

Eleazar's speech at Masada 1



- Eleazar ben Yair Speech - [Book 7, chapter 8, sec 6](#)
Commander of Sicarii, at Masada, descendant of Judas of Galilee of Zealots.

6 ... neither did **Eleazar** once think of flying away, nor permit any one else to do so; when he saw their wall burned down by fire, & could devise no other way of escaping, or room for further courage & setting before their eyes what the Romans would do to them, their children, & wives, if they got them into their power, he consulted about having them all slain. ...he judged this to be the best thing they could do in present circumstances, he gathered the most courageous of his companions together, & encouraged them to take that course by a **speech which he made to them in the manner following:**

“Since we, long ago, my generous friends resolved **never to be servants to the Romans**, nor any other than to God himself, who alone is the true & just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make **that resolution true in practice**. Let us not at this time bring a reproach upon ourselves for self-contradiction, while we formerly would not undergo slavery, though it were then without danger, but must now, together with slavery, choose such punishments also as are intolerable; I mean this, upon the supposition that the Romans once reduced us under their power while we are alive. **We were the very first that revolted from them, & we are the last that fight** against them; & I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God hath granted us, that it is still in our power to **die bravely, & in a state of freedom**, which hath not been the case of others, who were conquered unexpectedly. It is very plain that we shall be taken within a day's time; but it is still an eligible thing to **die after a glorious manner**, together with our dearest friends. This is what our enemies themselves cannot by any means hinder, although they be very desirous to take us alive. Nor can we propose to ourselves any more to fight them, and beat them. It had been proper indeed for us to have conjectured at the purpose of God much sooner, & at the very first, when we were so **desirous of defending our liberty**, and when we received such sore treatment from one another, and worse treatment from our enemies, and to have been sensible that the same **God**, who had of old taken the Jewish nation into his favor, had **now condemned them to destruction**;

Eleazar ben Yair Speech at Masada [Book 7, Ch 8, sec 6 & 7](#)

for had he either continued favorable, or been but in a lesser degree displeased with us, he had not overlooked **destruction of so many men**, or delivered **his most holy city** to be **burnt & demolished** by our enemies. To be sure we weakly hoped to have preserved ourselves alone, still in a state of freedom, as if we had been guilty of no sins ourselves against God, nor been partners with...others; **we also taught other men to preserve their liberty**. Wherefore, consider how God hath convinced us that our hopes were in vain, by bringing such distress upon us in the desperate state we are now in, & which is beyond all our expectations; for the nature of this fortress which was in itself unconquerable, hath not proved a means of our deliverance; and even while we have still great abundance of food, and a great quantity of arms, & other necessaries more than we want, **we are openly deprived by God himself of all hope of deliverance**; for that fire which was driven upon our enemies did not of its own accord turn back upon the wall which we had built; this was the effect of **God's anger against us for our manifold sins, which we have been guilty of in a most insolent and extravagant manner with regard to our own countrymen**; the punishments of which let us not receive from the Romans, but from God himself, as executed by our own hands; for these will be more moderate than the other. Let our wives die before they are abused, our children before they have tasted slavery; & after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually, & preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument. ...first let us destroy our money & the fortress by fire; for I am well assured this will be great grief to the Romans, that they shall not be able to seize on our bodies, & shall fall of our wealth also; & spare nothing but our provisions; they will be testimonial when we are dead that we were not subdued for want of necessaries but that, according to our original resolution, **we have preferred death before slavery.**”

7. This was **Eleazar's speech to them**. ...some...were very zealous to put his advice in practice, & were in a manner filled with pleasure at it, thought death to be a good thing, ...yet ...those that were most effeminate a commiseration for their wives & families; & when these men were especially moved by the prospect of their own certain death, they looked wistfully at one another, & by the tears that were in their eyes declared their dissent from his opinion. When Eleazar saw these people in such fear, & ...souls were dejected at so prodigious a proposal, he was afraid lest perhaps these effeminate persons should, by their lamentations & tears, enfeeble those that heard what he had said courageously; so he did it leave off exhorting them, but stirred up himself, and recollecting proper arguments for raising their courage, he undertook to speak more briskly & fully to them, & concerning the immortality of the soul. So he made a lamentable groan, ...spoke thus: