

Congregation Shaare Rahamim Halachot Series

THE AKKAD EDITION

Halachot and History of
The Three Weeks

☞ *Sephardic Laws & Customs – the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz,
The Three Weeks, Nine Days and Tishah B'Av*
☞ *Historical Background of the Hurban*



Halachot and History of The Three Weeks

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Foreword



ongregation Shaarei Rahamim is pleased to present the community with “The Three Weeks.” This fourth volume in our Halachot Publication Series follows the previous successful volumes on Hanukah, Purim and Passover.

“Halachot and History of The Three Weeks” is a unique volume. It is a complete compendium of laws and customs as they relate to the three week period between the Seventeenth day of *Tammuz* and the Ninth of *Av*. It incorporates the laws of the two fast days, as well as the restrictions of the Three Weeks, the Nine Days, and the special *halachot* of the week of the Ninth of *Av*.

Our Rabbis teach: “All who mourn for the destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash*, will merit to see the joy of the final redemption.” We pray with all our heart that we will merit the coming of *Mashiah* and that we will have no need to reprint this book.

We trust that the information contained in this volume will serve to enhance the reader’s appreciation of this sad period of time in the Jewish calendar.



👁️ Rabbi's Message 👁️



he three week period between the Seventeenth of *Tammuz* and the Ninth of *Av* represents the saddest, and unfortunately, the least understood period of time in the Jewish calendar. On the seventeenth day of *Tammuz* the walls of Jerusalem were breached, leading to the destruction of the Temple three weeks later on the ninth day of *Av*. Since both the first and second Temple were destroyed on that fateful day, the ninth of *Av* was legislated as a time of mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem. The Sages did not merely chalk up this double misfortune as a coincidence, but rather understood it to convey a deeper message: the ninth of *Av* was a day marked for catastrophe. And so it was, time and again throughout our exile, tragedies befell our people on this fateful day.

🌿 The Promiscuous Plague

As of today, the *galut* (exile) following the destruction of the Second Temple has been more than 1,930 years long. If we wish to do all in our power to end this extended exile, we must investigate the causes for the tragedies and rectify them. The Talmud documents various reasons for the exile after the First and Second Temples. The First Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people did not appreciate the value of Torah, while it was unwarranted hatred that caused the destruction of the Second Temple. (*Nedarim* 81)

Unfortunately, in our times, misfortunes and tragedies abound, sparing no one family from their evil grip. The Torah explains that everything that occurs in this world is orchestrated by G-d as a message to the Jewish people. What is the message to us?



Before we make an attempt to analyze the source of the misfortunes of the modern era, let us clearly state that we do not profess to be prophets, nor sons of prophets who can state with certainty the exact reasons for any particular crisis. Rather, our intention is on an academic level, to explore history for similar instances where retribution might have come upon the Jewish people because G-d's sensitivities had been offended.

During the reign of King David a severe, three year long famine struck. King David understood that such tragedy and famine can be caused by the sins of idolatry, immorality, or not fulfilling their charity commitments. If his generation was guilty of these sins, he would take the necessary action to correct their faults and pursue a *teshuva* program. Although in his final investigation, his generation was not guilty of these transgressions, we nevertheless learn that these sins can bring about misfortune, suffering, disease and tragedies. (*Yebamot* 78b)

Living today in America and other countries of the Free World affords us benefits for which we must be grateful. Politically, we are allowed freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Economically, we have been fortunate to be able to engage in business and commerce as we wish, and to prosper. However, the social fabric of American society leaves much to be desired.

The social scene is molded largely by the celebrities and propagated by the media. The atmosphere of permissiveness has eroded American ethics and morals to the extent that every sin in the book has become legal and acceptable. Take the code of dress for an example. Not that long ago, women would not be seen on the street without being respectably dressed, complete with a hat and gloves. Today, jeans has become respectable attire and immodest attire is commonplace. Men sport tattoos, earrings, unorthodox beards, pony tails, and the list goes on.

Living in such a promiscuous environment, and breathing its air every moment of the day, makes it extremely difficult to protect our homes and children from its evil influence. Yet, knowing that immorality offends G-d's sensitivities and results in retribution, one must make every effort to prevent the American culture of permissiveness from entering the home.



“The *Mashiah* will come either in a totally righteous generation or in a totally guilty generation” (*Sanhedrin* 98a). The commentators explain that the *Mashiah*’s arrival will be hastened by a totally righteous generation, otherwise, in a sinful generation, he will come at the predestined time. However, they further explain, since this dictum is directed at the religious community, one need not concern oneself with the behavior of those outside the fold. Therefore, in order to hasten the arrival of the *Mashiah*, it is incumbent upon the religious community to ensure that the American culture does not infiltrate their homes. In this way we will not be at fault in delaying the final redemption and the coming of the *Mashiah*, may it occur speedily and in our days, amen.

Rabbi Shlomo Churba



❧ CHAPTER 1 ❧

*Halachot of the
Seventeenth of Tammuz*

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Introduction



We are obligated to fast on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* as it states:

“Thus said Hashem, Master of Legions, “The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth...” (*Zechariah 8:19*)

Hazal interpret “the fast of the fourth” as the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, which is the fourth month. “The fast of the fifth” refers to the ninth of *Av*, the fifth month of the year. “The fast of the seventh” is the Fast of Gedaliah which occurs in the seventh month (third of *Tishrei*). “The fast of the tenth” refers to the tenth of *Tevet*, the tenth month. These are all days of fasting and mourning. Those who are required to fast (men and women) may not transgress this obligation.

There are five reasons for fasting on the seventeenth of Tammuz:

- 1. The *Luhot* were broken on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*.** It happened as follows: After *Bnai Yisrael* received the Torah on the sixth of *Sivan*, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai the following day — the seventh of *Sivan*. He assured the people that he would return forty days later. The people mistakenly thought that the day he ascended the mountain counted as the first day of the forty. Moshe meant that he would be away for a **complete** forty days and forty nights and therefore would return on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, while the people thought it would be on the sixteenth of *Tammuz*. When Moshe did not return as promised according to *Bnai Yisrael*'s reckoning, they became very frightened. The Satan told them that Moshe had died. As a replacement for Moshe they erected a golden calf.

Moshe returned the next morning carrying the *luhot*. To his dismay, he saw the people dancing around the calf. The weight of the *luhot* was immense, but since they were the *luhot* of Hashem, Moshe was



miraculously able to carry them. When he saw the people sinning with the calf, the letters of the *luhot* flew up to Heaven. As a result, the *luhot* became incredibly heavy and Moshe could no longer hold them — he cast them from his hands and they shattered! This was a tremendous tragedy — these *luhot* were the handiwork of Hashem Himself. As a consequence of the sin of the golden calf the Jewish people no longer were worthy to receive these *luhot*.

The second set of *luhot* were fashioned by Moshe and Hashem inscribed the Ten Commandments upon them. This difference indicated the diminished spiritual status of *Bnai Yisrael*. Had the nation merited the first *luhot*, we never would have been subjugated to other nations, nor would there have been death in this world.

2. The *Korban Tamid*, the daily sacrificial offering was abolished on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*.

In the time of the Temple, every day a lamb was offered in the morning and a second lamb in the afternoon to atone for *Bnai Yisrael's* transgressions. Shortly before the destruction of the first Temple (which occurred on the ninth of *Av*), the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on the ninth of *Tammuz*. From that time on, they were unable to obtain the sacrificial animals from the city, and they used the animals they had in the Temple. On the seventeenth of *Tammuz* there were no more sacrificial animals left in the Temple, and they were no longer able to offer the daily *Korban Tamid*.

Likewise, during the time of the Second Temple, the *Korban Tamid* was abolished on this day. Early during the Roman rule over Judea, the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, and they were unable to obtain sacrificial animals from outside the city. At first the Jews lowered chests filled with gold over the walls and the Romans exchanged them for two lambs. One day, however, a wicked old man informed the Romans that as long as the Jews could bring their daily offerings in the Temple the Romans will not be able to conquer them. He suggested exchanging the gold for pigs instead of lambs. The plan succeeded and on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, the *Korban Tamid* was not offered. The Romans entered Jerusalem, killed many Jews and ruled over them until the destruction of the Temple.



3. **In the time of the second Temple the walls of Jerusalem were breached on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, by the Romans after a siege of several years.** (The walls were breached on the ninth of *Tammuz* in the time of the first Temple, but we fast on the seventeenth, because the second *hurban* effects us more to this very day.)
4. **On the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, Apostomos burned the Torah.** Tragically, the day is considered “suitable” for such a travesty because the *luhot* were shattered on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*.
5. **An idol was placed in the Temple on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*.** There are those who say it was in the image of King Menashe and others maintain it was an image of Apostomos.

The Rambam states, “We fast on these days to commemorate the calamities that occurred and to awaken our hearts and follow the path of repentance. They serve as a reminder of the bad deeds of our forefathers, as well as our bad deeds, which are similar to theirs, all of which caused them and us so much anguish. By remembering we will repent and improve our ways.” Therefore, during these days we must each examine our actions and remedy whatever is wrong. The most important aspect of these fast days is repentance and not the actual fasting — the fasting prepares us to repent, and this is what must be uppermost in our minds and hearts. Those individuals who engage in idle things are missing the point of the fast — they are focusing on the secondary aspect and ignoring the essential. (משנה ברורה תקמ”ט, א)

Laws of the Seventeenth of *Tammuz*

1. It is forbidden for men (starting at *Bar Mitzvah*) and women (starting at *Bat Mitzvah*) to eat or drink anything on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*. The fast begins at dawn (*amud ha’sshahar*) and ends at *Tzait Ha’Kochavim* — when the stars come out, approximately 40-45 minutes after sunset.



2. Although we are permitted to eat and drink the entire night before, once a person falls asleep, his fast begins immediately because we assume that he has no intention to eat or drink thereafter. This applies whether it is “regular” sleep (even if it is not in bed) or a nap (even during the meal).
 - a. If he is coherent during his nap, i.e. if when reminded where he placed something, he can answer immediately, then he is still permitted to eat and drink.
 - b. If one slept **before** the evening meal eating is still permitted.
 - c. If one makes a condition **before** he goes to sleep saying that he wants to eat and drink when he wakes up, then he is permitted to do so.
3. Washing is permitted on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*. One may even wash one’s entire body with hot water (רבעל נפש יחמיר).
4. a. It is appropriate to be strict and **not** rinse one’s mouth on this fast day, because we are concerned that perhaps he will swallow the water.
 - b. Nevertheless, if he is accustomed to rinsing his mouth, and not doing so will be difficult for him, he may do so. However, extra care must be taken not to swallow even the slightest amount of water. One should also be careful not to rinse with more than a *rivi’it* (three ounces) of water.
 - c. The same law applies to brushing teeth.
5. a. It is permissible to taste a food or drink (by placing it on the tongue) to determine if it needs more salt or spice. One must be sure **not** to taste more than a *rivi’it* (three ounces) **and** it should **not** be swallowed.
 - b. It is permitted to taste the food for this purpose even several times during the day.
6. a. An otherwise healthy person who suffers from a headache during the fast is permitted to take medicine to relieve it as long as it is not flavored and he swallows it without water.



- b. If a person is sick or has a condition that requires daily medication he is permitted to take it, even if it has flavor if it cannot be substituted with an unflavored kind.
7. a. Even if a person accidentally ate and drank on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, he should still fast for the remainder of the day.
b. One is not required to fast on another day to make up this fast.
c. If one ate more than a *kezayit* (one ounce) it is questionable whether or not he may recite *Aneinu* (the special prayer recited on fast days during *Shemoneh Esrei*) during the Prayer Service.
8. If he accidentally forgot that it was a fast day and made a blessing over a food, he should eat a tiny amount so as not to have recited the blessing in vain.
9. It is not permitted to chew gum on a fast day because the flavor is swallowed.

✿ Laws of the עינו Prayer

1. a. On a fast day, we add the prayer of עינו (“answer us”) during the recitation of *Shemoneh Esrei* – both in the silent recitation and the *hazzan’s* repetition. The individual recites עינו as part of the *berachah* of שמע קולנו.
b. עינו is added during *Shaharit* and *Minhah*, but not at *Arbit* because the fast does not begin the night before. *Tishah B’Av* is an exception since it begins the night before עינו is recited at *Arbit*.
2. If an individual forgot to say עינו, he does **not** repeat the *Shemoneh Esrei*.
3. a. If an individual forgot to say עינו, in its proper place but remembered **before** he finished *Shemoneh Esrei*, he may insert it at the end of אלקי נצור before “יהיו לרצון אמרי פי”, at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*. He recites the entire עינו and concludes it with תפלה ברוך שומע (not mentioning the name of Hashem).
b. If he forgot to properly insert עינו but remembered during the recitation of the conclusion of שמע קולנו, if he already said



למדני חוקיך **he may not** insert the words **ברוך אתה ה'** the *Berachah* so as to go back and say *Aneinu*. Rather, he must conclude the *Berachah* correctly of **שומע תפלה** and add **עננו** at the end of **אלקי נצור**.

4. If he totally forgot to recite **עננו** then he can closely follow the *hazzan's* recitation of the *Amidah*, word for word, with the intention of being *yotzei* (fulfilling his obligation).
5. a. Only an individual who is fasting adds **עננו**, but if someone is ill and not fasting, he does not recite **עננו**.
b. If an individual knows he will **not** complete the fast (or even if he is doubtful) he should **not** recite **עננו** even at *Shaharit* when he has not yet eaten.
6. On a communal fast day (תענית צבור) the *hazzan* says **עננו** after the *Berachah* of **גואל ישראל** and concludes it with the *Berachah* **לעמו העונה** **ישראל בעת צרה**. The reason it is inserted here is because there is a connection in *Tehillim* between **גאולה** and **עננו**. In *Tehillim* the final verse in Chapter 19:15 is **יהיו לרצון אמרי פי ... ה' צורי גואלי** and immediately is followed by **יענך ה' ביום צרה** in Chapter 20:2. Therefore the *Berachah* of **גואל ישראל** is connected to **עננו** which concludes with the *Berachah* of **ישראל בעת צרה**.
7. a. The *hazzan* can only recite **עננו** if there is a *minyan* – ten people who are fasting. In the event there are not ten men fasting it is sufficient that there be six and the *hazzan* may be one of them.
b. If some of the men have already prayed they may **not** be counted as part of the *minyan* required to recite **עננו**.
c. If the required number is not present, the *hazzan* recites **עננו** during **שמע קולנו** (like the individual).
8. a. Only a *hazzan* who is fasting the entire fast may recite **עננו** after **גואל ישראל**.
b. If no one else is available to lead the service and the one serving as *hazzan* is **not** fasting, he may **not** insert **עננו** after **גואל ישראל** but instead recites it during **שמע קולנו** like an individual.



9. a. If a *hazzan* forgot to insert עננו in its proper place, he should do so in שמע קולנו, but he does **not** say the concluding *Berachah* of העונה לעמו ישראל בעת צרה. Rather, he recites the usual conclusion of שמע קולנו.
- b. If he did **not** remember to insert עננו during שמע קולנו then he should do so at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, but *without* mentioning Hashem's Name in the conclusion – instead he concludes ברוך שומע תפלה.

✿ הלכות קריאת התורה – Laws for reading of the Torah

1. a. On every fast day three people are called to the Torah at *Shaharit*, and three are called at *Minhah*.
- b. Only people who are fasting may receive an *aliyah*. Even if a person is the **only** *Kohen* present he still may **not** receive the first *aliyah* (belonging to the *Kohen*) if he is **not** fasting. A *Yisrael* replaces the *Kohen* preceded by the announcement of, אין כאן כהן, יעמוד ישראל במקום כהן. A *Levi* should not be called up for the next two *aliyot*.
- Similarly, a *Levi* who is **not** fasting may **not** receive the second *aliyah*, even if he is the **only** *Levi* present. The same *Kohen* who was called for his own *aliyah* is called again to replace the *Levi*.
- c. If the non-fasting *Kohen* or *Levi* are the only *Kohen* or *Levi* present, they should leave the Sanctuary before their *aliyah*. Even if his name was called he should refuse the *aliyah* and explain that since he is not fasting he can not receive an *aliyah*.
- d. If the fast falls on a Monday or Thursday, days that we always read the Torah, then if the non-fasting *Kohen* or *Levi* was publicly called at *Shaharit* by name he should accept the *aliyah*. However, if he was asked privately he should refuse.
2. An individual who knows he will **not** complete the fast should not accept an *aliyah*, even if he has not yet eaten.



3. The *ba'al Koreh*, Torah reader, should **not** read the Torah for the congregation if he is not fasting. However, if no one else can replace him it is permissible to be lenient and permit him to read.
4. It is our custom **not** to recite a *Haftorah* on a fast day, except on *Tishah B'Av* at *Shaharit*; unlike the *Ashkenazim* who recite a *Haftorah* on every fast. Therefore, a *Sephardi* who prays at an *Ashkenazi* synagogue should **not** accept the third *aliyah* (which is *maftir*) because it is not his custom to have a *Haftorah* and the third *aliyah* would obligate him to make the *berachot* for the *Haftorah*. However, if they already publicly called his name for the third *aliyah*, he should go up and recite the *berachot* of *maftir*.
5. a. There must be at least six people fasting in the congregation in order to read the Torah portion.
b. If there are less than six people fasting present in the congregation then the *Sefer Torah* is **not** read.
c. When the fast falls on a Monday or Thursday and there are less than six people present who are fasting, by *Shaharit* we read the *parshah* of the week and **not** the special reading for the fast day.

