



# Carnegie Shul Chatter

August 12, 2020



Light candles 8:02pm

Shabbat service 9:20am

## The Holy Temples

In last week's Chatter, we featured an article from Chabad about the destruction of the First Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Here is another article from Chabad (edited for space), this one discussing the destruction of the Second Holy Temple.

## The Second Holy Temple

The Second Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem for 420 years (349 BCE–70 CE). Unlike the period of the First Temple, when the Jews were for the most part autonomous, for the vast majority of the Second Temple era the Jews were subject to foreign rule: by the Persians, the Greeks, and eventually the Romans.

Aside from the troubles caused by these external powers, the Jews were also plagued internally by tumultuous politics, and they divided into many factions, which ultimately led to the Temple's destruction and our nation's torturous exile.

## The Eternal Plan

Sometimes life is not easy. Sometimes our faith can be put to the test. We all know the words of Ecclesiastes, made famous by the Byrds in their song, Turn, Turn, Turn. As the Byrds sang, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die."

But death does not come easy when it involves loved ones or people that you know well. A couple of weeks ago the wife of a good friend, and the wife of my cousin, who is like a brother to me, were transferred to hospice on the very same day. This week, a former teacher and a friend and neighbor in Florida both passed away.

Today I learned that my cousin's wife will probably pass in less than a week.

Life is not always easy. But God has a plan and we must have faith in his plan even when times are tough.

We are all, after all, a part of His eternal plan.

Nevertheless, for 420 years, the Temple constituted a divine presence in our midst, the point where heaven and earth met. Its presence is sorely missed, its absence mourned. Our sole consolation is the knowledge that very soon we will merit to see the Third Temple, an edifice that will last for all eternity, and which will eclipse both of the first Temples in every way imaginable.

## Jeremiah's Prophecy



Before the destruction of the First Temple, Jeremiah had famously prophesized (Jeremiah 29:10), “For so said G d: For at the completion of seventy years of Babylon I will remember you, and I will fulfill My good word toward you, to restore you to this place.”

And indeed, that is what happened. A little more than fifty years after the destruction of the First Temple, the Babylonians, who had destroyed the

First Temple, were vanquished by the rising Persian Empire. The Persian king, Cyrus the Great, soon authorized the Jews to rebuild the Temple, but construction ground to a halt due to interference by the Samaritans. In 353 BCE, exactly seventy years after the destruction of the First Temple, the Jews began building again—at first independently, but King Darius soon ratified their effort. The Second Temple was completed in 349 BCE. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the community in Judea became vibrant and secure.

The Second Temple era spanned 420 years, ending with the Romans’ destruction of the Holy Temple in 70 CE. For much of this period, Judea was under foreign domination. First the Jews were ruled by the Persians, and then, after the conquests of Alexander the Great, they were ruled by the Greeks. The Hasmonean revolt in 140 BCE brought about a period of Jewish monarchy. But the Hasmoneans did not rule for long.

## A Time of Tranquility — and its End

One radiant period of peace and tranquility during the Hasmonean dynasty was the ten-year reign of Queen Shlomit Alexander (76-66 BCE). There was political and religious harmony and Torah study and observance flourished. But this would not last into the next generation.

Queen Shlomit had two sons. The older son, Hyrkanus, was meek by nature and the younger son, Aristobulus, was greedy and ambitious. Upon the Queen’s death, the populace was divided as to who should be the successor to the throne. Bloody riots ensued, and the country was plunged into civil war. The brothers agreed to involve the Roman general Pompey as a mediator. Pompey chose the docile Hyrkanus to be king, intending to make him a puppet and Judea another province of the expanding Roman Empire.

Many Jews, faithful to Aristobulus, refused to accept Pompey’s decision. Fighting broke out in Jerusalem. The Temple became a fortress for the rebellious faction. In 63 BCE, Pompey’s troops entered the Holy City and put down the rebellion.

The revolutionaries were executed, and Hyrkanus was installed as the puppet king and High Priest. But the effects in the long-term were monumental. By allowing Pompey to become involved in the internal affairs of the Holy Land, Hyrkanus and Aristobulus had inadvertently given Judea into the hands of the Roman Empire. Judea was heavily taxed by Rome and a Roman governor of Judea was appointed.

## Herod the Great

In 36 BCE, an Idumean named Herod took over as king of Judea. Known as Herod the Great, he apparently suffered from paranoia and ruled with ruthless brutality. He put to death forty-six leading members of the Sanhedrin and killed all the remaining members of the Hasmonean family, including, eventually, his own wife and children.



