

The Man of Lawlessness Revealed

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We noted in a previous article that when the Neronic persecution began (August 64) Christians had to go into hiding. It was no longer safe to write epistles and send them to the scattered churches, go on mission trips, or even assemble as a church in public. Thus, all literary and evangelistic activities of the Christians ceased.

Then, after the Zealot rebellion broke out (May 66), all mention of true Christians vanished from the historical record, and the attention of historians shifted to the *Jewish-Roman war*. There is no record of Christians participating in the Jewish-Roman war on either side. Christians were *nowhere to be found* after the Zealot rebellion began. And that strange silence about the Christians continued for almost twenty years after AD 70. We will say a lot more about that after we finish our survey of the Jewish-Roman war. This article explores some of the events of the Zealot rebellion which reveal the identity of the *Man of Lawlessness*.

Eleazar blew the Trumpet

When *Gessius Florus*, the Roman governor of Judea, brought two cohorts of soldiers to Jerusalem in order to break into the temple and rob all of its gold, *Eleazar b. Ananias*, captain of the temple guard, *blew the trumpet* and rallied the citizens to block the lanes of the city. That began the Zealot rebellion.

From that day onward (**May 12, 66**), Eleazar took control of the temple and *lawlessly* used it as his fortress and “shop of tyranny” [*Wars* 4:151 (4.3.7)]. Four days later (**May 16, 66**), the angelic armies were seen in the sky signaling the return of Christ to *rescue His saints* and *pour out God’s wrath* on His enemies. Then, two weeks after that, on the day of Pentecost (**May 30, 66**), the dead were raised out of Hades and the living were changed, and then both groups were caught up to be with Christ forever afterwards in heaven above in the unseen realm.

After the true Christians were removed from the earth, and were safely gathered to Christ, the tribulation upon the unbelieving Jews began to intensify during the war and in the siege of Jerusalem as the wrath was being fully poured out.

Agrippa II and Manahem

Soon after this, in **June 66**, *Agrippa II* returned from Alexandria and met with the Jewish people in Jerusalem. He gave a long speech about the horrors and futility of war, hoping to deter them from the rebellion, but to no avail. After being insulted by the angry mob, Agrippa II took his entourage and departed for his own territory [*Wars* 2.335-407 (2.16.1 – 2.17.1)]. The Jews stopped paying taxes to Rome at this point. Prof. H. Graetz suggests that this occurred on Sivan 25th (**June 18, 66**) [*Popular History of the Jews*, Vol. 2, p. 184].

Hegesippus states that shortly after Agrippa II departed from Jerusalem in **late June 66**, “the instigators of war, ambushes having been arranged, captured [the fortress Masada], the guards of

the Romans having been killed, they stationed their own men [there]” [*Hegesippus* 2:10]. Josephus indicates that it was *Manahem* (the Zealot) who took his soldiers to Masada and overpowered the Roman guard, opened the armory, and distributed the weapons to his own men and to others from the region who joined with him [*Wars* 2:407-408 (2.17.1-2)]. Then Manahem and his soldiers returned to Jerusalem with those weapons to strengthen the rebel forces there.

Ananias and Eleazar

Eleazar was the son of *Ananias b. Nedebaeus*, who was the most powerful former high priest at that time. Ananias was the high priest during the time of Paul’s trial in AD 58. After Ananias *unlawfully* ordered Paul to be struck on the mouth, Paul prophesied that God was about to strike Ananias (Acts 23:3). And sure enough, eight years later, Ananias was killed by the Zealot leader Manahem [*Wars* 2.441 (2.17.9)].

Eleazar was the *Sagan* (captain) of the temple guard, second in command to the High Priest. He literally sat in the temple and acted *lawlessly* in the very manner Apostle Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 2. For instance, **in late June 66**, a month after the rebellion began, Josephus states that *Eleazar b. Ananias* stopped the daily sacrifices from, and on behalf of all Gentiles, including the peace offerings from, and on behalf of, Nero Caesar [*Wars* 2.408-410 (2.17.2)]. That constituted an act of war against Rome. He then went further by prohibiting all *buying and selling* with Gentiles.

