

Signs of the End (AD 65-66)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- June 16, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thank you for joining us here on *Then and Now* for another look at first century history.
- B. Let's pray before we get into our studies --
Glorious Lord, creator and sustainer of the universe, we praise you for all you have done to save us and make us your useful servants. Be with us now as we look at Your sovereign and providential work in history. May we learn from your example how to be holy, righteous, and godly in the midst of this dark world, so that our good example will light up the pathway for others to more easily follow You. It is in the Name of Your Son and our Savior Jesus, that we pray. Amen.
- C. Before we begin I want to let our new listeners know that there is a Lesson Outline available for each of these Podcasts: Many of our listeners like to have it open in front of them as they listen. If you would like to have it, simply email me and request it. If you would like to be on the list to receive each new lesson outline as soon as it is ready, without having to request it each time, simply email me and ask to be put on the **PDF List**. It is free for the asking. My email address is: <preterist1@preterist.org>
- D. Thanks to all of you who are emailing your questions and comments. I am so glad you are listening, and that you are carefully considering what we are saying here. If there is anything you do not understand, do not hesitate to email me.
- E. Last time we put the finishing touches on all the material that we covered in previous three podcasts, regarding the Seven Churches of Asia, How Many Saints were left alive on earth at the time of the Parousia, as well as Where all of those Christians Went at AD 70, and why they were no longer around.
- F. This session, we will get back into the historical narrative. We have spent quite a bit of time covering the two years from 62 to 64. A lot was happening then. There were at least twelve books of our New Testament written during those two years, possibly more. 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 Neronian 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.

G. It appears that the Neronic persecution was the beginning of the end for Nero and the Jews. Things begin to degenerate rapidly from here 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 poured out 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.

Things Begin to Go Badly for Nero and the Jews After They Killed the Christians (AD 65)

Mar - 65 – Nero assaulted his "religious" wife Poppaea, and caused her death.

Poppaea was pregnant, and Nero, in a fit of rage, assaulted her (allegedly kicked her in the midsection) causing the deaths of both her and their unborn child. This was the beginning of the end for the Jewish cause. Through the influence of Poppaea the Jews had been able to win many benefits from Rome, but now Nero was no longer as sympathetic to the Jewish cause. This relationship of the Roman emperor married to a wife who was sympathetic to Judaism, may have been in the mind of John when he penned the book of Revelation. The Jews probably used their influence with Poppaea to get Nero to kill the Christians. Was Poppaea a symbol of the Harlot City (Jerusalem), who was drunk with the blood of the saints? This is another reason why I believe Paul was arrested and martyred before AD 65. The Jews had an ally in Nero up until the death of Poppaea. After she was killed, it is less likely that the Jews would have been able to use Roman power against the Christians. The tide was beginning to turn against the Jews. This may have been the beginning of the "cutting short" of the tribulation that Jesus mentioned in his Olivet Discourse, coupled with increasing unrest and rebellion in Judea, which provoked the Romans to withdraw their protection from the Jews and begin gathering their forces to crush the rebellion. The Jews no longer had the Romans as an ally, but instead as their adversary now, and were forced to drop their active campaign against the Church and focus all their energies on preparation for the war. This would have "cut short" the persecution of the Church. Josephus was supposedly still in Rome at this time, but he does not say anything about the persecution of Christians, nor about its being cut short later.

April 65 – The Conspiracy of Piso against Nero. When Nero discovered the conspiracy against him, he had many of Rome's leading citizens put to death. Warmington says a lot about this in his book on Nero:

The object of the conspiracy was the assassination of Nero and his replacement as emperor by the noble C. Calpurnius Piso" (*Warmington* 136).

