

Cestius Gallus Fiasco (AD 66)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- July 21, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thanks for joining me here for another episode of *Then and Now* where we study the past, to help us understand the present, and to shape a better future.
- B. Let's pray before we begin --
Heavenly Father, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer throughout all ages of Your eternal Kingdom. We echo the praise and thanksgiving of the Psalmist who said: "Had it not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive" (Psa. 124:2-3). Blessed be Your Holy Name. We are chasers after Your Truth. Help us not to be afraid of following your truth wherever it leads, and no matter what others may do against us. Help us here to understand the Biblical and Historical truth, so we can share it with others, and all nations will be blessed by Your great salvation. We pray this in the Name of Our Precious Redeemer Jesus. Amen.
- C. Last session we looked at how one of the Zealot leaders (**Menahem**) led his Zealot force to Masada and ousted the Roman garrison, plundered all the armaments, and then returned triumphantly to Jerusalem as if he was a king. One of the other priestly Zealot leaders, **Eleazar b. Ananias**, who already had control of the temple, stopped the daily sacrifices of Caesar and all Gentiles. His father, Ananias b. Nedebaeus, was killed by Menahem's forces, just as Apostle Paul had predicted eight years earlier. Eleazar avenged his father's death by killing Menahem and his bodyguard troops. There was also a horrible massacre of all the Jewish inhabitants in **Caesarea**, which provoked many more of the moderate Jews to join the rebellion.
- D. This time we will be looking at the **early months of the rebellion** (August through December AD 66). We will see how the Zealots quickly organized their government and prepared for the Roman attack. The Roman Legate in Antioch, Cestius Gallus, did not waste any time responding to the rebellion, but his attack on Jerusalem was mismanaged from start to finish. His failure to squash the rebellion, only strengthened and emboldened the Zealot cause.

Early Efforts to Crush the Rebellion Failed – Cestius Defeated (AD 66)

Aug 66 – Misunderstanding of Prophecy. Many Christians, Jews, and secular historians have wondered not only why the Jews went to war in the first place, but more especially why they pursued it with such vigor, and to such a bitter end, including the loss of their temple, city of Jerusalem, and the right to continue dwelling in the land. Josephus provides several reasons for their daring attempt to throw off the Roman yoke:

- (1) The Zealot principle [**Fourth Philosophy**] of freedom from taxation and from paying tribute to any foreign government, and that God was therefore totally on their side no matter what they did. The founder of this Fourth Philosophy was Judas of Galilee in AD 6.
- (2) **False prophets** stirred up the belief that this was the time that God would establish His universal reign over all nations.
- (3) The **signs and wonders** and omens that they saw only strengthened their belief that this was the time when God would enable them to break free from Rome and set up His eternal kingdom.
- (4) Their unequivocal belief that **God was on their side**: John of Gischala said that he "could never fear capture, since the city was God's." [*Wars* 6.98-99 (6.2.1)].
- (5) Class conflict between the rich and poor, as well as political and economic competition between the various rival factions of the priesthood, rabbinate, and aristocracy.
- (6) Ethnic hatred between the Jews and the other Greco-Syrian inhabitants of Palestine.
- (7) The corruption and evil mismanagement of affairs by the Roman procurators, especially the last two, Albinus and Florus.
- (8) But the biggest reason of all was their belief that "*at about that time, one from their country would become ruler of the habitable world*" [*Wars* 6.312-315 (6.5.4)]. So it wasn't just independence from Rome that they wanted. He says there was a certain prophecy about a world ruler who was expected to appear at that time, and take over rulership of the whole world.

Gary Goldberg (from a Jewish perspective) commented on this on his Josephus.org website:

"This manifestly was understood as a prophecy of a Messiah, one appointed by the Lord to do His work on earth. But was it a prophecy of *the* Messiah, the one that would herald the passing of this world and the beginning of the World to Come?

"All we can safely say from Josephus' evidence is that **the revolutionaries expected divine assistance, and probably signs and miracles**, in freeing their country and even taking command of the Roman Empire. The oracle said to them nothing less than the **imminent arrival of a Jewish Empire** to replace it. This is somewhat different from supposing the revolutionaries had eschatological expectations akin to the early Christians.

