



[Jerusalem Talmud Ta'anit 4:6, 69a \(part two\)](#)

The Bar Kokhba Revolt
Date: 360 CE to 400 CE
Place: Syria Palaestina
Language: Hebrew

Category: Jewish

Literary genre: Talmud

Title of work: Jerusalem Talmud

Reference:

Ta'anit 4:6, 69a (part two)

Commentary:

This passage details the cruel Roman punishment following the fall of Beitar, which served as rebel headquarters and whose defeat marked the end of Bar Kokhba Revolt (132 to 135 or 136 CE). The prior portions of this *sugya* (talmudic unit) provide explanations for its fall ([Jerusalem Talmud Ta'anit 4:6, 68d-69a](#)) and describe the brutal Roman retribution toward the population of this city, especially the children ([Jerusalem Talmud Ta'anit 4:6, 69a \[part one\]](#)). Here Hadrian, called "the wicked," prohibited the burial of Jewish men who died in this war.

Jewish law mandates prompt burial of the dead. Specifically, the corpse of a person who has been hanged must be buried on the day of his death, rather than remain exposed. This requirement is based on Deuteronomy 21:22-23: "When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you for possession" (NRSV). This English translation of "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse," which follows the Septuagint, does not fit the rabbinic understanding in Tosefta Sanhedrin 9:7. This tosefta attributes the obligation to bury the dead, even a criminal, to humans having been created in the image of God. Thus, an unburied corpse is not only a disgrace to the deceased and that person's relatives but also to God (said differently, because of this similarity between humans and God, it is an affront to the divine for a corpse to remain exposed; more on this tosefta and its possible polemic against Christianity in Ben Shalom, "Additional Notes,"). Thus, in Jewish law, burying the dead is considered an ethical obligation and a good deed. Within this context, the Talmud emphasizes Hadrian's viciousness and immorality: he orders the construction of a fence around his enormous vineyard (likely confiscated land) from the "slain of Beitar." It is unclear whether these people had already died or whether they were crucified as a punishment. A parallel in Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, XXI.3 suggests that they had already died: "It is said that the people of Massalia fenced their vineyards round with the bones of the fallen..." (see Lieberman, *Texts and Studies*, p. 283). In our source, Hadrian's conduct manifests extreme cruelty, which endures until his successor (referred to as a "king" here) ascends to the throne and grants permission for the slain of Beitar to be buried. The Talmud does not specify the exact period when these corpses would have marked the border of this vineyard (the revolt ended in 135 or 136 CE; Hadrian died in 138 CE), nor does it mention the name of that next emperor (probably Antoninus Pius, if this narrative has historical veracity).

Section B cites a tradition that is attributed to Rabbi ?unah (sometimes written as Hunah), a fourth-generation amora who was active in the first half of the fourth century. He explains that the blessing "The One who is good and beneficent" (lit. "the One who is good and does good"; *ha-tov ve-ha-metiv*) was composed in response to the burial of the slain of Beitar. He explains that the "good" (*ha-tov*) refers to the miracle that their corpses did not decompose, and "the [one who] does good" (*ha-metiv*) acknowledges the decree that enabled their burial. This expression of gratitude is not directed to the new emperor but to God, who went against the laws of nature by preserving those corpses and eventually allowed their burial via an imperial decree.

This benediction is presented in two tannaitic texts: Mishnah Berakhot 9:2, without connection to Beitar or any other historical event, states: "For rain and good tidings, he says: 'Bless is the One who is good and does good' (*barukh ha-tov ve ha-metiv*)." Tosefta Berakhot 6:1 mentions this blessing as part of the grace after meals without linking it with the revolt or its aftermath. Tannaitic literature, therefore, does not associate this blessing with that war. Thus, the connection between the burial of the slain of Beitar and this benediction may have been formed



in the fourth century. Indeed, this link first appears in the Jerusalem Talmud, as shown in our passage (B) and twice in Tractate Berakhot (1:4, 3d and 1:7, 11a), which cites this same teaching from Rav Hunah. However, much like the Tosefta, these texts in Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot associate this benediction with the grace after meals, without reference to the narrative in Section A. In our *sugya*, the proximity of Section A, which details Hadrian's brutal behavior toward the corpses, to Rav Hunah's teaching, highlights the miracle that prevented these corpses from decomposing for about three years (which is not mentioned in A). The Talmud therefore conveys a favorable attitude toward these rebels (Efron, "Bar-Kokhva," p. 64), whose burial was enabled by divine providence and compassion. Hadrian, however, is portrayed as the epitome of the evil ruler.

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords in English:

- [Bar Kokhba Revolt](#)
- [Beitar](#)
- [benediction](#)
- [Betar](#)
- [burial](#)
- [crucifixion](#)
- [cruelty](#)
- [evil ruler](#)
- [fence](#)
- [grace after meal](#)
- [Hadrian](#)
- [Judea](#)
- [miracle](#)
- [Rav Hunah](#)
- [Roman punishment](#)
- [Roman rule](#)
- [vineyard](#)

Bibliographical references: Ben Shalom, Menachem, "[Additional Notes on the Verse: 'For an impaled body is an affront to God'](#)", *Oqimta* 1 (2013) : 105-132

Efron, Joshua, "[Bar-Kokhva in the Light of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmudic Traditions](#)", in *The Bar-Kokhva Revolt: A New Approach* (ed. Aharon Oppenheimer, Uriel Rappaport; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1984), 47-105

Lieberman, Saul, [Texts and Studies](#) (New York: Ktav, 1974)

Other sources connected with this document: Text



[Mishnah Taanit 4:6](#)

The calamities of the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av

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Inscription

[Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt](#)

The governor of Arabia, Titus Haterius Nepos, is honoured as a benefactor after the Bar Kokhba revolt.

- [Read more about Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt](#)

Text

[Cassius Dio, Roman History LXIX.12.1](#)

The foundation of the colony of *Aelia Capitolina*.

- [Read more about Cassius Dio, Roman History LXIX.12.1](#)

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