Herod was also an ambitious builder. His projects included, among others, the fortress in Massada, the building over the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and the port city of Caesaria. But his most ambitious project by far – which he embarked on in 19 BCE – was the renovation and expansion of the Temple, which was dilapidated after 334 years. (He undertook this renovation as atonement for all the rabbis he killed.)

The result was spectacular. Herod's Temple was made of white marble and covered with gold plates. According to Josephus, "it reflected so fierce a blaze of fire that those who tried to look at it had to turn away, as if they had looked straight at the sun. To approaching strangers it appeared in the distance like a mountain covered with snow." The Sages concurred: "He who has not seen the Temple of Herod, has never seen a beautiful building" (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra, 4a; Shemot Rabba 36:1).

After Herod's death, the country largely descended into anarchy. The Roman governors oppressed the Jews and allowed lawlessness to reign. Roving gangs and corrupt Roman officers plundered and killed. Former High Priests – who had paid their way into the office and then been replaced – formed their own militias to control the Temple. As a result of the violence and chaos, in 28 CE, the Sanhedrin left their post in the Temple.

## Political Upheaval

It was an era of great political upheaval internally, with an ongoing struggle for supremacy amongst different groups of Jews. The Jewish factions crystallized into four sects:

1. The Pharisees were led by the rabbis and Sanhedrin (rabbinical supreme court). The word "Pharisees" comes from the Hebrew word *perushim*, "separatists." There are various views as to the etymology of this word. One explanation is that they separated themselves from the follies and pleasure of the world. Another is that they were careful to maintain ritual purity, and separated themselves from those who did not strictly observe these laws.

2. The Sadducees rejected the Oral Torah and the leadership of the rabbis. Many of them were rich priests and they took control of the priesthood, sometimes buying their way into the office of High Priest. Those who wanted to befriend the Romans were mostly Sadducees.



3. The Zealots were passionate nationalists who broke away from the Pharisees because they wanted to fight the Romans at all costs, while the Pharisees hesitated. (Although the Pharisees too wanted to be free of Roman rule, they feared the Roman reprisals to a no-holds-barred revolt would destroy the nation.)

4. The Sicarii were against any form of government altogether. “Sicarii” literally means “dagger-men.” They resorted to stealth and terrorism to achieve their objectives. They would carry small daggers under their cloaks and stab their enemies – Romans or Roman sympathizers, often wealthy Jews and elites associated with the priesthood – and then blend into the crowd. (In contrast, the Zealots aimed their violence against Romans.)

While the First Temple was destroyed due to idol worship, illicit relationships and murder, our Sages attribute the destruction of the Second Temple to the baseless hatred that prevailed among the Jews. If the Jews had been united, they would have merited G-d’s protection. They would have withstood the Romans.

By 66 CE, the Jews in many of the coastal cities were treated as despised outsiders. They were easy prey for robbers and murderers, suffering the taunts of the Europeans who had migrated there. The Roman governor of Judea, Florus, imprisoned any Jew who brought a claim against a foreigner, even if the claim was justified. He also raided the Temple treasury for his own personal gain.

He encouraged Roman soldiers to provoke the Jews into rioting against him. And on one day in Jerusalem, 3,600 Jews were killed by Roman troops who had been sent in to quell the riots. Florus hoped the Jews of Jerusalem would try to avenge the slaughter so he could justify the mass killing of the Jewish population, loot their possessions, and seize the Holy Temple. Instead, the Jews organized a march seeking to make peace with the governor. The Roman soldiers, lusting for blood, charged into the crowd of marchers, killing many Jews, and continued on to the Temple Mount. Many Jews had gathered there to block the entrances. They were successful, and the Roman soldiers retreated.

## Jewish Revolt

But now the Jews began revolting against the Romans throughout the land. In ever-increasing numbers they joined the movement of the Zealots who were openly preparing for warfare against the Romans. More reasonable elements, especially the Sages, tried to dissuade the people from resorting to violence, but in vain. Young Jews roamed the hills and forests, avenging violence and murder with more violence and murder. For the next few years rebels would rule the entire country.

The Emperor Nero was sure the Jews were rebelling against the Roman Empire itself, not just

against the abuses of the governor Florus. He sent his best general, Vespasian, with 60,000 Roman soldiers and the most advanced weapons, to quell the revolt. Vespasian was joined by his son Titus. They would begin in the Galilee, in the north of Israel.

## Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

As mentioned earlier, the nation had fallen to a low spiritual state characterized by baseless hatred. The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza was the pivotal event that ignited Nero's rage and caused the destruction of the Holy Temple.

A Jew who had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza made a feast. He told his servant to invite Kamtza, but by mistake the servant invited Bar Kamtza. Bar Kamtza took this as a gesture of forgiveness and put on his finest clothes and attended the feast. But when the host noticed Bar Kamtza, he demanded that he leave.

Bar Kamtza was embarrassed. "Since I am here," he requested, "let me stay. I will pay for whatever I eat and drink." But the host refused. He then offered to pay half the cost of the whole feast. Once again the host refused. Finally, Bar Kamtza offered to pay the entire cost, begging that the host not embarrass him further. But the host had Bar Kamtza dragged from the feast and thrown into the streets.

Bar Kamtza believed that, since the rabbis were present at the feast and did not stop him, they condoned the host's actions. Bar Kamtza went to Emperor Nero and told him that the Jews were planning a rebellion against him. "How do I know that to be true?" Nero asked. "Send an offering to the Temple and see if it will be accepted," Bar Kamtza said.

Nero sent a choice calf with Bar Kamtza, along with a delegation of Romans. During the journey, Bar Kamtza secretly made a blemish on the animal, disqualifying it as a sacrifice, and the animal was not accepted. The delegation returned to Rome and told the emperor that his offering had been refused. Emperor Nero was furious, and the ramifications of his fury brought about one of the darkest chapters in our history.

Rabbi Elazar said, "Come and see how great is the punishment for causing embarrassment— for G-d assisted Bar Kamtza [i.e., He allowed Bar Kamtza's plot to succeed because of the embarrassment caused him] and He destroyed His house and burned His Tabernacle."

## Civil War Among Jews

Vespasian's troops brutally conquered the north of Israel, eradicating all resistance. Meanwhile, the Jewish factions – now increasingly concentrated in Jerusalem – moved beyond power struggles into open civil war. While Vespasian merely watched from a distance, various factions of Zealots and Sicarii fought each other bitterly, even those that had common goals.

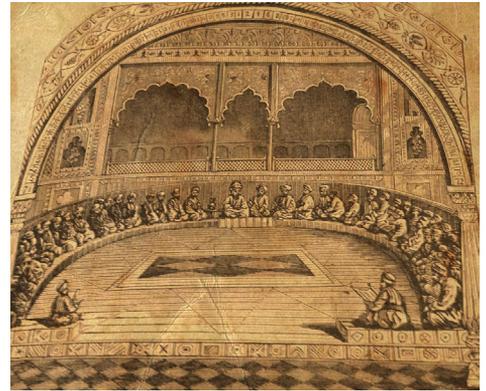


They killed those advocating surrender. Thousands of Jews died at the hands of other Jews in just a few years.

Long before, the residents of Jerusalem had stored provisions in case of a Roman siege, enough flour, oil, and wood to survive a siege of 21 years. However, the Zealots, who wanted all-out war, set fire to the city's food stores, in order to force their fellow Jews to fight. They, thus, condemned the population to starvation. They also imposed an internal siege on Jerusalem, not letting their fellow Jews in or out.

## Ensuring Torah Scholarship

The greatest Jewish sage of the time was Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. He wisely foresaw that Jerusalem was doomed and understood the need to transplant the center of Torah scholarship to another location, to ensure the survival of Torah study after Jerusalem's destruction. In order to leave Jerusalem despite the Zealots' blockade, he feigned death so that he could be carried out of the city in a coffin. Once outside the city's walls, Rabbi Yochanan proceeded directly to Vespasian's tent. He entered the tent and addressed Vespasian as "Your Majesty."



Vespasian was angered to be addressed as Emperor. However, while they were speaking, a messenger came and told Vespasian that Nero was dead and he had been appointed the new Roman emperor. Vespasian was so impressed with Rabbi Yochanan's wisdom that he offered to grant Rabbi Yochanan anything he wanted as a reward. Rabbi Yochanan asked that Vespasian spare Yavne – which would become the new home of the Sanhedrin – and its Torah sages. He thereby ensured the continuation of Jewish scholarship after the fall of Jerusalem.

## Titus is Appointed

In 69 CE, Vespasian returned to Rome to serve as emperor, but first he appointed his son, Titus, to carry on in his stead. In 70 CE, Titus came towards Jerusalem with an army of 80,000 soldiers.

