

Extremists among the Zealots turned to terrorism and assassination and became known as Sicarii \ se-ca'ri-oī: “daggersmen”\ . They frequented public places with hidden daggers to strike down persons friendly to Rome. In the first revolt against Rome AD 66–70) the Zealots played a leading role, and at Masada in 73 they committed suicide rather than surrender the fortress.¹

17. An historical account of the Roman campaign against Jerusalem is covered in this excerpt:

Under the governors, Felix, Festus, Albinus \ al-bī' nus \, and Florus, moral corruption and the dissolution of all social ties, but at the same time the oppressiveness of the Roman yoke, increased every year. After the accession of Felix, assassins, called Sicarians (si-ca'ri-ans\, from *sica*, a dagger), armed with daggers and endangering safety in city and country, roamed over Palestine. (pp. 393-94)

In the month of May, A.D. 66, an organized rebellion broke out against the Romans. The ferocious party of the Zealots (Sicarians) had all the fire and energy which religious and patriotic fanaticism could inspire. They gained the ascendancy in the progress of the war, took forcible possession of the city and the temple and introduced a reign of terror. They kept up the Messianic expectations of the people and hailed every step towards destruction as a step towards deliverance. The Romans recognized the Messiah in Vespasian \ ve-spā' zhēan \ and Titus.

To defy Rome in that age, without a single ally, was to defy the world in arms; but religious fanaticism, blinded the Jews against the inevitable failure of this mad and desperate revolt. (p. 394)

The emperor Nero sent his most famous general, Vespasian, with a large force to Palestine. Vespasian opened the campaign in the year 67 from the Syrian port-town, Ptolemais \ ta-le-mā' us \, and against the stout resistance overran Galilee with an army of sixty thousand men. But events in Rome hindered him from completing the victory. Nero had killed himself. Vespasian, in the year 69, was universally proclaimed emperor, and restored order and prosperity. (pp. 395-96)

His son, Titus, then undertook the prosecution of the Jewish war, and became the instrument in the hand of God of destroying the holy city and the temple. He had an army of not less than eighty thousand trained soldiers, and planted his camp on Mount Scopus and the adjoining Mount Olivet, in full view of the city and the temple. The valley of the Kidron divided the besiegers from the besieged. (p. 396)

¹ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed., (2010), s.v. “Zealot.”

In April A.D. 70, immediately after the Passover, when Jerusalem was filled with strangers, the siege began. The zealots rejected, with sneering defiance, the repeated proposals of Titus; and they struck down every one who spoke of surrender. They made sorties down the valley of the Kidron and up the mountain, and inflicted great loss on the Romans. As the difficulties multiplied their courage increased. The crucifixion of hundreds of prisoners (as many as five hundred a day) only enraged them the more. Even the famine which began to rage and sweep away thousands daily, and forced a woman to roast her own child, the cries of mothers and babes, the most pitiable scenes of misery around them, could not move the crazy fanatics. (pp. 396-97)

At last, in July, the castle of Antonia was surprised and taken by night. This prepared the way for the destruction of the Temple in which the tragedy culminated. The last and the bloodiest sacrifice at the altar of burnt offerings was the slaughter of thousands of Jews who had crowded around it. (p. 397)

Titus intended at first to save that magnificent work of architecture, as a trophy of victory; ... and when the flames threatened to reach the Holy of Holies he forced his way through the flame and smoke, over the dead and dying, to arrest the fire. But the destruction was determined by a higher decree. His own soldiers, roused to madness by the stubborn resistance, and greedy of the golden treasures, could not be restrained from the work of destruction. At first the halls around the temple were set on fire. Then the firebrand was hurled through the golden gate. The legions vied with each other in feeding the flames. Soon the whole structure was in a blaze and illuminated the skies. It was burned on the tenth of August, A.D. 70, the same day of the year on which according to tradition, the first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. (pp. 397-98)

The Romans planted their eagles on the shapeless ruins, over against the eastern gate, offered their sacrifices to them, and proclaimed Titus *Imperator*. (p. 398)

Jerusalem was razed to the ground; only three towers of the palace of Herod together with a portion of the western wall, were left as monuments of the strength of the conquered city, once the center of the Jewish theocracy and the cradle of the Christian Church. (pp. 398-99)

The number of the Jews slain during the siege, including all those who had crowded into the city from the country, is stated by Josephus at the enormous and probably exaggerated figure of one million and one hundred thousand.

Eleven thousand perished from starvation shortly after the close of the siege. Ninety-seven thousand were carried captive and sold into slavery, or sent to the mines, or sacrificed in the gladiatorial shows at Caesarea, Berytus \ be-rī' tus \, Antioch, and other cities.

Vespasian and Titus celebrated the dearly bought victory together. No expense was spared for the pageant. Crowned with laurel, and clothed in purple garments, the two conquerors rode slowly in separate chariots ... amid the shouts of the people and the aristocracy. They were preceded by the soldiers in festive attire and seven hundred Jewish captives. The images of the gods, and the sacred furniture of the temple—the table of show-bread, the seven-armed candlestick, the trumpets which announced the year of jubilee, the vessel of incense, and the rolls of the Law—were borne along in the procession and deposited in the newly built Temple of Peace, except the Law and the purple veils of the holy place, which Vespasian reserved for his palace.

The Temple of Peace was afterwards burned under Commodus, and it is not known what became of the sacred furniture. (pp. 400-401)²

² Philip Schaff, *Apostolic Christianity*, vol. 1 in *History of the Christian Church: A.D. 1–100* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910), 393–401.