

Rosh Hashanah Evening 5772
Babylonian Talmud Gittin 55b-56a

Scene 1

The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. came through a Kamza and a Bar Kamza in this way.

A certain man had a friend named Kamza and an enemy named Bar Kamza.

The man once threw a party and said to his servant: Go and invite Kamza. The servant went and instead invited Bar Kamza.

Scene 2

When the man saw Bar Kamza at his party he said to him: You gossip about me; what are you doing here? Get out!

Bar Kamza replied: Since I am already here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink.

The man said: No way!

Bar Kamza said: Then let me give you half the cost of the party.

The man again said no.

Bar Kamza said: Then let me pay for the whole party.

The man still said no.

And he took Bar Kamza by the hand and threw him out.

Scene 3

Said Bar Kamza: Since the Rabbis were sitting there and did not stop the man this shows that they agreed with what he did.

Scene 4

Bar Kamza said to himself: I will go and inform against them to the Government.

He went and said to the Emperor: The Jews are rebelling against you.

The Emperor said: How can I be sure?

Bar Kamza said to him: Send them an offering and see whether they will sacrifice it.

So the Emperor sent with him a fine calf.

On the way he made a blemish on its upper lip, or as some say on the white of its eye, in a place where the Jews count it as a blemish, but the Romans do not.

Scene 5

The Rabbis were inclined to sacrifice the offering in order not to offend the Government.

Said Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas to them: People will then say that blemished animals are offered on the altar.

Scene 6

They then proposed to kill Bar Kamza so that he would not go and inform against them again.

But Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them: Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?

Scene 7

Rabbi Yohanan thereupon remarked: Through the scrupulousness of Rabbi Zechariah ben Abkulas our House was destroyed, our Temple burned and we were exiled from our land.

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