

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

1. Who were the founders of the Zealot movement and how did it begin?
2. Who were the "Sicarii"?
3. Who first built the fortress of Masada?
4. Who was the leader of the Jewish resistance at Masada?
5. Who was the Roman general that conquered Masada?

This and much more will be addressed in the thirteenth lecture of this series: "Masada and Mass Suicide".

To derive maximum benefit from this lecture, keep these questions in mind as you listen to the tape and read through the outline. Go back to these questions once again at the end of the lecture and see how well you answer them.

PLEASE NOTE: This outline and source book was designed as a powerful tool to help you appreciate and understand the basis of Jewish History. Although the lectures can be listened to without the use of the outline, we advise you to read the outline to enhance your comprehension. Use it as well as a handy reference guide and for quick review.

THE EPIC OF THE ETERNAL PEOPLE

Presented by Rabbi Shmuel Irons

Series II Lecture #13

MASADA AND MASS SUICIDE

I. The Zealots

A. Now Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and one who had gone through other magistracies and had passed through them till he had been consul, and one who, on other accounts, was of great dignity, came at this time into Syria with a few others being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation and to take an account of their substance; Coponius also, a man of the equestrian order, was sent together with him, to have the supreme power over the Jews. Moreover, Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take an account of their substance and to dispose of Archelaus's money, but the Jews, although at the beginning they took the report of a taxation heinously, yet did they leave off any farther opposition to it by the persuasion of Joazar, who was the son of Boethus, and high-priest. So they, being over-persuaded by Joazar's words, gave an account of their estates, without any dispute about it. Yet there was one Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Sadduc, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt. He both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty; as if they could procure them happiness and security for what they possessed, and an assured enjoyment of a still greater good, which was that of the honor and glory they would thereby acquire for magnanimity. They also said that G-d would not otherwise be assisting to them, than upon their joining with one another in such counsels as might be successful, and for their own advantage; and this especially, if they would set about great exploits, and not grow weary in executing the same; so men received what they said with pleasure, and this bold attempt proceeded to a great height. All sorts of misfortunes also sprang from these men, and the nation was infected with this doctrine to an incredible degree; one violent war came upon us after another, and we lost our friends, who used to alleviate our pains. There were also very great robberies and murders of our principal men. This was done in pretence indeed for the public welfare, but in reality for the hopes of gain to themselves, whence arose seditions, and from them murders of men, which sometimes fell on those of their own people (by the madness of these men towards one another, while their desire was that none of the averse party might be left) and sometimes on their enemies; a famine also coming upon us, reduced us to the last degree of despair, as did also the taking and demolishing of cities. Nay, the sedition at last increased so high, that the very Temple of G-d was burnt down by their enemy's fire.

Such were the consequences of this, that the customs of our fathers were altered and such a change was made, as added a mighty weight toward bringing all to destruction, which these men occasioned by thus conspiring together; for Judas and Sadduc, who excited a fourth philosophic sect among us and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil governments with tumults at present, and laid the foundation of our future miseries, by this system of philosophy, which we were before unacquainted withal; concerning which

I shall discourse a little, and this the rather, because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction.

Josephus, Antiquities Book XVIII 1:1

B. But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions, but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that G-d is to be their only Ruler and L-rd. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man L-rd. Since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no farther about that matter; nor am I afraid that anything I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain. It was in Gessius Florus's time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper. He was our procurator, and he occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans. These are the sects of Jewish philosophy. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XVIII 1:6**

C. Then came Tiberius Alexander as successor to Fadus; he was son of Alexander the alabarch of Alexandria. This Alexander was a principal person among all his contemporaries, both for his family and wealth; he was also more eminent for his piety than this his son Alexander, for he did not continue in the religion of his country. Under these procurators that great famine happened in Judea, in which queen Helena bought corn in Egypt at a great expense, and distributed it to those that were in want, as I have related already. Besides this, the sons of Judas of Galilee were now slain; I mean of that Judas who caused the people to revolt, when Cyrenius came to take an account of the estates of the Jews, as we have shown in a foregoing book. The names of these sons were James and Simon, whom Alexander commanded to be crucified. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 5:2**

D. The Galileans were much displeased, and persuaded the multitude of the Jews to betake themselves of arms . . . and entreated the assistance of Eleazar ben Dineus, a robber, who had many years made his abode in the mountains, with whose assistance they plundered many villages of the Samaritans. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 6:1**

רבי אוניא אמר ד' שבועות השביען כנגד ד' דורות שדחקו את הקץ ואלו הן א' בימי עמרם
וא' בימי דינאי וא' בימי בן כוזיבא וא' בימי שותלח בן אפרים. שיר השירים רבה ב:ז

Rabbi Unia said: G-d administered four oaths corresponding to the four generations that pressed for a premature termination of the Galus and stumbled. This occurred in the days of Amram, in the days of Dineus, in the days of ben Koziba, and in the days of Shuselach ben Ephraim. **Shir Hashirim Rabah 2:7**

II. Sicarii

A. Upon Festus's coming into Judea, it happened that Judea was afflicted by the robbers, while all the villages were set on fire and plundered by them. And then it was that the sicarii, as they were called, who were robbers, grew numerous. They made use of small swords, not much different in length from the Persian "acinacae," but somewhat crooked, and like the Roman sicae [or sickles] as they were called. From these weapons these robbers got their name, and with these weapons they slew a great many, for they mingled themselves among the multitude at their festivals when they came up in crowds from all parts to the city to worship G-d, as we said before, and easily slew those that they had a mind to slay. They also came frequently upon the villages belonging to their enemies with their weapons, and plundered them, and set them on fire. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 8:10**

B. Now as soon as Albinus came to the city of Jerusalem, he used all his endeavors and care that the country might be kept in peace, and this was done by destroying many of the sicarii. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 9:2**

C. But now the sicarii went into the city by night, just before the festival, which was now at hand and took the scribe belonging to the governor of the Temple, whose name was Eleazar, who was the son of Ananus (Ananias) the highpriest, and bound him, and carried him away with them. After this they sent to Ananias and said that they would send the scribe to him, if he would persuade Albinus to release ten of those prisoners which he had caught of their party. So Ananias was plainly forced to persuade Albinus and gained his request of him. This was the beginning of greater calamities, for the robbers perpetually contrived to catch some of Ananias's servants, and when they had taken them alive, they would not let them go until they thereby recovered some of their own sicarii. Since they were again become no small number, they grew bold and were a great affliction to the whole country. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 9:3**

III. Messianic Expectations

A. Now it came to pass while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan, for he told them he was a prophet and that he would, by his own command, divide the river and afford them an easy passage over it. Many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them, who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem. This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus's government. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 5:1**

B. Now, as for the affairs of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually, for the country was again filled with robbers and impostors, who deluded the multitude. Yet Felix caught and put to death many of those impostors every day, together with the robbers. He also caught Eleazer the son of Dineus, who had gotten together a company of robbers.

Felix also bore an ill-will to Jonathan, the high-priest, because he frequently gave him admonitions about governing the Jewish affairs better than he did, lest he should himself have complaints made against him by the multitude, since it was he who had desired Caesar to send him as procurator of Judea. So Felix contrived a method whereby he might get rid of him, since he had become so continually troublesome to him, for such continual admonitions are grievous to those who are disposed to act unjustly. Wherefore Felix persuaded one of Jonathan's most faithful friends, a citizen of Jerusalem, whose name was Doras, to bring the robbers upon Jonathan, in order to kill him; and this he did by promising to give him a great deal of money for so doing. Doras complied with the proposal, and contrived matters so, that the robbers might murder him after the following manner: Certain of those robbers went up to the city, as if they were going to worship G-d, while they had daggers under their garments; and, by thus mingling themselves among the multitude, they slew Jonathan; and as this murder was never avenged, the robbers went up with the greatest security at the festivals after this time; and having weapons concealed in like manner as before, and mingling themselves among the multitude, they slew certain of their own enemies, and were subservient to other men for money; and slew other not only in remote parts of the city, but in the Temple itself also; for they had the boldness to murder men there, without thinking of the impiety of which they were guilty. And this seems to me to have been the reason why G-d, out of His hatred to these men's wickedness, rejected our city; and as for the Temple, He no longer esteemed it sufficiently pure for Him to inhabit therein, but brought the Romans upon us, and threw a fire upon the city to purge it; and brought upon us, our wives, and children, slavery,-as desirous to make us wiser by our calamities. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 8:5**

C. And now these impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the Providence of G-d. And many that were prevailed on by them suffered the punishments of their folly; for Felix brought them back, and then punished them. Moreover, they came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem, one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. He said farther, that he would show them from hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down. When Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their

weapons and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen from Jerusalem and attacked the Egyptians and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, and did not appear any more. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XX 8:6**

D. The dominion of the Kittim shall come to an end and iniquity shall be vanquished, leaving no remnant; for the sons of darkness, there shall be no escape. After these words, the Priests shall sound to marshall them into the divisions of the formation and at the sound of the trumpets the columns shall deploy until every man is in his place. Then the Priests shall sound a second signal on the trumpets for them to advance and, when the foot soldiers approach to within throwing distance of the formation of the Kittim (Romans), every man shall seize his weapon of war. The Priest shall blow the trumpets of Massacre, and the Levites and all the blowers of ram's horns shall sound a battle alarm, and the footsoldiers shall stretch out their hands against the host of the Kittim, and at the sound of the alarm they shall begin to bring down the slain. All the people shall cease their clamour, but the Priests shall continue to blow the trumpets of Massacre, and battle shall be fought against the Kittim. **The War Scroll 1QM**

IV. Masada

A. There was a rock not small in circumference, and very high. It was encompassed with valleys of such vast depth downward that the eye could not reach their bottoms. They were abrupt and such as no animal could walk upon, excepting at two places of the rock, where it subsides, in order to afford a passage for ascent, though not without difficulty. Now, of the ways that lead to it, one is that from the lake Asphaltitis, towards the sun-rising, and another on the west, where the ascent is easier; the one of these ways is called the Serpent, as resembling the animal in its narrowness and its perpetual windings, for it is broken off at the prominent precipices of the rock, and returns frequently into itself, and lengthening again by little and little, hath much ado to proceed forward. He that would walk along it must first go on one leg and then on the other, there is also nothing but destruction in case your feet slip, for on each side there is a vastly deep chasm and precipice, sufficient to quell the courage of everybody by the terror it infuses into the mind. When, therefore, a man hath gone along his way for thirty furlongs, the rest is the top of the hill, not ending at a small point, but is no other than a plain upon the highest part of the mountain. Upon this top of the hill, Jonathon the high-priest first of all built a fortress, and called it Masada, after which the building of this place employed the care of King Herod to a great degree. He also built a wall round about the entire top of the hill, seven furlongs long. It was composed of white stone; its height was twelve, and its breadth eight cubits; There were also erected upon that wall thirty-eight towers, each of them fifty cubits high out of which you might pass into lesser edifices, which were built on the inside round the entire wall, for the king reserved the top of the hill, which was of a fat soil and better mould than any valley, for agriculture,

that such as committed themselves to this fortress for their preservation might not even there be quite destitute of food, in case they should ever be in want of it from abroad. Moreover, he built a palace therein at the western ascent. It was within and beneath the walls of the citadel, but inclined to its north side. Now the wall of this palace was very high and strong and had its four corners towers sixty cubits high. The furniture also of the edifices, of the cloisters, and of the baths was of great variety and very costly, and these buildings were supported by pillars of single stones on every side. The walls also and the floors of the edifices were paved with stones of several colors. He also had cut many and great pits as reservoirs for water out of the rocks at every one of the places that were inhabited, both above and round about the palace and before the wall, and by this contrivance, he endeavored to have water for several uses, as if there had been fountains there. Here was also a road dug from the palace leading to the very top of the mountain, which could not be seen by those who were outside [the walls], nor indeed could enemies easily make use of the plain roads, for the road on the east side, as we have already taken notice, could not be walked upon by reason of its nature, and for the western road, he built a large tower at its narrowest place at no less a distance from the top of the hill than a thousand cubits. This tower could not possibly be passed by, nor could it be easily taken, nor indeed could those that walked along it without any fear (such was its contrivance) easily get to the end of it. After such a manner was this citadel fortified, both by nature and by the hands of men, in order to frustrate the attacks of enemies.

As for the furniture that was within this fortress, it was still more wonderful on account of its splendor and long continuance, for here was laid up corn in large quantities and such as would subsist men for a long time. Here was also wine and oil in abundance, with all kinds of pulse and dates heaped up together, all of which Eleazar found there when he and his Sicarii got possession of the fortress by treachery. These fruits were also fresh and full ripe and no way inferior to such fruits newly laid in, although they were little short of a hundred years from the laying in these provisions [by Herod] till the place was taken by the Romans; nay, indeed, when the Romans got possession of those fruits that were left, they found them not corrupted all that while, nor should we be mistaken if we supposed that the air was here the cause of their enduring so long, this fortress being so high, and so free from the mixture of all terrene and muddy particles of matter. There was also found here a large quantity of all sorts of weapons of war, which had been treasured up by that king, and were sufficient for ten thousand men; there was cast iron, and brass, and tin, which show that he had taken much pains to have all things here ready for the greatest occasions, for the report goes how Herod thus prepared this fortress on his own account, as a refugee against two kinds of danger: the one for fear of the multitude of the Jews, lest they should depose him and restore their former kings to the government; the other danger was greater and more terrible, which arose from Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, who did not conceal her intentions, but spoke often to Antony, and desired him to cut off Herod, and entreated him to bestow the kingdom of Judea upon her. And certainly it is a great wonder that Antony did never comply with her commands in this point, as he was so miserably enslaved to his passion for her; nor should any one have been surprised if she had been gratified in such her request. So the fear of these dangers made Herod rebuild Masada, and thereby leave it for the finishing-stroke of the Romans in this Jewish war. **Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book VII 8:3-4**

B. And it was at this time that some of those that principally excited the people to go to war, made an assault upon a certain fortress called Masada. They took it by treachery and slew the Romans that were there and put others of their own party to keep it.

Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book II 17:2

C. In the meantime, one Manahem, the son of Judas, who was called the Galilean (who was a very cunning sophister and had formerly reproached the Jews under Cyrenius, that after G-d they were subject to the Romans) took some of the men of note with him, and retired to Masada, where he broke open King Herod's armory and gave arms not only to his own people, but to other robbers also. These he made use of for a guard and returned in the state of a king to Jerusalem; he became the leader of the sedition and gave orders for continuing the siege.

Now Manahem and his party made resistance for a while, but when they perceived that the whole multitude were falling upon them, they fled which way every one was able; those that were caught were slain and those that hid themselves were searched for. There were a few of them who privately escaped to Masada, among whom was Eleazar, the son of Jarius, who was kin to Manahem, and acted the part of a tyrant at Masada afterward.

Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book II 17:8,9

V. The Fall of Masada

A. When Bassus was dead in Judea, Flavius Silva succeeded him as procurator there. When Flavius Silva saw that all the rest of the country was subdued in this war and that there was but one stronghold that was still in rebellion, he got all his army together that lay in different places, and made in expedition against it. This fortress was called Masada. It was one Eleazar, a potent man, and the commander of these Sicarii, that had seized upon it. He was a descendant from Judas who had persuaded many of the Jews, as we have formerly related, not to submit to the taxation when Cyrenius was sent into Judea to make one, for it was then that the Sicarii got together against those that were willing to submit to the Romans and treated them in all respects as if they had been their enemies, both by plundering them of what they had, by driving away their cattle, and by setting fire to their houses, for they said that they differed not at all from foreigners by betraying in so cowardly a manner that freedom which Jews thought worthy to be contended for to the utmost, and by owning that they preferred slavery under the Romans before such contention. Now this was in reality no better than a pretence and a cloak for the barbarity which was made use of by them and to color over their own avarice, which they afterwards made evident by their own actions.

For now the Roman general came, and led his army against Eleazar and those Sicarii who held the fortress Masada together with him, and for the whole country adjoining, he presently gained it and put garrisons into the most proper places of it. He also built a wall all around the entire fortress, that none of the besieged might easily escape. He also set his men to guard the several parts of it and pitched his camp in such an agreeable place as he had chosen for the siege, where the rock belonging to the fortress did make the nearest approach to the neighboring mountain, which yet, was a place of difficulty for getting plenty of provisions, for it was not only food that was to be brought from a great distance [to the army], and this was a great deal of pain to those Jews who were appointed for that purpose, but water was also to be brought to the camp, because the place afforded no fountain that was near it. When therefore Silva had ordered these affairs beforehand, he fell to besieging the place. This siege was likely to stand in need of a great deal of skill and pains, by reason of the strength of the fortress. **Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book VII 8:1,2**

