

Abomination, Rebellion, and Lawlessness

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IN OUR PREVIOUS ARTICLE we saw how both Jesus and Paul sequenced the Parousia immediately after the tribulation, but before God's wrath was poured out. In this article we will examine three events which "cut short" the tribulation just before Jesus came to rescue His saints: (1) the *Abomination of Desolation*; (2) the *Rebellion*; and (3) the *Man of Lawlessness*.

We will see not only where these events fit into the overall sequence of endtime events, but also how they were fulfilled in history. All three events were directly related to each other, and together combined to generate the abominable circumstances which ultimately led to the desolation of Jerusalem and the temple.

The Abomination of Desolation

According to Luke 21:20, when the saints saw armies encircling Jerusalem (like vultures circling in the sky above a dead carcass), they would then know that its desolation was near. Thus, the *Abomination* had something to do with armies defiling Jerusalem and the temple, and ultimately causing their desolation (cf. Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14).

Gessius Florus, Roman governor of Judea, AD 64-66, did everything possible to stir up a revolt in Judea, and he succeeded. In early May of AD 66, not long after Passover (Apr 10th), he provoked the Jews by demanding 17 talents of gold from the temple treasury. After some impetuous youths mocked the greediness of Florus, he retaliated by sending his soldiers into the marketplace where they killed 3600 citizens [*Wars* 2.293-315 (2.14.6–2.15.2)]. The Jews were justifiably outraged.

Florus then brought two additional cohorts of soldiers to Jerusalem in order to seize all of the gold in the temple. As they approached, the soldiers killed a great many citizens outside the gates. And when they got inside the city, they headed straight toward the temple.

However, **Eleazar b. Ananias**, captain of the temple guard, aware of their intentions, *blew the ram's horn* to rally the citizens, who then blocked the lanes of the city and prevented the soldiers' advance to the temple. Thus, frustrated in his attempt to plunder the temple, *Florus* withdrew his soldiers and returned to Caesarea [*Wars* 2.315-332 (2.15.2 – 2.15.6)]. Had he been successful, the temple would have been defiled by unclean, uncircumcised Roman soldiers.

Nevertheless, the temple was immediately afterwards polluted in a far more abominable way. On this very occasion (May 12th, 66), **Eleazar b. Ananias** took full control of the temple, and **unlawfully** used it as his fortress during the Jewish/Roman war [Wars 4:151 (4.3.7)].

This was the beginning of the rebellion (*Yosippon*, chs. 59 and 89 fn 538), which “**cut short**” the Great Tribulation for the sake of the elect. And it set the stage for the Parousia to occur **immediately afterward**, so that the elect could be gathered out of harm’s way before the wrath was poured out on their persecutors (Matt 24:21-29; cf. 2 Thess 1:4-10).

The ‘Apostasy’ Was the Rebellion

Paul told the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord, including the *Parousia* and the *Gathering*, would not come “*unless the **apostasy** comes first, and the **Man of Lawlessness** is revealed*” (2 Thess 2:2-3). What was this “*apostasy*” that had to occur before the Parousia?

“Apostasy” comes from the Greek word *apostasia* which usually means “rebellion.” The BDAG lexicon defines it as “defiance of established system or authority, **rebellion**, abandonment, breach of faith.” Then it claims that the usage here in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 refers to “the rebellion caused by the Lawless One in the last days.”

Charles Wanamaker (NIGTC commentary on 2 Thess) goes further to note that:

“the **rebellion** referred to is a religious one directed against God . . . [and] the reference to the temple in [2 Thess 2:4] suggests that [Paul] is working with a traditional apocalyptic understanding in which . . . the Jews would *rebel against God and the Law* at the time of the end. . . . [This] *apostasy* was to come about through the activity of the [Man of Lawlessness].”

Thus, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul is saying that some Jewish leader would lead a *rebellion* against God and the Law. That explains why Paul calls him a *Man of Lawlessness*—he has forsaken the Law and leads others to do the same. And as we shall see below, this perfectly describes the activity of **Eleazar b. Ananias**.

