in history to judge the wicked and reward the righteous. May we take these lessons of history to heart. It is in the Name of Your Son and our Redeemer, that we pray. Amen.
- C. In coming weeks, we will be looking at a lot of material from Josephus. If you do not have a copy of his book (**Josephus - Complete Works**), this is the time to get it! It is available on our website (<http://preterist.org>). You will want to read what he has to say about all the signs they saw occurring at that time when the war was just about to break out. I would also recommend getting copies of F. F. Bruce's book (**Israel and the Nations**), and my book (**First Century Events**). This will really help you get a handle on all this history that fulfilled the predictions of all the prophets, apostles, and Jesus. All three of these books are available right there on our website.
- D. This time we will be looking at **Gessius Florus**, the Roman procurator in Judea at this time (AD 64-66), and all the things that he did to provoke the Jews to go to war. We will also look at the probable fulfillment of the **Abomination of Desolation** and the **Man of Lawlessness**. At this time in mid-66 was the last chance for the Jewish people to flee from Judea easily and safely. Yet it seems that most of them stayed and got caught up in the war.

Gessius Florus Provoked the Jews to Rebellion (AD 66)

Apr - 66 – Violence erupted in Caesarea (AD 66). This violent clash occurred in the month of **Artemisius** (Iyar, April-May) of AD 66. Josephus says that this is the event that inflamed the seditious to revolt. The Greek residents of Caesarea a few years earlier (AD 60) had obtained control of the government of the city from Nero, putting the Jewish inhabitants at disadvantage. In AD 60, Beryllus, one of Nero's tutors, appealed to Nero and obtained a letter revoking the equal rights status of the Jews in Caesarea. This emboldened the Syrian-Greek inhabitants of Caesarea, and provoked the Jewish citizens to resist these encroachments upon their freedom and prosperity. Over the next six years, there was intensification of that conflict, pushing in the

direction of open rebellion. For Josephus' comments on this, see *Antiq* 20:173-184 (20.8.7-9) and *Wars* 2.13.7. See the Josephus.org website for more info on this: <http://www.josephus.org/causesOfWar.htm#wilderness>

The building which the Jews used for their synagogue was owned by a Greek who would not sell it to the Jews, even though they repeatedly offered him many times its value. He built other structures around the synagogue, leaving only a very narrow passage between the buildings, thus making it very difficult to access. The Jews complained about this impediment, but it only got worse. Then on a Sabbath day in the Spring of AD 66, as the Jews were gathering at the synagogue, a Greek insulted the Jews by sacrificing some birds on top of an earthenware jar at the entrance to the synagogue, implying that the Jews were unclean and leprous, and that their occupancy of the premises was defiling it and polluting it. [*Wars* 2.284-296 (2.14.4-6)] This inflamed some of the younger hotheaded Jews beyond containment. It very quickly erupted in violence on both sides. Jucundus, the Roman commander of cavalry, intervened and took away the earthenware jar and attempted to stop the violent clash. But the Greek inhabitants were too intense for him. The Greeks had the upper hand in the struggle and left the Jews no other option but to take their scrolls and relocate to the nearby city of Nabata. The date of this clash is given by Josephus as "the twelfth year of the reign of Nero [AD 66] ... in the month of Artemisius" [Iyar, April/May]. *Wars* 2.284-296 (2.14.4-6). This evidently occurred right after Passover which was in the month of Xanthicus (Nisan, March-April).