"Part of the interpretation on this point hinges on the term used for "habitable world," *oikoumene*. This word usually means the Graeco-Roman world, but it could also indeed signify the whole earth; the latter would be a magical happening requiring some new cosmic order. Of significance to Josephus may have been that the term is used by Cyrus in **1 Esdras 2:3** (Septuagint translation) to refer to his own kingdom, and Cyrus is the only foreign ruler to be called a *messiah* (*christ* in the Septuagint). It was a commonplace to reread passages about Cyrus as referring to the contemporary Emperor of Rome, so this may have been the basis for Josephus' interpretation.

"We do not know what oracle Josephus is citing here, although it seems to be one of the **Sibylline Oracles** held at Rome, [since] it is also mentioned by the Roman historians Tacitus (*The Histories*) and Suetonius (*The Twelve Caesars*, the Vespasian section)."

Found at: <http://josephus.org/causesOfWar.htm#messiah>

My comments: Did you notice the Zealot belief that this was the time when God would set up a **political ruler** in Jerusalem who would rule over the whole world? This was the very ideology that had caused the Jews to reject Jesus forty years earlier. They wanted a **fleshly descendant of David** ruling on a **physical throne** from **earthly Jerusalem**. They did not want God or Jesus to be their spiritual king. It was this same lust for an earthly king that originally made Israel reject God's rulership over them and set up King Saul. It was this same earthly kingdom concept which motivated the **Judaizers, Zealots, Ebionites**, and even **Premillennial Dispensationalists** today. *The destruction of Jerusalem was a very effective indication from God on what He thought about that idea.*

Apostle Paul taught that Christ Jesus was the true spiritual ruler of the world, and that he was already putting His enemies down who did not want Him to rule over them. Jesus was about to come and put down the rest of God's enemies, and then give the Kingdom back to God to whom it belongs (1 Cor 15:25-28). Indeed, this very prophecy that the Zealots used to undergird their rebellion, referred instead to the true Messiah Jesus who did establish His eternal kingdom over the whole world.

It is extremely revealing that one of the four doctrinal errors of the **Ebionites** in **Pella** was this very issue. They believed that a fleshly descendant of David (Jesus or one of his relatives) would set up a physical throne in Jerusalem and rule the world. They were making the same mistake that the Jews did. Furthermore, it seems that **Papias** was in agreement with this physical kingdom idea, which suggests that he may have been influenced by one of the Ebionite or Nazarean sects in Palestine or Syria.

Sep - 66 – Agrippa II was in Antioch by this time discussing the situation with Cestius Gallus, who was already assembling his troops. [*Wars* 2.18.6 (2.481)]

Oct 15-16, 66 – Cestius Gallus arrived in Ptolemais. He took the Twelfth Legion from Antioch, along with Agrippa's troops and other auxiliaries and marched to Ptolemais. His troops supposedly numbered more than 35 thousand. (**Elul 26-27, Oct 15-16, 66**)

Oct 17, 66 – After reaching Ptolemais, Cestius sent a detachment to burn and plunder the nearby city of **Chabulon** (Zebulon) and its surrounding villages in Galilee. Lost 2000 soldiers to a Jewish counter-attack. [*Wars* 2.499-506 (2.18.9)] (**Elul 28, Oct 17, AD 66**)

Oct 20-26, 66 – Cestius went to Caesarea, while his army took **Joppa** (8400 Jewish casualties), as well as the nearby toparchy of **Narbatene**, where his soldiers killed, plundered and burned their fortifications. [*Wars* 2.507-509 (2.18.10)] Then he sent forces back into **Galilee**. (**Tishri 2-8, Oct 20-26, AD 66**)

Late Oct 66 – **New coins minted at this time.** According to Graetz, the Zealots minted new coins just before the Feast of Booths in AD 66. [see Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, Fifth Edition, 1937. Vol. 2, p. 190] This seems to be the most likely time when the rebels began minting their own coins to replace the Roman coinage with images of Caesar on them. Florus had taken 17 talents. Then he attempted to get the rest of the gold out of the temple, but failed. Agrippa made them pay another 40 talents soon after that to complete their tax deficit. Supplies of imageless coins with which to buy sacrifices must have been running low. The rebel priests under command of Eleazar would have wanted to replenish their supply as soon as possible. Since they had just officially broke with Rome by refusing to accept the peace offering on Rome's behalf, it is logical that they would have had no hesitancy in minting their own coins, at least for temple use, if not also for general use in Judea and Israel. There are coins with the date "Year Five" on them, which would not have been possible if they only started minting coins in December of AD 66 after the defeat of Cestius. That implies that they reckoned the war to have begun in the late Summer of AD 66. They probably took the Roman coins and melted them and re-stamped them. There were thick silver shekel and half-shekel coins labeled "Year One" and so forth. Coins of the fourth and fifth years are extremely rare. They bear the legend, "Jerusalem the Holy," and were the only coins used to pay the Temple tax and purchase sacrifices. This had tremendous propaganda benefits for the revolt, in the same way it had during the Maccabean revolt. They probably could not "**buy or sell**" anything in Israel without using these coins. They certainly could not buy or sell sacrifices at the temple without them.