✿ Individuals who are absolved from fasting

1. a. A person who is not well (not because of the fast), even though his illness is not life threatening is absolved from fasting. There is no reason to be strict in this matter because the fast was not established for the ill.
b. If a sick person does **not** eat, he is in fact transgressing because he will cause himself to become weak and the Torah charges us to take care of our health, as it says **ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם**, “you shall safeguard your souls” (*Devarim* 4:15).
c. In a case where it is questionable whether or not he is exempt from fasting a rabbi should be asked. One should **not** make such a decision himself. [The foregoing are general *halachot* and one should ask a rabbi when a *halachic* question arises.]



- d. He may eat immediately in the morning, if necessary.
 - e. Although he may eat, he should not indulge so he can also participate with the community in mourning.
- 2.
- a. A person who is by nature weak or elderly and fasting is extremely difficult for him, he is absolved from fasting. However, a doctor should be consulted to determine if fasting would be harmful.
 - b. An individual who is *very* elderly and weak does not have to fast, even without asking a doctor.
3. If during the course of the fast one becomes ill, or feels weaker than is normal for one who is fasting – he may be considered in the category of a sick person. He should ask a rabbi to determine if he may break his fast.
4. A person who was exempt from fasting does not have to fast another day, when he feels better, in order to make up for the fast that he missed.
- 5.
- a. One who is **not** fasting does **not** recite the *Aneinu* prayer during *Shemoneh Esrei*, even at *Shaharit* when he has still not eaten.
 - b. A person who is not fasting may not be called to the Torah, even at *Shaharit*, even though he has still not eaten.
 - c. A non-fasting person who is a *Kohen* is not permitted to participate with the other *Kohanim* in *Bircat Kohanim* recited at *Minchah*. He must leave the Synagogue before *Re'tzei*.
- 6.
- a. A pregnant woman is absolved from fasting on the **Seventeenth of Tamuz** after the first trimester.
 - b. If she is feeling weak or vomiting, even from the beginning of the pregnancy, then she does **not** have to fast because the fetus is at its weakest during that period and it could be dangerous for the mother and the fetus.



7. a. A woman who has given birth is absolved from fasting for the first two years of the baby's life, whether she is nursing or not, because it takes that long to regain her previous vigor.
 - b. A woman who has suffered a miscarriage should ask a rabbi whether or not she is obligated to fast.
 - c. A pregnant or nursing mother who eats on the fast day should not indulge, so she can also participate with the community in mourning.
8. a. A "*Katan* – a child before *bar* or *bat mitzvah* – does **not** have to fast, even for a few hours.
 - b. If a child wants to fast the entire day, his parents should prohibit him/her from doing so.
 - c. Children who **understand** the significance of the fast should **not** indulge so they, too, can participate with the community in mourning.
9. a. When a *Brit Milah* is performed on a fast day which has been **postponed** it is permissible to be lenient with the father, the *Sandak* and the *mohel* not to complete the fast. That is to say that after praying *Minchah Gedolah* they are permitted to eat. This is *only* the case for a **postponed** fast, but if the fast falls on the appropriate date they are obligated to complete the fast.
 - b. Although they may eat they should **not** have a big meal as would be customary for a *Brit* held on non-fast day.
 - c. This applies only to a *Brit* that is made on the appropriate day (the eighth day). In the case of a postponed *Brit* they *must* complete the fast.
 - d. Regarding a *Pidyon HaBen* on a fast day the same leniency applies – the father and the *Kohen* do **not** have to complete the fast *only* if it is a **postponed** fast.
 - e. This law also applies to a groom and bride during the week of *Sheva Berachot* – they do **not** have to complete the fast if it is a **postponed** fast.



❧ CHAPTER II ❧
*General Halachot of
The Three Weeks*



✿ בין המצרים – The Three Weeks

The Period between the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av

☞ Introduction

The walls of Yerushalayim were breached on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* by Titus, King of Rome at the time of the second *Bet HaMikdash* (it stood for 420 years). Terrible fighting ensued, culminating in the destruction of the Temple on *Tishah B'Av*, the ninth of *Av*, three weeks later.

The three week period between the seventeenth of *Tammuz* and the ninth of *Av* is called “בין המצרים” from the verse in *Eichah*(1:3) כל רדפיה השיגה בין המצרים, “all her enemies captured her between the boundaries”. The words בין המצרים literally mean “between the boundaries” and homiletically are interpreted “in the days of distress”. This interpretation is based on the fact that during this three week period our enemies pursued and overtook us (as well as other terrible things which will be discussed). A tragic consequence of the destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash* was that we no longer had a place to bring offerings (קרבנות) to Hashem to atone for our transgressions. As long as there was a Temple the Divine Presence blessed us by dwelling in our midst. With its destruction all the blessings that we received as a result of the *Bet HaMikdash* ceased and *Shechinah* no longer had a place to “dwell” here on earth.

The loss of life suffered by the Jewish People was enormous during this three week period — over one million men, women and children (this toll includes **both** Temples). After our defeat we were exiled from our land and tormented by our oppressors. Tens of thousands of Jews were killed. Many became slaves to the Romans. The Jewish People no longer ruled their land or had the *Bet HaMikdash*. For almost 2000 years the Jewish nation was forced to wander or escape from country to country because of the conditions they were forced to endure. Over the course of time we have been subject to such horrors as the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, World War I and the Holocaust. All of these had their roots in the period of בין המצרים.



Because of these many tragedies and misfortunes our Sages have established this three week period as a time of mourning — (weddings and celebrations are not held; music and dancing are prohibited, as will be discussed).

Hazal have written that Yaakov *Avinu* merited to have control over the months of *Nissan*, *Iyar* and *Sivan*, while Esav dominated the months of *Tammuz*, *Av* and *Elul*. Eventually, Yaakov gained control over *Elul*, leaving Esav with *Tammuz* and *Av*. Consequently, Esav and his descendants (including Rome) have been able to prevail and dominate us specifically in these months. Many of our worst tragedies and misfortunes have occurred in *Tammuz* and *Av*.

Additionally, evil forces (מזיקין) are considered to be more prevalent during *Tammuz* and *Av*, and we should be more careful to observe the *Halachot* so they cannot dominate. The *Shulchan Aruch* writes that during this period a person should not go out alone during certain hours of the day (from the end of the fourth hour until the end of the ninth hour) because that is when the evil forces rule.

However, it is within our control to change this through repentance, *mitzvah* observance and good deeds — specifically by properly mourning the destruction of the Temple by observing the *halachot* of the Three Weeks. If Hashem will see our sincere mourning it will prove how much we want to rebuild the *Bet HaMikdash*. When we will merit to rebuild the Temple, then “the fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall become to the house of Judah times of joy and gladness and happy festivals...” (*Zechariah* 8:19). The month of *Av* (*av* also means father and first) will become the “first” month of all our joy during the year.

On the verse in Proverbs, נצר תאנה יאכל פריה, “the protector of a fig tree will eat its fruit” (*Mishlei* 27:18) the Ben Ish Hai says that the *gematriah* (numerical value of letters) of תאנה is the same as *Tammuz*, *Av* (תמוז / אב) — both are 456. Therefore we may interpret the *pasuk* to mean that one who protects the תאנה (referring to *Av* and *Tamuz*), in the future they will eat its fruits. Similarly, the verse in *Tehillim*, בא יבא ברנה נשא אלומותיו, “will return in joy, a bearer of sheaves” (126:6)



may be explained as follows: In the merit of returning — בא, which refers to the month of Av, אב (when transposing the letters of בא it spells אב) — we will receive many good things (יבא ברנה נשא אלומותיו).

We, therefore, see how tremendously important it is to observe the *Halachot* of the Three Weeks and how great will be the reward. Specifically, in our community where many people are on vacation at that time, the reward for observing these laws will be considerable. As *Hazal* said: לפום צערא אגרא, “according to the pain so is the reward.” *Hazal* have told us that “Whoever mourns the destruction of Jerusalem will surely rejoice in her rebuilding.” In the *zechut* of our community observing the *Halachot* of the Three Weeks may we merit to see the coming of *Mashiah*, speedily in our days, Amen!

✿ Laws of Mourning for בין המצרים

Hazal have established various laws of mourning that are in force during the Three Week Period — they intensify in stringency the closer we get to *Tishah B’Av*. They are subdivided as follows:

1. בין המצרים — *Halachot* that apply during the **entire** three week period from the seventeenth of *Tammuz* through *Tishah B’Av*. (See pages 30-32).
2. Additional stringencies that apply from *Rosh Hodesh Av* until after the ninth of *Av*. (See pages 35-39).
3. Laws that are in force during the week in which *Tishah B’Av* falls. (See pages 43-46).
4. *Erev Tishah B’Av* — laws for *Erev Tishah B’Av* after *hatzot*, midday. (See pages 48-51).
5. *Tishah B’Av* itself. (See pages 54-63).
6. The tenth of *Av*. (See page 66).

Each of these will be discussed.



❖ General Laws of the Three Weeks

1. It is customary not to make a wedding during the Three Weeks, even without a festive meal.
2. Dancing is prohibited, even without music, during the Three Weeks (for *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim*).

This law is emphasized by Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef in a letter written to Rabbi Isaac Dweck.

“To my esteemed and beloved friend, מִיחִידֵי סְגוּלָה (a distinguished individual), a man of יִרְאֵת שָׁמַיִם (God-fearing), Rabbi Isaac Dweck, שליט”א, Rabbi for the Deal, NJ Congregation ... Regarding what you have asked me about dancing during the Three Weeks, I would like to answer you that it is prohibited without question, both during the week and Saturday night, the entire three week period. This *halachah* applies to both *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim*. This law is brought down in the *Magen Abraham*, *Aliah Rabbah*, *Prei Megadim*, *Kaf Hachaim* ... and many others. It is clear from the *Poskim* that the prohibition starts from the seventeenth day of *Tammuz* through *Tishah B’Av*, and these days are called בֵּין הַמְצָרִים ... It is also brought in the *Midrash* of *Eichah* that during this period thousands of our brethren have been killed and died in famine in the period of the destruction of the first and the second Temple. Therefore these are days of tragedy and mourning for the Jewish nation...

“This prohibition also applies to separate dancing even with a separating divider. Additionally, mixed dancing is prohibited without question the whole year, as it is brought down in many *Poskim*...

The common claim people set forth that mixed dancing is necessary for marriage is wrong, and it is the argument of the יֵצֵר הָרַע (evil inclination), because Hashem has many other avenues available for people to find their spouse.”

3. a. Music is forbidden because it leads to joy. No distinction is made between live music at a party or music from a radio or tape, even listened to in private. This ban is upheld by Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *zt”l*.



- b. Group singing should not be engaged in (e.g. in camp) but singing to Hashem, i.e. during prayer, is permitted.
 - c. One who earns his livelihood in the music field is permitted to work until *Rosh Hodesh Av*. However, on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* and from *Rosh Hodesh* (including *Rosh Hodesh*) till *Tishah B'Av* he should refrain from doing so.
4. We do not recite the *berachah* of שהחיינו during the Three Weeks because it is not appropriate to say שהחיינו לזמן הזה, that Hashem granted us life, sustained us and let us reach this time, if this is a time of tragedy and mourning.
- a. Therefore, anything requiring the *berachah* of שהחיינו should not be enjoyed during this period — i.e. new clothing or new fruit.
 - b. One can be lenient regarding this prohibition on Shabbat — however, wearing new clothes during the Nine Days is prohibited even on Shabbat.
 - c. Since a *Brit Milah* or *Pidyon HaBen* that occurs during this period is a time-related *mitzvah*, we recite the שהחיינו on these occasions.
 - d. If a person already recited the *berachah* over a new fruit then he should say שהחיינו before he eats it.
 - e. If he did **not** say שהחיינו then he should wait until **after** the Tenth of Av, then take *another* new fruit and recite שהחיינו, keeping in mind the new fruit that he already ate during the Three Weeks.
 - f. A minor child who cannot make a distinction between the Three Weeks and the rest of the year should recite שהחיינו when he eats a new fruit, so as not to mistakenly omit שהחיינו at other times.
5. Since the Three Weeks is a time of trouble we must avoid as much as possible anything that is potentially dangerous. Included in this is hitting children — one should refrain from this type of punishment.
6. a. According to our custom there is no prohibition regarding hair-cutting or shaving, except during the week of *Tishah B'Av*.



- b. A *Sephardi* living among *Ashkenazim* does **not** have to accept upon himself the stringency of not shaving or cutting his hair, according to the letter of the law. However, it **is** preferable to be strict and follow the *Ashkenazic* custom. He should be sure to state explicitly that he is doing so בלי נדר (not promising to keep the custom) so he will not be obligated in nullification of vows (התרת נדרים).



❧ CHAPTER III ❧
Halachot of The Nine Days



✿ The Laws of the Nine Days

Rejoicing and happiness are limited when the month of *Av* arrives, (until the 10th of *Av*) because historically it was a time of calamity and suffering for the Jewish People. Consequently there are several restrictions.

☞ *Simhah*-related Prohibitions

1. a. Items that bring one happiness are **not** purchased during the Nine Days. Included in this are jewelry, knick knacks and merchandise bought for a bride and groom, such as gowns, furniture etc.
- b. If a great loss will be involved if the item is not purchased at this time (there is a major sale **only** then) or the item will not be available after *Tishah B'Av* one may be lenient and purchase it.
- c. Necessary major items, (e.g. appliances, basic furniture) **may** be purchased during the Nine Days (but **not** clothing).
- d. A bride or groom who has not yet fulfilled the *mitzvah* of having children who is getting married after *Tishah B'Av* may be lenient to purchase items necessary for the *huppah*.
2. An individual who works in the wholesale jewelry (or another *simha* related) industry is permitted to purchase merchandise during the Nine Days.

☞ Postponing Lawsuits

It is preferable to postpone court cases with non-Jews until after the *tenth of Av*, because we do not have good *mazal* and traditionally this period bodes ill for our people.

☞ Construction, Painting, and Decorating

Construction in the category of *simhah* should be suspended during the Nine Days.

1. a. Construction, not for living but enjoyment (like a swimming pool, greenhouse, or deck), and painting, redecorating, should **not** be done during the Nine Days.



- b. Only necessary construction for living purposes (i.e. kitchen, bedroom) is permitted. However, construction for a groom who has fulfilled the *mitzvah* of having children is **not** permitted since it brings excessive joy.
 - c. If a great loss is involved in postponing construction until after *Tishah B'Av* it is permitted to proceed. For example if the home improvements **cannot** be postponed until after *Tishah B'Av* because there will be even greater damage if not repaired **immediately** and then will cost more to repair — such work may be done during the Nine Days.
 - d. A non-Jewish contractor (paid by the job) working on his own schedule and who is not under contract to complete the work during this period it is permitted to proceed. It is preferable however, if the work can be postponed until after *Tishah B'Av*.
 - e. If workers were hired to complete the job **before** *Rosh Hodesh Av* and they did not, and now (during the Nine Days) if they do not work they will still have to be paid, the work may continue.
2. Building, painting and redecorating a building used for a *mitzvah* i.e. a synagogue, yeshivah, *mikvah* is permitted.
 3. Planting bushes, flowers etc. should **not** be done during the Nine Days.
 4. The Nine Days are **not** an opportune time to move into a residence.

Sewing and Mending Clothes

1. a. All types of sewing, knitting, crocheting, and weaving etc. are prohibited during the Nine Days. The reason for this is that when the *Bet HaMikdash* was destroyed not only was its foundation ruined, but the **אבן השתיה** — the foundation stone of the world was suspended. We are told that in the Holy of Holies **הקדשים קדש** of the Temple there was a foundation stone called the **השתיה אבן** — which was also a foundation of the world — it did not continue to function after the *Hurban*. Since the word **שתי** which refers to the lengthwise threads of yarn placed in a loom which are woven into fabrics is similar to the word **שתיה** therefore just as the **אבן השתיה** was nullified, so too, the **שתי** of the loom.



Maran writes that one should be strict regarding this halacha from *Rosh Hodesh Av* (and not only the Week of *Tishah B'Av*).

- b. This prohibition of sewing applies whether sewing for yourself or for others and no distinction is made whether you are paid or not.
 - c. Mending clothing and the like **are permitted**.
 - d. A bride or groom (who does not have children) who is getting married after *Tishah B'Av* is allowed to have a new suit made.
 - e. A tailor or someone who has a factory that makes clothing should ask a Rabbi what to do during the Nine Days.
 - f. Sewing or weaving that is not done for clothing is permitted, e.g. weaving a basket or needlepoint.
2. a. One should be strict not to buy or wear new clothes or shoes that bring *simhah*. (In the week of *Tishah B'Av* it is mandatory).
 - b. We should **not** wear new clothing, even on Shabbat.
 - c. New clothing that do not bring much happiness may be worn or bought, however not during the week of *Tishah B'Av*.
 - d. An individual may purchase sneakers for *Tishah B'Av* if he needs them. However, he should wear them before *Tishah B'Av* so as not to wear them the first time then.



