

From the Rabbi's Desk  
Rabbi Manes Kogan  
Hillcrest Jewish Center  
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366  
[rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org](mailto:rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org)

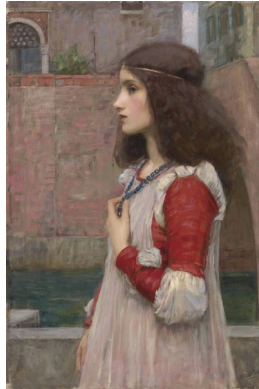
## Stories with a Twist [26]

### Jerusalem Was Destroyed on Account of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

(A Play in Five Acts)

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Gittin 55b – 56b)

#### Act 4



#### The Story up to this Point...

#### Background to Our Story

Marta bat Baitos



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Gittin. Koren publishers Jerusalem \(Page 314\)](#)

Marta bat Baitos is mentioned in several places in the Talmud. Due to her great wealth, she has served throughout the ages as the archetype of a very wealthy woman. The house of Baitos was one of the most powerful and wealthy families of priests in Jerusalem, and many members of this household served as High Priest or in other important positions in the Temple. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, Marta married Yehoshua ben Gamla as a result of trickery on his part. After becoming betrothed to him, she sought to secure him the position as High Priest.

#### Rabbi Zadok ben Eleazar

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbi\\_Zadok](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbi_Zadok)

Rabbi Zadok was a [Tanna](#) of the second generation of the Tannaic era, a contemporary of [Joshua ben Hananiah](#) and [Eliezer ben Hurcanus](#), descending from [Tribe of Benjamin](#). Rabbi Zadok was one of the notable Tannaim of his generation, and his opinion on many matters is often cited in the [Talmud](#). Forty years before the destruction of the [Second Temple](#), he observed fasts in order that [Jerusalem](#) might not be destroyed, and would eat only at night.

## The Text: Babylonian Talmud Gittin 55b – 56b

מרתא בת ביתוס עתירתא דירושלים הוּנא, שדרתה לשלוחה ואמרה ליה: זיל אייתי לי סמידא. אדאזל איזדבן, אתא אמר לה: סמידא ליכא, חיותא איכא, אמרה ליה: זיל אייתי לי. אדאזל איזדבן, אתא ואמר לה: חיותא ליכא, גושקרא איכא, אמרה ליה: זיל אייתי לי. אדאזל איזדבן, אתא ואמר לה: גושקרא ליכא, קימחא דשערי איכא, אמרה ליה: זיל אייתי לי. אדאזל איזדבן, הוה שליפא מסאנא, אמרה: איפוק ואחזי אי משפחנא מידי למיכל, איתיב לה פרתא בפרעא ומתה. קרי עלה רבן יוחנן בן זפאי: "הרפה בה והענוגה אשר לא נסתה כה רגלה". איכא דאמרי: גרוגרות דרבי צדוק אכלה, ואיתגיסא ומתה.

דרבי צדוק יתיב ארבעין שנין בתעניתא דלא ליחרב ירושלים, פי הוה אכיל מידי הוה מיתחזי מאבראי, וכי הוה בריא, מייתי ליה גרוגרות, מיניץ מניה ושדי להו. פי הוה קא ניחא נפשה, אפיקתה לכל דהבא וכספא שדיתה בשוקא, אמרה: האי למאי מיבעי לי! והיננו דכתיב: "כספם בחוצות ישליכו".

Marta bat Baitos was one of the wealthy women of Jerusalem. She sent out her agent and said to him: Go bring me fine flour. By the time he went, the fine flour was already sold. He came and said to her: There is no fine flour, but there is ordinary flour. She said to him: Go bring me ordinary flour. By the time he went, the ordinary flour was also sold. He came and said to her: There is no ordinary flour, but there is coarse flour. She said to him: Go bring me coarse flour. By the time he went, the coarse flour was already sold. He came and said to her: There is no coarse flour, but there is barley flour. She said to him: Go bring me barley flour. But once again, by the time he went, the barley flour was also sold. She had just removed her shoes, but she said: I will go out myself and see if I can find something to eat. She stepped on some dung, which stuck to her foot, and, overcome by disgust, she died. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai read concerning her: "The tender and delicate woman among you who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground" (Deuteronomy 28:56). There are those who say she ate a fig of Rabbi Tzadok, and became disgusted and died.

What are these figs?

Rabbi Tzadok observed fasts for forty years, praying that Jerusalem would not be destroyed. He became so emaciated from fasting that when he would eat something it was visible from the outside of his body. And when he would eat after a fast they would bring him figs and he would suck out their liquid and cast the rest away. It was one such fig that Marta bat Baitos found and that caused her death. It is further related that as she was dying, she took out all of her gold and silver and threw it in the marketplace. She said: Why do I need this? And this is as it is written: "They shall cast their silver in the streets and their gold shall be as an impure thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord; they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels" (Ezekiel 7:19).



**Explaining the Story** What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

### Comprehension Questions

**?** Why did Martha the daughter of Baitos send her manservant to buy fine flour?

**?** Why do you think the manservant did not buy lower-quality flour right away, without first asking his mistress?

**?** Why didn't Martha put on her shoes before going outside?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### Analysis Questions

**?** Why didn't Martha ask her manservant from the beginning to bring her whatever he found outside?

**?** Why did Martha die when some dung stuck to her foot, or according to the other version, when she ate a fig left by Rabbi Zadok?

**?** What could have prevented Martha's premature death?

## **“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

! Get ready for real life, venture yourself outside of your comfort zone, and learn how to live with less!



How can we cope with the unfortunate challenges life will inevitably bring upon us?

Martha’s tragic story teaches us that in abundance, we should teach ourselves frugality; in times of plenty, we should learn how to live with less. You do not plan for a rainy day when it is pouring. Our physical and mental health depend on our special abilities and skills to adapt to different circumstances. The time to learn these special abilities and skills is when we are in a position of power and control and not when we are down and out of luck.