Nov 2-9, 66 – **Zealots assembled in Jerusalem during Sukkot** (Fall Festival of Booths) to organize their government and prepare for Cestius' imminent attack.

Nov 3 – The twelfth legion went into Galilee against the strongest fortress there (**Sepphoris**), which surprisingly accepted them peacefully. However, the Zealots fled from the city to the hills and were soon flushed out by the Romans, killing two thousand of them in the nearby **Asamon** mountains [*Wars* 2.510-512 (2.18.11)]. (**Tishri 9-16, Oct 27–Nov 3, AD 66**)

Nov 4-5 – The twelfth legion returned to Caesarea and regrouped with the rest of the army to march against **Antipatris**, where they dispersed the Zealot forces holding the tower of **Aphek**. When the rebels fled from there, he burned and plundered it, then moved on to **Lydda**. Arriving at Lydda, the city was virtually unguarded. Most of the men of the place had gone up to Jerusalem for the feast of Sukkot (*Wars* 2.19.1). **(Tishri 15-22, Nov 2-9, AD 66)**

Nov 7, 66 – Then **Cestius** moved toward **Judea**, through the pass at Beth-Horon, and camped temporarily at Gabaon (Gibeon), which was not far from Jerusalem. A large force of Zealots who were at Jerusalem for the festival of Sukkot (Nov 2-9), left Jerusalem and attacked Cestius at **Gabaon**, killing 515 of his troops while suffering only 22 casualties. **(Tishri 20, Nov 7, AD 66)**

Nov 8-10 – Cestius decided to retreat to **Beth-Horon** temporarily to regroup, but their rear guard was attacked all along the way by **Simon b. Giora's forces**. Simon captured a lot of their weapons and supplies. The rebels then placed their troops on the hills surrounding Beth-Horon to prevent Cestius from getting through the pass. [*Wars* 2.513-522 (2.19.1-2)].

Nov 11-13, 66 – While Cestius and Agrippa were camped at Gabaon for three days, Agrippa offered amnesty to the Zealots if they would break off the attack and return their allegiance to Rome, but Agrippa's messengers were attacked, one killed and another wounded (*Wars* 2.19.3). **(Tishri 24-26, Nov 11-13, AD 66)**

Nov 14-16 – Cestius then engaged the rebels and chased them back to Jerusalem, where he set up camp on Mount Scopus for three days to collect food from local villages. **(Tishri 27-29, Nov 14-16, AD 66)**

Nov 17, 66 – **Cestius Gallus** began his attack on **Jerusalem** on the **thirtieth day of Hyperberetus (Tisri - Oct-Nov)**. He chased the rebels out of all the surrounding areas and bottled them up in Jerusalem. He camped at Mt. Scopus for three days (north of the city beyond the third wall). He seized all the corn from the surrounding villages. He entered through the third wall into the northern part of the city called **Bezetha** and burned it. Then he went up into the Upper City with his forces, where the rebel forces were camped. He stationed his troops at the wall of the upper city and camped near the royal palace. [*Wars* 2.528-530 (2.19.4)]

Nov 18-21 – The moderates and pro-Roman Jewish leaders offered to let Cestius come into the upper city, but he hesitated, giving the rebels time to organize their defense, and remove those moderate leaders who had offered to let Cestius into the city. Some of the moderate leaders were killed. Then the Zealots took control of the upper city walls, from which they bombarded Cestius' forces with arrows and stones, who were nevertheless heavily shielded while trying to undermine the walls.