The motives of the conspirators were various, some quite trivial. Lucan is said to have joined because he had been forbidden to publish; Afranius Quintianus because he had been insulted in a lampoon by Nero; Faenius Rufus because he feared the influence of his co-prefect Tigellinus. The consul designate Plautius Lateranus and the courageous freedwoman Epicharis were moved by *amor reipublicae* [love of the republic] (patriotism...). The participation of Faenius Rufus, with three tribunes and three centurions of the praetorian guard, had a double significance. No conspiracy had much chance of success without the support of the praetorians; more important, officers of the guard were naturally chosen for reliability as well as efficiency; they came from Italian towns whose upper classes had a tradition of loyal service to the emperors and where senatorial pretensions were little regarded. (*Warmington* 137)

Tacitus [*Annals* 15:62-68] attests the actual words of the tribune Subrius Flavus (one of the most active of the conspirators) when asked by Nero why he had broken his oath: "I hated you, though no soldier was more loyal when you deserved our love. I began to hate you when you became the murderer of your mother and wife, a charioteer, an actor and an **incendiary**." (*Warmington* 137)

Notice that latter charge ("incendiary" or fire-starter). The Tribune was putting his life on the line by making this accusation against Nero. He had nothing to gain by it, and everything to lose. It was probably testimony like this against Nero which reignited the rumors that Nero had ordered the fires to be started in Rome the previous summer. It is amazing that, after eight months had passed, and a scapegoat had already been punished for the fire, that a Roman Tribune, notoriously loyal to the emperor, was found involved in a plot against Nero, and claiming that part of the reason for his involvement in the plot was because Nero was an *incendiary*. Nero wasted no time and spared no expense to cover his tracks and get rid of all the evidence against him. Blood flowed again in Rome.

It is interesting that Apostle Paul had been in prison in Rome two years before this, and had said in his letter to the church at Philippi just before his release that "his imprisonment in the cause of Christ had become well-known throughout the whole **Praetorian Guard** and to everyone else" there in Rome, including "**Caesar's household**" (Phil. 1:13; 4:22). That would suggest that there were some Christians in the palace and in the military there in Rome. No wonder the Tribune Subrius Flavus was mad at Nero for starting the fires in Rome. Some of his fellow soldiers may have been killed in the persecution that followed.

Mid 65 – Nero even ordered Seneca to commit suicide. Seneca was the tutor of Nero, and later became the chief advisor to Nero. Nero believed that Seneca was somehow involved in the Piso conspiracy against him, or at least somewhat sympathetic with some of the conspirators, so he ordered Seneca to kill himself, which Seneca attempted and botched, then finally succeeded with a little help from his friends.

Meanwhile Back in Judea, Tensions Were Building Towards 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. Josephus says that Florus encouraged the bandits and rebels to spoil the Judean cities and give him his share of the booty. This policy of looking the other way while Judean cities were being plundered by Jewish rebels became intolerable for the moderates and loyalists. Armed groups of bandits terrorized the Judean countryside with no one to stop them. 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. Josephus notes that many people in Judea left their homesteads, lands, and property and fled to foreign provinces. It was those armed bands of Zealots and bandits which provoked many people to leave Judea. These armed groups were running around all the cities throughout Judea. This would have been a great time for the Jewish people to get out before Florus brought his troops shortly afterward and killed 3600 of them in Jerusalem.

Questions About Pella and the Rapture

Several have asked me whether this might have been the time when the Christians fled from Jerusalem and went to Pella and other safe haven cities, as well as why they were commanded to flee from Judea if there was going to be a rapture shortly. I will read their questions and then give a brief response to them:

Question 1 – Wouldn't this have been a good time for Christians to leave Judea?

Yes, it would, IF there were any Christians still left there. However, as we have seen in past sessions, the Christians were warned in AD 62 or 63 to leave before the Neronic persecution broke out in 64. If they had stayed in Judea, they would have been killed in the Neronic persecution, and would not have remained alive until the Parousia.

Question 2 – Why did Christ command them to flee from Judea if there was going to be a rapture?

It was so that they would live and remain until the Parousia. If they stayed there, they would have been killed in the Neronic persecution and not remain alive to be raptured at the Parousia. The reason so many of us ask this question is because we assume that the Christians fled to Pella just before the war began (AD 65-66). But such a late departure from Judea creates a real historical problem. The Christians needed to leave Palestine long before AD 65-66. They needed to leave in

AD 63 or early 64 before the Neronic persecution started. That is why both the book of Revelation and the book of Hebrews were written, to warn them to get out of Palestine before the Neronic persecution struck. This should be obvious to all of us, but because we have forgotten about the Neronic persecution, or failed to sequence it properly in relation to the other endtime events, we have been thrown off-track by this question.

