6. Why Jerusalem was destroyed?

The main reason for which our Bet-haMiqdash was destroyed was the animosity and divisions among the Jews. The development of these internal conflicts is very complex. Today I will try to present only the most relevant facts and in a brief and concise manner.

As we saw yesterday, after the withdrawal of Casius Galus, the Jews eliminated all the Roman forces from the city, and Jerusalem was now, finally, in the hands of the Jews. But this new situation generated a problem, apparently small, that destroyed the unity and brotherhood among the jews: Who was going to be the new leader? Unlike what happened in the time of Hanukka, when the Yehudim were all united under the command of Mattatiyahu and his sons, now, once freed from the yoke of Rome, there was no leader whom all Jews would accept.

Let’s look at some examples. Many Yehudim led by the Sadducean Priest Hanan ben Hanan were opposed to fighting against the Romans, since they thought that there was no possibility of triumph. On the other hand, most of the Jewish people, who had suffered the abuses of the Romans for decades, wanted to fight for their freedom. The leader of the “rebels” was Yohanan miGush Halab, a man from the North of Israel, who had personally experienced the infinite cruelty of the Romans. Yohanan proclaimed himself the leader of the rebellion and ordered to execute any Jews suspected of collaborating with the Romans. To reinforce his army Yohanan invited the Edomites, who had converted to Judaism in the time of the Hashmonayim (200 years ago) to fight alongside his army against Rome. About 20,000 Edomite warriors volunteered, but before they enter Yerushalayim Hanan ben Hanan closed the doors of the city and left them outside. Many Edomites, humiliated, returned to their lands. The next day the men of

Yohanan opened the gates of the city, brought the Edomites in and attacked the men of Hanan. Hanan was murdered by the Edomites along with many of his men. According to Josephus, the murder of Hanan marked the beginning of the Jewish civil war.

The divisions among the Jews were just beginning… Taking advantage of the chaos and confusion that this civil war generated, another Jewish leader, Shimon ben Giora, arrived at Yerushalayim with an army of about 12,000 men. Shimon also aspired to be the leader and openly challenged Yohanan miGush Halab. The Edomites, who were increasingly disappointed by the Yohanan, joined the army of Shimon.

Something else happened: the second most important man in Yohanan's army, Elazar ben Shimon, separated from Yohanan and led his own militia, confronting Yohanan and Shimon, to lead the rebellion. Each one of these three men dominated a different part of Yerushalayim and their armies fought to death against each other. These battles lasted for three years and resulted in the deaths of thousands of Jews.

The Gemara in Guitin (56a) says that the Hakhamim of that time, including Rabban Shimon ben Gamilel and Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai, when they saw these fierce internal struggles, understood that it would be impossible to resist and confront the Romans, and suggested surrendering. The rebels, whom the Gemara calls "biryonim", opposed the Rabbis and in order to force all the Jews to go out and fight the Romans, did the unthinkable: they set fire to the food supplies, warehouses with grain, wood and oil enough to survive a long siege the city. The lack of food brought a terrible famine in Yerushalayim, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of victims.

Meanwhile in Rome, Emperor Nero sent General Vespasian to put an end to the rebellion of the Jews and regain control of Jerusalem. Vespasian's men told him about the wars between the

Jews and advised him to attack the city as soon as possible. Vespasian refused to attack and explained that the Jews were not making new weapons, reinforcing the fortifications or securing the gates of the city: the Jews were killing one another. And if he assaults the city, the only thing that he would achieve would be to unite the fighting militias.

Sadly, Vespasian was right. The war between Yohanan, Shimon and Elazar only stopped when the Roman army destroyed the city walls and entered Yerushalayim. Only then the three factions, reluctantly, united to defend the city.

But it was already too late….

(To be continued….)