

Tisha B'Av: When Society Breaks Down, Temples Fall - Sources and Questions

Below are 4 sources having to do with the destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* (Temples). The focus is on *Bein Adam LeChaveiro* – the relationships between people. When these relationships break down, the whole society breaks down. When we lose our connection to one another, we lose our connection with God. The Temples only **represent** a Torah-centered society. If the Torah-centered values of the society are absent, the buildings become meaningless, hollow, and useless.

From these sources, we see that these breakdowns take many forms. They involve crimes between individuals, abuse of power, lack of social justice, and even silence and “bystanding” by people in power and/or with influence.

Source #1: [Talmud Yoma 9b](#)

מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב — מפני שלשה דברים שהיו בו: עבודה זרה, וגלוי עריות, ושפיכות דמים. עבודה זרה,

For what reason was the First Temple destroyed? It was destroyed since three matters existed in the First Temple: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed..

אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצוות וגמילות חסדים, מפני מה חרב? מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם. ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות: עבודה זרה, גלוי עריות, ושפיכות דמים.

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 baseless hatred during that period. This comes to teach you that **the sin of baseless hatred is equivalent to the three severe transgressions: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed.**

Questions:

1. (a) The first *Beit HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) was destroyed because of 3 *aveirot* (sins). What were they?

(b) How many of the 3 were *Bein Adam LaMakom* (between a person and God)?

(c) How many of the 3 were *Bein Adam LeChaveiro* (between people)?

2. (a) Why was the second *Beit HaMikdash* destroyed?

(b) What does this come to teach us?

3. (a) Based on these sections of Gemara, which type of *aveirot* are more serious and less “forgivable”: *Bein Adam LaMakom* or *Bein Adam LeChaveiro*?

(b) Why do you think that is?

Source #2: [Yirmiyahu 7:3-11](#)

(ג) כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאֵי-אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִיטִיבוּ דַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְאֲשַׁכְנָה אֶתְכֶם בְּמִקְוִם הַזֶּה:

Pasuk 3: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Yisra'el, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place [the Temple].

(ד) אַל תִּבְטְחוּ לָכֶם אֶל דִּבְרֵי הַשָּׁקֶר לֵאמֹר הִכֵּל ה' הִכֵּל ה' הִנֵּה:

Pasuk 4: Trust not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these.

(ה) כִּי אִם הִיטִיב תִּיטִיבוּ אֶת דַּרְכֵיכֶם וְאֶת מַעַלְלֵיכֶם אִם עָשׂוּ תַעֲשׂוּ מִשְׁפָּט בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ:

Pasuk 5: If you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbour;

(ו) גֵּר יְתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה לֹא תַעֲשִׁקוּ וְדָם נָקִי אַל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ בְּמִקְוִם הַזֶּה וְאַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים לֹא תֵלְכוּ לְרַע לָכֶם:

Pasuk 6: If you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt:

(ז) וְשִׁכַנְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּמִקְוִם הַזֶּה בְּאַרְץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם לְמֶן עוֹלָם וָעֶד עוֹלָם:

Pasuk 7: Will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

(ח) הִנֵּה אַתֶּם בֹּטְחִים לָכֶם עַל דִּבְרֵי הַשָּׁקֶר לִבְלִיתִי הוֹעִיל:

Pasuk 8: Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

(ט) הגלב רצח ונאף והשבע לשקר וקטר לבצעל והלך אחרי אלהים אחרים אשר לא ידעתם:

Pasuk 9: Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to the Ba'al, and walk after other gods whom you know not.

(י) ובאתם ועמדתם לפני בבית ה' אשר נקרא שמי עליו ואמרתם נצלנו למען עשות את כל התועבות האלה:

Pasuk 10: And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered; that you may do all these abominations? Now not;

(יא) המערת פורצים היתה הבית הזה אשר נקרא שמי עליו בעיניכם גם אנכי הנה ראיתי נאם ה':

Pasuk 11: Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord.

Questions:

1. *Pasuk 3:* What do the people have to do so that God will keep “living” in the *Beit HaMikdash*?

2. *Pasuk 4:* The “lying words” are “the temple of God.” What do you think this could mean? What do you think the people are relying on? Why is this a false assumption, a lie?

3. *Thought Question:* What building or structure do you think will **always** be around? Can you imagine this building or structure ever **not** being around?