Moreover, it needs to be noted that Jesus used the phrase “Abomination of Desolation” to label the event which Paul here describes as the “rebellion” instigated by the Man of Lawlessness. Two different terms, but both referring to the same event. We know this because both the *Abomination* and the *Rebellion* are found at the same place in the sequence of end-time events—i.e., just before the Parousia began.

The Man of Lawlessness

Paul’s description in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 provides numerous clues to help identify the *Man of Lawlessness* (“the son of destruction”). Paul portrays him as being a very arrogant and lawless Jewish

leader who initiated the *rebellion*, took control of the temple, was initially under the influence of some restraining force, but ultimately engaged in deception using satanic power, signs, and false wonders.

When we compare that description to the historical account recorded by Josephus, there is only one person who meets all of those qualifications—**Eleazar b. Ananias**. *Hegesippus* (5:53) says that **Eleazar was the “originator”** (instigator) of the rebellion when he **blew the shofar** and **took control of the temple** from that day onward (May 12th, 66). Thus, “*the war began with the revolt against Florus*” [*Sepher Yosippon*, Chs. 59; and 89 footnote 538, cf. *Jos. Antiq.* 20.257 (20.11.1)].

So, it appears that the encounter between Florus and Eleazar in early May of 66 was the time when the *Abomination* was set up, the *rebellion* began, and the identity of the *Man of Lawlessness* was first revealed. That was when Eleazar seized control of the temple to use as his “*shop of tyranny*” [*Wars* 4:151 (4.3.7)]. He brought his soldiers into the temple and committed many other **lawless actions** which **invalidated** all of its sacred ministrations.

From that time onward, the temple was constantly *deseccrated*, *defiled*, and *polluted* by bloodshed and other lawless atrocities which Eleazar allowed to occur both inside the temple, and in Jerusalem. Josephus condemned and lamented all of those “abominations” [*Wars* 2:455 (2.17.10); 4:162-163 (4.3.10); 4:201 (4.3.12); 4:323 (4.5.2); 4:388 (4.6.3); 5:14-19 (5.1.3); 5:402 (5.9.4); 6:110 (6.2.1); 6:126 (6.2.4)].

The Restrainer Was Removed

The former high priest, **Ananias b. Nedebaeus**, father of **Eleazar**, was probably the most powerful ruler of the Jews at that time. He was a moderate and a pro-Roman loyalist. And he was a **restraining influence** both upon his son Eleazar, and against the Zealot cause. That is why the Zealot rebels killed him soon after the rebellion began [*Wars* 2:441 (2.17.9)]. His death not only fulfilled Apostle Paul’s prediction from eight years earlier in AD 58 (Acts 23:1-3), but also his prophecy in AD 52 about the *restrainer being taken out of the way* (2 Thess 2:7).

Paul characterized Ananias as being a **law-breaker** (Acts 23:1-3), so it is no surprise to see his son Eleazar become an **even worse law-breaker** after his father’s **restraining influence** was removed. Then Eleazar’s **true lawless character was further revealed**. Almost immediately, Eleazar avenged his father’s death by killing Menahem, the Zealot leader who had murdered his father [*Wars* 2:442-448 (2.17.9)]. This temporarily consolidated most of the Zealot forces underneath Eleazar’s control. And now that he was *free from his father’s restraining influence*, his **lawless conduct** rapidly escalated, and his identity as the *Man of Lawlessness* was fully revealed.

Conclusion

We have not only historically identified the *Abomination, Rebellion, and Man of Lawlessness*, but have also seen the **sequence** in which they actually occurred. Studies like this clearly illustrate why a knowledge of first-century history is so vitally important.

Without knowing the history, we would be left to guess and speculate like the futurists. Since futurists do not believe these events have occurred, history is not relevant to them. But it is supremely relevant and absolutely essential for preterists. We can never be certain that we are correctly *identifying* and *sequencing* these events unless we match them with historical accounts, as we have done here. I hope this helps you in your studies, as much as it helped me. ✝

If you would like to see more of the historical details about these things, simply send an email request for the following PDF document: *Outbreak of Rebellion: The Real History*. Here is my email address: preterist1@preterist.org