

What Happens When You Let the Zealots Take Over

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BH

I'm a specialist in ancient texts and lately I've been thinking of this one, the story of why Jerusalem fell in 70 C.E. The city had strong walls, an absolutely secure water supply and plenty of food and energy to outlast any siege. It would seem that the city was impregnable. So how did it come about that Jerusalem was destroyed and the Temple burned? Here is the story:

Vespasian the Caesar came and besieged Jerusalem for three years. There were in it three men of great wealth, Nakdimon ben Gurion, Ben Kalba Savua and Ben Tsitsit Hakeset. One of these said to the people of Jerusalem; I will keep them in wheat and barley. A second said: I will keep them in wine, oil and salt. The third said: I will keep them in wood...

The zealots were then in the city. The Rabbis said to them: Let us go out and make peace with them [the Romans]. They would not let them, but on the contrary said, Let us go out and fight them. The Rabbis said: You will not succeed. The zealots then rose up and burnt the stores of wheat and barley so that a famine ensued. (B. Gittin 56a)

There were warring factions within the city. (I know, Jews disagreeing with each other, unfathomable, right?) Because they could not agree, nor could they be influenced by more moderate parties, they burned the supplies and a famine, the thing that causes surrender, ensued.

No discussion questions, per se, this time. Just a little lesson from history.