

Signs and Zealot Rebellion (AD 66)

By Ed Stevens -- *Then and Now Podcast* -- July 7, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Welcome back to another episode of *Then and Now* where we learn from the past to shape a better future.

- B. Let's pray before we get into our studies --
Almighty Father, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, full of mercy and grace for all Your chosen people: We praise you for saving us and using us to share Your liberating truth with all nations for all generations to come. Thanks so much for Your Spirit dwelling in our hearts to help us understand Your Word, so that we can view history from a proper Biblical perspective, and then share it with others, so that they can receive Your blessings as well. We pray this in the Name of Your Beloved Son and our Kinsman-Redeemer. Amen.

- C. Last week we looked 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, and how his attempt to plunder all the imageless gold coinage out of the temple, so that the Jews would be forced to bring in coins with Caesar's image on them, may have been the fulfillment of the **Abomination of Desolation**. We also looked at how **Eleazar** the son of High Priest Ananias b. Nedebaeus, in all of his lawless activities as the instigator of the rebellion and the controller of the temple, may have been the fulfillment of the **Man of Lawlessness**. If you did not hear that podcast, you will want to go back and listen to it. Fascinating fulfillments!

- D. This time we will be looking at the events leading up to 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. See these references in Josephus, Eusebius, and the New Testament: *Wars* 2.433-434 (2.17.8); *Wars* 2.258-263 (2.13.4-5); *Wars* 2.652-654 (2.22.2); *Wars* 4.503-510 (4.9.3-4); *Antiq* 20.97-102 (20.5.1-2); *Antiq* 20.167-172 (20.8.6) cf. **Acts 5:36-37** (Theudas and Judas the Galilean); [cf. *Antiq* 17.271 (17.10.5) and footnote, *Wars* 2.56 (2.4.1); 2.118 (2.8.1)], **Euseb. 2.11.2-3** (Theudas); **Acts 21:38** (the Egyptian); **Euseb. 2.21.1-3** (the Egyptian); ***Antiq* 18.4,9,23** (18.1.1-6), [cf. Eleazar b. Yair at Masada (acc. to Josephus) *Wars* 7.252-254 (7.8.1), or was it Eleazar b. Ananias? (acc. to Yosippon and Hegesippus)]

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. Josephus is following the Macedonian (Greco-Roman) calendar, not the Jewish Lunar calendar. He says there were many "eyewitnesses" to this event -- which means that it was "at the mouth of two or more credible first century eyewitnesses." **Josephus did not see this because he had not returned from Rome yet when it happened.** The fact that he gives very specific historical documentation for it (places, dates and time of day) lends much credibility to it, and shows that he had talked to several eyewitnesses, and maybe even had some written accounts of it. It is noteworthy that Tacitus refers to this as an actual occurrence, and no other histories of the destruction of Jerusalem reject it as untrue. Even more important is the "matter of fact" way he handles this Angelophany. The idea of angels being seen in the clouds does not seem to be at odds with the way Josephus views the God of Israel and the way He relates to and interacts with His creation through Theophanies and Angelophanies (Jewish Biblical Cosmology).

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.**” Notice how Josephus describes this event:

Josephus: “Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘**Let us remove hence.**’” [*Wars* 6.299 (6.5.3)]

Note that 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.*

It is worth remembering here that Pentecost was the time of wheat harvest, the time when the heads of wheat were threshed and gathered into the barn. The harvest (resurrection of the dead and the judgment) was at the end of the age. It fits the grain harvest typology, as well as the Parable of the Tares, to see the resurrection and rapture as the event that occurred here at Pentecost.

Furthermore, Josephus puts this story in the mouths of his fellow priests who were in the Temple at the very time these events occurred. He seldom gives this kind of strong eyewitness testimony to confirm his account, especially to the point of giving a date and place, and naming his sources, as he does here. The fact that he quotes these witnesses and identifies them, lends much credence to his story. Out of all the possible eyewitnesses who could be deemed reliable in the first century, the priests

in the Temple would have been at the top of the list. Those priests were lawyers, judges, scribes, and teachers of the Law. They understood the penalty for false testimony. Some of those priests survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and could have easily discredited Josephus' account. Yet, as far as we know, this account was never challenged by them, but instead verified "at the mouth of two or more" reliable first-century eyewitnesses (Deut 19:15) and accepted as true by contemporary historians such as Tacitus.