Apr - 66 – Florus Ordered the Temple Treasury to Give Him 17 Talents of Gold --

The Jewish leadership from Caesarea and Jerusalem appealed to Governor Florus to correct the injustice done to them by the Greeks in Caesarea, but it only made matters worse. The Roman governor, Gessius Florus, did everything he could to provoke the Jews into open rebellion, and he succeeded. When the ethnic violence broke out in Caesarea between the Jews and the Greeks, Florus should have intervened with his troops and pacified both parties. The Jews in Caesarea even bribed Florus with 8 talents of gold to intervene on their behalf, but he took their money and did nothing to help them. And the bribe only made him greedy for more. Florus "blew up the war into a flame" [*Wars* 2.293 (2.14.6)] by ordering the temple treasury to give him seventeen talents of gold. Josephus claims this action by Florus was the very provocation which pushed the Jews over the edge into revolt. When Florus' representatives came to Jerusalem to collect the 17 talents of temple gold, "some of the seditious" insulted Florus' greed by taking up a collection in the marketplace to help the poor Florus, who was in such a destitute condition [*Wars* 2:293-296 (2.14.6)]. This enraged Florus when he found out about it, and "**he marched hastily** [from Sebaste] **with an army** of horsemen and footmen against Jerusalem that he might ...bring the city into subjection" [*Wars* 2:296 (2.14.6)].

Apr - 66 – Florus Encamped in Jerusalem and Kills 3600 Jews There (Artemisius

16, AD 66) - His hasty march to Jerusalem [from Sebaste-Samaria] must have been an alarming thing for the citizens of Jerusalem. When they saw the Roman army of Florus approaching, they went out of the city to meet him peaceably, and welcome him to the city. However, Florus was not in the mood for pleasantries, and sent the

Centurion Capito with fifty soldiers on ahead of him to instruct the Jewish people to go back into the city [*Wars* 2.297-298 (2.14.7)]. Florus then brought his army into Jerusalem and camped in Herod's Palace. The next day he met with the Jewish leadership, but when they refused to deliver up the youths who had mocked him, he ordered his soldiers to plunder the Upper Market Place and kill any they found there (incl. men, women, children, and even infants). Some of the Jewish people who died were of equestrian order (i.e., they had the equivalent of Roman citizenship and aristocratic status) whom Florus' soldiers (illegally) whipped and crucified. They even threatened King Agrippa's sister Bernice who happened to be in Jerusalem fulfilling a vow at the temple. [*Wars* 2:307 (2.14.9)] According to Josephus and the online *Jewish Encyclopedia* in their article on Gessius Florus, this slaughter of 3600 citizens of Jerusalem occurred on the **16th day of the month Artemisius** (Iyyar or April-May) in AD 66. [*Antiq* 20.11.1; *Wars* 2.284 (2.14.4) and 2.315 (2.15.2); See also Graetz, *Gesch.* 4th ed., iii. 445-450 et seq.; Schurer, *Gesch.* 3d ed., i. 585, 601 et seq. G. M.]

Apr - 66 – Florus had two more cohorts of troops come from Caesarea, and attempted to seize the rest of the gold in the temple. It seems that Florus obtained the 17 talents of gold, but it was not enough – he was "provoked to get still more" [*Wars* 2:295 (2.14.6)]. Florus wanted all the gold that was left in the temple. On the next day after the massacre in the Upper Market, Florus ordered the chief priests to send the people out to meet the two cohorts of soldiers, coming in from Caesarea. However, he had instructed the incoming soldiers not to return the salutes of the people, and that if any of the Jewish people complained about this rude behavior, to use their clubs on them. This is exactly what happened. As the people began to flee away, the cavalry ran them down and trampled them. Josephus said, "a great many fell down dead by the strokes of the Romans, and more by their own violence in crushing one another ... at the gates." [*Wars* 2:315-327 (2.15.2-5)]

The reason Florus had two more cohorts of soldiers come from Caesarea, was so that he could forcibly enter the temple and seize the rest of the gold stored there. Evidently, the goal of the soldiers was to enter through the Bezetha quarter, and then through the tower of Antonia and seize upon the temple, but the whole populace of the city blocked all the lanes of the city so that it became impassible. Then the Zealots quickly knocked out the cloisters which joined Antonia to the Temple, so that in case Florus' soldiers did get as far as the Tower of Antonia, they would not have easy access to the Temple. This frustrated the attempt of Florus to get into the temple area to get the rest of the gold out of the Temple Treasury. So he took two cohorts and went back to Caesarea, leaving one cohort there as an occupational force to help the Jewish leadership restore order and keep the peace. [*Wars* 2.328-332 (2.15.5-6)]

