

Destruction and Discovery:

Second Temple Jerusalem Through Archaeology

The Sanhedrin Prepares the Way

On the first of Adar they make a public announcement about the shekels and concerning kilayim. On the fifteenth: they read the Megillah [Esther] in walled cities, and they fix the roads and the streets and the ritual water baths, and they perform all public duties, and they mark the graves, and [messengers] go forth also concerning kilayim. (Mishnah Shekalim 1:1)

Lost and Found

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: There was a Claimant's Stone in Jerusalem, and anyone who lost an item would be directed there and anyone who found a lost item would be directed there. This finder would stand and proclaim his find and that owner would stand and provide its distinguishing marks and take the item. And that is the place about which we learned in a mishna (*Ta'anit* 19a): Go and see if the Claimant's Stone has been obscured by the rising water. Bava Metzia 28b)

Shabbat Shalom

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: They sound six blasts on Shabbat eve. The first blast is in order to stop the people from work in the fields. The second blast is to stop those who are working in the city, and to inform the proprietors to close the stores. The third is to inform them to light the Shabbat light; that is the statement of Rabbi Natan. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: The third to remove their phylacteries,. And he pauses after the third blast for the length of time it takes to fry a small fish or to stick bread to the sides of the oven.. And he sounds a *tekia*, and sounds a *terua*, and sounds a *tekia*, and he accepts Shabbat. (Shabbat 35b)

Which Gate?

All who entered the Temple Mount entered by the right and went round [to the right] and went out by the left, save for one to whom something had happened, who entered and went round to the left. [He was asked]: "Why do you go round to the left?" [If he answered] "Because I am a mourner," [they said to him], "May He who dwells in this house comfort you." [If he answered] "Because I am excommunicated" [they said]: "May He who dwells in this house inspire them to draw you near again," the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yose to him: you make it seem as if they treated him unjustly. Rather [they should say]: "May He who dwells in this house inspire you to listen to the words of your colleagues so that they may draw you near again." (Mishnah Middot 2:2)

The Temple

One who has not seen Herod's building has never seen a beautiful building in his life. (Bava Batra 4a)

Pure to God or a Receipt?

אַרְבַּעַה חוֹתְמוֹת הָיוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְכָתוּב עֲלֵיהֶן, עֵגֶל, זָכָר, גְּדִי, חוֹטֵא. בֶּן עֲזַאי אוֹמֵר, הַמְּשָׁה הָיוּ, וְאַרְמִית כְּתוּב עֲלֵיהֶן, עֵגֶל, זָכָר, גְּדִי, חוֹטֵא דֵל, וְחוֹטֵא עֲשִׂיר.

ברטנורא: והב' זכר לנסכי איל, שתרגום איל דכרא

There were four seals in the Temple, and on them was inscribed [respectively]: 'calf', 'ram', 'kid', 'sinner'. Ben Azzai says: there were five and on them was inscribed in Aramaic [respectively]" 'calf', 'ram', 'kid', 'poor sinner', and 'rich sinner'.

On the seals was inscribed the name of the day because of the defrauders. Mishnah Shekalim 5:3

Incense Altar

The craftsmen of the House of Avtinas did not want to teach about the secret of the preparation of the incense,. The Sages taught in a *baraita*: The members of the House of Avtinas were expert in the technique of preparing the incense, and they did not want to teach others. The Sages dismissed them and sent for and brought craftsmen from Alexandria in Egypt. And the Alexandrian craftsmen knew how to blend the spices like they did, but they did not know how to cause the smoke to rise like the House of Avtinas did.

