

Historical Review (AD 64-66)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Mar 23, 2014

Opening Remarks:

- A. Welcome to the Then and Now podcast where we study the Bible and History from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we shared some of the great questions and feedback that we have been getting over the past month or so.
- C. This time, we need to back up to where we were in our previous historical studies, and have a quick review before continuing on our historical journey.
- D. Before we get into that review, let's ask God's blessings on our study:

All-Wise and All-Powerful God, who alone is Holy and Perfect, and the Only One who is qualified to be the Judge of all Your creatures. Your ways are so high above our ways that they are past finding out. You are the Sovereign King of all Kings, who exalts righteous nations and tears them down again when they lapse into wickedness. This very thing happened to the nation of Israel over and over again. Help us in this study of history to learn from the past mistakes of your people, so that we do not repeat those errors and suffer the same destruction. Teach us your holy ways and cause us to follow them all the days of our lives. Be with us here in this study of the past, so we can learn how to be Your faithful servants in shaping a better future for all future generations. We ask this in the Holy Name of Your Glorious and Eternally Existent Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

In our previous historical sessions, we finished the apostolic period, which saw all the New Testament books finished, followed by the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in which most of the first century Christians were either killed or fell away from the faith. However, some of the elect saints remained alive until Christ returned at His Parousia.

We noted that the Parousia began right after Passover in AD 66, and was a three and a half year (AD 66-70) visitation of Christ to reward His saints and pour out His wrath upon that generation of unbelieving Jews who crucified Him and persecuted His saints. Immediately after the sign of the Son of Man appeared in the sky above Palestine, He sent forth His angels to gather together His elect ones. Then, right after they were safely gathered out of harm's way, the Jewish revolt began.

In coming sessions we will be looking at the Jewish Rebellion, to provide a chronology of the whole war from start to finish, as well as suggest some connections between those events and the endtime prophecies in the Bible. To prepare us for that study of the Jewish War, let's do a quick review of the last two years leading up to that revolt.

Just Before the War (AD 64-66)

Here is a brief list of the most important events in the last 5 years before the war:

- AD 61 – Paul in prison in Rome
- AD 62 – James killed in Judea
- AD 62 – John exiled to Patmos where he wrote the Apocalypse
- AD 62 – Book of Revelation was written warning the saints to “**come out of her**”
- AD 63 – Book of Hebrews warned them to “**go out to Him** outside the camp”
- AD 63 – The saints **fled to Pella** BEFORE the Neronic persecution
- AD 64 – Last two NT epistles (Jude and 2 Peter) written – canon complete
- AD 64 – Fire in Rome and Neronic Persecution afterwards
- AD 64 – **Neronic persecution** killed all the Christians who stayed in Judea
- AD 65 – Florus allowed the armed bands to plunder the cities and villages of Judea
- AD 65 – Plague in Rome (30,000 died) and hurricane destroyed crops
- AD 65 – Year before the war, a star in shape of a sword and a comet over Jerusalem
- AD 66 – The Neronic persecution would be cut short by the Parousia
- AD 66 – Angelic Armies seen in the sky, signaling the **Parousia**
- AD 66 – The “elect” saints who fled to safety and remained alive would be **raptured**
- AD 66 – Pentecost - dead were raised and living were changed and raptured
- AD 66 – **The War** broke out in Judea
- AD 70 – The Temple was burned. Destruction of Jerusalem

We have spent quite a bit of time covering the two years from 62 to 64. A lot was happening then. There were about 19 books of our New Testament written during those two years. The persecution was heating up. Missionary activity was intense. Paul was in an out of prison during that time. James was killed. John was exiled. There was a great falling away of many false brethren. And the Neronic persecution was just about to strike. We noted how intense that persecution really was. Jesus said that great tribulation would be so intense that "unless it was cut short, none of the elect would have been saved." And Apostle John indicated in the Apocalypse that a "great multitude" of martyrs came out of that great tribulation (Rev 7:9-17). According to Rev. 7:9, this group of martyrs came "from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues." Evidently it was not just from Rome. Evidently there were martyrs from every nation in the Diaspora where there were Christians. It seems that the majority of Christians must have either fallen away in the great apostasy, or been killed in the Neronic persecution. But Jesus indicated that the "elect ones" would be preserved until the Parousia, at which time He would send forth His angels to gather together the elect.