This attempt to get control of the temple gold was viewed by the Jews as an attack on Judaism itself. The temple gold had no images of Caesar on it. And since the Jews were no longer allowed to mint their own gold coins, the depletion of the imageless coinage from the temple would virtually shut down the sacrificial system. Sacrificial animals could only be purchased with imageless coins. The money changers relied upon an abundant supply of such imageless gold to exchange Roman coins with images on them for temple coinage without the images. This

money exchange business was very profitable. Without imageless coins in the temple treasury, there could be no purchase of sacrificial animals without bringing coins with images on them into the temple (which would be an abomination). Florus was attempting to shut down the Jewish sacrificial system and bring images of Caesar into the temple in order to convert it to a Roman shrine. The Jews understood what the intentions of Florus were, and thwarted his attempt by blocking all the lanes of the city and tearing down the connection between the Tower of Antonia and the Temple cloisters so that his soldiers were unable to get into the temple and seize its imageless gold. [*Wars* 2:328-332 (2.15.5-6)]

This was not just a random act of greed on the part of Florus. Nor was it just normal gold coinage that he wished to obtain. It was a calculated assault on the Torah-compliant gold coinage that the temple required for purchase of sacrifices. Josephus seems to allude to this in veiled language when he said: "This cooled the avarice of Florus, for whereas he was **eager to obtain the treasures of God**," as soon as he saw there was no way to accomplish it on that occasion, "left off his attempt," took two of the three cohorts and headed back to Caesarea [*Wars* 2:331-332 (2.15.6)].

We have to wonder whether Nero was supportive of this attempt to get Roman coinage with his deified images on them received into the temple. Since the wife of Florus was good friends with Poppaea, and that relationship enabled Florus to get the governorship of Judea originally, it would seem that Florus was closely allied with Nero. This appears even more to be the case, since the Roman Legate at Antioch (Cestius Gallus) was very hesitant to censor or restrict Florus in any way. That implies that Florus had the approval of Nero for this policy of removing all the remaining imageless coinage from the temple, so that the Jews would be forced to bring in coins with Nero's image on them. Nero was certainly capable of concocting or supporting such a plot, especially at this time right after his deified image was put on the coinage. The fact that his wife Poppaea, who was friendly toward the Jews, had died the year before, means that the Jews no longer had a direct or strong connection with Nero. His megalomania and narcissism could easily explain his attempt to force emperor-worship on the Jews, as he had done to the Greeks and most other nations throughout the empire.

No Roman coinage with human images on it could be brought into the temple. This would have violated the second commandment (no graven images). Four years before this (AD 62) the Romans (under Nero) had deliberately stopped the minting of any more Torah-compliant coinage. The Jews were not allowed to mint their own coins that were Torah-compliant, so this meant that the supply of coinage that they had in the temple would be all they could store in the temple treasury. Unfortunately this supply of coinage had a tendency to dwindle down as a result of the money-changers, so that eventually they would run out of gold and be forced to bring coins with Caesar's image into the temple. Florus wished to hasten this process by seizing all the Torah-compliant gold out of the temple. The Jews understood very well what Florus was trying to do. They had seen this on the horizon four years earlier when the Romans stopped minting Torah-compliant coinage. So when Florus made his attempt with his armies to seize the temple gold, the citizens of Jerusalem "immediately turned back upon him, and stopped the violence of his attempt," and stopped up the

narrow passages" of the city" so that his troops could not get to the temple. Furthermore, some of the seditious "got immediately upon those cloisters of the temple that joined to Antonia, and cut them down." [*Wars* 2.328-330 (2.15.5-6)].

AD 66 - This was an attempt to bring idolatrous coinage into the temple.

Ken Gentry (*The Beast of Revelation*, p. 64) explains the deification of Nero and his appearance on the Roman coinage at this time: "That Nero actually was worshipped is evident from inscriptions found in Ephesus in which he is called "Almighty God" and "Saviour." ... As his megalomania increased, the tendency to worship him as ruler of the world became stronger, and in Rome his features appeared on the colossus of the Sun near the Golden House, while his head was represented on the coinage with a radiate crown... Nero deified his child by Poppaea, and Poppaea herself after their deaths."

