



# Eleazar's speech at Masada 2

- Eleazar ben Yair Speech - [Book 7, chapter 8, sec 7](#)

**Commander of Sicarii, at Masada, descendant of Judas of Galilee of Zealots.**

7 ... "Truly I was greatly mistaken when I thought to be assisting to brave men who struggled hard for their liberty, & to such as were resolved either to live with honor, or else to die; but I find that you are such people as are no better than others, either in virtue or in courage, & are afraid of dying, though you be delivered thereby from the greatest miseries, while you ought to make no delay in this matter, nor to await any one to give you good advice; for the laws of our country, & of God himself, have from ancient times, & as soon as ever we could reason, continually taught us, & our forefathers have corroborated the same doctrine by their actions, & by bravery of mind, that it is life that is a calamity to men, & not death; for this last affords our souls their liberty, & sends them by a removal into their own place of purity where they are to be insensible of all sorts of misery; for while souls are tied down to a mortal body, they are disagreeable. It is true, the power of the soul is great even when it is imprisoned in a mortal body; for the moving it after a way that is invisible, it makes the body a sensible instrument & causes it to advance further in its actions than mortal nature could otherwise do. However, when it is freed from that weight which draws it down to the earth & is connected with it, it obtains its own proper place, & does then become a partaker of that blessed power, & those abilities, which are then every way incapable of being hindered in their operations. It continues invisible, indeed, to the eyes of men, as does God himself; for certainly it is not itself seen while it is in the body; for it is there after an invisible manner, & when it is freed from it, it is still not seen. It is this soul which hath one nature, an incorruptible one also; but yet it is the cause of the change that is made in the body; for whatsoever it be which the soul touches, that lives & flourishes; from whatsoever it is removed, that withers away & dies; such a degree is there in it of immortality. Let me produce the state of sleep as a most evident demonstration of the truth of what I say; wherein souls, when the body does not distract them, have the sweetest rest depending on themselves, & conversing with God, by their alliance to him; they then go everywhere & foretell many futurities beforehand. ...why are we afraid of death, while we are pleased with the rest that we have in sleep? ...how absurd a thing is it to pursue after liberty while we are alive, yet to envy it to ourselves where it will be eternal! We, therefore, who have been brought up in a discipline of our own, ought to become an example to others of our readiness to die. ...Indian philosophy concerning life after death... are not we, therefore, ashamed to have lower notions than the Indians? ...circumstances we are now in ought to be an inducement to us to bear such calamity courageously, since it is by **the will of God, & by necessity, that we are to die;** for it now appears that **God hath made such a decree against the whole Jewish nation, that we are to be deprived of this life which (he knew) we would not make a due use of.**

Eleazar ben Yair Speech at Masada [Book 7, Ch 8, sec 7B](#)

for do not you ascribe the occasion of our present condition to yourselves, nor think the Romans are the true occasion that this war we have had with them is become so destructive to us all: **these things have not come to pass by their power, but a more powerful cause hath intervened, & made us afford them an occasion of their appearing to be conquerors over us.** What Roman weapons, I pray you, were those by which the Jews at **Caesarea** were slain? On the contrary, when they were no way disposed to rebel but were all the while keeping their 7th day festival, & did not so much as lift up their hands against the citizens of Caesarea, yet did those citizens run upon them in great crowds, & cut their throats, & the throats of their wives & children, & this without any regard to the **Romans** themselves, who **never took us for their enemies till we revolted from them.** But some may be ready to say, that truly the people of Caesarea had always quarrel against those that lived among them, & that when an opportunity offered itself, they only satisfied the old rancor they had against them. What then shall we say to those of **Scythopolis**, who ventured to wage war with us on account of the Greeks? Nor did they do it by way of revenge upon the Romans, when they acted in concert with our countrymen. Wherefore you see how little our good-will & fidelity to them profited us, while they were slain, they & their whole families, after the most inhumane manner, which was all the requital that was made them for the assistance they had afforded the others; for that very same destruction which they had prevented from falling upon the others did they suffer themselves from them, as if they had been ready to be the actors against them. It would be too long for me to speak at this time of every destruction brought upon us; for you cannot but know that there was not any **Syrian city** which did not slay their Jewish inhabitants, & were not more bitter enemies to us than were the Romans themselves; nay, even those of **Damascus**, when they were able to allege no tolerable pretense against us, filled their city with the most barbarous slaughters of our people, & cut the throats of 18,000 (*actually 10,000*) Jews, with their wives & children. And as to the multitude of those that were slain in Egypt, & that with torments also, we have been informed they were more than 60,000; those indeed being a foreign country, & so naturally meeting with nothing to oppose against their enemies, were killed... As for all those of us who have waged war against the Romans in our own country, had we not sufficient reason to have sure hopes of victory? For **we had arms, & walls, & fortresses** so prepared as not to be easily taken, & courage not to be moved by any dangers **in the cause of liberty**, which encouraged us all **to revolt from the Romans.** ...& only raised our hopes, while **they really appeared to be the origin of our miseries;**...