Eating Meat and Drinking Wine

1. a. We do not eat meat, poultry, or drink wine during the Nine Days because these things signify festivity and happiness.
 - b. Even the fat from meat or poultry may not be eaten; as well as anything cooked with meat or poultry.
 - c. It is permissible to eat something that was cooked in a meat pot — even a pot that was used the same day to prepare meat.
2. a. Meat and poultry are permitted on Shabbat of the Nine Days and *Rosh Hodesh*. The meat may be eaten at *Seudat Shelishit* and *Melaveh Malkah* until the fourth hour, after Shabbat. However, one should **not** deliberately prepare extra meat for *Melaveh Malkah*.



- b. It is permissible to taste the food on *erev Shabbat* while it is being prepared because it is an honor for Shabbat to taste the food beforehand.
 - c. If a doctor tells an individual that he must eat meat, that individual should consult a Rabbi.
3. Children (who have reached the age for *hinuch*) are also included in the prohibition of not eating meat. A Rabbi should be consulted if there is a problem with a child who is weak.
4. a. In the event that there is a *Seudat Mitzvah* during the Nine Days, such as a *Brit*, *Pidyon Haben*, *Bar Mitzvah*, or a *Siyum* (see specifics of number 5) it is **permissible** to eat meat and drink wine.
- b. *Only* those participants in the *Seudat Mitzvah* who are relatives and friends may eat meat. However, an outsider who would not have ordinarily come to this individual's *simhah* during the *rest of the year*, may **not** partake of the meat.
- c. An individual who did **not** attend the *Seudat Mitzvah* may **not** have someone bring meat home for him to eat the meat later on.
- d. In the week of *Tishah B'Av* only ten people in addition to the relatives may partake of meat at a *Seudat Mitzvah*. The other guests should eat only dairy.
5. Regarding a *Seudat Mitzvah* for a *Siyum* the following criteria apply:
- a. If the individual does **not** usually make a *seudah* for a *Siyum* during the year he may **not** do so during the Nine Days.
 - b. The invited guests are those who would participate in the *Siyum Seudah* no matter when it was held during the year.
 - c. One should not stretch out his learning of the entire tractate so as to finish by *Rosh Hodesh* and make a *Seudat Mitzvah*. Additionally, he should not rush his learning in order to make a *siyum* during the Nine Days. Also, he may **not** deliberately leave one small portion for this time if he finished learning the rest at an earlier time.



- d. He must understand what he learned in order to be able to make a *siyum* and a *Seudat Mitzvah*. A *siyum* on a Gemara, a *Seder* (complete order) of Mishnah, or a complete book of *Tanach* that was learned in depth using commentaries of *Rishonim*, all qualify as sources for a *siyum* and *Seudat Mitzvah*. — All the participants at such a *siyum* may eat meat. However, at a *siyum* made for a tractate of the Mishnah, only the one who learned it may eat meat at the *seudah* and the other participants may only eat dairy.
6. a. We do **not** drink wine during the Nine Days.
b. Whiskey and beer are permitted.
c. For purposes of a *mitzvah*, e.g. *Havdalah*, wine is permitted. He is allowed to drink even more than a *ri'viit* (3 oz.).
d. Wine is permitted on Shabbat and *Rosh Hodesh*, especially for the *kos* of *Bircat Hamazon*.
e. On weekdays, however, *Bircat Hamazon* is **not** recited over a cup of wine.
7. a. One may not make or attend a festive meal during the Three Weeks.
b. Only a *seudah* for a *mitzvah* e.g. *Brit Milah*, *Pidyon HaBen*, *Bar Mitzvah*, etc. which occurs during this period is permitted.
c. Even though it is permitted to get engaged during the entire Nine Days, it is prohibited to make a festive meal in honor of the engagement because it brings much happiness. However, cake, pastries and the like are permitted (without dancing and music).



❧ CHAPTER IV ❧
The Week of Tishah B'Av



✿ Laws Regarding the Week of Tishah B'Av

During the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs our mourning intensifies. Therefore, the *hachamim* instituted the same strict prohibitions that apply to a mourner for these specific days in the following areas:

1. Cleaning and laundering
2. Shaving and haircutting
3. Bathing
4. Nail cutting

Each of these will be discussed.

“The week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs” refers to the exact week when *Tishah B'Av* falls, beginning with Sunday of that week. If the fast occurs on Sunday, or on Shabbat and is postponed until Sunday, it is permitted to be lenient regarding the previous week of all these stringencies. (One who desires to be strict under these circumstances may do so, but is permitted on Thursday and Friday to be lenient regarding these prohibitions if they are necessary for Shabbat.)

☞ Prohibition of Cleaning and Laundering Clothing

1. Laundering may not be done, even if the clothing will not be worn until **after** the fast.
2. a. It is prohibited to wear laundered clothing, even though they were washed beforehand. This includes undergarments, towels, bed linens and tablecloths. These prohibitions apply to men and women, as well as children who are old enough not to become constantly dirty.
b. If the above items were used beforehand for a short time, and its freshness was removed, then it can be used.
c. Since it is difficult for one to wear one set of clothing for this entire time period, care should be taken to prepare **beforehand**. All clothing that he will require should be worn for a short time to remove some of the freshness and then the clothing can be used.



These preparations should be made **before** Shabbat of the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs. If he did not do so before Shabbat, he may not intentionally prepare clothes on Shabbat for the weekdays, since it is prohibited to prepare from Shabbat for the weekdays. However, one can be lenient to change his clothes several times over the course of Shabbat as long as his intention is **not** solely for the weekdays i.e. one suit Friday night, a second suit Shabbat morning, a third change in the afternoon after his nap.

- d. New clothing may **not** be bought or worn. Clothing that still appears freshly pressed, may not be worn.
3. One may not launder or clean the clothing for himself or others. A non-Jew is **not** permitted to do it for him either.
4. a. It is prohibited to give clothing to a non-Jewish cleaner or laundry during this week, even if it won't be washed or worn until after *Tishah B'Av*.
b. It is permitted, however, to give the garments to a laundry or cleaners **before** the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs, even if he knows that they will be cleaned during this week.
5. An individual who only has one garment and it has to be laundered or cleaned — may not do so during the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs.
6. Laundering baby's diapers and clothing is permitted. Also, it is allowed to wash children's clothing which constantly become dirty, since there is no issue of pleasure involved. This clothing should be washed in private, in the house and not more than is needed.
7. Washing clothing for the purpose of *mitzvah* is permitted as follows:
A woman who must wear white underwear for the Seven Clean Days is permitted to wash them if necessary, even in the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs. However, on *Tishah B'Av* this leniency does not apply.



☞ Prohibition of Bathing and Swimming

1. a. During the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs bathing in **hot** water is prohibited.
2. a. One who is dirty or perspired may take a shower and is allowed to mix a little warm water with the cold to remove the chill.
b. If the dirt cannot be removed except with hot water he is permitted to use it.
3. Deodorant is permitted.
4. It is customary **not** to swim for pleasure during this period.
5. Swimming for medical reasons is permitted, however, a Rabbi should be consulted.
6. Bathing for the purpose of a *mitzvah* is permitted — even in hot water. This applies to a woman who must bathe before going to the *mikvah* — she prepares as usual.
7. Men who have the custom to immerse in a *mikvah* may do so in cold water unless it is too difficult for him, in which case he may immerse in hot water.

☞ Prohibitions of Haircutting and Shaving

1. a. Haircutting and shaving are not permitted in the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs — both for adults and children (even below age six). Combing hair however, is permitted.
b. Trimming a mustache is permitted if it interferes with one's eating — except on *Tishah B'Av*.
d. Women may be lenient about haircutting.
2. When *Tishah B'Av* falls on Sunday, one should preferably not shave after Thursday, so that he will enter the fast not appearing freshly shaved.
3. a. Cutting nails during the week in which *Tishah B'Av* occurs is prohibited, unless they are too long (above the skin line).
b. A woman before going to the *mikvah* is permitted to cut her nails.



❧ CHAPTER V ❧
Seudah Hamafseket



🌿 Laws of Erev Tishah B'Av (after midday)

🌀 Learning Torah

1. a. In the afternoon of *erev Tishah B'Av* it is appropriate to learn only the laws and texts which are relevant to *Tishah B'Av* and mourning, i.e. *Eichah*, Gemaras discussing the *Hurban* etc.
b. If it is difficult for one to limit his learning, or it will lead to *Bitul Torah* he may be lenient and learn as usual.
c. One should not take pleasure walks or engage in other leisure activities on *erev Tishah B'Av* after midday.

🌿 Halachot of the Seudah Hamafseket

The final meal before the fast of *Tishah B'Av* is called the *סעודה המפסקת*.

Hazal teach us that this final meal should be eaten in the same manner as a mourner eats — while sitting on the ground and customarily only consists of bread, a cold hard boiled egg and water. The purpose of this is that we should experience sorrow over the destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash*. The Gemara relates how Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai would sit on the ground near the stove and heap and eat dry bread and salt with some water — resembling a mourner. Rambam similarly describes the *סעודה המפסקת* and adds that “One should cry and be upset as if the deceased was lying before him. We should try to follow this example.” Therefore, *Hazal* instituted many laws of mourning for this meal.

These are the laws of the *סעודה המפסקת*:

1. Meat, poultry, fish and wine are prohibited.
2. Only **one** type of cooked food may be eaten.
3. The meal should **not** be one of pleasure.
4. It is customary to eat the foods of a mourner.
5. One eats this meal alone.
6. One eats while sitting on the ground.



We will now explain each law in greater detail:

1. a. It is prohibited to eat meat, poultry, fish or anything made from and cooked with these items.
 - b. Wine, beer or any other intoxicating beverage may not be drunk. These prohibitions although in force the **entire** Nine Days are absolutely mandatory for the **סעודה המפסקת**. Therefore, even a sick person should not eat meat at this meal.

2. a. Only one cooked food may be eaten at the **סעודה המפסקת** because the more varieties of food there are the greater the pleasure and honor of the meal.
 - b. Even the same food prepared differently is forbidden, i.e. a soft boiled egg and a hard boiled egg.
 - c. Similarly, one may **not** eat two different types of roasted or broiled food, or the same food prepared by two different methods — one roasted and one cooked.
 - d. Even if both foods were cooked in the same pot, only one of the foods may be eaten. Each individual may only eat **one** cooked type of food.
 - e. One type of food that was cooked in two pots — it is permissible to eat from both pots because it is one variety.
 - f. Food that can be eaten raw is considered as a **second** type of food if it is cooked.
 - g. Food that is normally eaten together and considered as **one** dish is permitted, i.e. vegetable soup, rice and lentils, stuffed squash.
 - h. Raw foods are permitted, even several varieties (salad), however, pickled foods are considered as a cooked type of food and if eaten no other cooked food may be had.
 - i. Bread or other baked goods may be eaten with a cooked food.
 - j. Some opinions are strict regarding drinking tea or coffee and do not drink them at this meal, with another cooked food.



3. a. This meal should **not** be one of pleasure. Therefore, one should **not** indulge, even from those items that are permitted.
 - b. One who customarily drinks three cups should drink less and one should not add salad to the meal or toppings to the bread, i.e. butter, jelly. *Maran* says that it is preferable, for those who are able, to only have dry bread, salt and water at the סעודה המפסקת.

4. a. Although we said earlier that it is permissible to eat one cooked food of any variety, nevertheless it is customary to eat foods that represent mourning, i.e. cold hard boiled eggs or lentils — because these foods are round symbolizing the never ending life cycle, additionally they do not have a “mouth”, just as a mourner does not have the desire to speak a lot. [Some have the custom of eating scrambled eggs mixed with tomatoes.]
 - b. The cooked food is accompanied with bread and just before it is finished, the bread is dipped in ashes and one says, “This is the meal of *Tishah B’Av*” and mentions the number of years that have passed since the *Hurban* (determined by subtracting 68 from the civil year. For example: 2002– 68 = 1,934 years since the *hurban*).

5. a. This meal should be eaten alone — family members should not sit together, rather each should go to a different part of the room.
 - b. Three men should **not** sit together so they will not be required to recite *Bircat HaMazon* with a *zemun*. In case they ate together, since in his mind each one considered himself as eating alone, therefore they do not constitute a *zemun*.

6. a. The סעודה המפסקת is eaten while sitting on the ground or a low stool, less than a טפח (4 inches) — like a mourner.
 - b. Shoes do not have to be removed at this time since the mourning does not begin until evening.
 - c. After this meal it is permitted to sit on a chair, if one has not yet accepted the fast.



☞ Important Criteria of Seudah Hamafseket

1. These laws only apply to a meal that is eaten after midday and it is the final meal before the fast. However, a meal eaten before midday (even if it is his final meal) or a meal eaten after midday that is not his last meal before the fast, doesn't have the above restrictions.

Therefore the practice is to have a regular meal earlier in the afternoon, and then later, before sunset we eat the **סעודה המפסקת**. However, one must be very careful **not** to satiate himself completely with this earlier meal, until the point that the **סעודה המפסקת** will be repulsive to him and just being eaten as a snack to satisfy the requirement. The reason for this is, because if he fills himself by this earlier meal, it will be considered his **סעודה המפסקת** and all the above restriction will apply.

Therefore one should eat a regular meal with moderation and earlier in the afternoon to allow a big time span between the meal and the **סעודה המפסקת**.

2. After the **סעודה המפסקת** one may eat or drink until **שקיעה**, sunset unless one **orally** accepted the fast at that time.
3. If one orally accepted the fast after the **סעודה המפסקת** all the prohibitions of *Tishah B'Av* apply, except for wearing shoes which do not have to be removed until before sunset.



❧ CHAPTER VI ❧
Halachot of Tishah B'Av



✿ Introduction — What Happened on Tishah B'Av?

We fast on *Tishah B'Av* because of five tragedies that occurred to the Jewish People on that date:

1. As a result of the sin of the *meraglim* (spies) Hashem decreed on *Tishah B'Av* that our forefathers would have to wander for forty years in the desert before entering the land of Israel. The men of that generation who were twenty years old and above would die in the wilderness and not enter Eretz Yisrael.
2. The first *Bet HaMikdash* was destroyed.
3. The second *Bet HaMikdash* was destroyed.
4. Beitar, a large city in Israel was captured and fell to the Romans on *Tishah B'Av* (52 years after the second *Hurban* in the time of Rabbi Akiva), and hundreds of thousands of Jews died — including Bar Kochba. At first Bar Kochba — the name given to Shimon ben Kosibah — was a legendary and strong leader of the Jewish revolution against Rome and was supported by everyone, including Rabbi Akiva who said he was worthy of being *Mashiah*. He was accepted as the king of Judah. Hadrian, the king of Rome, sent a large army to lay siege and put an end to the independent Jewish state. For almost three years the Jewish commonwealth survived — but after one year Jerusalem, their capital was captured and placed under Rome's rule. Bar Kochba and his followers, 400,000 strong, went to the fortress city of Beitar planning to continue fighting. During this period Bar Kochba's behavior changed and he became erratic and a despot. As a result Rabbi Akiva and the other Rabbis with whom Bar Kochba argued (because he suspected that they were disloyal) could no longer support him. Rabbi Elazar HaModa'ie, Bar Kochba's uncle and a great scholar, lived in Beitar and he prayed constantly, fasted and wrapped himself in sackcloth so that the city would not fall to the Romans. Hadrian was informed about this Rabbi and was told that as long as he prayed the Romans would be unsuccessful. To cast suspicion upon Rabbi Elazar this same informer went to the sage and whispered in his ear, making sure that others would



see and suspect him of treason. Sure enough false accusations were brought against Rabbi Elazar to Bar Kochba. Despite Rabbi Elazar's denial that nothing was said to him and he was not involved in any plot Bar Kochba kicked him and he died. Shortly after this horrible act Beitar fell and hundreds of thousands were killed. The Gemara describes the horrible death and devastation of Beitar — there was so much blood that it reached the nostrils of the horses; the flow of blood was so great that it moved heavy rocks more than 4 *mil* and 500,000 children were wrapped in *sefarim* and burned. It was a most tragic calamity, one of great magnitude.

5. Turnus Rufus plowed the area of the *Bet HaMikdash* and its surroundings.

☞ Prohibitions of Tishah B'Av

We are obligated to mourn for the destruction of the first and second *Bet HaMikdash* on *Tishah B'Av*, therefore *Hazal* established many prohibitions of mourning for this fast day: It is prohibited to eat, drink, wash, anoint oneself, wear shoes, work, sit on a regular chair, learn Torah or cohabit. Engaging in any activity for pleasure (i.e. trip or idle talk) is prohibited. These *halachot* will now be discussed in detail.