Another writer noted: "This coin [a silver tetradrachm, or four-denarius piece] struck in Syria refers to Nero's wife Poppaea whom he married in AD 63. In AD 65 she became the victim of Nero's brutality when she died as a result of a kick to the abdomen while pregnant which Nero had delivered during a fit of anger. ... The obverse of this coin shows Nero wearing a radiate crown, the headdress of the divine. Nero was the first living Roman to wear this crown on coin types. Before this, only men who had been deified after death, such as Julius Caesar and Augustus, were given this honor." [Source: <http://www.usask.ca/antiquities/coins/nero.html>]

Note what Collingwood says about this: "The common currency of Judea, in 66 CE, had come to include coins bearing the image both of a living god-king [Nero] and of his dead-god-wife [Poppaea] whom he had slain -- on opposite sides of the same coin."

"Now, what kind of coin are we to suppose that Florus removed from the Temple treasury? Presumably the only kind of coin that the Temple treasury was allowed to hold, namely coins without an image either of Caesar or of any other man -- and supply of which was already so short that any further scarcity of it would greatly impede Temple worship (and yet further enrich the money-changers in the outer court). Presumably the 17 talents of that Florus removed from the Temple treasury was all he could get, namely, all it had.... The Temple coin supply once had been far greater, but had been depleted by prior Roman depredations. When the Roman commander Sabinus seized the Temple and plundered it, during the Feast of Pentecost in 4 BC, amidst the succession crisis following the death of Herod the Great, Josephus relates, "the soldiers fell upon the treasure of God, which was now deserted, and plundered about four hundred talents, of which sum Sabinus got together all that was not carried away by the soldiers." [*Wars* 2:50 (2.3.3.)]

"And what kind of coin are we to suppose that the Jews of Jerusalem threw into baskets, taunting Florus to take them instead of Temple treasure? The ubiquitous, but idolatrous, coins of the Empire, of course! The message was clear: you want money, take it in your own abundant coin, not the scarce image-free coin that is acceptable for Temple donation. One could hardly have been procurator of Judea and failed either to get the point, or to understand the underlying religious issue; indeed, it could hardly have been mistaken even in Rome, where Jews, by AD 66, were a far-from-unfamiliar governance problem. Florus' action can only be construed

as Josephus construes it: as a **deliberate religious provocation**, intended to force the Temple to accept the image of the Emperor, represented as a god, onto its premises as part of its ritual. By ceasing to strike Torah-compliant coins after 62 CE, Roman authorities in Judea had been systematically pursuing this policy even before Florus attempted to seize the Temple's small remaining stock of Torah-compliant coin in AD 66. Where Caligula's statue had been too large to enter, might not Nero's small coins infiltrate?

"Not surprisingly, the Temple priesthood responded, after some contentious deliberation, by discontinuing sacrifice for the Emperor -- effectively delegitimizing Roman rule over Judea and countenancing revolt." [Taken from the website:

<http://spengler.atimes.net/viewtopic.php?t=10921&start=20&sid=5aeda15f797cdeedbb266867c50d4780> (accessed on 6/28/13).

A person who goes by the email epithet of "Collingwood" wrote the post that we just quoted, and claimed that the Jewish writer Spengler was right on target when he asserted that the robbing of 17 talents from the temple was directly related to emperor worship and the bringing of images of the emperor into the temple (via the coinage that had the emperor's deified image on it). In Jewish eyes, it was the same issue they confronted earlier in AD 40 when Caligula ordered Petronius and his army to go to Jerusalem to have a statue of himself placed in the temple there. **That was an abomination** which the Jews were prepared to resist to the bitter end. Fortunately Caligula died before the order was ever carried out. But the same kind of thing is involved here with Florus. He was attempting to force the Jews to bring images into the Temple. The Jews would rather go to war than allow that to happen. See also *Wars* 2:433, 435; *Antiq* 20.11.1 (257-258) and 10:137.

