

# Who Was the Man of Sin? (2 Thess. 2:3-12)

By Ed Stevens, for *Fulfilled Magazine*, Winter 2011 (Vol. 6, Issue 4)

Gary DeMar, Ken Gentry, Jr., David Chilton, and others believe the Man of Sin was Nero. On the other hand, John Bray, whose little booklet *The Man of Sin* is well worth your study, believes he was John of Gischala. Like Bray, I too see the Man of Sin as a *Jewish Zealot leader*.

The reason I do not subscribe to the Neronian theory is because of the explicit Jewish character with which Paul describes the Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians. Paul stated the Man of Sin would set himself up in the temple as if he was God. Nero never set foot in Judea, much less in Jerusalem's temple, nor was his image ever set up in the temple. So, we need another candidate who might have set himself up in the temple as if he was God.

It is also worth mentioning that Paul identifies the Man of Sin as a single individual, in contrast with the apostle John who referred to "many antichrists" (1 John 2:18-27; 4:3-5; and 2 John 7). Furthermore, John describes these "antichrists" as having formerly been a part of the church, before "they went out from us." They were "deceivers" and "false apostles." The Man of Sin can not be the same as these "antichrists" since there is no indication that the Man of Sin was ever a part of the Church.

Paul provides over a dozen different characteristics by which to identify the Man of Sin, several of which paint him as a Jewish figure in close connection with the temple or priesthood: He would "sit in the temple of God"; break the Law completely; oppose everyone else; exalt himself above God and the Law; delude his followers with false signs and wonders; engage in utter wickedness; end up being slain and brought to an end by the breath of Christ's mouth at the Parousia. These qualifications limit the field of possible Jewish candidates to the following individuals: Ananus II, Eleazar b. Ananias, Menahem b. Judas, and John of Gischala. While there are a few fingers pointing at Ananus, Menahem, and John, none of them fit the qualifications as precisely as Eleazar, the son of Ananias.

When the Roman Procurator Gessius Florus brought his soldiers to Jerusalem to confiscate all the gold from the Temple (May AD 66), Yosippon writes that it was a brash young man, Eleazar, who blew the shofar in Jerusalem and rallied the citizens to block the lanes of the city. Eleazar then seized control of the temple and used it as his fortress (in violation of the Law) from that point forward. Shortly thereafter, the angelic armies were seen in the clouds over Palestine, signaling that the Son of Man had arrived to begin His judgment (May-June AD 66).

A couple of months later, Eleazar illegally stopped the daily sacrifices of all Gentiles (Aug AD 66). This was totally unprecedented, monstrous, and lawless. Never had Gentile sacrifices and offerings been refused. At the very time God was grafting the Gentiles into His Church, the Zealots were breaking off all religious contact with the Gentiles—quite a contrast! The moderate Jewish leadership and priests all reminded Eleazar that to do such a thing would be to set himself above the Law. They demanded that he restore the sacrifices, but he defiantly refused.

Eleazar was the son of Ananias b. Nedebaeus, who was the high priest when 2 Thessalonians was written, as well as four years later, in AD 58, during Paul's trial in Jerusalem (Acts 23). It was Ananias who ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth. Upon being struck, Paul predicted, "God is about to strike you," and then called him a law-breaker. As was the father (lawbreaker), so was the son (an even worse lawbreaker). Eight years later, in September of AD 66, Ananias was "struck" dead by the Zealot leader Menahem, immediately after which Eleazar used his own

soldiers to avenge his father by killing Menahem and his soldiers in the temple, again in violation of the Law. Thus, Eleazar opposed every other Zealot leader and exalted himself above them all.

As Yosippon indicates (*Yosippon*, Chapters 72, 75), Eleazar was the one who literally “sat in the temple” controlling all the affairs of the temple, priesthood, and sacrifices, and used the Temple as his fortress during nearly the entire war, beginning in April AD 66. Just before Titus began the siege, Eleazar was overpowered by John of Gischala, and his troops merged with John’s. According to Yosippon (Chapters 82, 89), Eleazar b. Ananias then fled with some of his companions to Masada, where he remained until General Silva conquered it by battering and burning its gates. *Hegesippus* (Book V, Chapter 53) also confirms this. Eleazar’s flight to Masada explains why Josephus lost track of him after John captured the temple (see *Wars* 5.6.1. in Whiston).

Paul stated in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 that the Lord Jesus would slay the Lawless One “by the breath of His mouth.” In the previous chapter (2 Thess 1:7) Paul had predicted that Christ would come “in flaming fire dealing out retribution” to their persecutors. Here, at the conquering of Masada, we see the “breath of His Mouth” driving the “flaming fire” which destroyed their final defenses against the Romans:

This work of theirs was like a real edifice; and when the machines were applied, the blows were weakened by its yielding . . . . When Silva saw this, he thought it best to [destroy] this wall by setting fire to it; so he gave order . . . and when it was once set on fire, its hollowness made that fire spread to **a mighty flame**. . . . after this, on a sudden the wind changed into the south, as if it were **done by divine Providence**; and blew strongly the contrary way, and carried the flame, and drove it against the wall, which was now on fire through its entire thickness. So the Romans, having now **assistance from God**, returned to their camp with joy, and resolved to attack their enemies the very next day . . . [but when Eleazar] saw their wall burnt down by the fire, and could devise no other way of escaping, or room for their farther courage, and setting before their eyes what the Romans would do to them, their children, and their wives, if they got them into their power, he consulted about having them all slain. (*Wars* 7:314-321/7.8.5-6; emphasis added)

The words of 2 Thessalonians 2:8 do not fit the fate of the other Jewish characters we have mentioned. We know that Ananias b. Nedebaeus, Menahem, and Ananus II were all killed during the war. Simon b. Giora and John of Gischala both surrendered to Titus and were taken to Rome to be displayed in the triumphal return of the Roman army. After being dragged through a crowd and tormented, Simon was finally killed, while John of Gischala was imprisoned in Rome for the rest of his life. However, 2 Thessalonians 2:8 states that the Man of Sin would be *slain* (Gk. *anaireo*), a word that is used 451 times in the works of Josephus describing all the slaughters and killings that occurred during the war. This same word was also used by Josephus three times in the context of the suicide killings in Masada at the end of the war (AD 73):

So they being not able to bear the grief they were under for what they had done any longer [by slaying all their families], and esteeming it an injury to those they had **slain** [Gk. *anaireo*] to live even the shortest space of time after them . . . . (*Wars* 7:394/7.9.1; emphasis added)

. . . and when these ten had, without fear, slain them all, they made the same rule for casting lots for themselves, that he whose lot it was should first kill the other nine, and after all, should **kill** [Gk. *anaireo*] himself . . . . (*Wars* 7:396/7.9.1; emphasis added)

. . . when he perceived that they were all **slain** [Gk. *anairoo*], he set fire to the palace, and with the great force of his hands ran his sword entirely through himself, and fell down dead near to his own relations. (*Wars* 7:397/7.9.1; emphasis added)

Eleazar died at Masada with 960 others in a final suicide pact, slain by his own soldiers. The zealot leader who was “the originator of the disturbance” (*Hegesippus* v. 53) was also the last to be slain. This explains why Titus sent Silva to Masada with such a large force: to make sure the last remaining remnants of the rebellion were completely crushed. Titus was determined to not let Eleazar (the original instigator of the rebellion) escape to fight another day.

The point that we must not miss here is that Eleazar seems to be the only one who fulfilled all the characteristics of the Man of Sin that are mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2. He was the one who blew the shofar and started the war. He was the only one who “sat in the temple” and took the law into his own hands by stopping the Gentiles’ daily sacrifices. Neither John of Gischala nor Ananus II ever had control of the Temple during the war. John of Gischala only gained control of it at the very end when the siege began (May AD 70), when holding the Temple no longer mattered. Although both John of Gischala and Ananus II were guilty of many lawless acts, none were so lawless as what Eleazar did by polluting the Temple and stopping the daily sacrifices. Eleazar far exceeded his contemporaries in lawlessness. It appears then, that the Lawless One/Man of Sin was indeed forced to slay himself when his last hope of defense was destroyed by the breath of our Lord’s mouth.