



5784 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Balak / פרשת בלק

The Arzei Levanon of Jerusalem: Rebbe Shimon ben Gamliel

We famously commemorate the ten great martyrs, known as the *asarah harugei malchut*, every *Tisha B'Av* and *Yom Kippur*. These giant Torah sages, likened to towering cedar trees, were cut down by the Romans in brutal fashion. As we near the Three Weeks and the period in which we mourn Jerusalem's destruction, I thought it would be appropriate to discuss the loss of these *tzaddikim* and their connection to our holy city.

(As an aside, the *midrashei Chazal* portray their martyrdom as if it happened in one fell swoop, a single decree from a Roman ruler that led to the demise of all ten Torah scholars. But as *Rav Sherira Gaon* already noted, it is clear that *Chazal* did not mean this literally. The deaths of these scholars could not have happened simultaneously. In fact, they were spread over 100 years of history. The first martyrs were killed close to the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, while *Rebbe Akiva* and his student *Rebbe Elazar ben Shamua* were killed after the *Bar Kochva* rebellion. *Chazal* viewed these tragic deaths as parts of a larger decree from heaven, and therefore portray them as one decree in the lower world as well.)

The first two martyrs were killed as Jerusalem was nearing destruction: *Rebbe Shimon ben Gamliel*, the great-grandson of *Hillel* and prince of Israel, and *Rebbe Yishmael Kohen Gadol*, the high priest known for his great piety and beauty. It is not a coincidence that the Romans chose these two *tzaddikim* as the first of their victims. On a superficial level, it would seem that the Romans sought to eradicate opposition and would naturally target the greatest political leaders of Israel. However, it doesn't seem that *Rebbe Shimon* or *Rebbe Yishmael* were involved in any rebellious activity (in fact, they may have opposed it). It is more likely that the Romans sought to break the Jewish people's resolve and pride; these two gems were central to the identity of *Klal Yisrael*.

On a deeper level, *Rebbe Shimon* and *Rebbe Yishmael* are profoundly interconnected with Jerusalem. Their deaths were natural spiritual harbingers of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. *Rebbe Shimon* was the *Nasi*, the descendant of *David HaMelech* who sat at the head of the *Sanhedrin*.

As we have already noted, *David HaMelech* is not only responsible for the physical construction of Jerusalem. His legacy and spiritual destiny are deeply intertwined with the city. In the third *beracha* of *Birkat HaMazon* which is dedicated to Jerusalem, one must mention *David's* monarchy (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 188:3). The commentators explain that Jerusalem's restoration is not a technical outcome of the *Mashiach's* arrival. Rather, the city cannot attain her previous glory without *David's* descendant at her helm.

This can explain an anomaly in the blessing of *עירך וירושלים* in the *Amidah* prayer. The *beracha* closes with a reference to *David HaMelech*, *וכסא דוד עבדך מהרה לתוכה תכין*, and the throne of *David* Your servant You should speedily establish. Normally, a blessing must close with its essence and main theme. In fact, we sometimes add on an extra line to the end of a *beracha* that is superfluous just to ensure a proper closing



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(such as *havdala*). Why do we close the blessing of Jerusalem's restoration with a reference to *David's* monarchy? This question is particularly poignant given that the next *beracha* in the *Amidah* is dedicated to requesting *David's* restoration. Why mix *David* into this blessing when we will mention him momentarily? But based on what we noted above, the explanation is obvious. The restoration of *David* is fundamentally and spiritually necessary for Jerusalem to be restored. Their destinies are entirely intertwined to the point that a reference to *כסא דוד* is viewed as thematically *identical* to *עירך ברחמים תשוב* ולירושלים.

Given these deeply rooted connections between *Rebbe Shimon's* ancestors and Jerusalem, his death inflicted a grievous spiritual wound on the Davidic line and, by definition, on the spiritual vibrancy of Jerusalem itself.