R. C. Sproul, Sr., calls this particular section of Josephus "one of the weirdest passages you ever read in ancient history" ("Last Days Madness" speech, Ligonier Ministries National Conference, Orlando, Florida, 1999). When quoting this passage in *The Last Days according to Jesus*, he describes it as a "most remarkable record" (pp. 123-127). He notes that this story is "corroborated by others" in the first century such as Tacitus (Eusebius, Yosippon, and Hegesippus also record this event). As Sproul suggested, this testimony of Josephus "lends credence" to the idea that there was some kind of coming of Christ associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 ("Last Days Madness" speech, Ligonier Ministries National Conference, Orlando, Florida, 1999).

Every time a preterist uses something out of Josephus to substantiate first-century fulfillment, futurist critics throw a temper tantrum. They first demand that we produce the documentation, and then when we do, they work overtime trying to downplay its significance, and ridicule us for using "uninspired" testimony. Yet, when they wish to justify their own unscriptural doctrines of *creedalism*, *sacramentalism*, or *hierarchicalism*, they do not hesitate to quote from the Church Fathers, whom they admit are just as uninspired as Josephus! They want freedom to use uninspired tradition when it helps their cause, but deny that freedom to others.

Preterists do not claim that Josephus' accounts are God-breathed. However, an event does not have to be recorded by an inspired author in order to be true. The story about Julius Caesar being stabbed by two of his best friends is true, but it is not inspired. Moses, Jesus, and the apostles all affirmed that something could be verified as true in a court of law if there were two or more credible eyewitnesses to back it up. This event described by Josephus has that kind of reliable attestation. It could truly have happened, regardless of whether or not the historians recording it were inspired. All we need for historical credibility is "testimony at the mouth of two or more reliable eyewitnesses," and we have that here with the numerous priests who witnessed these things in the temple on Pentecost in AD 66.

Furthermore, we all need to remember that *uninspired* testimony, even if it is "at the mouth of two or more eyewitnesses," can never negate *inspired* scripture, no matter how well-attested it is. Scripture stands supreme, regardless of how much uninspired historical testimony or church tradition is stacked against it. History and tradition can *only support and explain* Scripture, but can *never refute it or discredit it*. And this is the way we are using Josephus' testimony: to help support and explain inspired scripture. This is a valid use of history and tradition. With that in mind, let's examine this story to see if we can understand what really happened and how it might relate to the Resurrection and Rapture events.

Pentecost and the Wheat Harvest

Notice that neither the priests nor Josephus offer any explanation of this event. In fact, it seems that none of them understood it. Josephus simply laid out the facts as the priests gave them, and we are left to draw our own conclusions about what took place and how it relates to the “end of the age.”

I believe several details in this story are significant: (1) the **day** of occurrence (Pentecost), (2) the **hour** of occurrence (night), (3) the **place** of occurrence (the Jerusalem Temple), (4) **who** witnessed the event (officiating priests), and (5) **what** they felt, heard, and experienced.

The first two points certainly remind us of Jesus’ predictions about “*the day and the hour*” of His return (Matt 24:36, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:32; Luke 12:46). Furthermore, this occurred on the pilgrim feast of *Pentecost*, which was connected with the grain and fruit harvests. *Passover* was the time of the barley harvest in the Spring, during which the priests brought an “omer” of barley flour into the Temple courtyard and waved it (i.e., lifted it up and presented it) before the Lord (Lev 23:10-11, see Edersheim’s *The Temple*, chapter 13). *Pentecost*, which occurred fifty days after Passover, was the time of the wheat harvest in early summer. It was “the presentation of the two loaves [made of leavened wheat flour] . . . which distinguished this festival” (Edersheim, p. 172). At the time of Pentecost, the wheat harvest had already begun and was nearing completion. The two loaves may have represented the living and the dead, or the Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus used the harvest metaphor in His teaching about what would occur at His Parousia at the end of the age. A good example of this is the Parable of the Tares (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43), where He uses the wheat harvest motif in connection with the angelic gathering of the wheat into His barn at the End of the Age. In my article in *Fulfilled Magazine* (Summer 2011, Vol. 6 Issue 2) I explained how this parable was pointing to the Resurrection of the Dead out of Hades and the change of the living into their immortal bodies, at which time both groups were gathered together in the unseen realm and presented to Christ at His Parousia (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:17). John the Baptist also connected the wheat harvest with the End of the Age (Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17), and Paul used wheat imagery in his seed analogy to illustrate how the Resurrection would take place (1 Cor 15:37). See below for a list of PDF articles and MP3 files that give more details on all this.

Therefore, it would be no surprise to discover that this event mentioned by Josephus, which occurred at Pentecost, at the time of the *wheat harvest*, might have something to do with the *Resurrection of the Dead out of Hades*.

What Did the Priests Experience?