Question 3 – If there were very few believers who survived the Neronic persecution, what was the purpose of fleeing to Pella afterwards, especially if they were going to be raptured shortly?

This question presupposes a sequence and timing of events that does not harmonize with the way these events actually happened:

1. Neronic persecution killed most Christians (AD 64-66)
2. Warning to flee just before the siege of Jerusalem (AD 66-68)
3. Parousia and Rapture (AD 70)

The reason why we preterists have arrived at this wrong sequence and timing of events is because there are still some left-over futurist concepts floating around inside our heads. For example:

1. Many of us still think that the **tribulation** upon the church that is mentioned in Matthew 24 was only referring to the suffering of the Jewish people under the siege in Jerusalem. We don't realize that it was instead referring to the horrible afflictions the church suffered under the **Neronic persecution** before the war.
2. We also don't realize **when the flight to Pella actually took place**. We assume it was about the time the war broke out in Judea, but that forgets the fact that the majority of Christians had already been killed in the Neronic persecution. There were few (if any) Christians left in Judea by the time the war began in 66 AD. What would be the point of warning them to get out AFTER most of them had already been killed? That wouldn't be a very timely or helpful warning. They needed to be warned BEFORE the Neronic persecution, not AFTERWARDS.

Furthermore, Josephus tells us that Essenes, Zealots, Pharisees, and Sadducees all participated in the war effort, but there is no mention of any Christians, either staying and participating, or trying to get out of the city. If there were any Christians still left in Judea and Jerusalem at the time of the war, we would have expected Josephus to mention their attempt to flee and get away from the city, or their participation in the conflict on one side or the other. But Christians are nowhere to be found. They were not a factor in the war on either side. There is no mention of them. They drop totally out of the historical narrative before the war began.

Since most of the Christians died in the Neronic persecution during the two years before the war, it means that any warning to flee out of Judea at the beginning of the war would have been a little too late to be of any real benefit to the Christians.

Therefore, the warning to flee must have been related to the Neronic persecution. *This is the real game-changer!* Once we realize that Jesus was warning them about the Neronic persecution, and NOT about the siege of Jerusalem, it instantly clears up the confusion, and re-sequences the events in a way that makes much better sense.

Most of us (including myself) have been so historically handicapped from our futurist days that we miss this point. That is why I began digging deeply into this historical study six years ago. The one event that we have all overlooked is the Neronic persecution in AD 64. That is the 2000-pound gorilla in the room. I missed it for a lot of years. Few preterists are even aware of it as a factor in all this, much less understand where it fits into the overall sequence of events. Most of us have assumed that the great tribulation upon the church was the siege of Jerusalem (68-70 AD), and that the Neronic persecution was a part of that tribulation which was still going on during the war until Nero died in 68 AD. Unfortunately, that idea simply does not harmonize with the Bible or with history, as we are about to see.

Jesus said in Matthew 24 that “unless those days of the great tribulation [the Neronic persecution] were cut short, NO life would have been saved.” For the sake of “the elect ones” those days were indeed cut short, so that there would still be some elect ones (faithful Christians) on the earth at the time of the Parousia when Christ sent forth His angels to gather those “elect ones.” Notice the sequence of events here:

1. Great Tribulation would be Cut Short (Tribulation on Church)
2. Immediately afterwards Christ would come (Parousia)
3. He would send the angels to gather the elect (Rapture)

Eusebius tells us that the Christians were “warned by a Revelation given to approved men BEFORE THE WAR” to flee out of Judea. However, he does not tell us how long before the war this warning was given. But the peculiar wording of his statement suggests that the book of Revelation might have been the source of this warning.

Furthermore, we have two such warnings by apostles (“approved men” indeed) before the Neronic persecution broke out. The book of Revelation, written in late 62 AD, warned them to “come out of her my people” (Rev. 18:4). And the book of Hebrews, which was in circulation by early 63, also warned the Hebrew saints to “go out to Him outside the camp...because here we do not have a lasting city...but we are seeking the [everlasting city] which is about to come” (Heb. 13:13-14). Both of these warnings came to the church well over a year in advance of the Neronic persecution.

