

## Parshat Devarim - Shabbat Chazon Why the Ninth of Av?

Simon Wolf

The Mishna in Ta'anit enumerates five tragedies that occurred on the ninth day of Av:<sup>1</sup> On that day, as we will read in this week's parsha Parshat Devarim, Shabbat Chazon, it was decreed that our forefathers would not enter the land of Israel but rather wander and perish in the desert over the next forty years because of the sin of the Meraglim. The first and second Temples were destroyed. The city of Beitar was captured and the population decimated in the quashing of the Bar-Kochva revolt. Yerushalyim<sup>2</sup> was plowed over to fulfill the prophesy of Micha that "Zion shall be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins and the Temple Mount a monument in the forest."<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the latter three events ( חורבן בית שני , חורבן בית ראשון , חרישת העיר ) fell on Tisha B'Av the Gemara suggests is based on oral tradition. On the other hand, the first two events ( גזרת המרגלים , גזרת מרים ) are found in Tanach and are therefore subject to examination and validation.

The destruction of the first Temple is discussed in two places in Tanach, at the end of both Sefer Melachim and Sefer Yirmiyahu.

### מלכים ב פרק כה

(א) ויהי בשנת התשיעית למלכו בחדש העשירי בעשור  
לחדש בא ובכדראצר מלך-בבל הוא וכל-חילו על-ירושלם  
ויחן עליה ויבנו עליה דיק סביב:  
(ב) ותבא העיר במצור עד עשתי עשרה שנה למלך צדקיהו:  
(ג) בתשעה לחדש ויחזק הרעב בעיר ולא-היה לחם לעם  
הארץ: (ד) ותבקע העיר וכל-אנשי המלחמה הלילה דרך  
שערו בין החמתים אשר על-גן המלך וכשדים על-העיר סביב  
וילה דרך הערבה: (ה) וירדפו חיל-כשדים אחר המלך וישגו  
אתו בערבות ירחו וכל-חילו נפצו מעליו: (ו) ויתפשו את-  
המלך ויעלו אתו אל-מלך בבל רבלתה וידברו אתו משפט:  
(ז) ואת-בני צדקיהו לעיניו ואת-עיני צדקיהו עור  
ויאסרוהו בנחשתים ויבאהו בבל: ח  
(ח) ובחדש החמישי בשבעה לחדש היא שנת תשע-עשרה  
שנה למלך נבוכדנאצר מלך-בבל בא נבוזראדן רב-טבתים  
עבד מלך-בבל ירושלם:  
(ט) וישרף את-בית-יקוק ואת-בית המלך ואת כל-בתי  
ירושלם ואת-כל-בית גדול שרף באש:

In Melachim Bet, it says that on the tenth day of the tenth month (עשרה בטבת), Nebuchadnetzar lays siege to Yerushalyim. After being besieged for two years, the walls of the city are breached on the ninth day of the fourth month (ט' בתמוז). On the seventh day of the fifth month (ז' באב), the

Babylonean general and chief executioner, Nevuzeradin, burns the Temple and the entire city of Jerusalem. From Melachim Bet, it would seem that the Temple was destroyed on the seventh day of Av and not on the ninth.

### ירמיהו פרק נב

(ד) ויהי בשנה התשעית למלכו בחדש העשירי בעשור  
לחדש בא ובכדראצר מלך-בבל הוא וכל-חילו על-ירושלם  
ויחן עליה ויבנו עליה דיק סביב:  
(ה) ותבא העיר במצור עד עשתי עשרה שנה למלך צדקיהו:  
(ו) בחדש הרביעי בתשעה לחדש ויחזק הרעב בעיר ולא-  
היה לחם לעם הארץ:  
(ז) ותבקע העיר וכל-אנשי המלחמה יברחו ויצאו מהעיר  
לילה דרך שער בין-החמתים אשר על-גן המלך וכשדים על-  
העיר סביב וילכו דרך הערבה: (ח) וירדפו חיל-כשדים אחר  
המלך וישגו את-צדקיהו בערבת ירחו וכל-חילו נפצו מעליו:  
(ט) ויתפשו את-המלך ויעלו אתו אל-מלך בבל רבלתה בארץ  
חמת וידבר אתו משפטים: (י) וישחט מלך-בבל את-בני  
צדקיהו לעיניו וגם את-כל-שרי יהודה שחט ברבלתה:  
(יא) ואת-עיני צדקיהו עור ויאסרוהו בנחשתים ויבאהו מלך-  
בבל בבלה ויתגהו בבית-בית הפקדת עד-יום מותו:  
(יב) ובחדש החמישי בעשור לחדש היא שנת תשע-עשרה  
שנה למלך נבוכדנאצר מלך-בבל בא נבוזראדן רב-  
טבתים עמד לפני מלך-בבל בירושלם: (יג) וישרף את-  
בית-יקוק ואת-בית המלך ואת כל-בתי ירושלם ואת-כל-  
בית הגדול שרף באש:

Sefer Yirmiyahu, like in Melachim Bet, indicates that the Babylonean siege of Jerusalem began on the tenth day of the tenth month (עשרה בטבת). Similarly, the city is breached, after two years of siege, on the ninth day of the fourth month (ט' בתמוז). Then on the tenth day of the fifth month (י' באב), Nevuzeradin, the Babylonean general and executioner, burns the Temple and the entire city of Yerushalayim. Yirmiyahu seems to date the destruction of the Temple on the tenth day of Av rather than the ninth.

Not only is there no source that the Temple was destroyed on the ninth of Av, but there is also a discrepancy between the two sources that needs to be reconciled (7<sup>th</sup> vs 10<sup>th</sup>). The Gemara in Ta'anit,<sup>1</sup> aware of this inconsistency, makes the following suggestion to resolve the disparity. On the seventh of Av, the Babylonians entered the Temple. They celebrated, ransacked and desecrated the Temple on the seventh, eighth and ninth of Av. Then, late on the ninth of Av, they set fire to the Temple and it burnt on the entire day of the tenth of Av. While this proposition solves the seeming discrepancy between the verses in Melachim and Yirmiyahu, it only serves to reinforce the question as to why the Mishna indicates that the first Temple was destroyed on the ninth of Av. Rabbi Yochanan was so perplexed by this quandary that he states, "Had I been in that generation, I would have made the fast day on the

<sup>1</sup> תענית כו: וכו'. (משנה ד, ו).

<sup>2</sup> טור או"ח תקטט שחרש טורוסרפוס את ההיכל ע"פ הרמב"ן בתורת האדם אבל הרמב"ם כתב בהל' תענית ה, ג חרש טורוסרפוס הרשע ממלכי אדום את ההיכל ואת סביביו

<sup>3</sup> לכן בגללם צאן שדה תחבש וירושלם עיין תהיה ותר הבית לבמות יער (מיכה ג, יב) ירמיהו כו, יח)

tenth of Av because the majority of the Temple burnt on that day.”

What is even more disconcerting and supportive of Rabbi Yochanan's position is that the Mishna's claim that the story of the Meraglim took place on the ninth of Av faces a similar dilemma. The Gemara makes detailed calculations based on the Pesukim in Sefer Bamidbar as to when Moshe sent the Meraglim on their expedition. Once they have concluded that the mission began on the twenty-ninth of Sivan, the Gemara exclaims that the ninth of Av is only thirty-nine days later, not the requisite forty days that the Torah tells us they were reconnoitering the Land of Israel. Once again here, the initial assumption is that they returned on the tenth of Av.<sup>4</sup> The Gemara resolves the problem by suggesting that in that year they added an additional day to the month of Tammuz, making it a thirty-day month rather than the typical twenty-nine days, which resulted in the Meraglim returning on the ninth of Av.<sup>5</sup>

Rabbi Yochanan's position that the fast day should be commemorated on the tenth of Av seems eminently more palatable and plausible. It would obviate the need for adding a day to the calendar in the year the Meraglim were sent in order to have the decree that our forefathers would not enter the Land of Israel coincide with the ninth of Av. The Pasuk in Yirmiyahu could then be taken literally that the destruction of the first Temple took place on the tenth of Av.