This incident fits all the requirements of the **Abomination of Desolation** that was predicted by Daniel the prophet and reiterated by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. It is the very kind of threat against the Temple, at the very time and place, that the prophets had predicted. I am surprised that not very many others have seen these connections and suggested this.

But there is more to this story than what Josephus tells us. *Yosippon* appears to fill in some of the gaps:

When the Roman Procurator Gessius Florus brought his soldiers to Jerusalem to confiscate all the gold from the Temple (May AD 66), *Yosippon* writes that there was a brash young man, **Eleazar b. Ananias**, who blew the shofar in Jerusalem and rallied the citizens to block the lanes of the city (*Sepher Yosippon*, ch. 59).

Hegesippus claims that it was this very same Eleazar who was "the originator" of the rebellion (*Heg.* 5:53). Eleazar then seized control of the temple and used it as his fortress (in violation of the Law) from that point forward [*Wars* 2.424 (2.17.5); *Yos.* 61; *Heg.* 2:10; 5:1]. About this same time, the angelic armies were seen in the clouds over Palestine, signaling that the Son of Man had arrived to begin His judgment and wrath out-pouring (May AD 66).

A couple of months later, Eleazar **illegally** stopped the daily sacrifices of all Gentiles (Aug AD 66). This was totally unprecedented and **lawless** in the extreme. Never had Gentile sacrifices and offerings been refused. At the very time God was grafting the Gentiles into His Church, the Zealots were breaking off all religious ties with the Gentiles—quite a contrast! The moderate Jewish leadership and priests all

reminded Eleazar that to do such a thing would be to **set himself above the Law**. They demanded that he restore the sacrifices, but he defiantly refused.

Eleazar was the son of Ananias b. Nedebaeus, the former high priest (AD 47-58) when Second Thessalonians was written (AD 51-52), as well as six years later in AD 58 at the time of Paul's trial in Jerusalem (Acts 23). It was Ananias who ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth. Upon being struck, Paul predicted, "God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall" and then called him a **law-breaker**. As was the father (a lawbreaker), so was the son (an even worse lawbreaker). Eight years after the trial of Paul, in September of AD 66, Ananias was indeed "struck" dead by the Zealot leader Menahem, immediately after which his son **Eleazar** used his own temple soldiers to avenge his father by killing Menahem and his soldiers in Jerusalem, again in **violation of the Law**. Thus, Eleazar opposed every other Zealot leader and **exalted himself above them all**.

At the time of the rebellion, Eleazar was *Sagan* (captain of the temple guard). That was the second highest position in the priesthood (right underneath the High Priest). The Sagan was appointed by the High Priest and approved by the Sanhedrin. At least two of the sons of Ananias (Eleazar and Ananus) had held that office, both of whom were appointed after Ananias had left the High Priesthood. This speaks volumes about how much wealth, power, and influence Ananias must have had, in order to get two of his sons appointed as Sagan after he was no longer High Priest. Josephus verifies just how extremely wealthy and powerful Ananias really was.

As Yosippon indicates (*Sefer Yosippon*, Chapters 72, 75), Eleazar was the one who literally "**sat in the temple**" controlling all the affairs of the temple, priesthood, and sacrifices, and used the Temple as his fortress during nearly the entire war, beginning in April AD 66, until just before Titus began the siege in AD 70 (about three and a half years). Eleazar took it upon himself to make changes in the Law and customs that had always been followed since the beginning of their nation. Thus, it appears that **Eleazar** may have been the **Man of Lawlessness** that Apostle Paul pointed to in his second letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:3-9).

Some preterists think that **Nero** was the "Man of Lawlessness." However, there is not the slightest biblical or historical support for the idea that Nero ever set foot in Judea, Jerusalem, or the Temple, nor that he changed the Jewish sacrificial laws, nor that he was "slain by the breath of Christ's mouth" at the Parousia (2 Thess. 2:8). Nero committed suicide in AD 68, two years before the end of the war in AD 70.