That implies that the Neronic persecution was the great tribulation (upon the church) about which the church needed to be forewarned. Those two apostolic warnings were the divine signal the church was waiting for. If the church heeded those warnings and left Judea soon afterwards in 63 AD, they would have been out of harm's way long before the Neronic persecution reached Judea in the Fall of 64 AD. That would have been a great benefit to those saints who fled the country at that time.

However, it does not appear that the warning was heeded by the majority of Christians. Most of the Judean Christians evidently stayed and either fell away back into Judaism, or were killed in the Neronic persecution. Evidently, only a small remnant of saints left at that time. We noted in past sessions that some of those who went to Pella

were not true Christians. They were Judaizers who rejected the virgin birth and Deity of Jesus (Ebionites and Nazareans). Some of them were probably "elect" saints who "lived and remained" until the Parousia in the Summer of 66, at which time they would have been raptured, leaving nothing but the Unitarian Judaizers there in Pella.

We also need to remember that it was not just the Judean Christians who were at risk here in the Neronic persecution. It was all Christians throughout the Roman empire, especially those living in areas where there were large Jewish communities. When the Neronic persecution broke out, the Jews would have killed the Christians living among them. The Seven Churches of Asia would be a good example of this. Evidently most of the seven churches addressed in Revelation ignored the warning to back away from their connections with the Jewish community, and were totally devastated in the Neronic persecution (AD 64). This is not hard to believe, since Paul told Timothy in his second letter that "all who are in Asia had turned away from him" (in AD 63). This was after they had already been warned by the book of Revelation and the book of Hebrews. Evidently they rejected both warnings, and suffered the consequences shortly afterwards, either in the Neronic persecution, or in the outbreak of the war in Judea.

So, here is the sequence of events that we are suggesting here:

- AD 62 – book of Revelation written warning the saints to “**come out of her**”
- AD 63 – book of Hebrews written warning them to “**go out to Him** outside the camp”
- AD 63 – the saints **fled to Pella** BEFORE the Neronic persecution
- AD 64 – **Neronic persecution** killed all the Christians who stayed in Judea
- AD 66 – the Neronic persecution was cut short by the **Parousia**
- AD 66 – the “elect” saints who fled to safety and remained alive were **raptured**
- AD 66 – **the War** broke out in Judea

Notice again that they were warned to flee BEFORE the Neronic persecution, NOT AFTERWARDS as suggested in the question above. Do you see how this re-sequencing of the warning solves the problem of a belated flight to Pella after most of them had already died in the Neronic persecution? The warning came BEFORE the Neronic persecution, and it was warning them to get out of Judea before the persecution, not just before the war and the siege of Jerusalem. That makes a difference in how we understand Matthew 24 and its statements about the great tribulation and their fleeing from Judea.

Signs Warned of Coming Doom (AD 65-66)

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 whirlwind or hurricane which destroyed crops and fruit trees over a wide area in Campania. There were other plagues and pestilences during the period from AD 30-70 mentioned in Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Philostratus, and Seneca:

Fourfold Gospel (Harmony of the Gospels by McGarvey and Pendleton) comments on Luke 21:11 -- There were an indefinite number of **famines** referred to by Roman writers, and at least one **pestilence** during which thirty thousand perished in Rome

alone [AD 65]. All these signs are mentioned by unbelieving writers such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Philostratus, and Seneca, who speak of them because of their importance and not with any reference to the prophecy of Christ.

Barnes Notes on Matt 24:7. “A pestilence is recorded as raging in Babylonia, AD 40 (*Antiq* 18.9.8), in Italy, AD 65 (Tacitus 16.13). Both of these took place before the destruction of Jerusalem.”