Interestingly, in Eretz Yisrael, it seems that Rabbi Yochanan's view gained traction, at least in part. The Yerushalmi relates that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and Rabbi Avon both had the practice to fast on the ninth and tenth of Av and Rabbi Levi had the practice to fast on the ninth and the night of the tenth of Av.<sup>6</sup> The custom mentioned in the Yerushalmi seems to have achieved normative standing as a number of the Rishonim speak about what seems to be a relatively prevalent Minhag to fast on both the ninth and tenth of Av.<sup>7</sup> The Tur notes a waning in the practice because of the weakening physical constitution of people in later generations.<sup>8</sup> He brings evidence of this diminishment from the practice of Rabbi Levi to only fast on the night and not the whole day of the tenth of Av which he attributes to his inability to fast two full days in a row.<sup>9</sup> Today, he notes that the

proper Minhag is to abstain from meat and wine the night and day of the tenth, just enough to restore his soul, but to remain in a state of affliction. The cryptic last line of the Tur is understood by the Bach to mean that one should only eat the bare minimum of any food in order to restore their strength since in reality one should be fasting both days and of course it is not permitted to partake of any meat and wine on the tenth of Av.<sup>10</sup> The Shla suggests that one who continues to fast on the tenth of Av should mention Nachem in any prayer that he prays while he is still fasting.<sup>11</sup> Cumulatively, this all suggests a strong affinity for Rabbi Yochanan's position that the tenth of Av is the appropriate day to commemorate the destruction of the first Temple. That once again raises the question as to why the Mishna ascribes the destruction of the first Temple to the ninth of Av and why is the normative practice to fast on the ninth of Av rather than the tenth? Why all the machinations by the Gemara to have these events fall on the ninth of Av?

The Gemara explains that the dissention of the Rabbis to Rabbi Yochanan's opinion stems from their subscription to the principle that “it is preferable to focus on the beginning of the tragedy (אתחלתא דפורענותא עדיפא).” Why would the beginning of the destruction be more significant than the actual event itself?

Another puzzling aspect of Tisha B'Av is the fact that as the day of the ninth of Av wanes the intensity of the mourning diminishes. The special prayer for consolation over the destruction of the Temple (נחם) is only added into the Sh'moneh Esrei in the afternoon at Mincha because that is when they set fire to the Temple and so that is when we pray for consolation.<sup>12</sup> In addition, many items that are customs on Tisha B'Av, like not wearing Tallit and Tefillin and sitting on the floor, are suspended in the afternoon.<sup>13</sup> It seems completely counterintuitive to start seeking consolation at the exact moment that the destruction of the Temple is set in motion, especially since that is the whole reason we commemorate the destruction on Tisha B'Av.

There are two approaches in the Midrashim that could shed light on this matter. The Gemara Kiddushin relates the extraordinary means to which Avyimi went in performing the commandment of

<sup>4</sup> בה"א לפי רש"י חזרו מאוחר ביום ט' באב ובכו בליל י' (מאד דומה לתיאור חורבן הבית) ולפי התוספות חזרו בעשירי

<sup>5</sup> לפי רש"י ב' ימים מסיון, ל' מתמוז, ו' מאב וחזרו מאוחר בח' באב והעם בכו בכיית חנם בליל ט' באב ולפי התוס' א' מסיון, ל' מתמוז, ו' מאב וחזרו בט' באב עצמו

<sup>6</sup> ירושלמי תענית ד, ו

<sup>7</sup> שו"ת מהר"ל קכה כשט' באב חל להיות בשבת לא מתענים י' ו"א במקום ט' וי' (מובא בב"י תקנ"ח)

<sup>8</sup> טור או"ח תקנח

<sup>9</sup> שם ואנו בזמן הזה תש כחנו ואפי' ביוה"כ שהיה ראוי לעשות מספק ב' ימים אין אנו

מספיקין (לענ"ד יש לפקפק בעיקר ההשוואה כי יום שני של יו"כ הוא משום ספיקא

דיומא ומנהג אבותינו בידינו ואנן בקיעין בקביע דירחא אבל להתענות ב' באב הוא מנהג מעיקר הדין ולא מפני ספיקא דיומא)