Nov 22, 66 – Cestius withdrew unexpectedly: After five days of fighting, just as his soldiers were about to topple the wall and set fire to the gate of the Temple, Cestius disengaged and withdrew for some unknown reason. He was on the threshold of taking the City, and could have done it if he had only pressed the attack at that very time, because the rebels were not prepared to defend it. Josephus said that Cestius could have put an end to the war that very day, but for some unknown reason, he withdrew, and headed back toward Syria. [*Wars* 2.528-540 (2.19.4-7)] (**Heshvan 5, Nov 22, AD 66**)

Nov 23-24, 66 – Cestius retreated to Scopus first, then onward to **Gabaon**, being constantly attacked on his flanks and at the rear by the rebel forces. The Zealot forces were able to capture most of his baggage and supplies. Cestius camped at Gabaon for two days to plan his next move. (**Heshvan 6-7, Nov 23-24, AD 66**)

Nov 25, 66 – Cestius headed toward the Beth-Horon pass, but was hemmed in by the Zealot forces on the hills surrounding it. [*Wars* 2.540-555 (2.19.7-9)] The only thing that saved him from a total annihilation was nightfall. They left 400 men behind to appear as if they were still camped there, while the rest of the force fled in the night. This occurred on the **eighth day of Dius**. (**Heshvan 8, Nov 25, AD 66**)

Nov 26-27, 66 – When the Zealots discovered the trick the next morning, they quickly overpowered and killed the remaining 400 Roman soldiers, and pursued the Roman force which was now camped at Antipatris. In their haste to flee, the Romans left behind most of their heavy weaponry, war engines, and supplies. The Zealots plundered it all, and went “running and singing” back to Jerusalem believing this victory was a sign that God was going to deliver them from the Roman yoke. The Romans suffered heavy casualties on this retreat: 5300 soldiers, including 480 cavalry. [*Wars* 2.554-555 (2.19.9) and *Wars* 3.9 (3.2.1)] [*Wars* 2.555 (2.19.9)] (**Heshvan 9-10, Nov 26-27, AD 66**)

Josephus commented on this humiliating defeat of Cestius:

"After this catastrophe had befallen Cestius, many of the distinguished Jews abandoned the city like swimmers from a sinking ship." [*Wars* 2.556 (2.20.1)]

"This reverse of Cestius proved disastrous to our whole nation; for those who were bent on war were thereby still more elated and, having once defeated the Romans, hoped to continue victorious to the end." (*Life* 5-6, 22-24)

Two Roman historians also recorded the defeat of Cestius: (1) Tacitus, *The Histories* V, and (2) Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Vespasian 4.

Nov - 66 – The peace-loving folks “swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink.” [*Wars* 2.556 (2.20.1)] The moderates knew that it was now only a matter of time before the Roman war engine would return in full force. They fled to the hills [*Wars* 2.556 (2.20.1), see also *Life* 5-6, and *Life* 22-24]. Anyone who stayed in Jerusalem and Judea after this was begging for trouble. It was now evident to all that there was no way to avert a full-scale military response from Rome.

Dec - 66 – More false prophets appeared on the scene, and used this defeat of the Roman army to gather more support for the doomed war effort. Both Josephus and Eusebius mention the false prophets who deceived the Jews into pursuing the war at this time:

Wars 6:286 (6.5.2) Now, there was then a **great number of false prophets** suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that they should **wait for deliverance** from God: and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes.

Wars 6:287 (6.5.2) Now, a man that is in adversity does easily comply with such promises; for when a such a **seducer** makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries which oppress him, then it is that the patient is full of hopes of such deliverance.

Wars 6:288 (6.5.3) Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these **deceivers**, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend, nor give credit, to **the signs that were so evident** and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see, or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them.

Euseb. 3.8:1 Taking, then, the work of this author, read what he records in the sixth book of his History. His words are as follows: “Thus were the miserable people won over at this time by **the impostors** [i.e., the false Messiahs] and **false prophets**; but they did not heed nor give credit to the visions and signs that foretold the approaching desolation. On the contrary, as if struck by lightning, and as if possessing neither eyes nor understanding, they slighted the proclamations of God.

Dec - 66 – There were more Signs and Omens which foretold doom and destruction. The moderates were in **mourning** over what they saw coming. Josephus says, “...the moderate sort were **exceedingly sad**; and a great many there were who, out of the prospects they had of the calamities that were coming upon them, **made great lamentations**. There were also **such omens observed as were understood to be forerunners of evils**, by such as loved peace, but were by those that kindled the war interpreted so as to suit their own inclinations; and the very state of the city, even before the Romans came against it, was that of **a place doomed to destruction.**” [*Wars* 2.649-650 (2.22.1)]

Dec - 66 – Zealot leaders began organizing the defense of the country during the winter of 66-67. They sent emissaries to all the Jewish communities outside Palestine, seeking reinforcements and supplies for the war effort. Some reinforcements came from Adiabene and Babylon. They appointed 10 commanders over the seven regions of Palestine: *Wars* 2.20.3-4 (2.562ff) and *Wars* 3.3.5 (3.54).