B. Since, therefore, the Roman commander Silva had now built a wall on the outside, around this whole place, as we have said already, and had thereby made a most accurate provision to prevent any one of the besieged running away, he undertook the siege itself, though he had found but one single place that would admit of the banks he was to raise, for behind that tower which secured the road that led to the palace, and to the top of the hill from the west, there was a certain eminency of the rock, very broad and very prominent, but three hundred cubits beneath the highest part of Masada; it was called the White Promontory. Accordingly he got upon that part of the rock and ordered the army to bring earth. When they fell to that work with alacrity and many of them together, the bank was raised and became solid for two hundred cubits in height. Yet this bank was not thought sufficiently high for the use of the engines that were to be set upon it, so still another elevated work of great stones compacted together was raised upon that bank; this was fifty cubits, both in breadth and height. The other machines that were now made ready were like those that had been first devised by Vespasian, and afterward by Titus, for sieges. There was also a tower made to the height of sixty cubits and all over plated with iron, out of which the Romans threw darts and stones from the engines, and soon made those that fought from the walls of the palace retire, and would not let them lift up their heads above the works. At the same time Silva ordered that great battering-ram which he had made, to be brought thither and to be set against the wall and to make frequent batteries against it, which with some difficulty broke down a part of the wall, and quite overthrew it. However, the Sicarii made haste, and presently built another wall within that, which should not be liable to the same misfortune from the machine with the other; it was made soft and yielding, and so was capable of avoiding the terrible blows that affected the other. It was framed after the following manner: they laid together great beams of wood lengthways, one close to the end of another and in the same way in which they were cut. There were two of these rows parallel to one another and laid such a distance from each other as the breadth of the wall required, and earth was put into the space between the rows. Now, that the earth might not fall away upon the elevation of this bank to a greater height, they further laid other beams over across them, and thereby bound these beams together that lay lengthways. This work of theirs was a real edifice,

and when the machines were applied, the blows were weakened by its yielding. As the materials by such concussion were shaken closer together, the pile by that means became firmer than before. When Silva saw this, he thought it best to endeavor the taking of this wall by setting fire to it, so he gave order that the soldiers should throw a great number of burning torches upon it. Accordingly, as it was chiefly made of wood, it soon took fire, and when it was once set on fire, its hollowness made the fire spread to a mighty flame. Now, at the very beginning of this fire, a north wind that then blew proved terrible to the Romans, for by bringing the flame downward, it drove it upon them, and they were almost in despair of success, fearing that their machines would be burnt, but after this, suddenly the wind changed into the south, as if it were done by Divine Providence and blew strongly the opposite 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 G-d, returned to their camp with joy and resolved to attack their enemy the very next day. On this occasion they set their watch more carefully that night, lest any of the Jews should run away from them without being discovered. **Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book VII 8:5**

VI. Mass Suicide

A. However, neither did Eleazar once think of flying away, nor would he permit anyone else to do so, but when he 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. Now, as he judged this to be the best thing they could do in their present circumstances, he gathered the most courageous of his companions together and 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 to any other than to G-d Himself, who alone is the true and just L-rd of mankind, the time has now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice. And let us not at this time bring a reproach upon ourselves for selfcontradiction, while we formerly would not undergo slavery, though it was 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 reduce us under their power while we are alive. We were the very first that revolted from them, and we are the last that fight against them, and I cannot but esteem it as a favor that G-d hath granted us that it is still in our power to die bravely and in a state of freedom, which hath not been the case of others, who were conquered unexpectedly.

Let our wives die before they are abused and our children before they have tasted of slavery, and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually and preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument for us. But first let us destroy our money and the fortress by fire, for I am well assured that this will be a great grief to the Romans, that they shall not be able to seize upon our bodies and shall fail of our wealth also. Let us spare nothing but our provisions; for they will be a testimonial when we are dead that we are not subdued for want of necessaries, but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death before slavery."

Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book VII 8:6,7

B. Now as Eleazar was proceeding on in his exhortation, they all cut him short, and made haste to do the work, as full of an unconquerable ardor of mind and moved with a demoniacal fury. So they went their ways, one still endeavoring to be before another, and thinking that this eagerness would be a demonstration of their courage and good conduct, if they could avoid appearing in the last class, so great was the zeal they were in to slay their wives and children and 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 hearing of Eleazar's speech, while yet everyone of them still retained the natural passion of love to themselves and 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, for the husbands tenderly embraced their wives, and took their children into their arms, and gave the longest parting kisses to them with tears in their eyes. Yet at the same time did they complete what they had resolved on, as if they had been executed by the hands of strangers, and they had nothing else for their comfort but the necessities they were in of doing this execution to avoid the prospect they had of the miseries they were to suffer from their enemies. Nor was there at length any one of these men found that scrupled to act their part in this terrible execution, but every one of them dispatched his dearest relations. Miserable men indeed were they whose distress forced them to slay their own wives and children with their own hands, as the lightest of those evils that were before them! So they, being not able to bear the grief that they were under for what they had done any longer and esteeming it an injury to those they had slain to live even the shortest space of time after them, presently laid all they had in a heap and set fire to it. They then chose ten men by lot out of them to slay all the rest, every one of whom laid himself down by his wife and children on the ground, and threw his arms about them, and they offered their necks to the stroke of those who by lot executed that melancholy office. When these ten had, without fear, slain them all, they made the same ruling for casting lots for themselves, that he whose lot it was should first kill the other nine, and after all, should kill himself. Accordingly, all these had courage sufficient to be no way behind one another in doing or suffering, so, for a conclusion, the nine offered their necks to the executioner, and he who was the last of all took a view of all the other bodies, lest perchance some or other among so many that were slain should want his assistance to be quite dispatched, and when he perceived they were all slain, 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. So these people died with this intention, that they would leave not so much as one soul among them all alive to be subject to the Romans. Yet there was an ancient woman and another who was of kin to Eleazar and superior to most women in prudence and learning, with five children, who had concealed themselves in caverns under ground, and had carried water thither for their drink, and were hidden there when the rest were intent upon the slaughter of one another. These others were nine hundred and sixty in number, the women and children being included in that computation. The calamitous slaughter was made on the fifteenth day of the month Xanthicus [Nisan]. **Josephus, The Wars of the Jews Book VII 9:1**

VIII. Suicide and Jewish Law

A.

שפך דם האדם באדם דמו ישפך כי בצלם אלקים עשה את האדם. בראשית ט:ו

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man (Through the courts if there are any witnesses [Rashi]) shall his blood be shed; for in the image of G-d did He make man. **Genesis 9:6**

B.

לא תרצח. שמות כ:יג

Thou shalt not kill. **Exodus 20:13**

C.

ואך את דמכם לנפשותיכם אדרש. בראשית ט:ה

And surely your blood, if you take your own lives, will I require (bring to judgement). **Genesis 9:5**

D.

המאבד עצמו לדעת אין מתעסקים עמו לכל דבר ואין מתאבלין עליו ואין מספידין אותו. ש"ע י"ד ס' שמ"ה

One who willfully takes his own life is not afforded the standard traditional dignity of burial and mourning. **Shulchan Aruch 345:1**

E.

ת"ר המעצמו עם יציאת הנפש הרי זה שופך דמים משל לנר שכבה והולכת אדם מניח אצבעו ליה מיד כבתה. שבת קנ"א:

He who closes the eyes of a dying patient is considered as if he spilled blood. It is analogous to a candle that is flickering as it is going out. Anyone who put his finger close by will immediately extinguish the flame. **Shabbos 151b**

F.

[כשהרגו את רבי חנינא בן תרדיון באש] אמרו [לו תלמידיו] אף אתה פתח פיה ותכנס בך האש. אמר להן מוטב שיטלנה מי שנתנה ואל יחבל בעצמו ע"ז י"ח.

As Rabbi Chanina ben Tradion (one of the ten martyrs) was being burned to death, his disciples beseeched him, "Open your mouth and let the fire enter you (to hasten death)." He replied, "It is preferred that the One who placed (in man) his soul should take it. The person himself should not remove it." **Avoda Zora 18a**