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. Josephus said it this way: “Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year.” Whiston comments: “Whether Josephus means that this star was different from the comet which lasted a whole year, I cannot certainly determine. His words most favor their being different one from another.” [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]

Here is what Josephus said about the effect of these “terrors and great signs” upon the Jewish people in AD 66 just as the war was beginning:

“...in all parts of the city, darts and all sorts of armor were upon the anvil. Although the multitude of the young men were engaged in exercises, without any regularity, and all places were full of tumultuous doings; yet 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)]

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.” Whiston comments: “Since Josephus still uses the Syro-Macedonian month Xanthicus for the Jewish month Nisan, this eighth, or, as Nicephorus reads it, this ninth of Xanthicus, or Nisan, was almost a week before the Passover on the fourteenth: about which time we learn from St. John that many used to go “out of the country to Jerusalem, to purify themselves,” John 11:55, with 12:1; in agreement with Josephus also, *Wars* 5.3.1. [see also Acts 21:26f] And it might well be, that in the sight of these, this extraordinary light might appear.” [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). Now before we ridicule this story from Josephus, we need to remember that the priests in the temple were the ones who witnessed this event, specifically the high priest himself. If we had to pick some reliable witnesses, the priests would surely be at the top of the list, especially the high priest, as we have here on this occasion. And Josephus was a priest himself. It is highly unlikely that he would have recorded this event unless it really happened. At the time he wrote in 78 AD, there were still living some of his fellow priests who could have easily discredited this story. Yet, as far as we know, no one disputed it. This event occurred at the Passover inside the temple in April of 66 AD, just a few months before the revolt.

I have pondered the significance of this event several times, but never could quite understand it, until I was preparing the notes for this lesson and suddenly remembered how my dad on the farm when I was young explained to me the difference between a heifer and a cow. They were all cows to me, but he said, "A heifer is a young female who has not yet had a calf of her own and is under three years of age. It is a young girl cow, who has never mated with a bull, in other words, a young virgin cow." Now when I remembered that conversation with my dad on the farm, I suddenly understood the significance of this young virgin cow giving birth to a Lamb in the temple at Passover! Mary was a young virgin who had never had a child of her own, who gave birth to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now, that may not be the true explanation of this incredible event, so it is only a suggestion for our consideration. I wish we had Apostle Paul's perspective on that. God was definitely trying to get their attention by this event. What was He trying to tell them? We may never know for sure, but the Virgin Mary and her little lamb Jesus makes a lot of sense. Any Jewish person familiar with the virgin birth of Jesus could have seen that connection and understood what God was trying to say to them. It was at least an affirmation of the virgin birth of Jesus, if not a whole lot more.

Furthermore, the high priest who led away this heifer to be sacrificed was the grandson of the very High Priest who led away Jesus to be crucified 36 years earlier! His name was **Matthias**, son of Theophilus, and **grandson of Ananus I**.

This may shed some light on why this unusual birth of a lamb by a heifer in the temple occurred at the very time it was being led away to be killed by this particular High Priest. We have to wonder if God was sending a message, not only to the whole Jewish people in general, but even more particularly to the **family of Ananus**, showing them that He remembered what Ananus had done to Jesus 36 years earlier, and was about to bring them to judgment for it. Did Matthias catch the power of that? Or was he only thinking about the delicious feast his family would get from that beefy sacrifice? Or did he rub his chin and say, "Hmmm, there is something happening here, what it is ain't exactly clear, but it doesn't look good for me and my family! This is not a good sign!" Did he remember any of the things that his grandfather Ananus I and uncle Caiaphas had done to Jesus thirty-six years before? Did he realize that the blood of Jesus was imputed against that whole generation of Jews, and his own family of Ananus specifically? Notice what these texts have to say about this:

[John 11:49-52] But one of them, **Caiaphas**, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is **expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.**" Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, **he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.**

[John 18:24] So **Annas sent Him bound** to Caiaphas the high priest.

[Mark 15:1] Early in the morning the **chief priests** with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and **binding Jesus, they led Him away** and delivered Him to Pilate.

