

Fast of Ab - Idolatry and Baseless Hatred

Idolatry was associated with Belial - a term generally referring to the "evil inclination," a spirit of selfishness that makes us worthless to God. Paul equates Belial with Satan (**2 Corinthians 6:15**).

Deuteronomy 13:13 - "Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known"

But idolatry manifests in many ways:

One Way - Concerning the poor

Deuteronomy 15:8-9 - " But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked (belial) heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee."

"Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart," - "Or, thy heart of Belial"

Rabbi Yehosha ben Korchah: Whoever turns his eye away from one who asks for charity is considered as if he were worshipping idols. For it is written in one place, "Beware lest ye have a thought of Belial in your heart"; and in another place, "The people have become children of Belial." Just as in that case the sin is idolatry, so in this case the sin is idolatry." (Bava Batua 10a)

The Idolatry warned about in the Old Testament prophets shows up in a different form in the New Testament.

Colossians 3:5 - "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:"

The Amoraim (Jewish scholars of the period from about 200 to 500 A.D.) attributed the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem as punishment from God for the "baseless" hatred that pervaded Jewish society at the time.

"Due to what reason was the First Temple destroyed? It was destroyed because three matters existed in the First Temple: idol worship, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed . . . However, in the Second Temple period the people were engaged in Torah study, observance of mitzvahs, and acts of kindness, so 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. (Talmud, Yoma 9b.)

Another scholar, Rabbi Chanina said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the people did not rebuke one another. (Although they did a lot of complaining and accusing one another - true rebuke must come from a heart of love and concern)

Another interesting rabbinical observation:

One reason why the Second Temple was destroyed was that “they established their rulings on the basis of Torah law and did not go beyond the letter of the law.” Why was that bad? One explanation is that this too is seen as a result of baseless hatred. It is up to the litigants to be willing to find a compromise and go beyond the letter of the law, which they were unwilling to do due to their baseless hatred.

The following story illustrates both these reasons, baseless hatred and strict legalism:

The Hatred between Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

(Talmud, Gittin 55–56)\\\\\\\\\\\\

A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, “Go and bring Kamtza.” The man went and brought Bar Kamtza.

When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there he said, “See, you are my enemy; what are you doing here? Get out!” Said the other: “Since I am already here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink.”

Said the host: “Absolutely not.”

“Then let me give you half the cost of the party.”

The host refused.

“Then let me pay for the whole party.”

Still the host refused, and took him by the hand and threw him out.

Said Bar Kamtza, “Since the Rabbis were sitting there and did not stop him, this shows that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them to the government.”

He went and said to the emperor, “The Jews are rebelling against you.”

Said the emperor, “How can I know that this is true?”

“Send them an offering,” said Bar Kamtza, “and see whether they will offer it on the altar.”

So he sent with him a fine calf. While 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 we count it a blemish but they do not.

The rabbis were inclined to offer it in order not to offend the government. Said Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas to them: “People will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar.”

They then proposed to kill Bar Kamtza so that he should not go and inform against them, but Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas said to them, “Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?”

Rabbi Yochanan thereupon remarked: “Because of the scrupulousness of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt, and we ourselves exiled from our land.”

The Remedy is Love... but How?

The rabbis therefore urged Jews to nurture unconditional love for one another "by focusing on the divine soul that we all share, rather than focusing on the externalities that divide us."

The Pharisees of Jesus' day are depicted as self-righteous and legalistic.

In **Matthew 23** Jesus pronounces "Woes" on them, another illustration of how idolatry is expressed in many forms.

(Read the whole chapter) it ends...

Matthew 23:37-38 - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

Jesus adds:

Matthew 23:39 - "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

This is a quote from **Psalms 118** at the end of the Hallel.

If we say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." we acknowledge Jesus is Lord, that "it is finished."

This is also the way we "discern the Lord's body," by agreeing that we are a part of Him

and a part of our fellow believers also.

1 Corinthians 11:29 - "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

We are agreeing that any idols we have served have been overturned and destroyed, so they have no power to cause resentment or pride or boasting among us.

We turn from selfishness and the heart of Belial, with openness and generosity to all.

We go to the cross and die. That is how we love one another unconditionally, and avoid the baseless hatred that destroyed the Temple.

Pointing toward Redemption

The scriptures of the Three of Rebuke end with a note of hope and redemption. The Jerusalem "that now is" must die so the New Jerusalem can descend on us.

Isaiah 1:1-27

Isaiah 1:25-27 - "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness."