Tosefta Taanit 3:9-10, 14

The destruction of the Temple

Date: 3d CE

Place: Syria Palaestina Language: Hebrew

Category: Jewish

Literary genre: Teaching

Title of work: Tosefta Reference: 3:9-10, 14 Commentary:

These passages from the Tosefta discuss the ninth of Av. According to rabbinic texts, this is the date when the Temples were each destroyed. Section 9 states that these events occurred on the same date and highlights the similarities between the two destructions. Section 10 seeks to resolve contradictions in the biblical description of the destruction of the First Temple to demonstrate that it was burned on the ninth of Av. Sections 11-13, which are not presented here, delineate the laws regarding mourning on that day. The final section (14), concludes with an optimistic view that these days of mourning will be festivals in the future.

The Tosefta cites a teaching from Rabbi Yose in which he explains that "Good things are set (lit. rolled out) on an auspicious day and bad things on an ominous day." According to this passage, not only did the two destructions occur on the same date, but they each fell: on "the night following the Shabbat," which begins the week new in the Jewish calendar; during "the year following the Sabbatical year," which starts the new sabbatical cycle; "and it was [during] the [priestly duty of the] division of *Yehoyariyv* (Jehoiarib)," which 1 Chronicles 24:7 describes as the first priestly division: "The first lot fell to Jehoiarib" (NRSV). Moreover, during each destruction, the Levites recited the same psalm: "He will make their evil recoil upon them, [annihilate them through their own wickedness; the Lord our God will annihilate them]" (Psalms 94:23, JPS). The content of this psalm emphasizes the need to trust in God when evil approaches.

These two catastrophes are therefore paired since Jewish history seems to be repeated. Those who destroyed the Temples are not mentioned here. Section 9 concludes with a positive note by foretelling what the Levites will recite in the next Temple: "For tomorrow, when the House (the Temple) will be built [here is] what [they will say]: 'Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity' (Psalms 106:48; 1 Chronicles 16:36, JPS) 'who alone does wondrous things; Blessed is His glorious name [forever; His glory fills the whole world]' (Psalms 72:18-19, JPS)." These psalms hope for a king who is divinely chosen and for God's glory to fill the world. As in Tosefta Menahot 13:21-23, this teaching asserts with confidence that the Temple will be rebuilt soon ("tomorrow").

Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 4:6, 68d, includes a parallel of Tosefta Taanit 3:9:

It has been taught in a tannaitic tradition: Rabbi Yose says: "The day on which the House (the Temple) was destroyed was on the night following the Shabbat, in the year following the Sabbatical year, and it was [during] the [priestly duty of the] division of *Yehoyariyv* (Jehoiarib) and it was on the ninth of Av. And so [it was] the second [time]. And on this [one] and on that [one], the Levites were standing on the platform (*dukhan*) and saying: 'He will make their evil recoil upon them, [annihilate them through their own wickedness; the Lord our God will annihilate them]' (Psalms 94:23, JPS)."

Whereas the Tosefta conveys an explicit expectation for rebuilding of the Temple "tomorrow," the Jerusalem Talmud omits this passage (as do parallels in the Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 29a; Arakhin 11b). According to rabbinic texts, Rabbi Yose was active during the second century. If this teaching is indeed from the first half of the second century – perhaps just before or after the Bar Kokhba revolt – it may be compatible with the view of scholars who claim that, in this period, some Jews (or at least some rabbis) expected the Temple soon to be rebuilt (hopes for the imminent rebuilding of the Temple can also be found in Tosefta Rosh HaShanah 2:9).

Section 10 aims to explain how, according to the Bible, the First Temple was destroyed on the ninth of Av despite mention of its occurrence on the seventh of that month in 2 Kings 25:8-9: "In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month ... Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down" (NRSV). "The ninth of the month" is also mentioned earlier in that chapter: "On the ninth day the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land" (2 Kings 25:3-4). Although the Bible probably refers to the ninth day of the fourth month (Tammuz) in these verses, this rabbinic teaching presents the two dates ("on the seventh day of the month" and "on the ninth day") as references to the fifth month (Av). In its attempt to resolve this contradiction and, thus, to demonstrate that the First Temple was destroyed on the ninth of Av, this tradition asserts that the destruction began "on the seventh day of the month" (2 Kings 25:8) and was completed "on the tenth of the month." This date is also mentioned in Jeremiah 52:12-13: "In the fifth month, on the tenth of the month ... Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyquard ... entered Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem..." (NRSV). Indeed, Josephus mentions the tenth of the month as the date on when the two Temples were burned (Jewish War VI.250; 268). While tannaitic texts typically avoid descriptions of the destruction of the Second Temple, the Tosefta discusses the details of the first destruction.

A parallel to this section of the Tosefta (10), can be found in the Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 4:7, 69b-c:

Rabbi Jeremiah in the name of Rabbi ?iyya bar Abba: By rights, it should have been [ruled] that that they should fast on the tenth [of Av, the day] on which the House of our God was burned. So why on the ninth? For on that [day] the visitation began. And [indeed] there is a tannaitic tradition [that states]: "On the seventh, they entered it (the Temple). On the eighth, they were [in the process of] demolishing it. On the ninth they ignited the fire (lit: light) within it, and on the tenth it was burned down." Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi fasted on [both] the ninth and the tenth [of Av]. Rabbi Abun fasted on [both] the ninth and the tenth. Rabbi Levi fasted on the ninth and on on the eve of the tenth.

Like this Tosefta, the Jerusalem Talmud's discussion on the exact timing of this destruction is followed by a mention of the fast that was observed in response to this catastrophe. The Tosefta continues with passages on the laws of mourning the Temple (sections 11-13), then concludes this discussion of the Ninth of Av by stating with certainty that these fast days will become festive days (Section 14). This final passage is well suited for its location at the end of Tractate Taanitof the Tosefta. The editors of the Mishnah and the Tosefta often closed tractates with an encouraging message. In this case, the Tosefta cites Isaiah 66:10: "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her! [Join in her jubilation, all you who mourned over her] (JPS)" to prove the future transformation of these fast days into festivals.

Keywords in the original language:

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- Rabbi Yose
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The destruction of the Temple

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