

PRELUDE TO “THE END” OF THE JEWISH TEMPLE (PART II)

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

And He answered and said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”

And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.

“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.”

Matthew 24:1-14 (NASB 77)

54 [OCT] Emperor Claudius (63 yrs) died, most likely from being poisoned by his fourth & final wife, Agrippina (37 yrs). She then arranged for her son, Nero (16 yrs), the adopted son of Claudius, to become emperor, rather than his natural born son, Britannicus (13 yrs, who was also poisoned a few months later).

54 [Fall]-

55 [Fall] = The Jewish Sabbatical Year

54-58 Paul & took his “3rd Missionary Journey, spending much time at Ephesus.

Mid 50’s Proconsul Felix tracked down Eleazar, the infamous Jewish gang leader, sending him to Rome for execution. He also decimated the ranks of these Jewish gangs via mass crucifixions.¹

56 A special type of Jewish “terrorist” arose during Felix’s tenure – the *sicarii*.

“When the country was purged of these, there sprang up another sort of robbers in Jerusalem, which were called Sicarii, who slew men in the daytime, and in the midst of the city; this they did chiefly at the festivals, when they mingled themselves among the multitude, and concealed daggers under their garments, with which they stabbed those that were their enemies; and when any fell down dead, the murderers became a part of those that had indignation against them; by which means they appeared persons of such reputation, that they could by no means be discovered.

“The first man who was slain by them was Jonathan the high priest, after whose death many were slain every day, while the fear men were in of being so served, was more afflicting than the calamity itself; and while everybody expected death every hour, as men do in war, so men were obliged to look before them, and to take notice of their enemies at a great distance; nor, if their friends were coming to them, durst they trust them any longer; but, in the midst of their suspicions and guarding of themselves, they were slain. Such was the celebrity of the plotters against them, and so cunning was their contrivance.”²

¹ Wars 2.13.2 & Antiquities 20.8.4.

² Wars 2.13.3. In a very strange twist, Josephus later accuses Felix of bankrolling this very first murder in the *sicarii* style, in order to get rid of the High Priest Jonathan, who had been instrumental in Felix’s appointment & was constantly telling him how to run the country (Antiquities 20.8.5).

56 Agrippa II (29 yrs) appointed Ishmael as the new High Priest. But chaos was taking hold. There were incidents of street fighting (stones being thrown) between rival Jewish factions. Poorer priestly families were starving while the more powerful families forcibly confiscated their “tithes” from the threshing floors.³

57 **[25th Year of the Church] [Fall]** Paul had his very successful⁴ ministry at Ephesus interrupted by a riot (Acts 19:23-20:1).

In Judea, Proconsul Felix was now constantly dealing with Jewish “prophets” & “Christ’s” who were stirring up the people against the Romans.

“And now these impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God. And many that were prevailed on by them suffered the punishments of their folly; for Felix brought them back, and then punished them.

“Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem, one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. He said farther, that he would show them from hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down.

“Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen, from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more. And again the robbers stirred up the people to make war with the Romans, and said they ought not to obey them at all; and when any persons would not comply with them, they set fire to their villages, and plundered them.”⁵

57/58 **[Fall/Winter]** Paul visited various congregations in Asia, Macedonia & Greece, collecting financial aid for the starving Jewish believers back in Judea (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 9).

58 **[After Passover (APR)]** Paul sailed for Judea, hoping to arrive in time for Pentecost, which would mark the 25th Anniversary of the Church’s birth (Acts 20:6, 16). As you can see, he was arriving in Jerusalem at a very tense time in Jewish history.

[JUN] All the events of Acts 21-24, resulting in Paul’s arrest, took place in Jerusalem (the Jewish capital of Judea) & Caesarea (the Roman capital of Judea), with Felix intimately involved. Felix’s wife was Drusilla (in her early 20’s), the great grand-daughter of Herod “the Great,” daughter of the late King Agrippa I & sister of King Agrippa II.

58-60 According to Luke (Acts 24:26), Felix kept Paul in casual Roman custody for the next two years, hoping to receive a bribe for his release, probably out of the relief funds which Paul had brought back to Judea from the churches of Asia Minor, Macedonia & Greece.

During this same time, the Jews & Greeks were fighting over who had better claim to the city of Caesarea – the former, because it was built by Herod, whom they claimed as a Jew; the latter, because Herod had filled it with shrines, statues & many other things deplored by the Jews. Felix was constantly punishing offenders from each side of the dispute.

³ Antiquities 20.8.8.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.

⁵ Antiquities 20.8.6. The story of the Jewish-Egyptian false prophet is paralleled in Wars 2.13.4.

60 After Felix sent representatives from both sides of the Caesarean dispute to Rome, Nero sent Porcius Festus to replace Felix, so that he might come to Rome and defend his handling of the affair. Josephus was convinced that Felix would have been condemned for letting things get out of hand had it not been for the intervention of Felix's brother, Pallas, who was held in high esteem by Nero. Nero's tutor, after receiving a large bribe from the Greeks, also supported their cause, resulting in Nero revoking Jewish claims of control in Caesarea.⁶

60 Shortly after he arrived in Judea, Festus was confronted with the issue of Paul's confinement. Acts 25 & 26 tells of his initial hearing before Festus; his subsequent appeal to his right as a Roman citizen to have his case reviewed by Caesar Nero (22 yrs); and his secondary hearing, held by Festus before King Herod Agrippa II (33 yrs) and his sister, Bernice (32 yrs), so that they might give input on the matter.