Great Commission Finished (June 63)

AD 63 – Gospel had been “preached in the whole world...to all the nations” before the End arrived (Matt. 24:14). And it seems that the End Jesus had in mind was the Neronic persecution. Jesus had told the disciples that the End would not arrive and the Kingdom would not come UNTIL they had preached the gospel throughout the whole Roman world. That Great Commission was finished. From AD 58 onwards, Paul began to indicate in his epistles that the gospel had indeed been preached throughout the Diaspora, wherever there were Jewish communities.

AD 64 – The Literary Efforts of the Apostles Ceased. They stopped writing, not because they wanted to, but because they were killed in the Neronic persecution and were no longer around. The fact that their writings came to an abrupt end before 70, and we hear no more from them after that, tells us that they must have died or been raptured. If any of them had remained alive on earth beyond AD 70, they would have continued to pump out more inspired epistles to the churches.

All missionary and literary activity ceased. The Great Commission had been accomplished. The canon of New Testament scripture was closed. There were no more inspired writers left alive on earth to write any more books. From here onwards in our chronology you will notice that there is no more mention of any visible activities of the apostles and the Christians before AD 70. The Christians have left the stage, and the spotlight shifted over to the Jews and their war with Rome.

Peter said in his first epistle that the saints would be judged and rewarded first (1 Pet. 4:17), before the wicked were judged and destroyed. That seems to be exactly what happened. The Neronic persecution was when judgment began with the household of God. The Christians were judged and rewarded first, then the wrath was poured out full strength upon their persecutors.

In Jesus' Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24-43), the wheat is gathered (raptured) into the barn first (AD 66), and then the tares were burned (AD 70). The Neronic persecution eliminated the majority of remaining Christians. The few remaining went into hiding until the rapture. There were not a lot of Christians left on earth by the time of the Parousia. Jesus had already predicted this very scenario when he said, “when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:8), and “Unless those days had been cut short, no flesh would have been saved” (Matt 24:22). So, it wasn't a large number of saints left on earth to be raptured, and they were in hiding, running for their lives. If the world around them noticed their absence, they would only have thought that the Christians had either fled in the night to escape persecution, or they were rounded up by the Jewish and Roman authorities and taken away to be killed.

By the time of the Neronic persecution, all 27 books of our New Testament had been finished and put into circulation.

Fire in Rome and the Neronic Persecution (July 64)

Jul 19, 64 – Great Fire in Rome. The fire started on July 19th (AD 64), and burned for six days, and then broke out again and burned for three more days. Out of the fourteen sections of the city, only four remained intact after the fire (see Tacitus *Annals* 15:44).

The Neronic Persecution and the Great Tribulation (AD 64)

The Neronic persecution was one of the most significant factors in the history of the church just before the Parousia. But as significant as it is for our understanding, it has been almost totally ignored by futurists. Too many of us preterists have likewise underestimated its impact upon the pre-70 church.

This was a very dark time for the Church, and even though it was short-lived, for only two years from 64 to 66, it was extremely intense and killed the majority of the remaining Christians, and forced the remainder into hiding until the rapture. There was no other time of persecution on the pre-70 church as intense as this one. Therefore, it appears that the Neronic Persecution must have been the "Great Tribulation" that Jesus warned them about.

Aug 64 – Nero began the Persecution of Christians. It seems almost certain that none of the NT books were written after the Neronic persecution began. It would not have been safe for the scribes, the couriers, or the intended recipients. This implies that all of the NT canon was complete by the time Rome was burned, including 2 Timothy, Jude, and 2 Peter. After those three books were put into circulation, there does not appear to be any further writings from any of the inspired writers. All missionary work ceases, all literary activities (scribes, couriers) cease, and what is left of the church goes into hiding until the Parousia.