[Matt. 27:20-25] But the **chief priests** and the elders **persuaded the crowds** to ask for Barabbas and to **put Jesus to death**. But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "**Crucify Him!**" And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!" When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." **And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"**

It is extremely interesting that the High Priests at the beginning and end of that generation were from the **family of Ananus**. I would not be surprised at all to find out in heaven that this incident of the heifer giving birth to a lamb was a "thunderbolt out of the clear blue sky" to the family of Ananus. It was one of those "Remember the Alamo" moments. Remember that guy your grandfather and uncle killed 36 years ago? His blood-guilt is on you and your house.

It could also be the case that this High Priest **Matthias** had more than just the blood of Jesus imputed against him. VanderKam and Derenbourg have suggested that Matthias was **appointed High Priest right about the same time the Neronic persecution struck the Church in Judea in late 64 AD**, implying that this was the very high priest who **enforced Nero's persecution** in Palestine. If so, it means that he himself **had the blood of the martyred Christians on his own head**, and that he was one of the brood of vipers whom Jesus had in mind when He said that they would "fill up the measure of guilt of their fathers" by killing His disciples in the coming generation. He seems to have been the High Priest who literally finished "filling up the bowl of wrath" that his grandfather and uncle had partially filled 36 years before:

[Matt. 23:31-39] "So you testify against yourselves, that you are **sons of those who murdered the prophets.** **"Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.** "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence

of hell? “Therefore, behold, **I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.** “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. **“Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!** “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!’”

So, it seems that this strange occurrence of the heifer giving birth to a lamb in the temple at Passover exactly 36 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, may very well have been a sign from heaven that the Lamb of God born of virgin Mary was indeed the Son of the Most High, Judge and Avenger of His martyred saints, and was about to come on the clouds of heaven to pour out upon them the bowl of wrath that they themselves had filled to the brim, destroy the temple, desolate the land, kill the wicked, and scatter the rest of them among all the nations.

But this was not the only strange event that occurred at Passover in AD 66. Josephus tells us more:

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]. Now, those that kept watch in the temple came hereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it: who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty, was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But 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.” Cornfeld comments: “The gate referred to is the Nicanor gate, which gave access to the inner court. It is known that on the pilgrimage festivals the gates of the Temple were opened to the people at midnight. The reported extraordinary occurrence (also echoed by Tacitus, ‘*apertae repente delubri fores*’) is also mentioned in an obscure dissertation on an extra-Mishnaic halakha (ordinance) relating to omens.” (see below) [Wars 6.5.3 (293-296)]

Bab. Talmud (Yoma 39b): “Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the **right hand**; nor did the crimson-colored strap **become white**; nor did the westernmost **light**

shine; and the doors of the Hekal would **open by themselves**, until R. Yohanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying: Hekal, Hekal, why wilt thou be the alarmer thyself? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied concerning thee: Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars.” [Bab. Talm. *Yoma* folio 39b, cf. Zech. 11:1]

Well, that has given us a little taste of what was happening in Judea in the year or so 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.

I will never forget the day in my college dormitory when I walked into the dorm room of one of the guys down the hall, and saw a strange looking oversized book on his shelf next to all his religious books. It had the word **JOSEPHUS** on its spine. I had never heard of that book before. I asked the guy what it was all about, and he said (and I will never forget his words): *"That is the first century Jewish historian who recorded the history of the Jewish war with Rome in which the temple was destroyed."* That is the first time I had ever heard someone talk about the destruction of the temple like that. That instantly aroused my interest. I asked him where I could get a copy of that book, and went right down to the Christian bookstore and bought one. I started reading it and underlining it and highlighting it and annotating it in the margin. That was the beginning of my love affair with Jewish and Christian history.

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. Fascinating stuff.

Next week 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 look at the probable fulfillment of the **Abomination of Desolation**. At this time in late 65 and early 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.

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 -- Thanks so much for listening.

If any of this material has raised any questions for you, or if you need more information, do not hesitate to email me at: <preterist1@preterist.org>

There are a lot of great supplementary articles posted on our website, plus books and audio/video media for purchase. Go there and browse all you want. Here is the link: <http://preterist.org>

If you would like a some great books which deal with all of these events, I would highly recommend getting a copy of **The Complete Works of Josephus**, as well as **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 all three of these resources here in our studies. You can purchase them from our website:

<http://preterist.org>

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