4. *Pasuk 5:* What category of *aveirot* (sins) do the people have to “amend” (do *teshuva* for)?

5. *Pasuk 6:* (a) List all the *aveirot* (sins) the people have to stop doing:

(b) Are these mostly *Bein Adam LaMakom* or *Bein Adam LeChaveiro*?

6. *Pasuk* 9: (a) List the *aveirot* mentioned in this *pasuk*.

(b) Where do we know this list from?

(c) Is this list mostly *Bein Adam LeChaveiro* or *Bein Adam LaMakom*?

7. *Pesukim* 10-11: What do you think Yirmiyahu means in *pasuk* 11? What are the people doing wrong?

8. *Thought Questions*: What does God really want from us? What does it mean to be a “good Jew?” Why can’t you just observe *Bein Adam LaMakom* – why is *Bein Adam LeChaveiro* SO IMPORTANT?

Source #3: [Yirmiyahu 7:12-14](#)

כִּי לָכוּ נָא אֶל מְקוֹמִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁילֹו אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַנְתִּי שְׁמִי שָׁם בְּרָאשׁוֹנָה וְרָאוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ מִפְּנֵי רָעַת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
Just go to My place at Shiloh, where I had established My name formerly, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

וְעַתָּה יַעַן עָשׂוֹתְכֶם אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה נָאִם ה' וְאִדְבַּר אֲלֵיכֶם הַשֹּׁכֵם וְדִבַּר וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם וְאָקְרָא אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא עָנִיתֶם:
And now, because you do all these things—declares God—and though I spoke to you persistently, you would not listen; and though I called to you, you would not respond—

וְעָשִׂיתִי לְבֵיתִי אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עָלָיו אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בֹּטְחִים בּוֹ וְלַמְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָכֶם וְלְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְשִׁילֹו:
Therefore, I will do to the House that bears My name, on which you rely, and to the place that I gave you and your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh.

וְהִשְׁלַכְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַל פָּנָי כְּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁלַכְתִּי אֶת כָּל אַחֵיכֶם אֶת כָּל זֶרַע אֶפְרַיִם:
And I will cast you out of My presence as I cast out your kinsfolk, the whole brood of Ephraim.

Questions:

1. What had been located in Shiloh?

2. What had happened to it?

3. Why did this happen?

4. What is Yirmiyahu trying to tell the people about the permanence and “untouchability” of the *Beit HaMikdash*?

5. *Thought Question*: If you were living then, do you think you would have believed Yirmiyahu? Would you have believed that God would destroy God’s own house? Explain.

Source #4: [Talmud Gittin 55b-56a](#)

Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. This is because 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. 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.

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. 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 [*eikhul kurtza*] against them to the king. 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.

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. 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. Rabbi Yoḥanan says: The excessive humility of Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.

Questions:

1. In the story:

(a) Who was the host's **friend**?

(b) Who was the host's **enemy**?

(c) Who got **invited** to the host's feast?

2. How did the host react when he realized his enemy was at his feast instead of his friend?

3. (a) What did the enemy offer the host?

(b) Why did he offer that?

4. Thought question: How does this teach us about the importance of NOT embarrassing someone?

5. How did the host respond to the offer?

6. How did the rabbis and scholars who were at the feast respond to this as it was happening?

7. *Thought Question:* What do you think the Gemara is trying to teach us from the rabbis' behavior?

8. Summarize what Bar Kamtza did to get the whole Jewish community in trouble with the Romans:

9. *Thought Question:* Now that you've read the story, explain the first line in the Gemara – "Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza."

10. *Thought Questions:*

(a) What are two takeaways for you from this story?

(b) What questions do you still have?

Clearly, there were scholars, Torah learning, *avodat haMikdash* (work in the Temple), and mitzvah-doing during the times of the Batei Mikdash. Why weren't these enough?

SOME **BIG PICTURE** QUESTIONS (Feel free to add your own!)

- What do you think is the real "take away" about why the *Batei Mikdash* were destroyed?
- How can you integrate a greater awareness of *Bein Adam LeChaveiro* into your personal life?
- How can you, as an individual, heighten awareness of, and even improve, social justice?
- How can we, as a community, heighten awareness of and improve social justice?
- How is a building or a structure BOTH important in and of itself AND a symbol of big ideas and values?