It appears that the Neronic persecution was the beginning of the end for Nero and the Jews. Things began to degenerate rapidly from AD 65 onwards. The storm clouds of God's Judgment were looming on the horizon, not only for the Jews, but for the Romans as well. Nero and the Jews had unleashed a great tribulation upon the Church, and now it was their turn to reap what they had sown. The wrath was about to be poured out upon them. God was sending all kinds of signals "in the heavens and on the earth" that He was about to judge them for what they had done to His people.

In Judea, Tensions Were Building Toward the Outbreak of War (AD 65-66)

Apr - 65 – Gessius Florus (Roman Procurator) looked the other way as the armed bands of Zealots raided the cities and villages of Judea. He let them plunder, hoping that it would inflame the populace to revolt. And it worked. The next year in AD 66 the revolt broke out. Like Albinus and Festus before him, he continued to push the Zealots further and further toward open rebellion. The Zealots became determined to revolt and started gathering men and materials. This plundering by Jewish rebels became intolerable for the moderates and loyalists. It was at this time, Josephus says (*Wars* 2.14.2, or 2.279), that “**many people deserted their ancestral homes and sought refuge in foreign provinces.**” Many others joined the Zealot cause and started pushing for open revolt. The Christians had already left or been killed in the Neronic persecution. If any of them had fallen away back into Judaism, they would have been under tremendous pressure at this time to join the Zealot rebellion.

Apr - 65 – Plague in Rome (and other plagues). About 30,000 died (acc. to Suetonius) in a plague that struck Rome in the Spring of 65. Afterwards there was a powerful hurricane which destroyed crops and fruit trees over a wide area south of Rome.

AD 65-66 – “terrors and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11, 25-26) -- A year before the war began, there was a **star in the shape of a sword** and a **comet** which stood above Jerusalem for a whole year up until the outbreak of war. [See Josephus *Wars* 6.288-289 (6.5.3); *Wars* 6.296-299 (6.5.3); *Wars* 4.286-287 (4.4.5); and *Wars* 2.22.1 (2.650); Tacitus *Hist.* 5.13; and *Sepher Yosippon* ch. 87]

Apr - 66 – Week before Passover - Bright light around the altar and the Temple like daylight for half an hour. Josephus says, “Thus also, before the Jews’ rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread [Passover AD 66], on the **eighth day of the month Xanthicus [Nisan - March-April], and at the ninth hour of the night [3 AM]**, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which light lasted for half an hour.” [*Wars* 6.290 (6.5.3)]

Apr - 66 – Passover - Heifer gave birth to a lamb in the temple courtyard. Josephus says: “At the same festival also [i.e., Passover, April AD 66], a heifer, as she was led by the **high priest** to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.” *Wars* 6.292 (6.5.3).

Apr - 66 – Passover - Eastern Temple Gate Opens By Itself. Josephus continues: “Moreover, [at the same festival, Passover, April AD 66] the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night [midnight]. ...the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. ...this signal **foreshowed the desolation that was coming** upon them.” [*Wars* 6.5.3 (293-296)]

In those last two years before the Jewish war, the signs began to occur, just like Jesus had predicted, indicating that the End was drawing near. The birth pains were getting more frequent and intense. Josephus and the other historians seem totally unaware that Jesus had predicted these things, and were simply recording these events as they had been told to them by those who witnessed and experienced those events. It is utterly amazing to see how God used an unbelieving Jew like Josephus to document all these fulfillments without Josephus having a clue how it would be used later to prove Christianity true.

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 push for open revolt.

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. 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.

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

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 two more cohorts of soldiers come from Caesarea, 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)]

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

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."

"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.

Florus 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). Hegeippus 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).

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). 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 or inside 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.

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. 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)].

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.

Next we need to look at the events leading up to the full outbreak of the **Zealot rebellion**, including those **final signs in the heavens and on earth** which signaled the arrival of Christ and His angelic armies to reward His saints and begin pouring out the wrath on their persecutors.