🌿 Laws of Tishah B'Av

☞ Eating and Drinking

1. It is forbidden for men (starting at *bar mitzvah*) and women (starting at *bat mitzvah*) to eat or drink anything on *Tishah B'Av*. The fast begins at *שקיעה*, sunset of the night before and ends at *Tzait Ha'Kochavim* — when the stars come out, approximately forty to forty-five minutes after sunset on *Tishah B'Av*.
2. a. One may **not** rinse one's mouth on this fast day, because we are concerned that perhaps he will swallow the water.
b. Nevertheless, if he is accustomed to rinsing his mouth, and not doing so will be extremely difficult for him, he may do so. However, extra



care must be taken not to swallow even the slightest amount of water, therefore he should bend his head while rinsing. One should also be careful not to rinse with more than a *rivi'it* (three ounces) of water.

3. It is **not** permissible to taste a food or drink (by placing it on the tongue) to determine if it needs more salt or spice.
4. a. An otherwise healthy person who suffers from a headache (or other pain) during the fast is permitted to take medicine to relieve it as long as it is not flavored and he swallows it without water.
b. If a person is sick or has a condition that requires daily medication he is permitted to take it. If it has flavor and cannot be substituted with an unflavored kind a Rabbi should be consulted.
5. a. Even if a person accidentally ate and drank on *Tishah B'Av*, he should still fast for the remainder of the day.
b. One is not required to fast on another day to make up this fast.
c. If one ate more than a *kezayit* (one ounce) it is questionable whether or not he may recite *Aneinu* (the special prayer recited on fast days during *Shemoneh Esrei*) during the Prayer Service.
6. If he accidentally forgot that it was a fast day and made a blessing over a food, he should eat a tiny amount so as not to have recited the blessing in vain.
7. It is not permitted to chew gum on a fast day because the flavor is swallowed.

☞ **Individuals Who Are Absolved From Fasting**

1. a. A person who is not well (not because of the fast), and feels weak even though his illness is not life threatening is absolved from fasting. There is no reason to be strict in this matter because the fast was not established for the ill. On *Motzaei Shabbat* one must recite *Havdallah* before eating (refer to Chapter 8).
b. If a sick person does **not** eat, he is in fact transgressing because he will cause himself to become weak and the Torah charges us to take care of our health, as it says **ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם** “you shall safeguard your souls” (*Devarim* 4:15).



- c. In a case where it is questionable whether or not he is exempt from fasting a rabbi should be asked. One should **not** make such a decision himself. [The foregoing are general *halachot* and it is advisable to ask a rabbi when a *halachic* question arises.
 - d. He may eat immediately in the morning, if necessary.
 - e. Although he may eat, he should not indulge so he can also participate with the community in mourning.
2. a. A person who is elderly or by nature weak should consult a Rabbi if he is still required to fast.
 - b. An individual who is *very* elderly and weak does not have to fast, even without asking a doctor.
3. If during the course of the fast one becomes ill, or feels weaker than is normal for one who is fasting – he may be considered in the category of a sick person. He should ask a rabbi to determine if he may break his fast.
4. A person who was exempt from fasting does not have to fast another day, when he feels better, in order to make up for the fast that he missed.
5. a. One who is **not** fasting does **not** recite the *Aneinu* prayer during *Shemoneh Esrei*, even at *Shaharit* when he has still not eaten.
 - b. A person who is not fasting may not be called to the Torah, even at *Shaharit*.
 - c. A non-fasting person who is a *Kohen* is not permitted to participate with the other *Kohanim* in *Bircat Kohanim* recited at *Minchah*. He must leave the room before *Re'tzei*.
6. a. A pregnant or nursing woman is obligated to fast on *Tishah B'Av*.
 - b. If she is feeling pain or throwing up, or she feels she cannot handle the fast a Rabbi should be consulted.
 - c. On a postponed fast pregnant and nursing women may be lenient as on the seventeenth of *Tammuz* (refer to page 15). However, if possible she should try to fast until *חצות*, midday.



7. a. A woman who has given birth up till 30 days before *Tishah B'Av* is absolved from fasting whether she is nursing or not.
 - b. A nursing woman who feels she cannot handle the fast or is concerned that she will not have enough milk (the baby cannot have anything other than mother's milk) should consult a Rabbi.
 - c. A woman who has suffered a miscarriage should ask a Rabbi whether or not she is obligated to fast.
 - d. A pregnant or nursing mother who eats on the fast day should not indulge, so she can also participate with the community in mourning.
8. a. A "*Katan*" — a child before *bar* or *bat mitzvah* (9 or 10 years old, depending on his strength) — does not have to fast the entire day. If possible, he should fast 2-3 hours, or as much as he can handle.
 - b. If a child wants to fast the entire day, his parents should prohibit him/her from doing so.
 - c. Children who understand the significance of the fast should **not** indulge so they, too, can participate with the community in mourning.
9. a. When a *Brit Milah* is performed on a fast day which has been **postponed** it is permissible to be lenient with the parents, the *Sandak* and the *mohel* not to complete the fast. That is to say that after praying *Minchah Gedolah* they are permitted to eat. This is *only* the case for a **postponed** fast, but if the fast falls on the appropriate date they are obligated to complete the fast.
 - b. Although they may eat they should **not** have a big meal as would be customary for a *Brit* held on non-fast day.
 - c. This applies only to a *Brit* that is made on the appropriate day (the eighth day). In the case of a postponed *Brit* they *must* complete the fast.
 - d. Regarding a *Pidyon HaBen* on a fast day the same leniency applies – the father and the *Kohen* do **not** have to complete the fast *only* if it is a **postponed** fast.



☞ **Washing and Bathing**

1. Washing or bathing, whether in cold or hot water is prohibited, even washing one's finger is prohibited.
2. One may wash one's hands if they are dirty, even in hot water, if necessary.
3. Rinsing food is permitted, even if one's hands will become wet.
4. Upon awakening in the morning, one may wash one's hands taking care not to pour water above the joints at the end of one's fingers.
5. After using the bathroom one is permitted to wash one's hands (not above the joints at the end of one's fingers).
6. Before praying it is permissible to wash one's hands (until the joints at the end of one's fingers) only after using the bathroom or after touching parts of the body that are usually covered.
7. It is questionable whether or not a *Kohen* should wash his hands completely before *Bircat Hakohanim*, or just until his knuckles.
8. It is permissible to wash for medical reasons.
9. One who must eat on *Tishah B'Av* should wash their hands completely.

☞ **Anointing**

1. It is prohibited to anoint oneself for pleasure. Included is applying lotions, creams, perfume, ointment etc.
2. Unscented deodorant is permitted.
3. Anointing for medical reasons is permitted.

☞ **Wearing Shoes**

1. Leather shoes are prohibited to wear the entire day. Cloth, plastic, rubber or wood shoes are permitted. Even if the shoes are **partially** leather they are prohibited.
2. Leather shoes are permitted for medical reasons. A Rabbi should be consulted when there is doubt.



☞ Learning Torah

1. Learning Torah on *Tishah B'Av* is prohibited because it causes the heart to rejoice as it states **פְּקוּדֵי ה' ... מִשְׂמַחֵי לֵב**.
2. Laws related to general mourning and *Tishah B'Av* are permitted to be learned. Texts related to tragedy such as *Eichah*, *Iyob*, Gemara discussing the *Hurban*, i.e. *Gittin* 56a-58, *Sanhedrin* 104, *Yirmiyahu* 32-40 (*pesukim* that talk about **נְחֻמָּה**, consolation should be skipped), Josephus.
3. Even thinking in learning is prohibited.
4. Children may only be taught material pertaining to the *Hurban*.
5. Even what one is permitted to learn cannot be learned in great depth, because it will bring *simha*.
6. Portions of the Torah recited in the prayers is permitted, however *Tehillim* and *Hok L'Yisrael* is prohibited.

☞ Cohabitation

Cohabitation is prohibited, therefore a man should conduct himself as he does when his wife is a *niddah* and not even touch her.

☞ Greeting Others

1. a. It is prohibited to greet someone on *Tishah B'Av* (i.e. even saying “good morning” is not allowed).
b. If one is greeted one should indicate that greeting is prohibited by answering softly.
c. Someone who is unaware of this *halachah* should be informed, if possible.

☞ Work or Business

1. It is customary not to do **מְלָאכָה**, work or business on *Tishah B'Av*, so as not to be diverted from mourning. This prohibition is in force from the evening of *Tishah B'Av* and the entire day of *Tishah B'Av*.
2. If a financial loss will be suffered it is permissible to work.
3. Work can be done by a non-Jew, however not in public.



4. Even one who is permitted to work has to be careful not to divert his mind from mourning. One who totally engages oneself in work will not see a blessing from such work or business.
5. Similarly, it is customary that preparations for the meal following the fast should **not** be done until after **חצות**.

☞ **Sitting on a Chair**

1. a. On *Tishah B'Av* evening and in the morning until *Minhah* time one should sit on the ground or a low stool or cushion as a sign of mourning.
 - b. The stool may not be higher than one **טפח** (approximately four inches).
 - c. An elderly or weak person may be lenient to sit on a stool up to three **טפחים** (12 inches).

☞ **Pleasurable Activities**

On *Tishah B'Av* a person should only concentrate on mourning and the *Hurban* for that is the essence of the day.

1. Any activity that brings enjoyment is prohibited.
2. A pleasure walk or trip is not permitted.
3. a. One should be strict and not smoke on *Tishah B'Av* especially in synagogue during *Eichah* and *Kinot*.
 - b. If one is used to smoking and it is very difficult for him to refrain one should smoke in private.

☞ **Tishah B'Av Evening**

1. a. We go to synagogue on *Tishah B'Av* evening (not wearing leather shoes) to pray the *Arbit* service, read *Eichah* and say *Kinot*.
 - b. One should not speak or leave the synagogue (unnecessarily) during *Eichah* or *Kinot* so as not to interrupt his concentration on mourning.
2. **ענינו** is recited (refer to **ענינו** page 15), but it is not our custom to recite **נחם**.



3. a. One should try not to be too comfortable when going to sleep on the night of *Tishah B'Av*. Some people sleep on the floor and place a stone under their head — these things are **not** mandatory. However, everyone should demonstrate some measure of discomfort, for example, if one usually sleeps with two pillows only one should be used.
- b. Those who are weak are not required to do this.

☞ *Tishah B'Av Morning*

1. a. Upon awakening one washes one's hands until the joints at the end of one's fingers (three times each hand). One's damp fingers may also be passed over their eyes. The *berachah* על נטילת ידים is then recited, as usual.
- b. We omit שעשה לי כל צרכי because it also refers to wearing shoes, which is prohibited on *Tishah B'Av*.
2. a. *Tallit* and *Tefillin* are **not** worn at *Shaharit*.
- b. Some people have the custom to put on *Tallit* and *Tefillin* at home and say קדש לי and פרשת שמע and then go to synagogue. Others have the custom to put on *Tallit* and *Tefillin* at home and pray everything (through *Shemoneh Esrei*) and then go to synagogue for קריאת התורה and *Kinot*.
- c. One who wears Rabbeinu Tam *Tefillin* puts them on in the morning at home.
3. עננו is recited but not נחם.
4. After the *Amidah*, *Kinot* are said. The *Kinot* express our mourning over the destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash* and Jerusalem. One should try to keep in mind that not only are we mourning, but even Hashem and the angels cry over the *Hurban* as well as the *Avot*. One should remember that all the major tragedies that have occurred to *Klal Yisrael* are because we no longer have the *Bet HaMikdash*. *Hazal* tell us that one who properly mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem will merit to see Jerusalem in its rejoicing.



☞ **Halachot of קריאת התורה** (refer to page 17)

☞ **Tishah B'Av Afternoon**

1. At *Minhah*, *Tallit* and *Tefillin* are put on with a *berachah*.
2. In *Shemoneh Esrei* עֲנֵנו and נחם are added. נחם is inserted in the *berachah* of תשכון. If one forgot נחם, it may be said *before* ברחמיך ואתה, and if not then, then נחם may be inserted at the end of נצור אלקי ציון בבנין ירושלים. The concluding *berachah* of מנחם is not said in the event that נחם is forgotten to be recited in its proper place. If one totally forgot to say נחם, *Shemoneh Esrei* is **not** repeated.

☞ **The Night After the Fast**

1. Haircutting and doing laundry are permitted.
2. Eating meat and drinking wine are **not** permitted.



❧ CHAPTER VII ❧
The Tenth of Av



✿ The Tenth of Av

The *Bet HaMikdash* was set on fire on the ninth of Av and continued burning until sunset on the tenth. Therefore, there are certain restrictions on the tenth of Av as well.

1. We do not eat meat or drink wine on the tenth of Av, except those who were permitted to do so during the Nine Days. Listening to music is also prohibited.
2. Haircutting is permitted.
3. Laundry is permitted to be done.
4. If *Tishah B'Av* was a postponed fast then eating meat and drinking wine are permitted.
5. When *Tishah B'Av* falls on Thursday, and Friday is the tenth of Av, one may taste the meat foods prepared in honor of Shabbat on Friday.
6. שהיינו is **not** said on this day.



❧ CHAPTER VIII ❧

*When Tishah B'Av
Falls on Sunday*





✿ When Tishah B'Av Falls on Sunday

1. When *Tishah B'Av* occurs on Sunday and *erev Tishah B'Av* is on Shabbat, or if *Tishah B'Av* occurs on *Shabbat* and is postponed to Sunday there is no mourning on *Shabbat*.
2. a. Eating meat and drinking wine are permitted even for *Seudat Shelishit*, but eating must end before sunset.
b. One may be lenient on *Shabbat* regarding Torah learning that he does not have to restrict himself to only those portions permitted on *Tishah B'Av*.
c. We do not engage in pleasurable activities on *Shabbat* when *Tishah B'Av* has been pushed off until Sunday.
d. When *Tishah B'Av* occurs on Sunday it is permitted to engage in pleasurable activities on *Shabbat* until *hatzot*, just like any other year.
3. On *Motzaei Shabbat*, *Havdalah* is **not** recited, *only* the *berachah* of בּוֹרָא מֵאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ. After the fast *Havdalah* is recited over the cup of wine but the *berachah* for בְּשִׁמִּים is not said over the spices. Before doing work men or women must say בְּרוּךְ הַמְּבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לַחֹל.
4. Shoes are not removed until after *Tzeit Ha'Kochavim*, when the stars appear. We say בְּרוּךְ הַמְּבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לַחֹל and change into weekday clothing.
5. a. A person who is ill must make *Havdalah* **before** eating.
b. *Havdalah* should be recited over beer. If beer is not available, it can be recited over wine. When using wine, it is preferable that a child, who does not yet understand the significance of mourning, (however, he should be over the age of six) drink the wine. (He may drink it himself if there is no small child available.)
c. A person who is making *Havdalah* on *Motzaei Shabbat* could be *motzee* his family members who are fasting.
6. Sunday night before eating, one must recite *Havdalah* beforehand.
 - a. *Havdalah* is recited over wine.
 - b. בּוֹרָא מֵאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ and the *berachah* for בְּשִׁמִּים is not said.



SECTION II

The Destruction of the
First Temple



CHAPTER I

The Beginning of the Exile



The first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonian king Nevuchadnessar in the year 3338, the eleventh and final year of the reign of the Jewish king Ssidkiyahu. The story of this national calamity is recorded in *Sefer Melachim II*, Chapter 25.

Importantly, however, the history of *Benei Yisrael's* exile from their land begins well before the year 3338; this process had gotten underway, tragically, one hundred and thirty years earlier. Slowly but surely, the gentiles took our ancestors out of *Eretz Yisrael*, a grueling process that began when the people started worshipping idols. *Hashem* loves us as His own children but just as a parent must occasionally punish his children for their misbehavior to steer them in the proper direction, so does the Almighty at times discipline His nation in order that we improve our conduct. Ultimately, these punishments work for our benefit, as they help guide us towards the fulfillment of *Hashem's* will. Furthermore, the beautiful gift of *Eretz Yisrael* was given to us on the condition that the Jewish people observe the Torah. Once the nation strays and turns towards idolatry and ignores the service of *Hashem*, they have rendered themselves unworthy of *Hashem's* blessings, especially this remarkable blessing of *Eretz Yisrael*.

This condition of our worthiness to occupy the land appears several times throughout the Torah. The first is when Yitshak blesses his son, Yaakov. When Esav learns that Yaakov seized his blessing, he demands from Yitshak a blessing of his own. Yitshak offers him a blessing, in which he includes the prophecy, "... and it will be when you are down, you shall break his yoke from upon your shoulders" (*Bereishit* 27:40). As Rashi explains, when *Benei Yisrael* violate the Torah, Esav has the



opportunity to express grief over his having been denied Yisshak's blessings. At that point, Esav will successfully release the yoke of Yaakov from upon him, and he will achieve supremacy over his brother.

Another warning regarding the dependency of our occupation of the land on Torah observance appears in the *Shema* prayer. Twice each day we recite Moshe's exhortation in *Sefer Devarim* (11:16-17), "Guard yourselves, lest your heart will be led astray and you will turn away and worship other gods ... Then *Hashem's* wrath will be kindled against you... and you will quickly be destroyed from the land..." Likewise, we are warned in *Sefer Vayikra* (20:22), "You shall observe all My statutes and perform them, so that the land to which I bring you to reside therein shall not expel you..." Later in *Sefer Vayikra*, the Torah presents the frightening "*tochehah*," the list of unspeakable tragedies that *Benei Yisrael* will suffer should they neglect *Hashem's* commandments. Here, too, the destruction of *Eretz Yisrael* and the people's exile therefrom emerges as a dominant theme: "But if, despite this, you disobey Me ... I will lay your cities in ruin and make your sanctuaries desolate" (26:27, 31).