G. It is a brave thing to die in war; but so that it be according to the law of war, by the hand of conquerors. If, therefore, I avoid death from the sword of the Romans, I am truly worthy to be killed by my own sword and my own hand, but if they admit of mercy and would spare their enemy, how much more ought we to have mercy upon ourselves and to spare ourselves! It is certainly a foolish thing to do that to ourselves which we quarrel with them for doing to us. I confess freely that it is a brave thing to die for liberty; but still so that it be in war and done by those who take that liberty from us, but at present our enemies do neither meet us in battle, nor do they kill us. Now he is equally a coward who will not die when he is obligated to die, and he who will die when he is not obligated so to do. What are we afraid of, when we will not go up to the Romans? Is it death? If so, what are we afraid of, when we but suspect our enemies will inflict it on us, shall we inflict it on ourselves for certain? But it may be said, we must be slaves. And are we then in a clear state of liberty at present? It may also be said that it is a manly act for one to kill himself. No, certainly, but a most unmanly one; as I should esteem that pilot to be an arrant coward who, out of fear of a storm, should sink his ship of his own accord. Now, self-murder is a crime most remote from the common nature of all animals, and an instance of impiety against G-d our Creator: nor indeed is there any animal that dies by its own contrivance; or by its own means, for the desire of life is a law engraved in them all; on which account we deem those that openly take it away from us to be our enemies, and those that do it by treachery, are punished for so doing. And do not you think that G-d is very angry when a man does injury to what He hath bestowed on him? It is from Him that we have received our being; and we ought to leave it to His disposal to take that being away from us. The bodies of all men are indeed mortal and are created out of corruptible matter, but the soul is ever immortal and is a portion of the Divinity that inhabits our bodies. Besides, if anyone destroys or abuses a deposit he hath received from a mere man, he is esteemed a wicked and perfidious person, but then if anyone cast out of his body this Divine deposit, can we imagine that He who is affronted in this case

does not know it. Moreover, our law justly ordains that slaves who run away from their masters shall be punished, though the masters they ran away from may have been wicked masters to them. And shall we endeavor to run away from G-d, who is the best of all masters, and not think ourselves highly guilty of impiety? Do not you know that those who depart out of this life according to the law of nature and pay that debt which was received from G-d when He that lent it us is pleased to require it back, enjoy eternal fame? Do you not know that their houses and their posterity are sure, that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolution of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies, while the souls of those whose hands have acted madly against themselves, are received by the darkest place in Hades, and while G-d, who is their father, punishes those that offend against either of them in their posterity? For this reason G-d hates such doings, and the crime is punished by our most wise legislator. Accordingly our laws determine that the bodies of such as kill themselves should be exposed until the sun has set, without burial, although at the same time it be allowed by them to be lawful to bury our enemies (sooner). The laws of other nations also enjoin such men's hands to be cut off when they are dead, which had been made use of in destroying themselves when alive, while they reckoned that as the body is alien from the soul, so is the hand alien from the body. It is therefore, my friends, a right thing to reason justly, and not add to these calamities which men bring upon us, impiety towards our creator. If we have a mind to preserve ourselves, let us do it, for to be preserved by those our enemies, to whom we have given so many demonstrations of our courage, is no way inglorious, but if we have a mind to die, it is good to die by the hand of those that have conquered us. For my part, I will not run over to our enemies' quarters in order to be a traitor to myself, for certainly I should then be much more foolish than those that deserted to the enemy, since they did it in order to save themselves and I should do it for my own destruction. However, I heartily wish the Romans may prove treacherous in this matter, for if, after their offer of their right hand for security, I be slain by them, I shall die cheerfully, and carry away with me the sense of their perfidiousness, as a consolation greater than victory itself. **Josephus, The War of the Jews Book III 8:5**

IX. Is Suicide Ever Warranted?

A. I knew what were the laws of the Jews in this case, and how it becomes general to die. **Josephus, The War of the Jews Book III 8:9**

B.

ותכבד המלחמה אל שאול וימצאהו המורים אנשים בקשת ויחל מאד מהמורים. ויאמר שאול לנשה כליו שלוף חרבך ודקרני בה פן יבאו הערלים האלה ודקרני והתעללו בי ולא אבה נשה כליו כי ירא מאד ויקח שאול את החרב ויפל עליה. שמואל א לא: ג,ד

And the battle went severely against Saul, and the men shooting with the bow hit him; and he was severely wounded by the archers. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was very afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. **Samuel I 31:3, 4**

C.

אך להביא החונק את עצמו. יכול כשאול ת"ל אך יכול כחנניה מישאל ועזריה ת"ל אך. בראשית רבה לד:יג

The phrase "And however" (ואך) comes to include someone who chokes himself to death [not only someone who spills his own blood], I would think that someone like Saul [is prohibited from committing suicide], therefore the Scripture writes the phrase "And however" (ואך). I would think that someone like Chanania, Mishoel, and Azaria (the martyrs) would be included in the prohibition, therefore the Scripture writes the phrase "And however" (ואך). **Midrash Beraishis Rabbah 34:13**

D.