<sup>10</sup> נראה דר"ל דאפילו שאר מאכלים לא יאכל רק כדי להשיב הנפש אבל לא קאי

אאכילת בשר דבשר אין לאכול כלל (שם בב"ח) וגם בלבוש שם... מ"מ אין לו לאדם

להתענג ביום עשירי... דאי לא ששת כוחינו היה ראוי להתענות גם יום עשירי, אלא

שאין גזרין גזירה על הצבור שאין רוב הציבור יכולין לעמוד בו

<sup>11</sup> של"ה מסכת תענית פרק נר מצוה אות י' (גם מצוטט בברכ"י תקנח, א)

<sup>12</sup> רמ"א או"ח תקנח, א

<sup>13</sup> שו"ע או"ח תקנה, א ובביאור הגר"א שם ותקנט, ג

Kibuv Av V'Em.<sup>14</sup> One day while waiting on his father, he has a heavenly inspired insight into homiletically interpreting Psalm chapter seventy-nine. The Psalm begins, "A song to Asaph (מזמור לאסף)", but it then continues, "God, heathens have entered Your domain, defiled Your holy temple and turned Jerusalem into a heap of ruins (אלקים באו גוים בנחלתיך טמאו את היכל קדשך שמו את ירושלים (לעיניים)." Given the negative content and theme of the Psalm, why does it begin as "A song to Asaph (מזמור לאסף)" it should begin as "A lament to Asaph (קינה לאסף)"? Avyimi's insight was the reason that the destruction described in the Psalm is a song is based on the verse in Eicha, "God vented all his anger, poured out His wrath, He kindled a fire in Tzion which devoured its foundations."<sup>15</sup> When seen through the proper prism, there is a silver lining to the destruction of the Temple in that God poured out His anger on the wood and stones, the Temple, rather than Bnei Yisrael.<sup>16</sup> The moment that God allowed the Temple to be destroyed was also the instant that He spared Bnei Yisrael from annihilation.

A similar idea is found in the Midrash on the verse in Eicha, "Daughter of Zion your iniquities have been expiated..."<sup>17</sup> The destruction of the Temple was such a devastating punishment and seminal event that it initiated a complete reset, a clean slate for the sins of Bnei Yisrael.<sup>18</sup> It was an either or proposition, Bnei Yisrael or the Temple. God in his infinite mercy chose the Temple which spared the Jewish people. As we say in the Kinot of Tisha B'Av, "God you are righteous and charitable, with the destruction of both temples because of our sins, and we survived and are still living..."<sup>19</sup> This would explain why the beginning of the destruction is the moment we commemorate because inexorably intertwined in it is the consolation of Bnei Yisrael's survival.

In addition, the Gemara<sup>20</sup> points out the inconsistency in the verbiage of the verse, "when a fire breaks out and finds brambles...the kindler of the fire will have to make restitution (כי תצא אש (ומצאה קוצים...שלם ישלם המבעיר את הבעירה)"<sup>21</sup> Why does the Pasuk begin with a passive verb, "a fire breaks out," and end with an active verb, "the kindler of the fire?" The Gemara allegorically

interprets the verse as referring to God. It as if God said that although the fire that I brought to destroy the Temple was caused by the sins of Bnei Yisrael, nevertheless I will make restitution and take responsibility for the fire that I kindled. I kindled a fire in Tzion as it says "He kindled a fire in Tzion which devoured its foundations (ויצתת אש) and I will therefore rebuild it in the future with fire as it says about Yerushalayim, "and I, proclaims God, will be for her a wall of fire surrounding it... (ואני אהיה לה נאם יקוק חומת אש סביב)." The moment of the destruction spawned hope for the future.<sup>23</sup>

The above explains why the setting of the fire to the Temple late on the ninth of Av was such a pivotal moment and it also explains why that should precipitate a sense of consolation and relief, but it still does not fully explain why the ninth of Av was chosen over the tenth. It could be that Chazal wanted to embed in the direness and calamitous nature of the day some sense of hope, but is that a sufficient reason to spurn the tenth of Av when the overwhelming majority of the destruction took place?