Many of the moderate priests and powerful Jewish leaders strongly objected to this rejection of sacrifices from all foreigners since it was considered to be a *nullification* of the validity of the whole sacrificial system. But Josephus records that the rebels in the temple, all of whom were under the control of Eleazar, paid no attention to these complaints by the moderates and went on with their war preparations while neglecting to perform all of their normal and proper sacerdotal duties [*Wars* 2.409-417 (2.17.3-4)]. Josephus notes that those rebel priests were *profaning the temple* with their weapons of war [*Wars* 2.424 (2.17.5)].

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At the beginning of the rebellion *Eleazar* was still somewhat under the *restraining* influence of his father Ananias. But when the Zealot leader Manahem returned to Jerusalem from Masada, he crushed the moderate resistance in the upper city, and then killed Ananias (**late August 66**) – thus removing his *restraining* influence from Eleazar. Ananias had been an ally of Agrippa, and was very much opposed to the Zealot cause, so it was no surprise to see him killed by Manahem. With his father’s restraining influence eliminated, Eleazar was free to pursue his Zealot activities, thus fulfilling another of Apostle Paul’s prophecies: “the *restrainer* will be taken out of the way” (2 Thess 2:6-7).

Josephus notes that Manahem’s victory over the moderates inflated his ego so much that he believed himself to have no rival for leadership of the revolt, and he therefore became overbearing tyrannical. However, *Eleazar* was not about to relinquish his command to Manahem, so he devised a conspiracy to kill Manahem [*Wars* 2.442-443 (2.17.9)].

When Manahem put on royal garments and pompously went up into the temple to worship with some of his armed men as bodyguards, he was captured and killed by the rebel priests under Eleazar's leadership. This put an end to Manahem's role in the revolt and consolidated all of the rebel forces under Eleazar's control [*Wars* 2.442-448 (2.17.9)]. Now, with all that power at his command, and without his father's *restraining influence*, Eleazar's *lawless* conduct escalated rapidly, just as Paul had predicted fourteen years earlier (2 Thess 2:3-12).

Eleazar Broke His Oath

Eleazar and his soldiers continued their siege of the three towers in the upper city, which were occupied by Roman soldiers, until *Metilius*, the Roman commander, offered to surrender and lay down their arms in exchange for their lives. Eleazar granted the request, but then *lawlessly* broke his promise as soon as all the soldiers laid down their arms. All of the Romans were slain except *Metilius*, who promised to convert to Judaism. Josephus laments that this *breach of oath* not only provoked Roman revenge, but the *wrath of God* also [*Wars* 2:449-456 (2.17.9-10)].

And it was not long before that cup of wrath was poured out. The day on which Eleazar treacherously killed the Roman soldiers was a *Sabbath*, and on that *very same "day and hour"* in Caesarea, the Gentile citizens rose up against the Jewish citizens and slew twenty thousand of them in one hour's time, thus emptying Caesarea of its Jewish inhabitants [*Wars* 2:457 (2.18.1)].

Martin Hengel suggests that Eleazar might have performed the High Priestly function during Yom Kippur (**mid-October 66**) since he was in control of the Temple Mount at that time [Hengel, *The Zealots*, p. 360, note 240]. If true, that would be another example of Eleazar grievously violating the Law and setting himself up in the temple as being above Moses and God—a very *lawless* and *impious* thing to do (cf. 2 Thess 2).

From **late August 66** onward, the temple was constantly *desecrated*, *defiled*, and *polluted* by bloodshed and other crimes committed by Eleazar and his men inside the temple, in the outer courts, and outside in the city of Jerusalem. Josephus condemned and lamented all of this, stating that these *abominations* were the cause of the *desolation* [*Wars* 2:455 (2.17.10); 4:162-163 (4.3.10); 4:201 (4.3.12); 4:323 (4.5.2); 4:388 (4.6.3); 5:14-19 (5.1.3); 5:402 (5.9.4); 6:110 (6.2.1); 6:126 (6.2.4)]. This is apparently what Jesus had in mind when he mentioned the *Abomination of Desolation* (Matt 24:15), and which Paul described as the *apostasy* (rebellion) by the *Man of Lawlessness* (2 Thess 2:3).

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