In honor of Passover, many Jews from all over Judea risked their lives to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, arriving just ahead of the swiftly-approaching Roman army. When they arrived, they found a city divided among warring factions, even as the Romans were in sight.

An unlikely alliance of Pharisees and Sadducees – both of whom did not want to engage the Romans in war – held control of large swathes of the city. The Sicarii, led by Simon ben Giora, held much of the Upper City and parts of the Lower City. The Zealots, divided amongst themselves, controlled the Temple area: A moderate faction, led by Eleazar ben Simon, camped in the Temple complex itself while the extreme Zealots, led by Yochanan of Gush Chalav, camped on the Temple Mount—in between the moderate Zealots and the Sadducees.



The moderate Zealots generously opened the gates of the Temple so the Jews could come in and offer their Paschal sacrifices. But the extremists, pretending to be Jews coming to offer sacrifices, also entered. Once inside, they took out their swords and began to kill moderates as well as visiting Jews. Not wanting to increase the panic among the masses of Jews in the Temple, the moderates did not fight back. Thus the extremists took control of the whole Temple area. Eleazar ben Simon's faction was wiped out and it appears that he died.

Titus was not sure he would be able to conquer the city, which was swollen with pilgrims and refugees to two or three times its usual population, with many of the people willing to die for their cause. He waited, hoping the Sadducees would take control and send a peace delegation, but no delegation arrived. On the day after Passover, Titus started engaging in active warfare.

## Joining Forces



Now, finally, all the factions in Jerusalem had no choice but to work together and fight their common enemy. Altogether, there were about 23,000 warriors, both Zealots and moderates, as well as many pilgrims who had come for Passover and gotten stuck inside the city. The outnumbered Jewish defenders fought with great courage.

In addition to the many defenders entrenched in the Temple Mount itself, the Jews were concentrated in two more areas:

1. The Upper City, to the west of the Temple Mount, was the province of the priests and rich people. A deep valley between the Upper City and Temple Mount could be crossed by bridges. Excavations of this area, in the current Old City of Jerusalem, can be toured today.
2. The Lower City, to the south of the Temple Mount, was the province of the ordinary folk. This area is outside of the current walls of Jerusalem. (Today it is called the City of David – in Arabic, Silwan – and it can also be toured.)

There was also the “New City,” a suburb to the north of the city.

The Roman soldiers attacked the weakest side of Jerusalem, the north side, first. They pounded the wall surrounding the New City with their battering rams and threw stones into the city with their catapults. The defenders, from on top of the wall, threw stones and burning torches onto the Romans, occasionally venturing out in surprise attacks to burn the Romans' battle equipment. On the seventh of Iyar, after two weeks of incessant ramming, the Romans breached this wall, and established their camp in the New City.

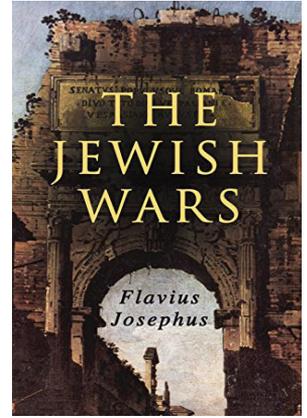
On the fifteenth of Iyar, after more fierce fighting, they breached a second wall, allowing them access from the north into the Lower City. They did not completely destroy the Lower City at this point. Instead, they paraded in a show of might intended to frighten the Jews. Then they prepared to storm the Upper City and the Temple area.

First they had to take the Antonia fortress, a towering fortress which had been built by Herod overlooking the Temple Mount. The defenders of the Antonia fortress, led by Yochanan of Gush

Chalav, were desperate and wily. The Romans built a huge rampart next to the wall, but the Jews dug a tunnel underneath it, filled it with wood, and ignited it. The tunnel collapsed, causing the rampart to collapse as well. The Roman catapults and battering rams were burnt up.

## Starvation

When Titus saw he could not conquer them by force, he decided to starve the Jews into submission. He built a stone wall around the city and sealed all the exits. A terrible hunger now ravaged the overcrowded city. In Josephus's account (*The Jewish Wars*, 5:10): "The roofs were filled with women and small children expiring from hunger, and the corpses of old men were piled in the streets. Youths swollen with hunger wandered like shadows in the marketplace until they collapsed. No one mourned the dead, because hunger had deadened all feeling. Those who fell to the ground turned their eyes for the last time to the Holy Temple and beheld the defenders still fighting and holding out." The best of friends would snatch food from each other. The Talmud recounts the sorry tale of a woman who killed and consumed her own baby, recalling the verse in Leviticus 26:29, "You will eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters you will eat."



