

SEFER HA-ZIKRONOT (CHRONICLES OF YERAḤME'EL)¹

‘Because of the sins of her prophets ...’ (Lam 4:13). Rabbi Yūdan asked Rabbi Aḥā: ‘Where did they murder Zechariah? Was it in the courtyard of the women or the courtyard of Israel?’ He answered him: ‘It was neither in the courtyard of Israel nor in the courtyard of <the women, but rather>² in the courtyard of the priests.’ Nor did they treat his blood like the blood of an antelope or the blood of a gazelle, for of the blood of the antelope (and the gazelle) it is written: ‘and one will pour out its blood and cover it with dirt’ (Lev 17:13).³ But with regard to this blood, (it is written): ‘for her (Jerusalem’s) blood [was] in her midst: she put it on bare stone, and she did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with dirt’ (Ezek 24:7). All of this was to what end? ‘... in order to provoke wrath and exact vengeance’ (Ezek 24:8).

When Nebūzarādan the chief butcher entered Jerusalem in order to devastate it, the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him the blood. It was frothing and bubbling. He (i.e., God) was thinking: ‘It is the time and the moment that they should collect the punishment for the blood of this one who was murdered!’ As soon as he saw it, he said to them: ‘What is the nature of this blood?’ They answered him: ‘It is the blood of the bulls, rams, and lambs which we have been offering on the altar.’ He immediately brought bulls and lambs and slaughtered them on/over it, but it did not stop (bubbling). [He applied torture to them].⁴ He said to them: ‘What is the nature of this blood?’ They <thought>:⁵ ‘Since the Holy One, blessed be He, is determined to exact his blood from our hands, we must tell him what it is.’ [They said to him]: ‘He was our priest, prophet, and judge. He prophesied to us and related to us all these things which you are doing to us, but we did not believe him, so we arose against him and murdered him.’ He said: ‘I will appease it!’ Immediately he brought a thousand⁶ novice priests and slaughtered them over it,⁷ but it did not cease (bubbling). The blood (of the slaughtered priests) kept bubbling⁸ and flowing until it reached the tomb of Zechariah.⁹

At that time he rebuked it and said to it: ‘What will satisfy you? How many satisfactions do you need? What do you hope for – that I might destroy your entire people because of you?’ Then the Holy One, blessed be He, was filled with mercy and said: ‘If even this wicked and cruel mortal who has come to destroy them can be filled with mercy for them, then I, the one of whom it is written about Me “the Lord, a merciful deity, etc.” (Deut 4:31), “the Lord is good to all, and His mercies (prevail) over all His doings” (Ps 145:9), how much the more so (should I act)!’ At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, gestured toward that blood, and it was absorbed in its place. As scripture states, ‘the sea (הים) ceased its frothing’ (Jonah 1:15) – read as if it said ‘the blood (הדם) ceased its frothing.’

Rabbi Yūdan said: ‘Israel committed seven transgressions on that one day: they murdered a priest, prophet, and judge, they shed [innocent]¹⁰ blood, they defiled the courtyard, and it was both the Day of Atonement and a sabbath!’

‘The blind wandered aimlessly in the streets ...’ (Lam 4:14). What were the blind saying? ‘Who among us is afraid of the blood of Zechariah?’ And the lame, what were they saying? ‘Who will give us the ones who murdered Zechariah so that we might hug them and kiss them?’ As scripture states, ‘the blind wandered aimlessly in the streets ...’ (Lam 4:14).

¹ Eli Yassif, ed., *Sefer ha-Zikronot hu' Divrey ha-Yamim le-Yeraḥme'el* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2001), 318-19. This version of the story is closely related to that found in Salomon Buber, ed., *Midrasch Echa Rabbati: Sammlung agadischer Auslegungen der Klagelieder* (Wilna: Romm, 1899), 74b-75a.

² Restoring אלא הנשים; see *y. Ta'an.* 4.8, 69a.

³ Cf. Deut 12:15-16, 22-23; 15:22-23.

⁴ The text is corrupt in the manuscript, but the general sense can be regained through comparison with the parallel passages.

⁵ Read אמרו in place of לו.

⁶ Most of the parallel accounts give the number as 80,000.

⁷ עליו. Alternatively ‘upon it,’ if the pronoun refers instead to the altar.

⁸ Read מבבץ in place of בוקע? See Buber, *Echa Rabbati*, 75a.

⁹ Exemplifying Hos 4:2 (ודמים בדמים נגעו), the text referenced by most of the parallel accounts.

¹⁰ Insert נקי; cf. *y. Ta'an.* 4.8, 69a; *Lam. Rab.*, *petiḥah* §23.