More Signs and Supernatural Events (AD 66)

AD 66 – “**many false Messiahs** showing great signs and wonders to mislead the elect” (Matt. 24:5, 24). Throughout the period from AD 30 to AD 66, there were several of these false messiahs mentioned both in the New Testament and in external literature: (Theudas, Judas of Galilee, and the Egyptian). From AD 64 onwards, the number of these false messiahs increased rapidly, so that by the time of the revolt in AD 66, it was nothing unusual to see these Zealots gathering up followers and plundering the countryside (Sicarii, Bandits, Robbers, Rebels, and other Deceivers). After Eleazar b. Ananias blew the shofar and took control of the temple during the incident with Florus in April or May, several more messianic pretenders showed up, including Menahem the Zealot, Simon b. Giora, John of Gischala, and others.

AD 66 – “**terrors and great signs** from heaven” -- “on the earth is distress of nations with perplexity” -- “men **fainting from fear** and expectation of things coming” -- Jesus had predicted all this to occur with greater frequency and intensity as the End approached. Note that Jesus mentioned “terrors and great signs from heaven.” What else could this be, other than these very signs that Josephus has recorded for us? (Lk. 21:11, 25-26). *Wars* 6.288-289 (6.5.3); *Wars* 6.296-299 (6.5.3); *Yosippon* ch. 87; *Wars* 4.286-287 (4.4.5); *Wars* 2.649-650 (2.22.1); Tacitus *Hist.* 5.13.

Apr - 66 – Few Days After Passover - Angelic Armies seen in the Clouds (Artemisius 21 AD 66). Josephus says: “Besides these, a few days after that feast [Passover, April AD 66], on the **twenty-first day of the month Artemisius** [Iyar - May of AD 66], a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not **related by those that saw it**, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sunset, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities.” [*Wars* 6:296 (6.5.3)] Note that Josephus gives the exact “day and hour” of this angelophany. It

was just before sunset (**the hour**) on the 21st day (**the day**) of Artemisium.

This event appears to have been **the sign that the Son of Man had come** with his angels to begin “gathering the tares to be burned” and “gathering his wheat into the barn” (Matt. 13:40-43 and 13:49-50). This is not just coincidental. There is most definitely a connection between this carefully documented Angelophany and the prophecies of Jesus. I believe this sighting of the angels in the clouds above Israel was the **sign of the coming of the Son of Man** that Jesus told them to watch for “immediately after the tribulation” (Matt. 24:29-31). Josephus gives the exact Day and Hour (“a few days after Passover” on the **twenty-first day of Artemisius**, just before sunset). [*Wars* 6.296-298 (6.5.3)] This was evidently when Christ began his Parousia (presence) in AD 66 at the time when Josephus says they saw the angelic armies in the clouds. His Parousia (presence to reward and punish) was ongoing after that until the temple was burned -- it was a visitation (extended visit) instead of a one day event. That visitation began in April AD 66 when the commander of the hosts (Jesus, the Son of Man) came with his legions of angels to start gathering up the tares, which would be burned after his **wheat was safely gathered into his barn, i.e., the rapture** (see Matt 13:24-30). [*Wars* 6.296-299 (6.5.3)].

June - 66 – Pentecost - Priests in the Temple heard a multitude of voices in the unseen realm which shouted in unison: “**Let us depart from here.**” [*Wars* 6.299 (6.5.3)]

Josephus gives us the exact *day and hour* **when** this event occurred (on the day of Pentecost at the hour of the evening sacrifices), **where** it occurred (in the Jerusalem Temple), and **who** witnessed it (the officiating priests). The Jewish priests testified about what they felt and heard in the Temple at night on Pentecost in the year AD 66, at the very time when the Zealot war with Rome was about to begin.

