



# Eleazar's speech at Masada 3

- Eleazar ben Yair Speech - Book 7, chapter 8, sec 7

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

7C ... Some of them have been put upon the rack, & tortured with fire & whippings, & so died. Some have been half devoured by wild beasts, & yet have been reserved alive to be devoured by them a 2nd time, in order to afford laughter & sport to our enemies; & such of those as are alive still are to be looked on as the most miserable, ... being so desirous of death, could not come at it. Where is now that great city, the metropolis of the Jewish nation, which was fortified by so many walls round about, which had so many fortresses & large towers to defend it, which could contain instruments prepared for the war, & had so many ten thousands of men to fight for it?

**Where is this city that was believed to have God himself inhabiting therein?**

It is now **demolished to the very foundations**, & hath nothing but that monument of it preserved, I mean the camp of those that hath destroyed it, which still dwells upon its ruins;

some unfortunate old men also lie upon the ashes of the temple, & a few women are there preserved alive by the enemy, for our bitter shame & reproach. Now who is there that revolves these things in his mind, & yet is able to bear the sight of the sun, though he might live out of danger?

Who is there so much his country's enemy, or so unmanly, & so desirous of living, as not to repent that he is still alive? And I cannot but wish that we had all died before we had seen that **holy city demolished** by the hands of our enemies, or the **foundations of our holy temple dug up** after so profane a manner. But since we had a generous hope that deluded us, as if we might perhaps have been able to avenge ourselves on our enemies on that account, though it be now become vanity, & hath left us alone in this distress, let us make haste to die bravely.

Let us pity ourselves, our children, & our wives while it is in our own power to show pity to them; for we were born to die, as well as those were whom we have begotten; nor is it in the power of the most happy of our race to avoid it. But for abuses, & slavery, & the sight of our wives led away after an ignominious manner, with their children, these are not such evils as are natural & necessary among men; although such as do not prefer death before those miseries, when it is in their power so to do, must undergo even them, on account of their own cowardice.

**We revolted from the Romans with great pretensions to courage; & when, at the very last, they invited us to preserve ourselves, we would not comply with them.** Who will not, therefore, believe that they will certainly be in a rage at us, in case they can take us alive? Miserable will then be the young men who will be strong enough in their bodies to sustain many torments!

Miserable also will be those of elder years, who will not be able to bear those calamities which young men might sustain! One man will be obliged to hear the voice of his son implore help of his father, when his hands are bound. But certainly our hands are still at liberty, & have a sword in them; **let them then be subservient to us in our glorious design**; let us die before we become slaves under our enemies, & let us go out of the world, together with our children & our wives, **in a state of freedom**. ...**God himself hath brought this necessity upon us**; while the Romans desire the contrary...

Eleazar ben Yair Speech at Masada Book 9

1...as **Eleazar** was proceeding on in this exhortation, **they all cut him off short, & made haste to do the work**, as full of an unconquerable ardor of mind, & **moved with a demoniacal fury**. So they went their ways, as one still endeavoring to be before another, & as thinking that this eagerness would be a demonstration of their courage & good conduct, if they could avoid appearing in the last class; so **great was the zeal they were in to slay their wives & children, & themselves also!** Nor indeed, when they came to the work itself, did their courage fail them, as one might imagine it would have done, but they then held fast the same resolution, without wavering, which they had upon the hearing of Eleazar's speech, while yet every one of them still retained the natural passion of love to themselves & their families, because **the reasoning they went upon appeared to them to be very just**, even with regard to those that were dearest to them;...**everyone of them despatched his dearest relations. Miserable men indeed were they!** Whose **distress forced them to slay their own wives & children with their own hands, as the lightest of those evils that were before them**. ...they presently laid all they had upon a heap, & **set fire to it**. They then chose **10 men by lot out of them to slay all the rest**;...they made the same rule for casting lots for themselves, that he **whose lot it was should first kill the other nine, & after all should kill himself**. ...when he perceived that they were all slain, **he set fire to the place, & with the great force of his hand ran his sword entirely through himself**,... So **these people died with this intention, that they would not leave so much as one soul among them all alive to be subject to the Romans**.

**Yet was there an ancient woman, & another** who was of **kin to Eleazar**, & **superior to most women in prudence & learning**, with **5 children**, who had **concealed themselves in caverns** under ground, & had carried water thither for their drink, & were hidden...

**Those others were 960** in number, the women & children being withal included in that computation. **This calamitous slaughter was made on the 15th day of the month of Xanthicus (Nisan)**.

2...the Romans,...expected they should be fought in the morning, when, accordingly, they put on their armor, & laid bridges of planks upon their ladders from the banks, to make an assault upon the fortress,...So they were at a loss to guess at what had happened. ...the women heard this noise, & came out of their under-ground cavern, & informed the Romans what had been done, as it was done, & **the 2nd of them clearly described all both what was said & what was done**,