Another warning of exile is found in *Parashat Va'ethanan*, in the section chosen as the Torah reading for the morning of *Tishah B'Av*: "... should you become corrupt and make for yourselves sculptured images of any likeness ... I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess" (*Devarim* 4:25-26).

Throughout the First Commonwealth, so long as *Benei Yisrael* served *Hashem* properly, peace and blessing abounded. The people enjoyed security and prosperity as long as they followed the teachings of the Torah. However, as they began abandoning their ancestral heritage in favor of new, idolatrous modes of worship, the exile gradually unfolded. We present here a brief historical review of the long, calamitous process of *Benei Yisrael's* exile from their land.

During the reign of King Shlomo, which began around the year 2924, *Benei Yisrael* loyally followed the Torah and observed the *mitsvot*. Consequently, the kingdom flourished and grew into a regional power. So powerful was the Kingdom of Israel in Shlomo's time that all the



surrounding nations would bring regular gifts to the king, and the royal treasury grew larger and larger. After the death of King Shlomo, however, the situation began deteriorating as the nation turned to idolatry. How did this happen? What was behind this devastating trend of idol worship among *Benei Yisrael*?

Shlomo's son and heir to the throne, Rehavam, was going to be crowned as king upon his father's death. During his coronation ceremony in *Shechem*, representatives from the people came to the king demanding that he lower the taxes levied by his father. Rather than acquiesce to their demands, the king announced that he would now collect even more taxes, a decision that proved disastrous to this reign. The people promptly declared, "What portion do we have with David [referring to the Davidic line of royalty]," and reneged on their crowning of the new king (see *Melachim* I, 12). Only the tribe of Yehudah, from which the royal family of David and Shlomo descended, supported Rehavam's reign.

And so began the long, sorrowful story of the split kingdom of *Benei Yisrael*. The kingdom of Yehudah in the South remained under the leadership of Rehavam, while the Northern tribes anointed Yeravam ben Nevat as king. The Northern tribes' secession occurred in the year 2964, three hundred and seventy-four years prior to the destruction of the First Temple. Throughout this period, the nation remained divided, and the two kingdoms generally quarreled with one another.

Upon his ascent to the newly established throne, Yeravam turned his attention to solidifying his rule. His immediate concern involved the *Bet HaMikdash*. Whereas the Temple served as the single, central location of ritual worship in both kingdoms, his own constituents would continue making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern kingdom, in order to bring sacrifices. The king felt that regular pilgrimages to the enemy capital might lead the people's hearts back to their former leadership, the dynasty of King David, and caused them to rebel against him. Yeravam promptly consulted with his advisors, and it was decided that he would fashion two golden calves and erect them in *Dan* and *Bet-El*. These two sites would then become the new "temples" of the



Northern kingdom. (See *Melachim I*, 12.) Yeravam issued an edict forbidding the population under his rule to make pilgrimages to *Yerushalayim*, effectively leading the nation to idol worship. This marked the beginning of the idolatrous trend among *Benei Yisrael*, a drastic change from the loyal adherence to the *mitsvot* that characterized Shlomo's reign. This trend did not, however, stop at the borders of the Northern kingdom. The kingdom of Yehudah, subjected to the sinful influences of the North, also moved towards the worship of idols.

At this point, the gentile nations in the region no longer feared *Benei Yisrael* as they had during the time of Shlomo. The enemy nations began invading *Eretz Yisrael*, causing trouble to the entire nation.

This process of religious decline continued after Rehavam and Yeravam. Although there were several notable exceptions, the majority of their successors adopted their sinful policies. In spite of the rampant idolatry, the Almighty withheld His anger, patiently awaiting *Benei Yisrael's* repentance. This period of waiting continued for two hundred and forty-one years, until the year 3205. It was then that the Assyrian king Sanheriv besieged the city of *Shomron*, the capital city of the Northern kingdom that was then ruled by Hoshea ben Elah. After three years of siege, Sanheriv's army conquered the city and took control of the Northern kingdom, exiling the ten tribes to Assyria. Only the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin remained in *Eretz Yisrael*. (See *Melachim II* 17.) Since the Northern kingdom turned to idol worship before the kingdom of Yehudah, *Hashem* exiled them first, withholding His wrath from Yehudah a bit longer.



CHAPTER II

The Temple is Destroyed



he king of *Yehudah* at the time was Hizkiyahu ben Ahaz, known as among the most righteous kings that ever ruled in *Yerushalayim*. He devoutly observed the *mitsvot* and encouraged his constituents to do the same. Additionally, he once and for all eliminated the “*bamot*,” the small sanctuaries where sacrifices were offered, which were forbidden once the *Bet HaMikdash* was erected. (See *Melachim* II, 18.) *Hashem’s Presence* accompanied Hizkiyahu and granted him success throughout his reign. When Sanheriv, the king of *Ashur*, plundered *Eretz Yisrael* with his formidable army, the prophet Yeshayahu assured Hizkiyahu that Sanheriv will not capture *Yerushalayim* or even shoot a single arrow at the city. Indeed, as the Assyrian army besieged *Yerushalayim*, an angel came down at midnight and killed the entire army — all 185,000 of them!

Unfortunately, however, Hizkiyahu’s legacy did not continue after his death. His son, Menasheh, essentially reversed the righteous trend initiated by his father. He was an outright sinner, who built “*bamot*” (after his father had eliminated them), worshipped idols, and even placed an idolatrous image in the *Bet HaMikdash*. He constructed altars to all types of pagan gods, even in the Sanctuary of the *Mikdash*. His intent was clear and simple: to anger the Almighty. He went so far as to sleep with his own sister. She asked him, “Are there not enough beautiful women that are permitted for you?” to which he replied, “I do this specifically to arouse anger.” Out of the same malicious contempt for *Hashem*, he killed the prophet Yeshayahu.

On Menasheh’s account, *Hashem’s* decree of the destruction was finalized. The prophets reported the news of the Divine decree to the people: “Thus said *Hashem*, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such



a disaster on *Yerushalayim* and Yehudah that both ears of everyone who hears about it will tingle... I will wipe *Yerushalayim* clean as one wipes a dish and turns it upside down. And I will cast off the remnant of My own people and deliver them into the hands of their enemies” (*Melachim* II 21). The situation deteriorated even further upon Menasheh’s death, as his wicked son, Amon, surpassed his father’s iniquity. He slept with his mother so as to deliberately anger *Hashem*.

After Amon, however, the spiritual tides among the people took a turn for the better. Amon’s son and heir to the throne, Yoshiyahu, was a devout, righteous man, who committed himself to reversing the pattern established by his father and grandfather. He ordered all the idolatrous altars removed and exerted whatever efforts he could into bringing the hearts of *Benei Yisrael* closer to their Father in heaven. Despite Yoshiyahu’s sincere efforts and noteworthy accomplishments as spiritual leader, *Hashem* did not revoke His decree of destruction. Sadly, although the public image of the people had improved, *Benei Yisrael* still worshipped idols in private; the repentance process was incomplete. In the thirteenth year of Yoshiyahu’s reign, the prophet Yirmiyahu began prophesying about the imminent destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash* and downfall of *Malchut Yehudah*.

Upon learning of the Temple’s ultimate destruction, Yoshiyahu quickly took action. He hid several precious and sacred articles, including the *aron* (ark), the container of “*mann*” that was prepared when *Benei Yisrael* were in the desert, the dish containing the special anointing oil, and Aharon’s staff that had blossomed in the wilderness as confirmation to his having been chosen as *kohen gadol*.

Yoshiyahu was tragically killed by the Egyptian army in the year 3316. Yirmiyahu composed a lamentation over the king’s death, in which he expressed his grief and anguish over the loss of a man to whom he referred as, “the breath of our nostrils, the savior of *Hashem*.”

Yoshiyahu’s son Yeho’achaz succeeded him. Unlike his righteous father, he betrayed *Hashem* and was consequently exiled three months later by Pharaoh to Egypt, where he remained until his death. The Egyptian king crowned Yeho’achaz’s brother, Yehoyakim, as succes-



sor. Already in his fourth year of rule, the political map of the region underwent a drastic change. A new king (Nevuchadnessar) ascended to the throne in Babylonia, and the Almighty granted him control and dominion over many nations throughout the area. Babylonia succeeded in overpowering the previous regional power, Egypt, and *Eretz Yisrael* thus came under Babylonian rule.

Hashem then ordered Yirmiyahu to record all the prophecies regarding *Benei Yisrael* and *Yerushalayim* that he had received since the time of Yoshiyahu. *Hashem* hoped that Yirmiyahu's reading of the prophecies to the people would arouse them to perform *teshuvah* and prevent the destruction. Tragically, however, this was not the case. Upon hearing of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of calamity, King Yehoyakim ordered his immediate imprisonment.

Yirmiyahu asked his close student, Baruch Ben Neriya, to announce his prophecies in the *Bet HaMikdash*. In the fifth year of Yehoyakim's reign, Baruch read from a scroll containing his mentor's prophecies before a public gathering. The king sent an officer named Yehudi, to seize the scroll from Baruch. Yehudi brought the scroll back to the royal chamber and read the prophecies of destruction in the presence of the king. Upon hearing Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the success of the enemy against *Benei Yisrael*, Yehoyakim became enraged. He grabbed the scroll and cast it into the fire. The prophet's warning had no impact upon him whatsoever.

Hashem warned the king through the prophet that because he burned the scroll rather than humbly accepting *Hashem's* Word, his kingship over Yehudah will never be established. Additionally, he will be killed by the enemy sword and not even merit a proper burial, and all the destruction of which *Hashem* had spoken through the prophets will befall the people of *Yerushalayim*.

Sure enough, several years later catastrophe began to unfold. Yehoyakim revolted against Nevuchadnessar, the powerful king of Babylonia, who then came to *Eretz Yisrael* and captured *Yerushalayim*. The Babylonians tied Yehoyakim in ropes to bring him to Babylonia. They dragged him by the ropes and he died a gruesome death, just as the prophet had warned.



But the tragedies were still not over. Yehoyakim's son and successor, Yehoyachin, ruled in *Yerushalayim* for only three months. He, too, revolted against the Babylonian monarch, who promptly came and besieged the city in the year 3327. Yehoyachin left the city to surrender in peace, but Nevudnessar refused. He exiled the Judean king to Babylonia and imprisoned him. Besides King Yehoyachin, Nevuchadnessar also took with him the treasures of the *Bet HaMikdash* and royal palace, as well as the government officials, ten thousand nobleman, and all the Torah scholars. Among those exiled were Mordechai, Daniel, and Yehezkel. Only the lower class remained in *Yerushalayim*.

Sympathetic towards the underprivileged citizens remaining in the decimated city of *Yerushalayim*, Nevuchadnessar decided to crown a descendant of Yoshiyahu as king. Indeed, Yehoyachin's uncle, Ssidkiyahu, a son of Yoshiyahu, had remained in *Yerushalayim*. Nevuchadnessar named him king, but first had him swear upon a *Sefer Torah* that he would remain loyal to the Babylonian Empire, unlike his father and nephew. Ssidkiyahu swore and pledged his fidelity to Nevuchadnessar. He was a righteous king, and took several measures to lead *Benei Yisrael* towards *teshuvah*. He freed Yirmiyahu from prison and sought to correct the mistakes of his predecessors. Unfortunately, however, the people quickly returned to their sinful past. Ssidkiyahu himself turned away from the Almighty and rebelled. Upon seeing the people's iniquity, *Hashem* finalized His decree to destroy the *Bet HaMikdash*. It was because of *Hashem*'s final decree to destroy the *Bet HaMikdash*, which occurred during Ssidkiyahu's reign, that he was named "*Ssidkiyahu*." This word evolves from the Hebrew word for justice ("*ssedek*"), thus alluding to the fact that during his reign *Hashem* justified the destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash*.

In Ssidkiyahu's ninth year in power (3336), *Hashem* put the idea into his head to revolt against the Babylonians. Nevuchadnessar responded by drafting his army and besieging the defiant city. Ssidkiyahu summoned aid and support from Egypt, and when Nevuchadnessar learned that Egypt had come to assist *Benei Yisrael* he headed back. Yirmiyahu, however, prophesied, "Behold, the Egyptian army that has come to assist you has returned to Egypt; the *Kasdim* [as the Babylo-



nians were called] will come back, wage war against this city, and burn it down with fire.”

Sure enough, just as the Egyptians left to assist *Benei Yisrael* in their campaign against Babylonia, *Hashem* cast upon the sea thousands of empty containers. The Egyptians saw the sea from afar and wondered why the surface of the water had become discolored. They concluded that what they saw were the bodies of their ancestors who were drowned by the ancestors of *Benei Yisrael*. They asked one another, “Their forefathers drowned our forefathers — and we are going to offer them assistance!?” They immediately retreated and headed back towards Egypt, at which point the *Kasdim* returned and besieged the beleaguered city of *Yerushalayim*. The siege continued until the eleventh year of *Ssidkiyahu*’s reign (3338).

Throughout this period, the people ignored *Yirmiyahu*’s prophecies and call for repentance. He warned, “So says *Hashem*: Whoever dwells in this city will die by the sword, famine, and plague, while whoever surrenders to the *Kasdim* will live.” The corrupt royal officials called for *Yirmiyahu*’s execution, charging him with discouraging the people, particularly the armed forces. They cast *Yirmiyahu* into a well, but he was saved by a miracle: *Hashem* made the mud rise and the water sink beneath the muddy surface.

Baruch heard what had happened to the prophet and immediately reported the news to the king. *Ssidkiyahu* ordered *Yirmiyahu*’s release from the pit and detention in prison. *Yirmiyahu* remained a prisoner until the Babylonians breached the city, at which point *Nevuzaradan*, the commander-in-chief of *Nevuchadnessar*’s army, released the prophet from prison at the command of *Nevuchadnessar*, who ordered *Nevuzaradan* to ensure *Yirmiyahu*’s safety.

At one point during *Yirmiyahu*’s stay in prison, *Ssidkiyahu* sent him a message asking for *Hashem*’s word. *Yirmiyahu* replied that if the king surrenders to Babylonia, his life and that of his family will be spared and the city will not be destroyed. If, however, he resists Babylonian rule, then *Hashem* will hand the city over to the *Kasdim* and they will burn it to the ground. *Ssidkiyahu* stubbornly refused to heed the prophet’s warning.



The *Kasdim* besieged the city for three years but could not break through, since the divinely ordained time for the destruction had not yet arrived. Afraid of suffering the same devastation wrought upon the Assyrian king, Sanheriv, during his siege of Jerusalem, Nevuchadnessar ordered Nevuzaradan to lead the battle against the Jewish capital in his stead. Nevuchadnessar sent his commander-in-chief three hundred donkeys loaded with iron axes to help break through the city wall. Much to the general's astonishment, however, almost all of them broke as he tried to batter the very first gate! Frustrated and distraught, Nevuzaradan decided to give up and turn back. But a heavenly voice urged him on, informing him that the time has come for the Temple to be destroyed. On the ninth of *Tammuz*, Nevuzaradan took the last remaining ax and broke through the city wall. Ten days later, on the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, the Jews inside the city had no more animals to bring for the daily "*tamid*" offering in the *Mikdash*. (This is one of the reasons why we observe the seventeenth of *Tammuz* as a fast day.) Without *korbanot*, they had no means by which to achieve atonement for their sins. On this same day, Nevuzaradan breached the inner wall of the city, and from that day on the enemies stormed the city and killed scores of Jews. The Jews had been starved as a result of the siege and had no strength to defend themselves. It was at this point that all of Yirmiyahu's prophecies, which *Benei Yisrael* continually ignored, saw fulfillment. Those who were not murdered were exiled to Babylonia in chains, amidst utter shame and humiliation.

When Ssidkiyahu saw that the city fell into enemy hands, he fled with his ten sons through a special underground tunnel that led from his palace to *Yericho*. But the Almighty ordered a deer to walk with them on the outside of the tunnel. The *Kasdim* followed the deer until the tunnel's end, at which point Ssidkiyahu came above ground right into enemy hands. The *Kasdim* brought Ssidkiyahu to Nevuchadnessar, who sharply scolded the Jewish king for rebelling against his authority in violation of his oath. Nevuchadnessar sentenced Ssidkiyahu and his sons to death.

"Kill me first," pleaded Ssidkiyahu, "so that I may not see the death of my children!"



His sons, however, turned to the Babylonian king and begged, “Please, kill us first so that we do not witness the death of our father!” Nevuchadnessar heeded their plea and killed them before their father’s eyes. As if this wasn’t enough, he proceeded to blind Ssidkiyahu. Ssidkiyahu was then sent to Babylonia and imprisoned, remaining in jail the rest of his life. “Let all people come and see,” he would cry, “that Yirmiyahu the prophet prophesied that I will go to Babylonia and die there, yet I will never see it with eyes; alas, it has come true!”