What is even more striking is the position attributed to Rabbie (רבי) that he wanted to abolish Tisha B'Av (בקש רבי לעקר ט' באב).<sup>24</sup> In order to explain this puzzling statement, the Gemara limits Rabbie's opinion to a situation in which Tisha B'Av fell on Shabbat. He proffers that since the fast is already being deferred from its usual time let us eliminate it completely rather than postpone it to Sunday. The Rabbis who disagreed with Rabbi Yochanan believed that the ninth of Av is the preferable day to memorialize the destruction of the Temple, but that implies that they acknowledge the tenth of Av as being a viable option. They accept that the tenth has significance, but it is a less favorable alternative to the ninth of Av. Rabbie's position is so remarkable in that it views the ninth of Av as being the only possible commemoration of the destruction of the temple. While Rabbie's position is rejected in practice, it does have manifestation and influence in some normative positions. The Sha'arei Knesset HaGedolah when speaking of those that have the practice to also fast on the tenth of Av, he notes that they have the right to voluntarily opt into the stringencies of the five afflictions, the mourning and the lamenting (ולנהוג בו הה' ענויים), but they do not have the right to abstain from Torah learning or to be exempt from

<sup>14</sup> קידושין לא:

<sup>15</sup> כלה יקוק את חמתו שפך חרון אפו ויצתת אש בציון ותאכל יסודתיה (איכה ד, יא)

<sup>16</sup> איכה רבה פרשה ד אות יד, רש"י קידושין לא: ועיין בתוס' שם שמביאים פירוש אחר

ובמהרש"א שטוען שההסבר של תוס' הוא יותר מסתבר ע"פ ההקשר לכיבוד אב ואם

<sup>17</sup> תם-עונך בת-ציון לא יוסיף להגלותך פקד עונך בת-אדום גלה על-טאתיה (איכה

ד, כב)

<sup>18</sup> והיה כאשר נלכדה ירושלים אמר להם אף היא אינה צרה אלא שמחה שבו ביום נולד

מנחם ובו ביום נטלו ישראל אפוכי על עונותיהם דאמר ר' שמואל בר נחמן אפוכי

שלימה נטלו ישראל על עונותיהם ביום שחרב בהמ"ק שנא' תם עונך בת ציון לא

יוסיף להגלותך (איכה רבה ד, כה במדבר רבה יג, ה' עווד)

<sup>19</sup> לך ה' הצדקה, בשני חרבנות שחרבו בבצענו ואנו קימים... (קינות לתשעה באב -

קינה יט - לך ה' הצדקה)

<sup>20</sup> בבא קמא ס:

<sup>21</sup> שמות כב,

<sup>22</sup> ואני אהיה לה נאם יקוק חומת אש סביב ולקבד אהיה בתוקה (זכריה ב, ט)

<sup>23</sup> מאד דומה לנחמת רבי עקיבא במכות כד: עד שלא נתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה -

הייתי מתיירא שלא תתקיים נבואתו של זכריה, עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה -

בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת

<sup>24</sup> גמ' מגילה ה: וגם ירושלמי תענית ד, ו בהיפוך המימרות של ר' אבא בר זבדא ור'

wearing Tallit and Tefillin.<sup>25</sup> He rejects the possibility that the tenth of Av could actually simulate Tisha B'Av or be anything more than a stringency. The Gra seems to be pushing back against many of the Minhagim of the tenth of Av when he remarks that all of the practices of the tenth of Av are simply stringencies, but the letter of the law is that once Tisha B'Av is over all the restrictions associated with it and with the week in which it falls immediately terminate. How could it possibly be that the tenth is an inappropriate day for marking the destruction of the Temple when the majority of the burning and ruination took place on that day?