The connection of Pentecost with the Resurrection becomes even more apparent when we look at the way the priests described their experience of this event:

. . .they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence."[Wars 6.5.3 (6.299-300)]

Notice there were *no visuals* here. It all involved hearing and feeling. This means that the multitude that the priests heard were *invisible*. They were in the UNSEEN realm. The priests were only allowed to *hear* what was said, but not allowed to see those speaking. This raises some very interesting questions:

- *Who* were these folks in the unseen realm?
- *From where* had this multitude (in the unseen realm) come?
- *To where* (in the unseen realm) were they going?

The fact that these people existed in the unseen realm significantly limits the possibilities of their identity. What group of people in the unseen realm would be leaving one part of that realm for another part of it, and why? [*Hint: The disembodied souls of the dead saints left Hades and entered heaven.*] And what does the Temple have to do with this transfer from one location to another? [*Hint: According to Jewish tradition, it was the one place on earth where heaven and earth met. It was the gateway to heaven in the unseen realm. Many Jews also believed that the huge rock on which the Temple stood, was the lid which covered the opening to the Hadean realm. In other words, the Temple sat on top of the rock that sealed the gates of Hades, so that if the dead were ever raised out of Hades, they would have to come out through the gates of Hades right there in Jerusalem near the Temple mount.*]

Furthermore, it is worth remembering that this event occurred on *Pentecost* about 45 days after the angelic armies were seen in the clouds "a few days after Passover" [Wars 6.5.3 (6:296)]. If the angels were there, then Christ had to be present with them in the unseen realm above. In Matthew 24:31, Jesus said that after His arrival He would send forth His angels to gather together the elect. This transfer of a large multitude of souls from one place to another in the unseen realm sure sounds like the Resurrection of the Dead out of Sheol (Hades) and their entrance into the heavenly realm above. If this was in fact the Resurrection, then it was also the very "moment in the twinkling of an eye" when the living saints were "changed" into their immortal bodies (1 Cor 15:52) and "caught up" together with the resurrected dead to meet Christ in the unseen realm above (1 Thess 4:17).

For more detailed information about this event, I have created several PDF files which provide other translations of Josephus' account of this event by Greek scholars, as well as the parallel accounts found in Tacitus, Yosippon, Hegesippus, and Eusebius. If you would like to have this amazing information, simply email me at <preterist1@preterist.org> to request my two articles in *Fulfilled Magazine* on "Let Us Remove Hence" and "More on Let Us Remove Hence," plus all their related charts, notes, and quotes files in PDF format.

For more information about the Resurrection, Change, and Rapture events, here are some excellent resources available for order from the IPA website (<http://preterist.org>):

- Ian D. Harding. *Taken to Heaven in A.D. 70* (book)
- J. Stuart Russell. *The Parousia* (book)
- Ed Stevens and Parker Voll. *2011 Garrettsville Seminar DVDs*, dealing with the Resurrection, Change, and Rapture (DVD album)
- Ed Stevens - *Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture* (book)
- Ed Stevens - *First Century Events in Chronological Order* (prepub manuscript)
- Ed Stevens - *Parable of the Tares* - MP3 Audio tracks
- Ed Stevens - *Resur-Change-Rapture* - Free PDF of my Kansas City speech
- Ed Stevens - *Gather Together the Elect* - Free PDF of the Fulfilled mag. article

The Rebellion Was Beginning to Take Shape

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. The Jewish people received Neapolitanus warmly with open-arms, and treated him royally. They made it clear that their only complaint was against Florus, and not against Rome itself. However, there was plenty of evidence that a rebellion was forming in Judea, which involved much more than mere complaints against Florus. The Zealots were indeed against all Roman interference in Jewish affairs, especially in taxation and tribute matters. Both Florus and Gallus were aware of this, and therefore were acting in the best interests of Rome. [*Wars* 2.333-335 (2.16.1)]