Hashem then ordered Yirmiyahu to purchase a field from his Uncle Hanamel, symbolizing *Benei Yisrael*’s eventual return to their land. Yirmiyahu thought that perhaps this signified the cancellation of *Hashem*’s decree against *Yerushalayim*. However, just as he left the city, an angel descended from the heavens and placed his feet on the city walls, breaking them. He called out and declared, “May the enemies come and enter the home, for its owner is not here. Come, loot the city and destroy it! Enter the vineyard whose watchman has deserted it, come, cut down its branches! However, in case you would pride yourselves with the credit for the destruction, you should know that you capture a captured city, you kill a dead population, and you burn a burnt Sanctuary!”

On the seventh of *Av*, the enemies stormed the Sanctuary of the *Bet HaMikdash*. They ate and reveled with the utmost irreverence in the sacred site. They continued doing so for the next two days. On the ninth of *Av*, the Almighty thought to Himself, as it were, “So long as I remain in the *Bet HaMikdash* the enemies have no power to destroy it. I will therefore turn away from the *Mikdash* and vow not to concern Myself therewith until the time for the final redemption has arrived.” At that moment, the Almighty pulled back His “right hand” that protected the *Mikdash*, as the *pasuk* states, “He pulled back His right hand from the enemy.” Sure enough, towards sundown on the ninth of *Av* the enemies set fire to the *Mikdash*. It burned throughout the night and the following day. As it started burning, the *Bet HaMikdash* began rising up and away from the fire towards the sky. However, as the *pasuk* states, “As in a press *Hashem* has trodden the maiden, Yehuda” (*Eichah* 1:15) — *Hashem* trampled the *Mikdash*, as it were, sending it back down into the fire.



The angels in the heavens observed the destruction and cried, “Look at the wicked, arrogant man who prides himself over having burned the Almighty’s Sanctuary!” *Hashem* immediately ordered four angels carrying torches to go to the four corners of the *Mikdash* and set it ablaze, thus precluding the possibility of *Nevuzaradan*’s crediting himself with the destruction.

The *kohen gadol* watched as the *Mikdash* went up in flames. He took the keys to the *Mikdash* gates and cast them up to the heavens. The enemies then captured him and slaughtered him right near the altar, where the *kohanim* would offer the *korbanot*. The young *kohanim*, too, threw the keys to the gates up to the sky. “We did not earn the merit of serving as loyal, trustworthy keepers of the *Mikdash*,” they confessed. “We must therefore surrender the keys placed under our charge.” The image of a hand thrust forth from the heavens and took hold of the keys, as the young *kohanim* cast themselves into the flames. The other *kohanim* and *Levi'im* took the trumpets and musical instruments from the *Mikdash* and likewise jumped into the raging fire.

The *Kasdim* burned down not only the *Mikdash* itself, but also the royal palace and all the *Batei Keneset*. They looted the *Mikdash* and took the accessories of the *Bet HaMikdash* back with them to *Babylonia*. After the prisoners were taken into exile, the only ones left in *Yerushalayim* were the poorest, lower-class citizens who stayed behind to till the land.

As *Nevuzaradan* watched the *Mikdash* burn, he felt a strong sense of pride over his most recent military feat. But yet another heavenly voice descended and dismissed any notion of attributing the city’s fall to *Nevuzaradan*’s prowess: “You killed a dead population, you burned a burnt Sanctuary, and you ground already-ground, fine flour!”

Upon his return to *Yerushalayim*, *Yirmiyahu* looked up and saw the smoke rising from the *Bet HaMikdash*. He optimistically thought to himself, perhaps *Benei Yisrael* have repented and they now offer incense, which has produced this thick cloud of smoke... He stood on top of the city wall and saw that the *Mikdash* had turned to rubble. He began crying and shouting, “In which direction have the sinners gone?”



In which direction have gone those who have been lost?” He searched the roads and found one path drenched with blood. He looked down at the ground and saw the footprints of the small children that had gone into exile; he leaned down to the ground and kissed them. When he caught up to the captives he embraced and kissed them, and joined them in weeping. He said, “My brothers, all this happened to you because you did not heed my prophecies...” He then saw a group of young men bound in chains, making their way to exile. Yirmiyahu went and joined them, only to be removed from them by Nevuzaradan. A little further, he saw a group of the elderly tied in chains. Once again, he approached them until the Babylonian general forcefully pulled him away.

“You are a murderer,” said Nevuzaradan to Yirmiyahu. “I have been ordered by the Babylonian king to watch over you. If you do not let me obey my orders, he will have me killed!”

Yirmiyahu accompanied the exiles until they were near Babylonia. Nevuzaradan then gave the prophet the option of continuing along to Babylonia under guaranteed protection or turning back to *Eretz Yisrael*. The Almighty told Yirmiyahu that if he joins the exiles then *Hashem* will remain in *Eretz Yisrael* with the remaining Jews; if Yirmiyahu opts to stay, then *Hashem* will join the exiles in Babylonia. Yirmiyahu decided that since he can not do much for the exiles in Babylonia, he should return to *Yerushalayim* while the Almighty accompanies them to the foreign land.

When the exiles saw Yirmiyahu departing they broke out in bitter and frantic crying. They shouted, “Our father, Yirmiyahu! This is it — you are leaving us?!” This is to what the *pasuk* refers when it says, “On the rivers of Babylonia, there we sat and cried...”

The prophet replied, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses to the fact that were you to have cried even once while you were still in *Ssiyon*, you would not have gone into exile.” Yirmiyahu departed, and as he walked he cried bitterly, “Woe unto you, the precious nation!”



CHAPTER III

Hashem and the Avot Weep



After the Temple was destroyed, the Almighty said, “I no longer have a place of residence on earth. I will therefore remove My *Shechinah* from the Mikdash and return to My original abode.” Hashem then began crying, as it were, lamenting, “Woe unto Me! What have I done? I bestowed My *Shechinah* upon earth for Yisrael’s sake, and now that they sinned I have returned to My primordial location. Alas, I have become the laughingstock of the nations, the scorn of people!”

The archangel Metatron came before the Almighty and fell to the ground. He pleaded, “Master of the World! Allow me to cry in Your stead!”

Hashem replied, “If you do not allow Me to cry, I will have to go into an area to where you are barred entry, in order that I can cry!”

Hashem turned to the angels and said, “Come, let us go together to My home to see what the enemies did there.” Hashem went with the angels, and the prophet Yirmiyahu walked ahead of them. Upon seeing the ruins of the Mikdash, the Almighty cried, “Unquestionably, this is My house, this is My resting place, the site where the enemies came and did as they wish!” At that moment the Almighty wept and exclaimed, “Alas, My home! My children — where are you? My kohanim and levi’im — where are you? But what else can I do — I warned you many times, but you failed to repent.”

Hashem turned to Yirmiyahu and said, “Today I am like the father who died under the canopy of his only son. Are you not pained for Me and My children?! Go, summon Abraham, Yitshak, Yaakov and Moshe from their graves, for they know how to cry.”



Yirmiyahu answered, “Master of the World, I do not know where Moshe is buried.” The Almighty replied, “Go stand on the banks of the Jordan River. Raise your voice and shout, ‘Son of Amram! Son of Amram! Arise, and look upon your sheep, see how they have been devoured by their enemies!’”

Yirmiyahu then immediately proceeded to the Me’arat Hamachpelah burial site in Hevron, where the *Patriarchs* are buried. He said to them, “Arise, for you are summoned by the Almighty.”

“What is special about this day,” they inquired, “that we have been summoned by the Master of the World?”

“I do not know,” the prophet answered.

Moshe left Yirmiyahu and went to the heavenly angels, whom he recognized from the time he spent in the heavens when receiving the Torah. He turned to them and asked, “Tell me, perhaps you know why I have been summoned to appear before the Almighty?”

“Son of Amram,” they responded, “are you not aware of what has happened? Did you not hear that the Temple has been destroyed and *Benei Yisrael* have been exiled?”

Immediately upon hearing the tragic news, Moshe rent the special garments of splendor with which the Almighty Himself had dressed him. He placed his hands on his head in disbelief, and proceeded to the *Patriarchs*, weeping and shouting the entire way.

When he came before the *Patriarchs*, they asked him, “Moshe, the great shepherd of Israel, why today are we suddenly summoned to come before the Master of the World?”

“The fathers of my fathers,” exclaimed Moshe, “have you not heard that the *Bet HaMikdash* has been destroyed and *Benei Yisrael* have been driven into exile?” They, too, immediately tore their garments and cried and wept, until they reached the gates of the *Bet HaMikdash*. When the Almighty saw, He, too, wept, as it were. They cried and walked from one gate to the next, as was the custom of one who had lost a family member. Hashem lamented, “Woe unto the king who succeeded in His youth, but did not succeed in His old age!”



When the *Bet HaMikdash* was destroyed, Abraham *Avinu* came before the Almighty, tearing the hairs from his head and beard, beating himself on the face, tearing his clothing, and placing ashes on his head. He walked through the Temple ruins, lamenting and weeping. He turned to the Almighty and asked, “Why am I different from all other nations, that I must suffer such humiliation and shame?”

The angels saw Abraham’s weeping and joined in his lamentation. They formed rows, as if for mourners, and cried, “The roads that You paved for Jerusalem, which were always full of pilgrims and travelers — how are they now desolate?!”

Hashem turned to the angels and asked, “Why are you forming rows as people generally do for mourners?”

They replied, “Master of the World! We do this to console Abraham, your beloved, who has come here to the Temple and weeps and cries. Why do You not look after him?”

God answered, “Since the day My beloved has passed from this world, he never came to My home. Why does he suddenly come now?”

Abraham said before the Almighty, “Master of the World, why have You driven my children into exile, handed them over to their enemies, killed them in all types of gruesome deaths, and destroyed the *Bet HaMikdash*, the site upon which I brought my own son as an offering before You?”

The Almighty answered Abraham, “Your children have sinned. They violated the Torah, including all twenty-two letters therein!”

Abraham then responded, “Master of the World, who testifies to the fact that *Benei Yisrael* transgressed Your Torah?”

“May the Torah itself come and testify against *Benei Yisrael!*” the Almighty declared.

The Torah immediately accepted the summons and sat upon the Almighty’s witness stand, as it were. Abraham came before the Torah and asked, “My dear Torah, you have come to testify that *Benei Yisrael* transgressed your mitsvot. Do you have no shame in my presence? Do you not remember the day on which the Almighty took you around to



every nation on earth, and not a single people was interested in you until you reached Mount Sinai, when *Benei Yisrael* accepted and honored you lovingly? You now come to testify against them during their time of crisis and calamity?!” As soon as the Torah heard Abraham’s censure, it moved to the side and refused to testify.

Having lost one witness, the Almighty again turned to Abraham *Avinu* and said, “Let the twenty-two letters of the Torah come and testify against *Benei Yisrael*!”

The letters came before the tribunal, and “alef,” the first letter, stood to testify. Abraham questioned the letter, “Alef, you are the first of all the letters. You have come to prosecute *Benei Yisrael* during their time of distress? Have you forgotten the day on which the Almighty revealed Himself at Mount Sinai and opened His remarks with you — ‘Anochi Hashem Elokecha’? No nation or tongue accepted you until you came before my children. You now come to testify against them?!” At once, the “alef” stepped aside and refused to prosecute.

After he sat down, the next letter, “bet,” came to offer testimony. Abraham turned to this letter, too, and said, “You are coming to prosecute against my children, who are diligently attached to the Torah, which begins with the letter ‘bet’?” The “bet,” too, walked away and refused to testify.

The other letters saw how Abraham silenced these three witnesses and were embarrassed to come before him. They refused to step up and testify. Abraham *Avinu* then turned to the Almighty and exclaimed, “Master of the World! You gave me a son when I was one hundred years old, and when he reached adulthood You told me to bring him as a sacrifice. In compliance with Your command, my compassion for my son turned into cruelty, and I myself bound him upon the altar. This You do not bring to mind, You do not have compassion on my children?!”

Then Yitshak came before Hashem. “Master of the World!” he cried, “When my father told me that You commanded him to slaughter me, I did not resist; I willingly allowed myself to be bound upon the altar and I stretched my neck out under the knife, in fulfillment of Your will. This You do not remember, You do not have compassion on my children?!”



Then Yaakov came and pleaded his case. “Master of the World, did I not spend twenty years in the house of Lavan? When I left his home, I was confronted by Esav, who sought to kill my children. I risked my life on their behalf, and now they are brought before their enemies like sheep to the slaughter, after all my hard work and devotion in raising them. This You do not remember, You do not have compassion for my children?!”

After Yaakov came Moshe Rabbenu. “Master of the World, was I not a faithful shepherd for *Benei Yisrael* throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness? I ran before them like a horse, and when the time came to enter the land You decreed that I must be buried before the nation enters. Now that they are exiled You send for me to cry and weep for them?!”

Moshe then turned to Yirmiyahu and said, “Go before me and take me to them. I want to see what is being done to them!”

“We cannot go,” warned Yirmiyahu, “because the dead bodies have blocked the roads.”

“We will go nonetheless!” declared Moshe resolutely.

Yirmiyahu led Moshe to the rivers of Babylonia. The people saw Moshe and said to one another, “Look — the son of Amram has risen from his grave to redeem us from our oppressors!” But a heavenly voice came and declared, “This is a decree that I have issued!”

Moshe turned to the people and said, “I cannot bring you back, for the irrevocable decree has been issued. But the Almighty will bring you back soon enough.” Moshe finished speaking and left them. At that moment, the people cried so intensely that their wails reached the heavens. About this moment the verse states, “On the rivers of Babylonia — there we sat and also wept...” (Tehillim 137:1).

Moshe left the people and returned to the *Patriarchs*. “What have the enemies done to our children?” they asked.

“Some they have killed,” Moshe lamented, “some they have bound in iron chains, some had their hands tied to their backs, and some they stripped naked. Others died along the way, and their bodies now feed



the birds and animals. Still others suffer terrible hunger and thirst from the intense summer heat.”

Upon hearing of the unspeakable tragedy that has befallen their children, the *Patriarchs* burst out in mourning and tearful lamentation. “O, what has befallen our children! How have you become orphans, without any father? How have you gone to sleep in the afternoon, only to awaken without clothing? How have you walked through mountains and upon gravel with bare feet? How have your backs been loaded with sacks of sand? How have your hands been tied behind your backs?”

Moshe exclaimed, “Cursed be the sun! Why did you not darken when the enemy invaded the Temple?”

The sun quickly came to its own defense: “Moshe, the faithful servant, I swear that there was no way I could have darkened! They did not let me even try — they smote me with sixty flaming torches and shouted, ‘Go — shine your light!’”

Moshe continued his eulogy: “Woe unto your glorious light, *Bet HaMikdash*! How was it darkened? O, that the time for its destruction has arrived! The Sanctuary was burned, the young schoolchildren were slaughtered, and their fathers went into captivity and exile.

“Captors, I implore you! Do not kill your captives cruelly, and do not destroy them completely! Do not kill sons in front of their fathers, nor daughters in front of their mothers, for the time will come when the Almighty will punish you for your cruelty.”

The Babylonians ignored Moshe’s warning. They would place a young boy in his mother’s bosom and order his father to slaughter him. The mother’s tears poured onto her son, as she sat helpless and in terrible anguish.

Moshe once again turned to the Almighty and pleaded, “Master of the World! You wrote in Your Torah that one may not slaughter an ox or sheep on the same day as its young. Yet, the enemies kill children and parents, and You do not respond...”

Rachel jumped before the Almighty and pleaded, “Master of the World! As you know, Yaakov loved me immensely and worked seven



years for my hand in marriage. When the wedding day came, my father decided to trick him and give him my sister in my stead. Yet, I felt no jealousy towards her and I did not put her to shame. If I, a human being, did not harbor feelings of jealousy towards my sister who was marrying my husband, then why did You, the eternal, merciful King of kings, feel jealousy towards the useless idols that *Benei Yisrael* worshipped, that You exiled them from their land? Immediately, the Almighty was overcome with compassion and declared, “For you, Rachel, I will restore *Benei Yisrael* to their land.” This is what is meant by the pasuk, “A cry is heard in Ramah — wailing, bitter weeping — Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone.” Hashem promises her, “Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears... And there is hope for your future, declares Hashem: your children shall return to their country” (*Yirmiyahu* 31).



☞ SECTION III ☞

*The Destruction of the
Second Temple*





CHAPTER 1

Roman Dominion over Judea Begins (3700-3826/ 61 B.C.E. – 66 CE)



The Holy Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 CE. Judea was under Roman dominion for one hundred eighty years prior to the Destruction of the Temple. The Jews lost their autonomy in the following way:

During the latter years of the reign of the Hasmonean family (of *Hanukah* fame), the Sadducees gained a foothold in the government of Judea, causing the Jews faithful to the Torah untold persecution. However, under the reign of Queen Salome Alexandra (76-66 BCE), there were ten years of respite, when she ruled the country and consulted in every aspect with her brother, the great Torah sage, Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah. Those peaceful years quickly came to an end with her death, when the dispute over the throne between her two sons, Hyrkanus and Aristobulus, blew up into a full-fledged civil war.