In order to answer this question, it is worthwhile to take a look at a story found in Sefer Shmuel.<sup>26</sup> Natan HaNavi indicts Dovid with improperly consorting with Bat Sheva and informs him of the impending punishments that will befall him. One of the penalties Dovid will suffer is that the baby born of the illicit relationship will pass away. After Bat Sheva gives birth to the baby, the child falls deathly ill. Dovid entreats God to save the baby. He fasts and lies on the ground as if in mourning. The elders of Dovid's household try to comfort him and encourage him to eat with them, but Dovid is inconsolable. On the seventh day, the baby passes away. The elders of Dovid's house are afraid to break the news to him of the passing of the child. They surmise that if Dovid acted this way when the baby was alive, then who knows what he will do to himself when he hears the news of the child's passing. Dovid sees the people of his household whispering to each other and he intuits that the child must have passed away. He asks his servants for confirmation of the baby's passing and then he immediately arises from the floor, washes and anoints himself, changes his clothes and he then heads to the house of God to bow down. Upon returning to the palace, they prepare a meal for him and he eats. His household queries him about his quixotic behavior. Why when the baby was alive did you fast and cry and then when the baby passed away you were consoled and ate? It seems completely counterintuitive. Dovid HaMelech explains that when the child was alive, I fasted and I cried because I said who knows maybe God will show me grace and the child will live. Once the child had passed away, why should I fast, can I bring him back to life? I am inevitably going to join him; he is not coming back to me. Dovid's insight is actually codified in a Mishna in Berachot, "when one prays for something that is in the past, it is a worthless prayer."<sup>27</sup> The Rambam explains that one does not pray for something that has already happened, but rather one only

beseeches God and requests things that are possible to happen in the future.<sup>28</sup>

With that in mind, we can now understand the choice of the ninth of Av as the day to commemorate the destruction of the Temple. Until the Babylonians set fire to the Temple, there was a chance that the decree could be reversed; there was a hope that the Temple could be salvaged. There was a value in imploring God and seeking His intercession. Once the destruction had begun, it was a fait accompli. At that moment, there was no longer any value in praying or mourning, because as the Mishna in Berachot says, it would be an act in futility. For that reason, the Rabbis chose the ninth of Av since "the beginning of the tragedy is preferable (אתחלתא דפורענותא עדיפא)" because it is the pivotal transition from an event being in the future and preventable to being in the past and inevitable. It also explains why the mourning ebbs and the consolation begins to surface on the afternoon of Tisha B'Av. At the moment of the destruction, there was nothing more we could do and therefore, like Dovid HaMelech, we needed to look forward and grapple with the reality of a world without the Temple. The process of consolation could begin.<sup>29</sup> Tisha B'Av is the day when the destruction became a reality, when we passed the point of no return. To commemorate the fact that the Temple continued to burn on the tenth of Av would be similar to praying for something that has already happened in the past. In practice, we do not accept Rabbie's position, but we acknowledge it by having the primary day of mourning be the ninth of Av and by beginning the process of consolation late in the day. On the other hand, the Rabbis position prevailed in that, similar to Aveilut, we also recognize that moving from mourning to consolation is a process and we therefore have the transitional bridge of the tenth of Av. We slowly emerge from the depths of despair on the ninth of Av to look forward with hope and reach the consolation of Shabbat Nachamu.

נחם ה' אלהינו את אבלי ציון ואת אבלי ירושלים...כי אתה ה' באש הצתה ובאש אתה עתיד לבנותה. כאמור: ואני אהיה לה נאם ה' חומת אש סביב ולכבוד אהיה בתוכה...

Shabbat Shalom

<sup>25</sup> לפי שאין מתפללים לה' על מה שכבר נעשה, אלא מתפללים לה' ומבקשים ממנו דברים האפשריים להבא (פיה"מ שם) והל' ברכות י, כב וכו' עיין יחזקאל לג, כא-כב ובמלבי"ם שם...רק אחר שנחרב הבית אז ניתן רשות ליחזקאל לנבאות כי נשלם שליחות ימיהו ומאז נפתח פיו לנבאות אל הכלל ולא נאלם עוד...

<sup>26</sup> שירי כנסת הגדולה הגהות בית יוסף או"ח סימן תקנח  
<sup>27</sup> שמואל ב' יב, יג-כה  
<sup>28</sup> ברכות נד. (משנה ט, ג)