1. *Jerusalem* - Joseph b. Gorion and Ananus II (who killed James four years earlier)
2. *Idumaea* - Jesus b. Sapphias, Eleazar b. Ananias, and Niger the Perean
3. *Jericho* - Joseph b. Simon
4. *Peraea* - Manasseh
5. *N.W. Judea* (i.e. Thamna, Lydda, Joppa, Emmaus) - John the Essene
6. *N.E. Judea* (i.e. Gophnitica and Acrabattene) - John b. Matthias (or son of Ananias?)
7. *Far North* (i.e. two Galilees and Gamla) - Josephus b. Matthias (with two priests, Joazar and Judas, underneath him. *Life* 29)

Dec - 66 – Josephus was sent to Galilee (Dec. 66 or Jan. 67) to begin war preparations there. He was only 29 years old at the time of his appointment to this position of command over the Galilean region.

Dec - 66 – Judean citizens forbidden to buy anything from Gentiles. It is no surprise that Eleazar b. Ananias was directly involved in initiating and enforcing this prohibition. We might also note that in order to enforce such an order, the Zealots would already have needed to mint their own coinage with which to buy and sell in Judea. Notice what Graetz says about this prohibition from buying from Gentiles in his history:

After Cestius' defeat or flight, the animosity of the heathens against the Judaeans became even more violent. They banded together and murdered their Judaeans neighbors, men, women, and children without mercy. The Judaeans patriots retaliated on their heathen neighbors whenever possible. A desperate race-war broke out between the Judaeans and the heathen population of Palestine and the neighboring countries. Since all these nationalities, Romans, Greeks, Syrians, and even Alexandrians made the emperor's cause their own, the ultra-Zealots believed themselves justified in embracing all heathens in their hatred of Rome. The school of Shammai therefore promulgated a law which aimed at nothing short of a total separation, or the erection of an insurmountable barrier, between Judaeans and heathens. **Judaeans were forbidden to learn the language of the heathens, to accept gifts from them for the temple, and even to buy wine, oil, bread, and other food from them.** These decrees became known under the caption of "Eighteen Things." Religious rigorism and political zealotism went hand in hand in that stirring period. The politically and religiously moderate Hillelites, however, were not in accord with these measures of separation. When the Synod was called together, the Zealots lorded it with a high hand. Armed guards were stationed at

the doors, with instructions to make short shrift of the Hillelites. The Shammaites succeeded in carrying their point by force. The meeting of the Synod took place in the residence of **Eleazar ben Ananias (ben Hezekiah), the leader of the Zealots**. [H. Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, Fifth Edition, 1937. Vol. 2, p. 194]

Graetz also stated that this same **Eleazar b. Ananias** was the very one who initiated the war effort. He says that "Eleazar ben Ananias ... gave the first impetus to the mighty struggle..." This confirms what we have seen from Yosippon, Hegesippus, and Josephus as well. All fingers point to Eleazar b. Ananias as the prime instigator of the rebellion. [H. Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, Fifth Edition, 1937. Vol. 2, p. 195]

Dec – 66 – The Zealot forces marched swiftly to Askelon right after their defeat of Cestius, and attempted to subjugate it, so that the Roman garrison there would not be a thorn in their side later. But it backfired on them. They were no match for the Roman footmen and horsemen, and the Zealots suffered heavy losses, including two of their three main leaders (**John the Essene** and **Silas of Babylon**). The other Zealot leader (**Niger the Perean**) was assumed dead from being trapped in a burning tower in Bezedel, but he had jumped down from the tower into a subterranean cave. There he was found alive three days later by the Zealots, and considered to have been providentially preserved to be their leader in the coming war effort. [*Wars* 3.27-28 (3.2.3); cf. *Wars* 3.11 (3.2.1)]

Dec - 66 – Cestius immediately dispatched messengers to Nero to report the rebellion and ask for reinforcements. (*Wars* 2.19.5-9 and *Life* 5-6, 22-24). Nero was in Greece at the time with Vespasian as his bodyguard. As soon as Nero heard the bad news, he dispatched Vespasian and Titus to settle the score.

Next time we will look at Vespasian's and Titus' preparations for the war.

That will wrap it up for this session. If any of our listeners have questions or comments about what we looked at here, do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks so much for listening.