17 of Tamuz: The Falling Of Jerusalem's Walls

Today, Thursday, July 9, 2020, we commemorate the 17 of Tamuz, a day of public fasting, in memory of five tragedies that occurred on that day. Previously we mentioned two of these tragedies (see below) and today we will mention the other three

APOSTOMUS BURNED A SEFER TORAH

A Jewish command attacked an expedition of Romans bringing weapons and supplies to the invading army. The Roman governor, Komanos, besieged the city of Bet Horon, from where the Jewish attack had been organized, and ordered that the attackers be arrested. Roman soldiers complied with the governor's orders but a Roman officer, named Apostomus, took a Sefer Torah and publicly burned it. This happened on the 17 of Tamuz 17. Upon hearing of this great tragedy –which had never happened before, but unfortunately it happened many times after that– the Jews started a great revolt, which was only placated when they executed the roman officer that committed this aberration.

THE DAILY SACRIFICE WAS CANCELLED

Every day at the Bet haMiqdash two sacrifices were offered, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The daily sacrifice was so important that it was also offered on Shabbat and even on Yom Kippur. This Mitsva was fulfilled uninterruptedly from the time Moshe Rabbenu until the 17th day of tammuz in 586 BCE, that is, every single day for around 700 years.

When the Babylonian army invaded Jerusalem the city's walls were destroyed on the 9th day of Tamuz. But the Bet haMiqdash, which was protected by other internal walls, continued to operate, and the daily sacrifice was the best proof of this. The Gemara tells that on the 13th of Tamuz the Cohanim, the

priests who were in charge of the public sacrifices, could not find any animals left. Then, they tried to bribe the invading army soldiers and get animals at any cost. This worked for four days, until the 17th of Tamuz. That day, for the first time in 700 years, the daily sacrifice was not offered. And so the Bet haMiqdash, while still standing for three more weeks, virtually ceased to operate as such.

THE WALLS WERE DESTROYED

In the time of the Second Bet haMiqdash the Jews rebelled against the Romans and they recover the control of Jerusalem for a few years, defending the city protected by strong walls. These walls were originally built in the days of King Solomon. The people fought with all their might and ingenuity to survive and repel the powerful enemy and they knew that as long as the walls stood, they could be safe.

The Romans, the most powerful world-power at that time, had very advanced military technology. They used catapults with which they threw very heavy rocks of up to 25 kilograms that impacted and broke the stones of the walls. They also used towers through which the soldiers climbed the walls and attacked the Jewish fighters. The Romans attacked with “ram’s heads”, huge logs with an iron ram’s head to knock down the city walls and gates.

On the 17th day of Tamuz one of the walls of Yerushalayim, the fortress of Antonia, built by Herod 40 years ago in honor of the emperor Marc Antony, collapsed, and a breach was opened through which Roman soldiers began to enter the city. This was the beginning of the end of the city of Yerushalayim.

The Jews fought valiantly from within the walls, but as our Sages explained, they were not united but separate. Our strength and survival depends on HaShem, and He is with us when we are united. This does not mean that all the Jews of the world should think alike (that is impossible!) but it does mean that we should make our maximum effort to accept and tolerate each other and feeling not only part of the same

people but part of the same family .