Others have suggested **John of Gischala** as the Man of Lawlessness, even though he did not get control of the temple until right near the end of the war, after most of the abominations had already been committed in the temple. Nor was John of Gischala "slain by the breath of Christ's mouth." Instead, John was taken to Rome where he was paraded through the streets of Rome during the Triumph, and then kept in Roman prison until he died several years later. Very few of the statements in 2 Thess. 2 can be applied to John. Furthermore, **Simon b. Giora**, another of the three main Zealot leaders, was dragged through the streets of Rome and thrown over the cliff in sacrifice to the Roman gods right after the Triumph of Vespasian and Titus. Simon never had control of the temple, so it is impossible to see him as the one who "sat in the temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

Of the three original Zealot leaders, only **Eleazar b. Ananias** is un-accounted-

for. Josephus drops all mention of him after the war council in Jerusalem in AD 66, but both Yosippon and Hegesippus state that he stayed in Jerusalem and maintained control of the temple throughout the war, until just before the siege of Titus (mid-70). When John of Gischala broke into the temple with his soldiers and gained control of it (Spring or Summer of AD 70), evidently Eleazar took his family and got out of the city through some of the underground tunnels, and then fled to Masada, where he held out until AD 73. It is interesting that Josephus mentions the fact that the defenders of Masada, including Eleazar himself, were **slain** by the hand of their own fellow Zealots in a mass suicide pact. Then their bodies were thrown into the blazing fire and burned to ashes there on top of Masada. We will say much more about all that when we get to that part of the history in AD 73.

When viewed through the historical lens of Josephus, Yosippon, and Hegesippus, **Eleazar b. Ananias** does have a lot of connections with the Man of Lawlessness, as he is described in 2 Thess. 2:3-9. If he is the Man of Lawlessness, then the one who restrained him was his own father (Ananias b. Nedebaeus) who held a tight rein on him until AD 66 when Menahem killed Ananias. Eleazar was then freed from restraint, and immediately began to manifest his LAWLESS nature.

Apr - 66 – Lawlessness is Increased. At this time, just before the revolt (mid-66), the amount of law-breaking and lawlessness began to rapidly escalate and proliferate, just as Jesus had predicted: "lawlessness is increased" (Matt. 24:12). At Paul's trial in Jerusalem back in AD 58, the High Priest Ananias broke the Law by striking Paul on the mouth (Acts 23:1-3). This was not the only law-breaking that Ananias was guilty of, and it set the example for his son Eleazar to follow here in 66 AD. Like father, like son. In this case, the son went way beyond the example of his father. From here onwards Josephus tells us that the Zealots and Jewish religious leaders kept laws only selectively (if at all). [Antiq 20:200-203 (20.9.1); War 7.253-273 (7.8.1); War 4.556-563 (4.9.10); 4.184 (4.3.10)]

Apr - 66 – Abomination of Desolation ("Jerusalem encompassed by armies") [Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Lk. 21:20] Somewhere in this timeframe (Spring of AD 66) just before the war began, we would have to place the Abomination of Desolation. Both Matthew and Mark in their accounts of the Olivet Discourse (the Synoptic Apocalypse) say that the Abomination would **stand in a holy place where it should not be**. Luke was definitely aware of both those accounts when he composed his gospel, and it is clear that he understood the Abomination to be **armies or army encampments in the area around Jerusalem**. We noted above the movements and actions of Florus' troops in his attempt to seize all the gold in the temple and force the Jews to bring coins into the temple with Caesar's deified image on them. This was viewed by the people of Jerusalem as an attack on their religion (not just on their pocketbook). They would not sit idle and let Florus get away with this.

This phrase ("abomination of desolation") would immediately arouse the interest of Jewish people because they believed that at the end of the age an evil man of lawlessness (cf. 2 Thess. 2) would do something abominable like Antiochus did. The word abomination is referring to an abominable person or thing which would defile the temple or Jerusalem and cause it to be desolated and destroyed. The word

abomination had strong connections with idols and pagan sacrifices to idols, or anything unclean which pollutes the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Something utterly abhorrent like this would happen to force the Jews to go to war, just like they did in the days of Antiochus. As Antiochus tried to Hellenize the Jews and change their religion to pagan idolatry, so the Romans tried to paganize the Jews and force idolatry and emperor worship upon them.

