



Mishnah Sotah 9:12

The destruction of the Temple and its aftermaths

Date: 200 CE to 220 CE

Place: Syria Palaestina

Language: Hebrew

Category: Jewish

Literary genre: Teaching

Title of work: Mishnah

Reference: 9:12

Commentary:

This passage from the Mishnah reflects the rabbinic perspective on life without the Temple. Rabbinic texts present Rabbi Yehoshua as an active figure during the period following the destruction of the Temple (late first century CE), whereas Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yose are depicted in the second century, especially after the Bar Kokhba revolt. According to Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who cites Rabbi Yehoshua, each day since the destruction of the Temple has been afflicted by its own curse. Dew does not appear as a blessing and fruits have lost their savor. Rabbi Yose adds that produce also lost its fullness. According to this teaching, the destruction of the Temple negatively affected the order of nature. Tosefta Sotah 15:2 offers a parallel to this mishnah (the identical parts of the Mishnah and this Tosefta are underlined):

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Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: "You should know that the dew had been cursed. In earlier times (lit. at first), when the dew descended on straw and on stubble, it would become white, as it is stated [in Scripture]: "There over the surface of the wilderness lay a fine flaky substance [as fine as frost on the ground]" (Exodus 16:14, JPS). Now it becomes black. In earlier times (lit. at first), any town that received more dew than its neighbors would produce more abundant fruit (lit. its [amount of] fruits was larger). Now they [produce] less [fruit]. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: "Since (lit: from) the day on which the Temple was destroyed, there has been no day without a curse, and the dew failed to (lit: did not) descend as a blessing, and the fruits lost their taste." And the first [curse still] stands." Rabbi Yose says: "Fruits also lost their fullness (lit. fatness)."

This passage from the Tosefta also emphasizes changes in the natural world that have taken place since the destruction of the Second Temple. The dew has become cursed: it no longer appears as a white coating and fruits no longer grow in correlation with the quantity of dew that each town receives. As in the Mishnah, each day has its own curse, but here prior curses are not canceled when a new one appears: "And the first [curse still] stands" (see Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Feshutah*, vol. 8, p. 760). The discussion of Mishnah Sotah 9:12 in the Jerusalem Talmud (Sotah 9:12, 24b) has an approach that resembles this Tosefta:

1. A. ??' "??? ????? ??? ???". ??' ?' ??????. ?????? ?????? ???????. ?? ?????. ?' ????? ??? ?' ????. ?????
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2. B. ??' ??? ?????? ?? ???????. ??? ?? ?????? ???????. ?????? ??? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????.
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1. It is written [in Scripture]: "And God becomes angered every day" (Psalms 7:12). Rabbi Ze'ira said:
 "And the earlier [curse] endures." Who annuls [the previous curse]? Rabbi Avin, in the name of
 Rabbi A?a, [said]: "The priestly benediction annuls [it]."
2. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: "You should know that the dew had been cursed. In earlier times
 (lit. at first), [in the case of] a town that received abundant dew, its fruit [produce was] abundant. But
 now [even] a town that receives abundant dew [yields] meager fruit. In earlier times (lit. at first),
 when the dew had fallen on straw and on stubble, they became white, but now [when it] falls on



straw and on stubble, they become black.

While this passage from the Jerusalem Talmud is similar to the Mishnah (on which it comments) and the Tosefta in many respects, it also articulates ideas that are absent from those tannaitic sources. Most important, Section B includes the same teaching from Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel that appears in the Tosefta (albeit with some variations), whereas Section A, which delivers opinions from amoraim (who were active in the third – or early fourth century), finds a mechanism for canceling previous curses: Who annuls [the previous curse]? Rabbi Avin, in the name of Rabbi A?a, [said]: “The priestly benediction annuls [it].” It is noteworthy that – despite the absence of the Temple and, therefore, its functions – according to the Talmud, the priests still have a role in moderating God’s anger and preventing the accumulation of curses. Thus, the notion that the destruction of the Second Temple inflicted lasting damage on the world – an idea found in the Mishnah, the Tosefta and the Jerusalem Talmud – later generations of rabbis developed a belief in a mechanism for preventing permanent damage from these curses. Furthermore, these sources focus exclusively on divine power and the (dis)order that resulted from the demise of the Temple without mentioning the Romans who destroyed it and ruled the Land of Israel in the centuries that followed.

Keywords in the original language:

- [??? ?????](#)
- [?????](#)
- [?????](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [curse](#)
- [destruction of the Temple](#)
- [land of Israel](#)
- [priestly benediction](#)

Bibliographical references: Lieberman, Saul , [Tosefta Ki-Feshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta](#) (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955)

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