The Sages sent for the members of the House of Avtinas to reassume their previous position, and they did not come. They doubled their wages and they came. (Yoma 38a)

Troubles in the Temple

...R' Yochanan ben Turta said: why was Shiloh destroyed? Because there they treated holy offerings disgracefully. Why was the first building of Jerusalem destroyed? Because of the idolatry, sexual immorality and spilling of blood that was in its midst. But we know that in the later one (Second Temple period) they labored in Torah and were careful with tithes, so why were they exiled? Because they loved money and each one hated his fellow. (Tosefta Menachot 13)

Misplaced Priorities

An incident occurred where there were two priests who were equal as they were running and ascending the ramp. One of them reached the four cubits before his colleague, who then, out of anger, took a knife and stabbed him in the heart. . .

The father of the boy, i.e., the young priest who was stabbed, came and found that he was still convulsing. He said: May my son's death be an atonement for you. But my son is still convulsing and has not yet died, and as such, the knife, which is in his body, has not become ritually impure through contact with a corpse. If you remove it promptly, it will still be pure for future use. The *Tosefta* comments: This incident comes to teach you that the ritual purity of utensils was of more concern to them than the shedding of blood. (Yoma 23)

Inner Battles

There were certain zealots among the people of Jerusalem. The Sages said to them: Let us go out and make peace with the Romans. But the zealots did not allow them to do this. The zealots said to the Sages: Let us go out and engage in battle against the Romans. But the Sages said to them: You will not be successful. It would be better for you to wait until the siege is broken. In order to force the residents of the city to engage in battle, the zealots arose and burned down these storehouses [*ambarei*] of wheat and barley, and there was a general famine. (Gittin 56a)

The Romans Attack the Temple Mount

So Titus retired into the tower of Antonia; and resolved to storm the temple, the next day, early in the morning, with his whole army: and to encamp round about the holy house.. But these Romans put the Jews to flight; and proceeded as far as the holy house it self. At which time one of the soldiers, without staying for any orders, and without any concern or dread upon him at so great an undertaking; and being hurried on by a certain divine fury, snatched somewhat out of the materials that were on fire: and being lifted up by another soldier, he set fire to a golden window, through which there was a passage to the rooms that were round about the holy house, on the north side of it. As the flames went upward, the Jews made a great clamour, such as so mighty an affliction required; and ran together to prevent it. And now they spared not their lives any longer, nor suffered any thing to restrain their force, since that holy house was perishing, for whose sake it was that they kept such a guard about it. (Josephus The Jewish War Book 6, Chapter 4)

Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai's Heroism

Vespasian then said to Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai: I will be going to Rome to accept my new position, and I will send someone else in my place to continue besieging the city and waging war against it. But before I leave, ask something of me that I can give you. Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai said to him: Give me Yavne and its Sages and do not destroy it, and spare the dynasty of Rabban Gamliel and do not kill them as if they were rebels, and lastly give me doctors to heal Rabbi Tzadok. (Gittin 56b)

Remembering the Temple

When the Temple was destroyed a second time, there was an increase in the number of ascetics among the Jews, whose practice was to not eat meat and to not drink wine. Rabbi Yehoshua joined them. He said to them: My children, for what reason do you not eat meat and do you not drink wine? They said to him: Shall we eat meat, from which offerings are sacrificed upon the altar, and now the altar has ceased to exist? Shall we drink wine, which is poured as a libation upon the altar, and now the altar has ceased to exist?

Rabbi Yehoshua said to them: If so, we will not eat bread either, since the meal-offerings that were offered upon the altar have ceased. They replied: You are correct. It is possible to subsist with produce. He said to them: We will not eat produce either, since the bringing of the first fruits have ceased. They replied: You are correct. We will no longer eat the produce of the seven species from which the first fruits were brought, as it is possible to subsist with other produce. He said to them: If so, we will not drink water, since the water libation has ceased. They were silent, as they realized that they could not survive without water.

Rabbi Yehoshua said to them: My children, come, and I will tell you how we should act. To not mourn at all is impossible, as the decree was already issued and the Temple has been destroyed. But to mourn excessively as you are doing is also impossible, as the Sages do not issue a decree upon the public unless a majority of the public is able to abide by it. . .(Bava Batra 60b)