This transfer of a large multitude from one place to another in the unseen realm seems to have been the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living saints, when they were caught up to be with Christ. This event occurred at Pentecost, fifty days after Passover. *Notice also that it occurred at night, not during the daytime. That explains why no one noticed the snatching away of the living saints. Anyone who noticed their absence the next day would have merely thought the Christians were arrested in the night and taken away to be killed, or that they fled away during the night to get away from the persecution.*

Christians Disappear After This

One of the things that we need to point out, in case we have not already noticed it, is that the Christians totally disappeared from the historical narrative right after the war broke out in the summer of AD 66. Neither Josephus, Tacitus, Yosippon, or Hegesippus mention any activities of any Christians during the war (AD 66-70). There are no more New Testament books being written, no more missionary journeys, and no participation in the Zealot war effort. Josephus mentions Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Hellenistic Jews, proselytes, Babylonian and Persian Jews, Idumaeans, Galileans, Samaritans, and all other Jews from all over the Roman empire coming back to Judea to help fight the war. But there is no mention of any Christians whatsoever. **There is a strange**

absence of Christians at this time. Jewish historians like Graetz do not mention the presence and activities of Christians again until a couple of decades after the war, and even then it is not the kind of Christians that we saw before the war. The Christians that the rabbis in Yavneh encountered and interacted with in their synagogues after the war, according to Graetz, were only "half-Judaean and half-Christian" [Graetz, vol. 2, p. 259]. This sounds more like the Ebionite and Nazarean Unitarian Judaizers who would have felt comfortable congregating in the synagogues. We will have a lot more to say about all this when we get into the history of the next generation after the destruction of Jerusalem. For now, it is enough to note that for some reason (i.e., *the rapture*), there were not very many Christians on the scene for anyone to notice until almost two decades after AD 70.

The Rebellion Was Taking Shape

June 66 – Declaration of Independence from Paying Tax (Tribute) – On the 25th day of Sivan (June), the leadership in Jerusalem declared that they would no longer pay tax (tribute) to Rome. [see Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, Fifth Edition, 1937. Vol. 2, p. 184]

July - 66 – **Cestius Gallus received complaints** from both Florus and the Jewish leaders about the disturbances in Caesarea and the brutality of Florus in Jerusalem. So, Cestius sent an emissary, Neapolitanus, to investigate the situation and report back to him. [*Wars* 2.333-335 (2.16.1)]

Aug - 66 – **Agrippa II returned from Alexandria** (Egypt) where he had gone to "congratulate Alexander upon his having obtained the government of Egypt from Nero" [*Wars* 2.309 (2.15.1)]. On his way back he met Neapolitanus at Jamnia (Yavneh). [*Wars* 2.335 (2.16.1)] A delegation from Jerusalem also went to Jamnia to welcome Agrippa back and inform him of what had happened in Jerusalem while he was in Alexandria. Bernice his sister also made him aware of these things. Then Neapolitanus and Agrippa went back to Jerusalem together. Neapolitanus was welcomed by the citizens of Jerusalem who assured him that they were loyal to Rome and only upset at Florus. Then Neapolitanus left and went back to Cestius in Antioch. Agrippa insisted that the Jewish leaders should submit to Florus. This did not satisfy the moderates in Jerusalem. And some of the seditious insulted Agrippa even further by throwing stones at him. [*Wars* 2.406 (2.17.1)]

Aug - 66 – **Agrippa left Jerusalem after failing to stop the rebellion.** [*Wars* 2.407 (2.17.1)]. After his failure to dissuade the Zealots from going to war (Aug 66), King Agrippa II then went to Antioch to meet with Cestius Gallus about the worsening situation in Jerusalem (Sept 66). [*Wars* 2.481]

Conclusion

That was a whirlwind tour of the most significant events that occurred in those final two years before the Jewish War (AD 64-66). I am sure for most of us that is a blur of dates and events that leaves our head spinning. But as we can see, the birth pangs really intensified right there at the end just before the war. In coming weeks we will get into the chronology of the Jewish War itself.

There are some other loose ends that I want to tie up before we get too into our study of the war chronology. One of those is the article by Brock Hollett in the latest issue (Spring 2014) of *Fulfilled Magazine*. That article has challenged all full preterists to come up with some better answers on the resurrection issue, and I fully intend to meet that challenge. So, be on the lookout for a podcast in the near future which deals with Brock Hollett's attack on all of us full preterists.

That will wrap it up 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: <http://preterist.org>

Some further recommended reading:

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