During this time, the Talmud reports an incident which portended evil for the upcoming years:

“The Rabbis taught: When the Hasmonean family fought against each other: Hyrkanus was outside [the Temple walls] and Aristobulus was inside. Each day a basket with dinars was lowered [over the wall], and then the basket was lifted containing animals for the daily sacrifice. Until an old man informed the besiegers, ‘As long as they continue the Temple service you will not defeat them.’ The next day, when the basket with dinars was lowered, they placed a pig in the basket. When the basket was lifted halfway up the wall, the pig stuck its hooves into the wall, and the Land of Israel shook.” (*Sotah 49b, Menahot 64 b, Bava Kamma 82b*)



In an attempt to bring the internal strife to a resolution, the brothers approached the famous Roman general, Pompey for assistance. Pompey and his army marched to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. After approximately two months, the Romans succeeded in breaching the wall and gaining entry to the Temple Mount.

Despite the bloodthirsty enemy in their midst, the *Kohanim* heroically attempted to continue with the Temple service for as long as was humanly possible. As soon as one *Kohen* was murdered, a second took his place. On that day, Pompey and his army murdered 12,000 Jewish people. The next day, the Roman army left and the *Kohanim* resumed the Temple service. Before returning to Rome, Pompey installed the weak Hyrkanus as his governor. Pompey returned to Rome and Judea was now under the jurisdiction of the Roman proconsul.

Despite their loss of independence, the Jewish spirit of unity had not been weakened. Over the next twenty years, several attempts were made to regain independence, but all of them were quelled. In an attempt to break the Jewish unity, the Roman proconsul stripped the *Sanhedrin* of their authority and divided the land into five provinces. The Mishnah states that at that time (57 BCE, 3704), “songs were no longer heard at banquet halls.” (*Mishnah Sotah* 9:11).

When Julius Caesar became Roman Emperor in 48 BCE, he made changes to the ruling structure in Judea. He appointed the hated Edomite, Antipater, as ruler, giving him almost unlimited authority. Antipater appointed his younger son, Herod, as governor of Galilee in the north. Herod brutally murdered many Jewish people in his district, because they refused to pay taxes.

Just four years later, in 44 BCE, Julius Caesar was assassinated. At about this time, Antipater was poisoned, and Herod was appointed ruler of Judea. Herod married Miriam, the granddaughter of Hyrkanus. By marrying into the Hasmonean family, Herod hoped to legitimize his claim to power and soften the Jewish people’s hatred toward him. In addition, he built many palaces and fortresses in Jerusalem and throughout Judea both to protect himself and to glorify his position. The one building project that was indeed a benefit to the Jewish people was Herod’s restoration of the Temple. The



Talmud records: “ He who did not see Herod’s restoration [of the Temple] has not seen a truly magnificent edifice.” (*Baba Basra 4a*)

Herod ruled a total of 32 cruel, tyrannical years (from 36-4 BCE). During his lifetime the Jewish people did not dare to protest, for fear of swift retaliation. Only after his death, Jewish delegates came before the Roman Senate and described the suffering they endured under Herod.

“Even if a raging beast had ruled over us, it would not have been as disastrous as the calamities that were inflicted upon us during the period of Herod’s rule. In ancient times too, Israel saw many dark days and terrible disasters; and we were exiled from our homeland. But what happened to the Judeans in the days of Herod has no comparison. Nor does the history of other nations contain anything like it” (Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities*).

With Herod’s death, the Jewish people had hoped for a brighter future. But it was not to be. Herod’s son Archelaus used the same cruel methods as his father to impose fear of his royal authority upon the Jews. On the eve of Passover, the Jews came to the Temple to sacrifice the Passover offering. Suddenly, in the midst of the festivities, the king’s army broke into the Temple court and killed 3,000 Jews and drove the others away. On *Shavuot*, again, the Roman soldiers bloodily asserted the new king’s authority. Archelaus continued in his tyrannical ways for nine years. Throughout this time, the Jews constantly complained to the Roman emperor about Archelaus’ untold cruelty. Finally, Augustus Caesar removed Archelaus from his post and exiled him. Rather than appointing another governor, Augustus Caesar placed Judea under the jurisdiction of the Roman proconsul in Damascus, with the daily affairs to be overseen by the Roman procurator in Caesarea.

Under the Procurators, the Jewish people were granted some degree of self-government. The *Sanhedrin* was restored, and they supervised the Temple service. This sense of tranquility soon came to an end, with Sadducees gaining a foothold, this time in the office of the *Kohen Gadol*. In addition, later procurators took on an attitude of disdain and oppression, leading to lawlessness. The Jews frequently resisted and rose up in rebellion. The Romans quelled their rebellions and punished the perpetrators.



Approximately fifteen years before the Destruction of the Temple, the political situation deteriorated drastically. Many Jews could no longer bear the Roman oppression and joined the group of Zealots who wished to overthrow Roman dominion. Bloodshed became commonplace with daily skirmishes between the Jews and their oppressors.

At that time, Nero became the Roman Emperor. The procurator he appointed, Florus, made his predecessors look righteous. He would commonly force the Jews into acts of defiance, knowing full well that once the Jews resisted, the Romans would always consider them the guilty party. After provoking the Jewish community in Caesaria, he went to Jerusalem and demanded a huge sum from the Temple treasury. The people were outraged and demonstrated their feelings openly. As a result, the procurator ordered his soldiers to attack the Jews in the street. They plundered the market and broke into houses, robbing and killing the residents. Jews fleeing for their lives were caught and killed. Other Jews were whipped and then nailed to the cross. On that day 3,600 men, women and children were killed.

After this incident, Florus anticipated that the Jews would rise up in revolt, and then he would have an excuse to declare Jerusalem a conquered city. Indeed, many Jews wanted to retaliate, but the Sages prevailed upon them to greet the marching Roman soldiers peacefully. Some people could not contain themselves when the Romans did not return the Jews' peaceful greeting, and protested loudly. Immediately the Romans burst into the ranks of the people. The Jews retreated in panic—until they saw the Romans advancing to the Temple Mount. Those who had been watching from the rooftops hurried to the scene and fought the Romans, effectively preventing them from occupying the Temple. When Florus saw that things did not go as he had planned, he left the city with his army. This incident occurred in 66 CE, four years prior to the destruction, and it set the stage for the Jewish revolt against Rome.

The information in this chapter was drawn primarily from: “History of the Jewish People,” Artscroll Publications.



CHAPTER II

Jerusalem Besieged

(3826-3829/ 66 CE – 69 CE)



he Talmud records that the following incident to be one of the causes of the Destruction. (*Gittin* 56a) It was this incident that convinced Nero that the Jews were rebelling against him, rather than against the evil Florus. Kamsa and Bar Kamsa lived in Jerusalem. Kamsa's friend was making a feast and told his messenger to invite Kamsa. The messenger inadvertently invited Bar Kamsa, the host's enemy.

Bar Kamsa was surprised at the invitation, but thinking that the host was making an effort toward reconciliation, he arrived at the feast. As the host was circulating among the guests at the feast, he saw Bar Kamsa and was filled with rage. Before the host could order him out, Bar Kamsa pleaded, "Please do not embarrass me by ordering me to leave. Let me remain and I will pay for everything I eat and drink."

"Nothing of the sort," screamed the host.

"I will pay for half the feast," begged Bar Kamsa.

"No, leave now!" shouted the host, his voice rising to a crescendo.

"I'll pay for the entire feast," pleaded Bar Kamsa.

"Absolutely not! I will not have my enemy attend my feast," and Bar Kamsa was bodily removed from the banquet hall.

Bar Kamsa was utterly shamed. Why did the Torah sages present not protest against the host's reprehensible behavior? he wondered. I will not rest until I have my revenge, he resolved.

He quickly sent a message to the Roman Emperor that the Jews were planning a rebellion against him.



“How do I know you are telling the truth?” asked the Roman Emperor.

“Let’s test it,” said Bar Kamsa. “Send a sacrifice to the Temple. According to the Jewish law, they may accept a sacrifice from a non-Jew.”

The Emperor did as Bar Kamsa suggested, and sent his animal to the Temple along with Bar Kamsa. En route, Bar Kamsa made a small nick to either the animal’s upper lip, or its eye-lid. Although virtually unnoticeable, this small cut was sufficient to disqualify the animal from being sacrificed.

When the Sages saw the animal with its blemish they were in a quandary. Most Sages were of the opinion that the animal should be sacrificed for the sake of peace with the Roman Empire, although it was blemished. However, Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkilus felt that if they would offer the sacrifice, people would think that it is acceptable to offer a blemished sacrifice in the Temple. People would not realize that this sacrifice was offered only for the sake of peace.

The Sages countered with another plan. “Let’s arrange for Bar Kamsa to be killed so he can not inform the Emperor that his sacrifice was refused,” they said. “After all, it can not be that the Emperor sent a blemished sacrifice. Most likely, it was Bar Kamsa who injured the animal en route, to create this problem for us.”

Once again Rabbi Zechariah refused. “If you kill him,” he reasoned, “people will say that one deserves to die for blemishing a sacrifice.”

Many years later, Rabbi Yohanan blamed Rabbi Zechariah for his zealotry. The Talmud states, “Because of the zealotry of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkilus, our Temple was destroyed, our Sanctuary burned, and we were exiled from our land.”

Bar Kamsa reported to the Emperor that the Sages had refused to offer his sacrifice. “It is as I told you,” Bar Kamsa gloated, “the Jews are planning a rebellion against you.”

Immediately, General Nero was dispatched to Judea to quell the rebellion. He confidently marched to Jerusalem with four huge battalions of soldiers from Arabia, Philistia, Egypt, and Africa. He laid siege



to Jerusalem, surrounding it on all four sides. In this way he hoped to starve the Jews into surrendering to him.

Nero wondered about the campaign in Judea, and sought an omen regarding its outcome. He shot an arrow eastward, and it landed facing Jerusalem. He then shot another arrow westward, and it too, landed toward Jerusalem. Whichever direction he shot an arrow, it would land pointing toward Jerusalem.

Then he met a young child on the street. “What did you learn in school today?” he asked.

“We learned a verse in *Ezekiel: I will give My revenge against Edom through My people Israel (Ezekiel 25:14)*” replied the child.

Nero shuddered. “The Jewish G-d wishes to destroy His Temple,” he said. “But not without punishing the one who oversees the destruction.”

I will have no part of this, he decided. With that, he fled and converted to Judaism. One of his descendants was the famous Rabbi Meir.

General Vespasian was then dispatched to continue the siege.

At that time there were three wealthy people in Jerusalem who had the resources to support the entire city for twenty-one years! These wealthy people were Nakdimon ben Gurion, Ben Kalba Savua and Ben Sisit Hakesat. Nakdimon was called so because the sun shone (*Nakdah hashemesh*) in his merit. Ben Kalba Savua was so called because anybody who visited him left fully satisfied. (*Kalba Savua* means a satisfied dog.) Ben Sisit Hakesat was called so because wherever he went his servants would spread carpets before him, so his feet would never have to touch the ground. (*Sisit Hakesat* means that his *sisit* always dragged on mats.) Others document the meaning of his name to be derived from *Hakesat*, the throne. When he went to Rome to meet the Emperor, he was seated among the leaders of Rome.

One of them agreed to supply the city with wheat and barley, the second agreed to give wine, salt and oil, and the third said he would supply the wood for the city. The Sages point out that the latter wealthy man who offered the wood was most generous, as it takes sixty measures of wood to cook one measure of wheat.



Life in Jerusalem could have been bearable during the Roman siege. The Sages attempted to prevail upon the Zealots (those who wished to fight the Romans) to make peace with the Romans, but they would not hear of it. The Sages argued: “This is not a propitious time to regain our independence.” Instead, the Zealots burned the storehouses of grain, plunging the city into a famine.

The information in this chapter was drawn primarily from *Gittin* 56a.



CHAPTER III

Starvation in Jerusalem

(3829 / 69 CE)



ood grew scarcer with each passing day. Soon even the wealthiest residents of Jerusalem were starving.

One of the wealthiest women in Jerusalem, Martha, daughter of Beithos sent her servant to the market to purchase fine wheat flour. The servant soon returned and reported: “There is no fine flour, but there is still some white bread.” Martha instructed him to purchase the bread. He quickly returned from the marketplace, still empty-handed, and reported: “By the time I arrived, the white bread was gone. But there is still some dark bread.” Martha told him to purchase that. Once again he returned empty-handed, with the report: “There is no dark bread, but there is still some barley flour.” Again, Martha sent him back to purchase the barley flour. By the time he returned to the market, the barley flour was gone. When the servant returned empty-handed again, Martha could take it no longer, and decided to go to the marketplace herself. As her feet were swollen from hunger, she could not put on her sandals. Desperate and starving, she walked barefoot to the market. Walking barefoot for the first time in her life through the streets littered with filth and decay was extremely painful and degrading. When her foot touched some dung, she could take it no longer, and she fell to the ground in a faint. Her hand lay across a fig from which the juice had already been sucked.

This fig had been sucked by Rabbi Sadok, the holy sage who had fasted forty years to forestall the destruction of the Temple. He became so weak that anything he swallowed could be seen as it passed down his throat. To restore his health, his physicians would give him figs to suck. It was one of these figs that Martha had touched. She placed the



fig in her mouth, and her delicate body began to tremble in revulsion. She took her jewels, cast them into the street, saying, “What are these worth to me now?” and she fell back and died.

The people of Jerusalem walked about half dazed from starvation. Dead bodies and carcasses littered the streets, as there was no cemetery within the confines of the city.

Anyone who attempted to leave the city to bury a friend or relative, was executed by the Zealots who assumed he was plotting to surrender to the Romans.

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai was walking through the streets when he saw some men huddled over a pot. They were boiling straw. When the straw boiled, they passed around the pot and sipped the water. “How low our people have fallen!” exclaimed Rabbi Yohanan.

He immediately called for his nephew Abba Sikra, one of the generals of the Zealots. “How much longer must our people suffer because you refuse to make peace?”

Abba Sikra replied, “My men will kill me if I dare suggest peace.”

“Please allow me to leave the city,” pleaded Rabbi Yohanan. “Perhaps I can achieve some benefit for our People.”

After some thought Abba Sikra suggested that Rabbi Yohanan pretend that he is ill, and have his students spread the word that he has died. Then his students should carry him out of the city in a casket.

Rabbi Yohanan did as his nephew suggested. His students, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua carried the coffin. As they approached the gates of the city, a Zealot guard stopped them.

“Let me pierce the body with a spear to make sure he is dead,” said the guard.

Abba Sikra protested, “Shall the Romans say that the Jews stabbed their Rabbi?”

“Then let me hit him to see if he will move,” argued the guard.

“Shall the Romans say that the Jews strike their Rabbis?” said Abba Sikra.



The Zealots let the funeral procession through. The students left Rabbi Yohanan alone in the graveyard and returned to the city. Later, Rabbi Yohanan made his way to the camp of Vespasian.

“Peace unto you, Your Majesty, peace unto you,” Rabbi Yohanan greeted the general.

“Rabbi, you are deserving of death on two accounts,” responded the general. “First, I am not King, and when you address me as such, you mock me. And second, if I am indeed King, why have you not come sooner?”

Rabbi Yohanan responded, “You are indeed King, because otherwise Jerusalem would not fall into your hands, as it states: ‘Jerusalem will fall by the hand of the mighty one’ (Isaiah 10). I did not come sooner because the Zealots do not allow anyone to leave the city.”

“If a serpent were coiled around a jar of honey, would you not break the jar to rid it of the serpent? Should you not demolish the city walls to rid yourself of the Zealots?” asked Vespasian.

Rabbi Yohanan did not respond.

At that moment, a messenger from Rome rode into the camp and declared, “Long live King Vespasian. The nobles of Rome have proclaimed the great general, Vespasian, as emperor. Long live the Emperor.”

The mood was euphoric. Just one thing troubled Vespasian. When the messenger arrived announcing the glad tidings, Vespasian was in the middle of putting on his shoes. He already had one shoe on. Now he couldn’t get his other foot into his shoe. He even tried to take the first shoe off, but evidently his feet had swelled, and it wouldn’t come off. Rabbi Yohanan explained: This is as it says in Proverbs” ‘Glad tidings make the bones fat’ (*Proverbs* 15:30). Therefore, think of one of your adversaries, and the swelling will subside, as it says ‘A depressed spirit dries up a bone’ (*Proverbs* 17:22).” Vespasian immediately followed Rabbi Yohanan’s advice, and he was able to don his shoe.

Vespasian was impressed with Rabbi Yohanan’s foresight, and granted him three requests. Rabbi Yohanan asked that the Rabbis of Yavneh be spared, that the family of Rabban Gamliel be spared, and that physicians be provided to heal Rabbi Sadok. All three requests were granted.



Vespasian left to assume his position in Rome and appointed his son Titus as general in his place.

In the meantime, in the city, the famine raged. The death toll continued to rise. People were scrounging for anything that would keep them alive — a piece of grass, a leaf, a mouse, a snake, an insect. Whenever a dead horse or other dead animal was found, the people would fight over it. People would eat garbage and even human waste. As a result, plague broke out, and those who had not fallen prey to hunger, now died in the plague.