61 After a winter shipwreck at the island of Malta, Paul arrived in Rome, where he was confined, under Roman guard, to his own apartment, awaiting review of his case by Nero (Acts 27-28).

Meanwhile, back in Judea, Festus was aggressively attempting to eradicate the *sicarii*, whose terror attacks were increasing & spreading well beyond the festivals at Jerusalem.

"They also came frequently upon the villages belonging to their enemies, with their weapons, and plundered them, and set them on fire. So Festus sent forces, both horsemen and footmen, to fall upon those that had been seduced by a certain impostor, who promised them deliverance and freedom from the miseries they were under, if they would but follow him as far as the wilderness. Accordingly those forces that were sent destroyed both him that had deluded them, and those that were his followers also."⁷

61 In addition, King Agrippa II was causing controversies of his own.

"About the same time king Agrippa built himself a very large dining room in the royal place at Jerusalem, near to the portico. Now this palace had been erected of old by the children of Asamoneus, and was situated upon an elevation, and afforded a most delightful prospect to those that had a mind to take a view of the city, which prospect was desired by the king; and there he could lie down, and eat, and thence observe what was done in the temple; which thing, when the chief men of Jerusalem saw, they were very much displeased at it; for it was not agreeable to the institutions of our country or law that what was done in the temple should be viewed by others, especially what belonged to the sacrifices.

"They therefore erected a wall upon the uppermost building which belonged to the inner court of the temple towards the west; which wall, when it was built, did not only intercept the prospect of the dining room in the palace, but also of the western cloisters that belonged to the outer court of the temple also, where it was that the Romans kept guards for the temple at the festivals.

"At these doings both king Agrippa, and principally Festus the procurator, were much displeased; and Festus ordered them to pull the wall down again; but the Jews petitioned him to give them leave to send an embassage about this matter to Nero; for they said they could not endure to live if any part of the temple should be demolished; and when Festus had given them leave so to do, they sent ten of their principal men to Nero, as also Ismael, the high priest, and Helcias, the keeper of the sacred treasure.

"And when Nero had heard what they had to say, he not only forgave them what they had already done, but also gave them leave to let the wall they had built stand. This was granted them in order to gratify Poppea, Nero's wife,⁸ who was a religious woman, and had requested these favors of Nero, and who gave order to the ten ambassadors to go their way home;"⁹

61 [Fall]-

62 [Fall] = The Jewish Sabbatical Year

⁶ Antiquities 20.8.9.

⁷ Antiquities 20.8.10.

⁸ In 62, when Nero resolved this issue, he had only recently married Poppea (about 32 yrs).

⁹ Antiquities 20.8.11.

62 Festus died very suddenly, causing Nero to scramble for a replacement - Albinus, who ended up traveling to Jerusalem via Alexandria. When King Agrippa II appointed Ananias (the son of the earlier High Priest Ananias) as High Priest shortly after Festus' death, this man took advantage of the Roman power vacuum in order to strike out at the Jewish-Christian community.

“this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority].

“Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned;

“but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrin without his consent; — whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.”¹⁰

After a successful review of his case, Paul was released after two years of home detention at Rome & probably (as indicated in his “prison epistles”) visited Asia Minor before heading off to Spain, as he had earlier intended.

Albinus raised the Jewish tax rate and began prosecuting a “war on terror” against the *sicarii*. Meanwhile, the recently deposed High Priest Ananias (being very rich and prone to offer bribes & having many servants who were not adverse to using force) grew exceptionally powerful. The two men became unlikely allies after the *sicarii* kidnapped Ananias' son, holding him in exchange for 10 *sicarii* prisoners held by the Romans. Ananias paid Albinus a large sum of money in order for him to agree to the terrorist demands. This deal only proved the need for our modern day axiom, “we never negotiate with terrorists.”

“This was the beginning of greater calamities; for the robbers perpetually contrived to catch some of Ananias's servants; and when they had taken them alive, they would not let them go till they thereby recovered some of their own sicarii; and as they were again become no small number, they grew bold, and were a great affliction to the whole country.”¹¹

Thereafter, Albinus, realizing that he had access to a great source of personal gain, began releasing anyone (except for the most violent criminals, whom he did execute) from custody for whom someone was willing to pay a price. In the end, instead of reducing the number & strength of various Jewish gangs, Albinus actually increased them.¹²

64 Despite Albinus' propensity for graft, Josephus considered him “a saint” when compared to his successor, Gessius Florus, under whose administration the Jewish War with Rome would begin.

¹⁰ Antiquities 20.9.1.

¹¹ Antiquities 20.9.2-3.

¹² Wars 2.14.1