The streets were soon filled with corpses, and, as it was hot summer weather, terrible epidemics broke out. Hundreds of people were found dead every morning. In their despair, many of the Jews tried to leave the enclosure of Jerusalem under the cover of night to seek something edible in the fields. They were easily captured, and Titus had them crucified in plain view of the city's defenders on the wall. In one night, Josephus tells us, five thousand Jews were discovered searching for food and were all crucified.

Titus had his soldiers cut down all the trees in a thirteen-mile swath around Jerusalem in order to build a new rampart for their assault, and they began dragging their battering rams up again. By the end of the month of Sivan, the Romans were once again battering the Antonia fortress, and this time the Jewish fighters did not have strength to resist. The Romans gained the Antonia fortress, and those who had been defending it retreated into the Temple complex.

## The Three Weeks and Tisha Ba'av

As days passed and Titus saw that the fighters in the Temple complex were still holding out, he decided to raze the fortress and attack the Temple complex directly. On the 17th of Tammuz, the wall of the Temple complex was breached. Titus sent his spokesman, Josephus, to convince the Jews to surrender. But the Jewish warriors ejected him contemptuously.

The battle raged for three weeks in the Temple area. The Jewish warriors were starving, exhausted, and far outnumbered, but they continued to drive off the Romans. The last battle was on the morning of the Ninth of Av. The Temple was engulfed in flames. In despair, many Jews threw themselves into the flames. The sound of screaming filled the air and the floor of the Temple was covered with bodies, with blood streaming down the steps.

The Romans brought idols into the Temple and offered sacrifices to them. They took the golden vessels of the Temple and killed everyone they found. The still-surviving Jews in the

Upper City could only watch as the Temple burned down to the foundations. It burnt well into the next day. When the flames finally died down, left standing was the retaining wall on the western side of the Temple Mount. This is the Western Wall that still stands in Jerusalem today, where Jews over the centuries have gathered to pray.



The remaining warriors withdrew into the Upper City. With the loss of the Temple, the Jews had lost their passion to keep fighting the Romans, but Titus would not allow them to surrender. First the Romans finished razing the Lower City; whoever the Romans found alive they slaughtered and fed to their dogs. They burned all the houses filled with the starved dead.

On the seventh day of Elul, the Romans applied their battering rams to the walls of the Upper City. The fighters defended it courageously, but in the end, the Romans captured this last stronghold. Whoever they found alive they killed or took captive. Many of the Zealots took to underground tunnels, but the Romans tore up the streets and found them, along with the dead bodies of two thousand fighters who had either succumbed to hunger or committed suicide. Yochanan of Gush Chalav and Simon ben Giora were taken alive. Titus ordered that all the surviving warriors and anyone connected to the Zealots should be killed, as well as any old or sick people.

## Captivity

The remaining captives were divided into groups. Those over seventeen were sent to work to their deaths in Egyptian copper mines, while those under seventeen were sold as slaves. Many captives were sent to circuses where they were forced to fight hungry lions for the pleasure of the mobs. Seven hundred of the tallest and most attractive Jewish youths were chosen to be marched in Titus' victory parade in Rome. Yochanan of Gush Chalav and Simon ben Giora were also kept alive to be paraded. While this selection was going on, 11,000 more people died of hunger.



In 71 CE, Titus sailed home. An Arch of Triumph was constructed, engraved with images of Jewish captives carrying the vessels of the Temple. The victorious troops marched through the arch with Titus at their head and in front of him the young and handsome captives, carrying

the golden vessels of the Temple, as well as Yochanan of Gush Chalav (who was imprisoned for life) and Simon ben Giora (who was executed). The arch can still be seen in Rome today.

The Romans also minted a coin in honor of their victory. On one side of the coin there was an image of Emperor Vespasian's head, and on the other side there was a woman, chained and crying under a palm tree, guarded by a Roman soldier, with the words "Judea Capta" (Judea is captured).



In those last few years before the Temple was destroyed, vast numbers of Jews – over a million – died from disease, hunger, or battle. The holy vessels of the Temple were carried away by the conquerors. A hundred thousand Jewish captives were sold into slavery. The last group of Zealots was put down in Masada three years later.