The approach of Florus' Roman troops toward Jerusalem could easily have been understood by the Jewish people as a signal to flee. (Matt. 24:15-20; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20) It was the first time since the days of Caligula (AD 39-41) that a Roman commander had brought that many **soldiers (three cohorts) to Jerusalem** with such a hostile intent (to rob them of their imageless coinage, and force them to use coins with Caesar's image on them). Plus, there were **Zealot armies** forming at this very time who came to Jerusalem shortly after this with their armies to take over the leadership of the war effort. So there were **several armies encircling Jerusalem** at this time, including the **angelic armies** that were seen in the clouds a few days after Passover. If there were any Christians remaining in Jerusalem after the Neronic persecution (which is doubtful), they would have seen all this army and angelic activity and remembered the warning that Christ had given them to flee when they saw armies encircling Jerusalem. This would have been the last chance for any remaining Christians to get out safely, so that none of them would be caught up in the Zealot takeover of the city shortly afterwards, and so that they could remain alive until the Parousia (and the rapture). The longer they waited, the riskier it became. But we have no mention of any Christians still being left in Jerusalem at this time, nor does Josephus indicate that any Christians participated in the war afterwards, on either side.

As we noticed previously, Eusebius stated that the Christians had received a warning to flee a few years before the war (Euseb. Eccl. Hist. 3.5). After the Neronic persecution began (late 64), and especially after the Zealot rebellion broke out (mid-66), it would have been extremely difficult for any Jews, especially Christians, to flee out of Judea. Note what Josephus says about this: Wars 2.556 (2.20.1); Wars 4.565 (4.9.10). Because of the persecution, and the desire of the Zealots to enlist every available Judean in the war effort, the suffering and hardship in Judea at this time was getting worse by the day. Jesus had warned the Judean Christians and all Judeans about this: "woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are **nursing babies** in those days... your flight not be in winter or on a **Sabbath**" (Matt. 24:19-20). Sure enough, it all came to pass: A nursing mother slew her infant son for food in the famine during the siege [Euseb. 3.7.1-2; Wars 6.201-213 (6.3.4)]. No travel was allowed on the Sabbath, because the city gates were closed [Antiq. 13.252 (13:8.4)].

If any Christians were still in Palestine a few days after Passover in AD 66, they would have seen another sign to leave Judea when they saw the angelic armies in the clouds. **Either of these events (the armies of Florus, or the Zealots, or the angelic armies in the clouds) would have provided a clear signal for the Jews to abandon Judea for refuge elsewhere.** Many more signals to leave were provided within the next two months.

Menahem the Zealot took his army to Masada and captured it from the Roman garrison there, while Eleazar the captain of the temple guard used his soldiers to

occupy the temple and put a stop to the daily Roman peace offering. Armed bands of Zealots were running around Judea and all around Jerusalem, and inside Jerusalem as well. By August of AD 66 there were plenty of “armies encompassing Jerusalem” inside and outside (Luke 21:20). Jerusalem was a holy place where such armies ought not to be standing. The Zealot leaders brought their armies right into the temple and camped there (where they definitely ought not to be). Josephus (a priest concerned for the sanctity of the temple) was horrified at this abomination, and even more so when the Zealot factions began killing each other and the priests and the innocent worshippers right there inside the temple. This indeed was a horrific abomination which caused its desolation.

The Romans considered it abominable when blood of their countrymen was shed in their pagan temples [cf. Wars 2:210 (2.11.3)]. Josephus tells how the blood of priests and common people was shed inside the Temple [Wars 5.11ff (5.1.3)]. There are dozens of references in Josephus where this kind of abominable activity is mentioned and lamented by Josephus: Wars 4.201-203 (4.3.12); Wars 4.215 (4.3.13); Wars 4.242 and 4.261-262 (4.4.3); Wars 4.313 and 318 (4.5.1); Wars 4.437 (4.7.6); Wars 4.151 (4.3.7) and 4.388 (4.6.3); Wars 4.558-565 (4.9.10); Wars 5.442-445 (5.10.5); Wars 6:316 (6.6.1); Wars 6.428 (6.9.4); Wars 4.163,171,181-183 (4.3.10); Wars 7.262-270 (7.8.1); Antiq. 20:166 (20.8.5); Antiq 20.165 (20.8.5) -- The **Sicarii** murdered in the temple, thus polluting it. Wars 5:17 (5.1.3); Wars 2.455 (2.17.10) -- "abomination" used in reference to Priest Eleazar's murder of the Roman garrison on a Sabbath day. Euseb. 3.5.4 and 3.7.4-9

The outbreak of the rebellion “cut short” the persecution upon the Church in Judea, since the Jews now had to turn their attention to preparations for the war and their own survival against Rome (Matt. 24:22; Mk. 13:20). Conditions in Judea and Jerusalem now grew progressively worse by the day. Florus had succeeded in provoking the Jews into open rebellion, so that his own perverse activity would appear innocent to Nero.

It is therefore not surprising that some of the priesthood (under the leadership of **Eleazar b. Ananias**) shortly afterwards made their break with Rome official by stopping the daily sacrifice (peace offering) for the Roman Emperor (Nero), as well as the sacrifices of all Gentiles. The removal of 17 talents of imageless gold from the temple treasury had left them little choice. The temple could no longer function normally. They would have to mint new coins, and that meant revolt against Rome. When the Zealots made this decision to revolt, their minting of new coins most likely would have begun soon afterwards. The Zealots intensified their efforts of gathering men, weapons, and finances for the revolt. They urged all their sympathizers throughout Israel and the Diaspora to support and join the Zealot cause (deceiving the nations to go to war – cf. the book of Revelation).

Josephus dates the unofficial beginning of the revolt from this very incident with Florus. The Zealots were provoked to go to war by his attempt to remove all the temple gold and force Nero's coinage to be used instead. The people despised Florus even more than the previous governors (Felix, Festus, and Albinus). Florus urged Cestius Gallus to intervene at this time and crush the rebellion before it gained more momentum, but instead Cestius merely sent an emissary (Neapolitanus) to inspect the situation and determine how serious it really was. This only bought the

Zealots more time to fan the flames of revolt even more. Evidently Cestius did not trust Florus' assessment of the situation, since the Jews had also sent a delegation to Cestius at the same time Florus did. This provocation by Florus happened right around the time of Passover. Josephus says the killing of the 3600 citizens and residents of Jerusalem occurred on the **16th day of Artemisius** [*Wars* 2:315 (2.15.2)], just five days before the angelic armies were seen in the clouds (21st day of Artemisius) [*Wars* 6.296 (6.5.3)].

In conclusion: Thus, it seems possible that this incident with Florus, and the actions of Eleazar in response to it, may have been the occasion when the prophecies of the **Abomination of Desolation** and **Man of Lawlessness** were fulfilled. We offer this as one possibility for our serious consideration.

In coming weeks, we will be looking at a lot more material from Josephus. If you do not have a copy of his book (**Josephus - Complete Works**), this is the time to get it! It is available on our website (<http://preterist.org>). You will want to read what he has to say about all the signs they saw occurring at this time when the war was just about to break out. I would also recommend getting copies of F. F. Bruce's book (**Israel and the Nations**), and my book (**First Century Events**). This will really help you get a handle on all this history that fulfilled the predictions of all the prophets, apostles, and Jesus. All three of these books are available right there on our website.

That will wrap it up for this time. If any of our listeners have questions or comments about what we looked at here in this session, do not hesitate to email me. My email address is: preterist1@preterist.org

That will do it for this session. Thanks so much for listening.

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If you would like a couple of great books which detail all of these events, I would highly recommend **ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS** by F. F. Bruce, and my book, **First Century Events**, which deals with the Roman, Jewish, and Christian events of the first century. We are using both of these resources here in our studies. You can purchase both of them from our website: www.preterist.org

Some further recommended reading:

The Complete Works of Josephus (Antiquities and Wars), which is also available from our website: www.preterist.org)