Aug - 66 – Josephus returned from Rome about this time (sometime between August and September) to find that the “innovations [for war] were already begun.” (Life 17) He had been gone since November of AD 62 (almost four years). He definitely returned before Cestius Gallus attacked Jerusalem (Nov 66). (Life 17-23) He mentions that he was back before Menahem was killed by Eleazar’s forces (Sept 66). He participated in the group of moderates who appealed to Eleazar to restart the Gentile sacrifices again and stop the rebellion (Life 19). Several interpreters note that Josephus was back in Jerusalem by the time the Antonia fortress was captured (on Sept 5, 66, acc. to F. F. Bruce). However, that is not a necessary implication of the statements of Josephus. He explained that he had frequently challenged the rebel priests under the command of Eleazar (son of Ananias) to desist from the war effort, to the point that they were beginning to distrust him and look upon him as an enemy. (Life 18-19) He began to be afraid of them at that point, because they had become strong enough to push Agrippa’s forces back up into Herod’s Palace and capture the Tower of Antonia. (Life 20) He evidently had been living in the upper city with the other aristocratic priests who tried to remain neutral at the time when the rebels were being held in check in the temple by the moderates, Royal Troops, and Loyalists. But when the Sicarii sneaked into the temple and reinforced the rebels, they were able to drive the moderates and Agrippa’s forces up into Herod’s Palace in the upper city and take control of the Tower of Antonia. The rebels were burning and destroying many of the priestly and aristocratic homes and buildings in the upper city, so the neutral priests like Josephus would have rapidly moved out of the upper city and into the temple away from all the fighting and violence going on in the upper city. Then the

flash point was well away from the temple area, and it was now safer for the priests to come back to the temple which was under the control of their fellow priests (rebel priests under Eleazar). That is most likely when he returned with the other neutral priests and “retired into the inner court of the temple.” (Life 20) This would have been right after the Tower of Antonia had been taken.

But the point of all this is that he was back dwelling in the upper city before the Tower was taken, and only moved into the temple after the Tower had fallen into rebel control. So I think he must have arrived back in Jerusalem about the time Eleazar had taken control of the temple area, while the forces of Agrippa and the moderates were still strong and keeping the rebel forces bottled up in the temple. Evidently the priests did not want to go into the temple area at that time, since Agrippa’s forces outside appeared to have the upper hand. So the priests like Josephus who were not required to be there (because it was not their scheduled time to serve) stayed out of the temple at that time. But when the rebels under Eleazar’s command were reinforced by the Sicarii and overpowered the moderates and Agrippa’s forces, then it would have been safer for the neutral priests to return to the temple and stay inside, well away from the flash point which was now in the upper city at Herod’s Palace.

His return to the temple could also imply that Josephus had some kind of friendly relations or trustful relationship with the Eleazar faction in the temple. It is hard to believe that Eleazar would have allowed those priests back inside unless they were totally neutral or somewhat supportive of Eleazar's cause. This later scenario seems more likely to be the case in respect to Josephus, since not long after this he was appointed as one of the ten generals over the Zealot troops.

It therefore seems to me that when Josephus arrived back in Jerusalem he was staying in the upper city among the priestly aristocracy who were trying to remain neutral and discourage the revolt. At that time the rebel forces were weak and held in check by the moderates and Agrippa’s forces, so it was not safe to be in the temple, since the temple was the flash point. But when the Sicarii sneaked into the temple to reinforce the rebels, then the moderates and Agrippa’s forces were beaten back away from the temple by the rebel forces. It was then much safer for the priests to go back into the temple and stay there, because the flash point was away from the temple. But he says he left the temple again after Menahem and the principal men of his band of robbers were put to death by Eleazar’s soldiers. (Jos. Life 21) He says he then “abode among the high priests and the chief of the Pharisees” (in the upper city) at that point, and that they were greatly afraid when they saw the people of the city in arms, and that they were unable to convince the rebel forces to stop. (Life 22) The neutral priests (like Josephus?) were unsure at that point what the best course of action for themselves should be. So they pretended to be of the same opinion with the rebel priests under the leadership of Eleazar, since his rebels were now in control of the temple area, lower city, and some parts of the upper city.

Another thing that makes me think that Josephus got back from Rome before the rebels had killed the Romans in the Tower of Antonia, is that since the Romans controlled the ships and seaports, it would be difficult to understand how Josephus (a Jewish priest) could have been safe on his trip back to Jerusalem if the Romans he was traveling with had heard about the rebel priests killing the Roman garrison in the

Tower of Antonia. So it seems more likely that he must have arrived back in Judea before Eleazar's men killed the Roman soldiers at the Tower of Antonia.

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 stayed in Jerusalem to have more discussions with the leaders of Jerusalem who wished to send a delegation to Nero bringing accusations against Florus so that Nero would replace him with another milder procurator. Agrippa negated that idea and charged them to submit to Florus and abandon any thoughts of rebellion, and to pay the tribute money that they had failed to pay. The moderates complied with this request for the tribute money, and quickly went out to the cities of Judea and raised forty talents to pay the back taxes. [*Wars* 2.405 (2.17.1)] But they still wanted to send a delegation to Nero to get Florus replaced. Agrippa insisted that this should not be done, and that the Jewish leaders should instead 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]

Summary of what we just looked at, and concluding statements.

Thanks so much for listening.

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

Some further recommended reading:

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