וכתוב בהגהת סמ"ק ס' ג' דאותן קדושים ששחטו עצמן שלא סמכו דעתם לעמוד בנסיון קדושים גמורים הם וראיה משאול ומביאו הב"ח וכ"כ בב"ה בשם א"ח מיהו כ' הא"ח שם שיש חולקים שאינו יכול להרוג את עצמו ע"ש שהאריך. ש"ך י"ד ס' קנ"ז ס"ק א'

The "HaGohas HaSMaK" writes in chapter 3 that those martyrs that killed themselves because they did not believe that they would be able to withstand the test [of torture] are considered true "kedoshim" (holy martyrs) and the proof is from Saul. The BaCh quotes this, and the Bedek HaBayis quotes this in the name of the Orchas Chaim. However, the Orchas Chaim writes that there are those that disagree and maintain that one cannot commit suicide even under those circumstances. **Shach, Yoreh Deah 157:1**

E.

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל ואיתימא רבי אמי ואמרי לה במתניתא תנא מעשה בד' מאות ילדים וילדות שנשבו לקלון הרגישו בעצמן למה הן מתבקשים אמרו אם אנו טובעים בים אנו באין לחיי עולם הבא דרש להן הגדול שבהן אמר ד' מבשן אשיב אשיב ממצולות ים מבשן אשיב מבין שיני ארי אשיב ממצולות ים אלו שטובעין בים כיון ששמעו ילדות כך קפצו כולן ונפלו בתוך הים נשאו ילדים ק"ו בעצמן ואמרו מה הללו שדרכן לכך כך אנו שאין דרכן לכך על אחת כמה וכמה אף הם קפצו לתוך הים. ועליהם הכתוב אומר כי עליך הרגנו כל היום נחשבנו כצאן טבחה. גיטין נז:

והא דאמר במס' ע"ז (י"ח) מוטב שיטלנה מי שנתנה ואל יחבל בעצמו הכא יראים היו מיסורין כדאמרינן (כתובות לג:) אלמלי נגדו לחנניה מישאל ועזריה פלחו לצלמא ועוד דע"כ היו מענין אותן ולא היו הורגים אותן. תוס' שם

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, or it may be Rabbi Ami, or as some say it was taught in a Braisa: On one occasion four hundred boys and girls were carried off for immoral purposes. They determined what they were wanted for and said to themselves, "If we drown in the sea we shall attain the life of the future world." The eldest among them expounded the verse, "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea" (Psalms 48:23) "I will again from Bashan" (בשן) refers to from between the lions teeth (שן)." I will bring again from the depths of the sea" refers to those who drown in the sea. When the girls heard this they all leaped into the sea. The boys then drew the moral for themselves, saying, "If these for whom this is natural act so, shall not we, for whom it is unnatural?" They also leaped into the sea. Of them the text says, "Yea, for thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." (Psalms 44:23) **Gittin 57b**

Even though it is stated (Avodah Zarah 18a), "It is preferred that the One who placed (in man) his soul should take it. The person himself should not remove it," here they were afraid of the torture (that they would succumb) as it is stated (Kesubos 33b) "Had they flogged (without end) Chanania, Mishoel and Azariah they would have bowed down to the statue." Furthermore, in this case they would have certainly tortured them and not have them killed. **Tosephos ibid.**

F.

גדול המאבד עצמו לדעת והוא אנוס כשאול המלך אין מונעין ממנו כל דבר. ש"ע י"ד ס' שמ"ה

שהרג את עצמו לפי שראה שהפלשתים יעשו בו כרצונם והרגוהו. ש"ך שם

An adult that commits suicide, who is forced like king Saul, is not deprived of any of the [honors]. **Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 345**

Because he killed himself because he saw that the Philistines would do unto him according to their desires and afterwards kill him. **ShaCh ibid.**

THE ROMAN PROCURATORS

<u>DATE (C.E.)</u>	<u>NAME</u>
6-9	Coponius
9-12	Marcus Ambibulus
12-15	Rufus Tineus
15-26	Valerius Gratus
26-36	Pontius Pilate
36-37	Marcellus
37-41	Marullus
44-46	Cuspius Fadus
46-48	Tiberius Julius Alexander
48-52	Ventidius Cumanus
52-60	Antonius Felix
60-62	Porcius Festus
62-64	Albinus
64-66	Gessius Florus