

Why God Permitted the Destruction of the First and the Second Temple

by [Petr Chylek](#) (September 2023)



Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Francesco Hayez, 1867

According to Jewish tradition, the First (957-587 BC) and Second Temple (516 BC-70 CE) were destroyed by the Babylonian army and by Romans on the same day of the lunar year, on the 9th day of the month of Av (Tisha b'Av in Hebrew). This year, the 9th of Av happened to be July 26, 2023. On this day, people are supposed to fast and to restrain themselves from

expressing their joy.

If God is all-powerful, he could prevent the destruction of Temples, but He decided not to. Why did God let the temples to be destroyed? Some Rabbis even write that God planned to have the Temples destroyed. The destruction of Temple was no accident, it was God's plan.

The Talmud, the written version of Oral Torah, tells us that the reason for destruction of the First temple were three matters in which Jews participated at that time, namely idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed. Because of the sins of people, God decided that He cannot dwell among them anymore.

During the destruction the second Temple the reasons were quite different. Most Jews were engaged in performing commandments (mitzvot), in Torah study and leading a generally ethical life. That is at least what they thought. Why did God then let the Temple to be destroyed? The Talmud tells us that the second Temple was destroyed because of hatred among the Jewish people.

A civil war between the Sadducees and Pharisees started during the second century BC. Sadducees were a sect of the Jewish population connected to priesthood and to the Temple duties. They represented the upper political and economic layers of society. The membership was determined by the birth: only descendants from Moses's brother Aaron could become members. Sadducees rejected the validity of Oral Torah (which later became the Talmud) and they did not believe in resurrection of physical bodies. The conflict between Sadducees and Pharisees extended to all aspects of life. It included cultural, religious, and economic components. Unfortunately, no writing produced by Sadducees survived to our time. The only source of knowledge about them and their beliefs comes from writings of their opponents. Thus, we have to assume that our knowledge about them and their beliefs is tainted by a negative bias.

Pharisees were more liberal. Anyone who was willing to learn, to study the Torah, to study oral traditions and other scriptures, could become a Pharisee. While Sadducees emphasized Temple rites and services, the Pharisees emphasized the Jewish law and their interpretation of it. Most of the population sympathized with the Pharisees. The fight between Sadducees and Pharisees sometimes became violent. That is the hate among Jewish people that the Talmud is talking about.

The Talmud also provides additional reasons why God might have let the second Temple to be destroyed. These included:

- not making a blessing before study of the Torah
- not reciting the Shema (the most important Jewish prayer)
- establishing judicial rulings on the basis of literal interpretation of Torah
- not keeping the Shabbat
- neglecting the education of children
- not having shame before each other
- making small and the great equal
- not rebuking one another
- not respecting the Torah scholars

I think all the above reasons for destruction of Jerusalem and Temple given in Talmud are plausible, but they are not the true reason. Why? Because the destruction did not stop people from doing these same things even after the destruction.

There is, however, one thing that destruction of Temple made the people to stop doing it. What is this one thing? Animal sacrifices – killing innocent animals and thinking that it takes away their sins. This is the only thing that people were forced to stop after the destruction of the Temple.

Maimonides (1238-1304), one of great Jewish philosophers and mystics, said that Jewish people were killing the animals as sacrifices because all pagan nations around were doing the same. God permitted Jews to continue with animal sacrifices only because they were not mature enough to quit doing so.

This was supposed to be a temporary arrangement. Since God did not see any effort on the part of Jewish people to grow up and to stop this baseless cruelty, he had no choice, but to destroy the place where this took place, to destroy their Temple. Then people rebuilt the Temple and God had to do it again. Still, it looks like, that people did not learn.

With the destruction of the Temple in year 70 CE, the Sadducees lost the fight—there was no more any Temple. Pharisees became the only interpreters of Torah and Jewish law. Historically, the current Rabbinic Judaism developed from Pharisaic background.

In the New Testament Jesus (Jeshua) frequently argues with Pharisees. However, he himself was a Jewish Rabbi, very likely a Pharisee. So, why he did argue predominantly with Pharisees and not with Sadducees? As you surely know, Jesus was from the High Country, from Galilee. If you read the New Testament carefully, you might notice that Jesus was not arguing against Judaism in general. He was arguing mostly against the innovations introduced by Pharisees, which were not part of Torah. As an example we can see it here: “Why do you transgress commandments of God by your tradition?” (Matthew 16:3), or “But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15: 9).

Some Rabbis and some Jews have been dreaming about building the Third Temple and re-starting the animal sacrifices. Not realizing that the Eternal Temple has to be built in each person's heart and mind—it is not a building of stones and bricks. Only then will the Divine dwell among us.

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