



Anonymous Prophet of Temple Salvation

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Published: 5th January 2023

Nathan C. Johnson. 2023. "Anonymous Prophet of Temple Salvation (excerpt from Jewish Sign Prophets)." In James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart (eds.) Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements. 5 January 2023. Retrieved from www.cdamm.org/articles/anonymous-prophet-of-temple-salvation.

Introduction

In his CDAMM article on '[Early Jewish Sign Prophets](#),' Nathan C. Johnson looks at first-century Jewish [millenarian](#) figures as described by Josephus, the Jewish historian writing towards the end of the first century. Here is an excerpt on one figure: The Anonymous Prophet of Temple Salvation (70 CE; *Jewish War* 6.283–87)

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The next figure was less certainly the leader of a sustained 'movement,' yet bears mentioning as a charismatic leader who appealed to eschatological hopes in circumstances of crisis.

Before the final destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Roman forces, an anonymous 'false prophet' encouraged people to go to the top of the temple's outer portico to 'receive there the signs of their deliverance' and to 'await help from God' (*Jewish War* 6.283). A throng including women and children—estimated by Josephus at six thousand—gathered at the time and place indicated by the prophet. Tragically, but predictably, deliverance did not arrive. After Roman soldiers set fire to the structure, some plunged to their deaths below, while others died in the flames; apparently, all perished.

While the prophet predicted 'this-worldly', imminent, and collective salvation (cf. [Talmon's millenarian criteria](#)), there is nothing in Josephus's account to indicate that the expectation was ultimate and total. One could, of course, imagine the kind of scripturalized and eschatological rhetoric employed by the prophet to encourage his desperate audience that God would, despite appearances to the contrary, intervene to save them. God had done likewise for the Israelites when pressed against the Red Sea by a foreign army. Why would he not again 'fight for' them if only they 'kept still' (Exodus 14:14)? But Josephus's account leaves us without firm conclusions and with only guesswork as to what ideological hopes animated this desperate group.

References

Primary Sources

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Article information

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