There were those who risked leaving the city to search for food with their wives and children. The Romans caught them, and they would kill the children. “Let us kill these children,” they would say, “then they will not grow up to fight like their fathers.” They killed the adults and crucified them opposite the city gates. Before long, there were five hundred men crucified opposite the city’s gates.

Those who had wheat stored away were afraid to grind it, knead it or bake it, because they were afraid of the Zealots who roamed the city searching for food. When they discovered food they would take it for themselves. Therefore, whoever was fortunate to find food, would eat it in hiding. Husbands grabbed food from wives, and mothers snatched it from their children.

The desperate situation in the city did not stop the Zealots. The leaders of the Zealots would crucify the Roman soldiers they captured on the wall facing the Romans. They also crucified any Jew caught attempting to defect to the Romans. In all, the Zealots crucified five hundred men, equal to the number of Jews the Romans had crucified.

The information in this chapter was drawn primarily from *Gittin 56a – 56b and Josephus, Chapter 86*.



CHAPTER IV

Battling for Jerusalem

(3830 / 70 CE)



After days of fighting and enduring surprise attacks from the Jews, the Romans succeeded in breaching the third outer wall of Jerusalem on the seventh day of Iyar. After fierce fighting, they breached the second wall, as well, placing the newer outer section of Jerusalem in Roman hands. All houses were burned and preparations were made to attack the Old City. The Old City was protected in the North by the Antonia fortress adjacent to the Temple and Herod's palace with its three towers in the northwest.

Titus planned to gain entry to the Temple by first occupying the Antonia fortress. At the end of *Iyar*, he divided his camp into four groups and placed them around the wall. Four iron battering rams were set up, one of which was placed against the Antonia wall.

As the rampworks were nearing completion, the leader of the Zealots left the city at night with a small band of men. They approached the battering ram guarded by sleeping guards. Under the cover of night, they furtively dug a tunnel under the ramp supporting the battering ram. They placed boards coated with pitch and then ignited them. The flames spread to the battering ram. It collapsed with a tremendous crash, killing the guards.

Confusion reigned in the Roman camp. Despondent, they complained, "How shall we continue to fight against Jerusalem? All our siege machinery have been burnt. These were the last four battering rams of the fifty we brought with us from Rome. Now we have just three left and two siege towers left."

The Zealots overheard the Romans' tone of despondency and secretly rejoiced that they had broken the morale of their enemy.



Titus was infuriated. He ordered his men to set up the remaining three battering rams in place of the one that was burnt.

While the Romans were reorganizing their camp, four young Jewish boys were siezed with patriotic feelings for G-d and His Holy Temple. They took their weapons and left the camp. Three thousand men were guarding the battering rams, while the generals were discussing future battle strategies. The four lads advanced on the Roman camp fearlessly. They approached the battering rams, attacked the guards, and chased other soldiers away. While two of the lads were fighting the guards, the other two set the battering rams on fire. All the while, the Romans were shooting at the boys from a distance. In the meantime, two generals of the Zealots came to the assistance of the boys. One remained to guard the gate, while the other two chased away the Romans from the battering rams. The four boys and the Zealots returned victorious to the city. They had succeeded in burning the last three Roman battering rams. The Romans suffered a terrible defeat — 10,500 Roman soldiers perished in battle.

Titus reorganized and decided to challenge the Jews head on. He led forty thousand of his soldiers toward Jerusalem, just an arrow's shot away. Appealing to the Zealots' sense of pride, they called to them, "Are you cattle that remain inside the walls of your pen? If you are men, come out to fight us face to face!"

The Zealots heard this and asked their men, "Who volunteers to face these dogs for the honor of G-d and His Temple?" Immediately five hundered men volunteered. They pounced upon the Romans and killed eight thousand men and chased the rest away. Not a single Jew fell in battle. The Zealots returned to the city triumphant.

The Romans set up camp at a distance. The Zealots taunted them, "Come face us in battle. Come fight us like men. Are we dogs that you shoot at us from a distance? No, we are your masters. You ran from us like a slave runs from a master."

Titus was infuriated. "How shameful it is to suffer defeat from a starving army! Woe unto you, Romans! You have conquered the entire land, save the city of Jerusalem, of which remains just one wall! The



Jews have few weapons and fewer troops. And they are loners. There is no one to come to their aid. We have many weapons, troops, and all the nations on our side.”

Titus ordered his men to set up the last two siege towers they had brought with them from Rome, and at the same time gave orders to build more. During this time, the battlefield was quiet, giving the Romans a certain sense of security. They were boasting that not a single Jewish soldier would remain alive after the upcoming battle.

As the new siege towers neared completion, the three leaders of the Zealots held a meeting. “In our last battle when the three battering rams were burned,” said one of the leaders, “you went out in battle to assist the four lads, proving yourselves as warriors, while I remained behind to guard the city’s gates. This time, you guard the city’s gates, and I will go out to battle with my warriors and we will prove ourselves to be mighty.”

“Go,” responded the other two leaders, “and prove yourself, for G-d of the Temple will assist you. But do not be foolhardy, for if you are captured or killed, we will be humiliated.”

“May G-d protect me,” said the first leader, “and may the merit of my father, Onias, the High Priest, stand me in good stead. Please, G-d overlook my sins at this time. There will be other occasions to punish me.”

He immediately proceeded to choose one hundred of his best men and led them in battle against the Romans that very night, before the morning dawned. The Roman camp consisted of five thousand soldiers and one hundred fifty carpenters and iron workers. They were warming themselves around huge bonfires. The Zealots pounced upon the Romans suddenly, catching them unaware, and caused massive destruction. In the confusion, many Romans ran into the fire and were burned alive. The Zealots destroyed all the siege machinery, including the battering rams, the towers, the weights, the rings, ropes and chains. They captured the carpenters and then burnt them all in the bonfire. They took whatever souvenirs from the battle they could carry, such as the burned siege machinery and the heads of the burned carpenters, and marched back to Jerusalem triumphant.



At daybreak, Titus saw smoke rising in the distance. As it became light, he saw that the siege machinery was burned and his men killed. The stench of human flesh in the air was unmistakable. He and his camp ran to see what had happened. He was appalled at what he found. The extent of his losses was overwhelming, and he was beginning to lose heart.

He consulted with the seasoned generals of the nations who had come to his assistance from all over the Roman Empire. He told them of the might of the Jewish people and how they defeated the huge Roman armies time after time, destroying all the Roman war machinery.

“Did you ever hear of four men defeating 10,500 trained warriors?” asked Titus. “My men were unable to capture or defeat these few men. The four men were fighting hand to hand with ten thousand soldiers and cutting them down as if they were harvesting cucumbers.”

The seasoned generals were astounded.

Titus continued, “We can not allow this to continue. We must not be humiliated before the nations of the world!”

The generals answered, “The Romans are tired of war. We are fresh. Let the Roman soldiers rest while we battle the Jews. They won’t be able to stand up against our huge army.”

The Roman officers said to Titus: “Don’t allow them to proceed as they suggest. They will just make things worse for us. The Jews will defeat them as well and add to our humiliation. We know their strategies and can’t stand up to them—one of them chases one thousand of our men. How will they, who have no experience with them, fare?”

The seasoned generals disagreed. “No. We will fight them and defeat them!” they insisted. They pressured Titus until he gave them permission to attack the Jews.

Titus rationalized. “Perhaps the nations with their huge armies will defeat the Jews. They will unleash the full force of their fury against the Jews, for they do not know the Jews’ power. Our men, on the other hand, can no longer fight against the Jews in this way, for they fight with fear in their hearts.”



Seventy thousand men prepared for war against the Jews: 10,000 Macedonians, 20,000 Britons, 5,000 Armenians, 10,000 African troops, 10,000 Begonians, 5,000 Arabs, and 10,000 Persians. They attacked the Jews from the plain facing the grave of Yohanan, the High Priest. They raised siege ladders in order to climb the walls.

Said one Zealot general to the other, “Shall I confront these uncircumcised ones?”

“Not alone,” replied the other. “There are too many of them for you to fight alone.”

“Indeed,” agreed the first general. “Let two of us fight against them.”

“Go,” said a third general. “And may G-d of the Temple make you victorious. Let Him not judge you harshly at this time.”

The two generals of the Zealots and 1,500 of their men left the city and approached the huge army. They battled the entire day, from morning to night, that ninth day of *Tevet*, the tenth month of Titus’ battle against Jerusalem. The Jews emerged victorious — they killed 57,500 men and captured 3,000 officers alive, while the remaining soldiers fled. Seven Jewish soldiers fell in battle, and their brethren brought the bodies to the city for burial. The Zealots returned to Jerusalem with songs of praise to G-d on their lips, while the nations returned to their camp utterly humiliated.

Titus reproached them. “You got as you deserved for not heeding Roman advice. Now you too have been humiliated.”

To add to the humiliation, the three thousand prisoners of war returned to camp the next morning, each with an eye and a hand missing.

The information in this chapter was drawn primarily from *Josephus*, Chapters 86-88.



CHAPTER V

Destruction of the Temple

(3830/ 70 CE)



Titus held a conference with his officers and the seasoned generals who had come to assist him to discuss strategies to defeat the Jewish people. Many suggestions were offered, but Titus found them all unsatisfactory.

At last, Titus said, “I have the solution. This is what we must do. We shall build a wall around the entire city, putting it under a total siege. In this way, we need not fight them. Their food is gone—starvation will defeat them. In addition, if we don’t fight them, they will begin fighting among themselves, and do to themselves, what we wish to be done to them.”

All the officers and generals agreed to Titus’ plan, and they immediately began its implementation. They closed all roads leading to the city, to prevent the Jews from attacking. They set up watchposts manned by guards day and night at all the city gates to prevent people from leaving the city to collect grass to eat.

As the days passed, the famine in the city intensified. Even the Zealots were weakened. The death toll climbed so rapidly that there was no longer any place to bury the dead. The alleys were littered with corpses. Some threw their dead relatives into the cisterns. At times, while disposing of their relatives in this way, they too would fall in alive, and remain to die with their relatives. Others dug graves in their yards and lay in them to await inevitable death.

Jerusalem became a living graveyard, eerily quiet, with no moaning or mourning. The hunger had dried up all tears and silenced all cries. Houses turned into mass graves. When a house became full of bodies, it was sealed, and the next house was used. Later, some resorted to throwing corpses over the city wall into the Kidron Valley below.



Titus had been correct. If not for the famine, Jerusalem could never have been defeated.

The Romans built new ramps against the Antonia fortress in the month of *Sivan*. The Zealots attempted to burn the rampworks as they had done in the past, but the hunger took its toll. They went limp, and were unable to burn the ramps. The Romans hauled the battering rams up the ramps unchallenged and battered the wall. But the stones would not budge. At the beginning of the month of *Tammuz*, in the middle of the night, the Romans made their way into the fortress. The Jews retreated into the adjacent complex, the Holy Temple.

On the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, the wall between the Antonia Fortress and the Holy Temple was breached. By this time, there were no remaining priests who did not suffer from wounds that made them unfit for Temple service. Besides, there were no sheep available. For the first time in all the years of war with Rome, the daily sacrifice was interrupted.

Titus ordered the battering rams to be set up against the inner western Temple wall. These walls had been built by Herod. The stones were about four feet thick, four feet high, and varied in length. The battering rams battered furiously against the walls, but were unable to impact them. Instead, on the eighth day of *Av*, they set fire to the gates. The gates were wooden, plated with intricately designed silver. The fires melted the silver, and then burned the wooden gates. The Romans dashed in and threw torches onto the roof of the Temple that still remained. The roof caught fire and trapped the Jews inside the Temple court.

The last battle took place in the morning of the ninth of *Av*. A Roman soldier threw a torch through a Temple window. The fire spread rapidly and before long, the inner court caught fire. The Romans ran in with torches to add to the blaze.

The trapped Jews were huddled around the Altar. The Romans flung spears and arrows at them, slaying every Jew they met, sparing no one. Soon the entire Temple area was covered with corpses. A stream of blood flowed across the Temple floor and down the eastern steps.



Before the fire consumed the Temple, Titus and his men entered the Holy of Holies. Drunk with victory, he cursed the G-d of Israel. He unrolled a Torah scroll and committed a grievous sin upon it. He then took his sword and slashed the curtain. Miraculously, blood spouted forth. Titus shouted, “I have killed the G-d of Israel.” The Romans plundered the Temple of all its valuable golden vessels, and then the Temple was consumed by fire, besides the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, the *Kotel Hamaaravi* — from which the Presence of G-d has never departed.

For the rest of that day and into the following day, the tenth of Av, the flames rose to the very heavens. The shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying were echoed by the surrounding hills. Over one million Jews died during these months of siege and destruction, and almost 100,000 were taken captive to Rome to be sold as slaves. The Talmud documents how one group of Jews chose to die, rather than to live a life of forced immorality and other sins.

The Romans celebrated their victory over Jerusalem in a special victory parade in Rome. Each participant in the parade carried some of the spoils of war. Silver, gold, including the holy vessels of the Temple, and other valuable objects were displayed before the cheering Roman citizens. The parade passed under the Victory Arch which had been constructed for the occasion. Depicted on the arch in stone relief is the scene of Jewish captives carrying the holy Menorah. The Arch can be seen to this day.

The information in this chapter was drawn primarily from *Josephus*, Chapter 88, “*Tishah B’av*,” Artscroll Publications, and “*A Time to Weep*,” CIS Publications.



CHAPTER VI

Fall of Beitar

(3883-3893 / 123 CE - 133 CE)



about fifty years later, the governor of Syria, Hadrian was declared Emperor of the Roman Empire. At first Hadrian seemed to be a friend of the Jews, promising them religious freedom, and even to rebuild Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. Many older people still remembered the Temple and they were ecstatic that it was about to be restored to its former glory. But, suddenly Hadrian's promises took a drastic turn: a temple would be built, but in honor of Jupiter. In addition, he prohibited the Jews from observing the commandments fundamental to their faith. Sabbath, circumcision, and family purity were the commandments he targeted. In order to protect their faith, the Jewish people were ready to rebel against Rome, once again. This led to the Bar Kochba revolt and the destruction of Beitar.

Approximately three years after the beginning of the revolt, Bar Kochba led his troops toward Jerusalem. He easily overcame the Roman battallion there. The next two and one half years were peaceful ones for the Jews in Jerusalem. But then, the Romans sent in huge battallions of troops to recapture Jerusalem. After a siege of approximately one year, they recaptured Jerusalem.

At that time, Bar Kochba and his men retreated to Beitar, where the fighting continued for another three and one half years.

Beitar was situated southwest of Jerusalem, near the Mediterranean Sea. It was protected on three sides by the deep valleys surrounding it. In addition, it was surrounded by a mighty wall. It had its own wellsprings within the city, ensuring a continual water supply in case of an enemy's siege. Besides being protected physically, Beitar was protected spiritually, as it was a stronghold of Torah study. The residents were confident in Bar Kochba's leadership, and that he would somehow miraculously deliver them from the Romans.



At first, the fighting went well for the Jews, but when Bar Kochba grew arrogant and attributed his might to his own abilities, Beitar fell to the Romans. On the ninth day of *Av*, the city of Beitar was conquered by the Romans. The destruction that took place was unimaginable. Approximately one half million Jews were killed. The Talmud states: “For seven years, the non-Jews fertilized their vineyards with the blood of the Jews” (*Gittin* 57a). Hadrian owned a vineyard eighteen by eighteen *mil* and he enclosed it with a fence made out of corpses that had fallen in Beitar. He felt that this would be a lesson to all those who contemplate rebellion. Miraculously, the bodies did not decompose until many years later permission was granted for their burial.

But this was only the beginning of the suffering of the Jewish people. Every Jewish community in Judea was considered to have aided the revolt, and the Romans murdered and plundered the entire country. In addition they implemented a campaign to obliterate the teaching of Torah and the observance of *mitzvot*. Sages and students were killed one after another. The ten great sages — *Asara Harugai Malchut* were killed in vicious and barbaric methods typical of the torturous punishment the Romans inflicted upon their victims.

The Romans decided to eradicate any remaining vestiges of Jewish glory. Although the Temple had been burned years before, there still remained massive stones, foundations, and the like. They levelled the entire Mount and plowed it over into an ordinary field. This final destruction also occurred on the ninth day of *Av*.

Indeed, *Tishah B’Av* became “a day designated for punishment” (Rambam). Time and again, throughout the ages, punishment befell the Jewish people on the ninth day of *Av*. In 1492, it was on the ninth day of *Av* that the Jews were expelled from Spain. Likewise, the precursor to our present-day tragedy, the Holocaust, began on *Tishah B’Av* in 1914, with the outbreak of World War I.

The information in this chapter was drawn primarily from “*Tishah B’av*,” Artscroll Publications, and “*A Time to Weep*,” CIS Publications.



The Talmud states: “Whoever mourns the destruction of Jerusalem [and the Temple], will merit to see the joy [of its rededication].” (Taanit 30b, Baba Batra 60b) May we, who have studied about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and gained new insight into its meaning, be worthy to see the joy of its rededication, may it occur speedily, and in our times, Amen.

