Tales of Destruction Part 2 The Second Temple in Rabbinic Literature

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1. Yoma 9a

אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם However, considering that the people during the Second Temple period were engaged in Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and acts of kindness, and that they did not perform the sinful acts that were performed in the First Temple, why was the Second Temple destroyed? It was destroyed due to the fact that there was wanton hatred during that period.

2. Gittin 55b-56b

...ם ירושלים... אמר רבי יוחנן מאי דכתיב "אשרי אדם מפחד תמיד ומקשה לבו יפול ברעה" אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים... Rabbi Yoḥanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Happy is the man who fears always, but he who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 28:14)? Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza...

Part 1

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים – דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמצא ובעל דבביה בר קמצא עבד סעודתא אמר ליה לשמעיה זיל אייתי לי קמצא, אזל אייתי ליה בר קמצא

The Gemara explains: Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza. This is as there was a certain man whose friend was named Kamtza and whose enemy was named bar Kamtza. He once made a large feast and said to his servant: Go bring me my friend Kamtza. The servant went and mistakenly brought him his enemy bar Kamtza.

אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב אמר ליה מכדי ההוא גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא מאי בעית הכא קום פוק אמר ליה הואיל ואתאי שבקן ויהיבנא לך דמי מה דאכילנא ושתינא

The man who was hosting the feast **came and found** bar Kamtza **sitting** at the feast. The host **said to** bar Kamtza. **That man is the enemy** [ba'al devava] of that man, that is, you are my enemy. What then do you want here? Arise and leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: Since I have already **come**, let me stay and I will give you money for whatever I eat and drink. Just do not embarrass me by sending me out.

אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיך אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיך א"ל לא נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה

The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza said to him: I will give you money for half of the feast; just do not send me away. The host said to him: No, you must leave. Bar Kamtza then said to him: I will give you money for the entire feast; just let me stay. The host said to him: No, you must leave. Finally, the host took bar Kamtza by his hand, stood him up, and took him out.

אמר הואיל והוו יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה ש"מ קא ניחא להו איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא After having been cast out from the feast, bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Sages were sitting there and did not protest the actions of the host, although they saw how he humiliated me, learn from it that they were content with what he did. I will therefore go and inform against them to the king.

3. Eicha Rabba 4:3

מְצְשֶׂה שֶׁהָיָה בְּאָדָם אֶחָד בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁעָשָׂה סְעוּדָה, אָמֵר לְבָן בֵּיתוֹ לֵךְ וְהָבֵא לִי קַמְצָא רַחֲמִי, אֲזַל וְאַיִיתֵי לֵיהּ בֵּר קַמְצָא שָׁנְאֵיה, עָאל וְיָשַׁב בִּין הָאוֹרְחִים. עָאל אַשְּׁכְּחֵיה בֵּינֵי אֲרִיסְטְיָיא, אָמֵר לוֹ אַתְּ שָׂנְאִי וְאַהְ יָתֵיב בְּגוֹ בֵּיתָאי, קוּם פּוּק לָךְ מִיגוֹ בַּיתָאי. אָמֵר לוֹ אַל תְּבַיְשׁנִי וַאֲנָא יָהֵיב לָךְּ דְמֵי דְסְעוּדָתָא. אָמֵר לוֹ לֵית אַתְּ מְסוּבָּה. אָמֵר לִיה אָנָא יָהֵיב וְלֵית אָנָא יָהֵיב דְּמֵי כָּל הָדֵין סְעוּדְתָא. אֲמֵר לֵיה קוּם לָךְ. וְהָיָה שָׁם רַבִּי אַנָּא אָכֵיל וְשָׁתֵי. אָמֵר לוֹ לֵית אַתְּ מְסוּבָּה. אָמֵר לֵיה אָנָא יָהֵיב דְּמֵי כָּל הָדֵין סְעוּדְתָא. אֲמֵר לֵיה קוּם לָךְ. וְהָיָה שָׁם רַבִּי זִּכִירָה בֵּן אַבְקוּלַס וְהַיָּתָה סַפָּק בְּיֵדוֹ לַמְחוֹת וְלֹא מִיחָה...

There was once a man in Jerusalem who made a feast. He said to one in his household: "Go and bring Kamtza, my friend." He went and brought Bar Kamtza, his enemy. He came and sat down among the guests. He saw him among the guests and said to him, "You are my enemy and you sit in my house. Get up and leave my house!" He replied to him: "Do not embarrass me; I will pay the cost of the meal." He said to him, "You may not eat here!" He said to him: "Do not embarrass me; I will just sit and not eat or drink." He said to him, "You may not eat here!" He said to him: "Do not embarrass me; I will pay for the entire meal." He said to him: "Go!" Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas was there and it was in his hand to stop it and he did not stop it...

Part 2

Gittin

אזל אמר ליה לקיסר מרדו בך יהודאי א"ל מי יימר א"ל שדר להו קורבנא חזית אי מקרבין ליה **He went** and **said to the emperor: The Jews have rebelled against you.** The emperor **said to him: Who says** that this is the case? Bar Kamtza **said to him:** Go and test them; **send them an offering** to be brought in honor of the government, and **see whether they** will **sacrifice it.**

אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא בהדי דקאתי שדא ביה מומא בניב שפתים ואמרי לה בדוקין שבעין דוכתא דלדידן הוה מומא ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא

The emperor went and sent with him a choice three-year-old calf. While bar Kamtza was coming with the calf to the Temple, he made a blemish on the calf's upper lip. And some say he made the blemish on its eyelids, a place where according to us, i.e., halakha, it is a blemish, but according to them, gentile rules for their offerings, it is not a blemish. Therefore, when bar Kamtza brought the animal to the Temple, the priests would not sacrifice it on the altar since it was blemished, but they also could not explain this satisfactorily to the gentile authorities, who did not consider it to be blemished.

סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות אמר להו <u>רבי זכריה בן אבקולס</u> יאמרו בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מזבח סבור למיקטליה דלא ליזיל ולימא אמר להו <u>רבי זכריה</u> יאמרו מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג

The blemish notwithstanding, the Sages thought to sacrifice the animal as an offering due to the imperative to maintain peace with the government. Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas said to them: If the priests do that, people will say that blemished animals may be sacrificed as offerings on the altar. The Sages said: If we do not sacrifice it, then we must prevent bar Kamtza from reporting this to the emperor. The Sages thought to kill him so that he would not go and speak against them. Rabbi Zekharya said to them: If you kill him, people will say that one who makes a blemish on sacrificial animals is to be killed. As a result, they did nothing, bar Kamtza's slander was accepted by the authorities, and consequently the war between the Jews and the Romans began.

אמר רבי יוחנן ענוותנותו של <u>רבי זכריה בן אבקולס</u> החריבה את ביתנו ושרפה את היכלנו והגליתנו מארצנו Rabbi Yoḥanan says: The humility of <u>Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas</u> destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.

Part 3

Gittin

שדר עלוייהו לנירון קיסר כי קאתי שדא גירא למזרח אתא נפל בירושלים למערב אתא נפל בירושלים לארבע רוחות השמים אתא נפל בירושלים

The Roman authorities then **sent Nero Caesar against** the Jews. **When he came** to Jerusalem, he wished to test his fate. **He shot an arrow to the east** and the arrow **came** and **fell in Jerusalem.** He then shot another arrow **to the west** and **it** also **fell in Jerusalem.** He shot an arrow **in** all **four directions of the heavens,** and each time the arrow **fell in Jerusalem.**

א"ל לינוקא פסוק לי פסוקיך אמר ליה ונתתי את נקמתי באדום ביד עמי ישראל וגו' אמר קודשא בריך הוא בעי לחרובי ביתיה ובעי לכפורי ידיה בההוא גברא ערק ואזל ואיגייר ונפק מיניה ר״מ...

Nero then conducted another test: **He said to a child: Tell me a verse** that you learned today. **He said to him** as follows: "And I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel" (Ezekiel 25:14). Nero said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, wishes to destroy **His Temple, and He wishes to wipe his hands with that man,** i.e., with me. The Romans are associated with Edom, the descendants of Esau. If I continue on this mission, I will eventually be punished for having served as God's agent to bring about the destruction. So **he fled** and **became a convert, and** ultimately **Rabbi Meir descended from him...**

Part 4

Gittin

מרתא בת בייתוס עתירתא דירושלים הויא שדרתה לשלוחה ואמרה ליה זיל אייתי לי סמידא אדאזל איזדבן אתא אמר לה סמידא ליכא חיורתא איכא אמרה ליה זיל אייתי לי אדאזל איזדבן אתא ואמר לה גושקרא ליכא קימחא דשערי איכא אמרה ליה זיל אייתי לי אדאזל איזדבן... With regard to this famine it is related that Marta bat Baitos was one of the wealthy women of Jerusalem. She sent out her agent and said to him: Go bring me fine flour [semida]. By the time he went, the fine flour was already sold. He came and said to her: There is no fine flour, but there is ordinary flour. She said to him: Go then and bring me ordinary flour. By the time he went, the ordinary flour was also sold. He came and said to her: There is no ordinary flour, but there is coarse flour [gushkera]. She said to him: Go then and bring me coarse flour. By the time he went, the coarse flour was already sold. He came and said to her: There is no coarse flour, but there is barley flour. She said to him: Go then and bring me barley flour. But once again, by the time he went, the barley flour was also sold...

Part 5

Gittin

כי מטא להתם אמר שלמא עלך מלכא שלמא עלך מלכא א"ל מיחייבת תרי קטלא חדא דלאו מלכא אנא וקא קרית לי מלכא ותו אי מלכא אנא עד האידנא אמאי לא אתית לגבאי א"ל דקאמרת לאו מלכא אנא.

When Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai reached there, i.e., the Roman camp, he said: Greetings to you, the king; greetings to you, the king...

אמר ליה מיזל אזילנא ואינש אחרינא משדרנא אלא בעי מינאי מידי דאתן לך אמר ליה תן לי יבנה וחכמיה ושושילתא דרבן גמליאל ואסוותא דמסיין ליה לרבי צדוק קרי עליה רב יוסף ואיתימא רבי עקיבא משיב חכמים אחור ודעתם יסכל איבעי למימר ליה לשבקינהו הדא זימנא

Vespasian then said to Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai: I will be going to Rome, and I will send someone else in my place to continue besieging the city and waging war against it. But before I leave, ask something of me that I can give you. Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai said to him: Give me Yavne and its Sages and do not destroy it, and spare the dynasty of Rabban Gamliel and do not kill them as if they were rebels, and lastly give me doctors to heal Rabbi Tzadok. Rav Yosef read the following verse about him, and some say that it was Rabbi Akiva who applied the verse to Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai: "I am the Lord... Who turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish" (Isaiah 44:25), as he should have said to him to leave the Jews alone this time.

והוא סבר דלמא כולי האי לא עביד והצלה פורתא נמי לא הוי

And why didn't Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai make this request? He maintained that Vespasian might not do that much for him, and there would not be even a small amount of salvation. Therefore, he made only a modest request, in the hope that he would receive at least that much.