

TALMUDIC ZECHARIAH NARRATIVES

a. y. *Ta'an.* 4.8, 69a-b:

R. Yoḥanan said: 'Eighty thousand novice priests were slaughtered over the blood of Zechariah.' R. Yudan asked R. Aḥa: 'Where did they kill 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 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) there it is written "and one will pour out its blood and cover it with dirt" (Lev 17:13). But here: "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 I have put your blood on bare stone without any covering" (Ezek 24:8).'

Israel committed seven transgressions on that one day: they murdered a priest, prophet, and judge, they shed innocent blood, they defiled the courtyard, and it was both the Day of Atonement and a sabbath!

As soon as Nebūzarādan had entered there, he saw the blood bubbling. He said to them: 'What is the nature of this (blood)?!?' They answered him: '(It is) the blood of bulls, lambs, and rams which we have been offering on the altar.' He immediately brought bulls, rams, and lambs, and slaughtered them over it, but the blood continued to bubble. Since they refused to confess (its true identity) to him, they were suspended on the gallows. They thought: 'It is because the Holy One, blessed be He, is determined to seek satisfaction for his blood from our hands!' They said to him: '(It is) the blood of a priest, prophet, and judge who was prophesying to us about everything you would do to us. We arose against him and we murdered him.' He immediately brought eighty thousand novice priests and slaughtered them over it, but the blood still bubbled. At that time he rebuked it (and) said to it: 'What do you seek? Shall your whole nation perish over you?!?' Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, was filled with compassion and said: 'If even this cruel mortal can be filled with compassion for My children, then I, the one of whom it is written about Me "a merciful God is the Lord your God: He will not weaken you, and He will not destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant with your ancestors" (Deut 4:31), how much the more so (should I act)!' At that time He gestured toward the blood, and it was absorbed in its place.

b. b. *Git.* 57b:

R. Ḥiyya bar Abin related a tradition from R. Yehoshua b. Qarḥah: ‘An old man who was a resident of Jerusalem told me that in this valley Nebūzarādan the chief butcher slaughtered two million and one hundred and ten thousand (people), and he killed in Jerusalem nine hundred and forty thousand (people) on one stone until their blood ran and reached the blood of Zechariah, thus fulfilling what scripture had said: ‘and blood came into contact with blood’ (Hos. 4:2). He found the blood of Zechariah boiling and frothing. He said: ‘What’s this?’ They answered him: ‘(It is) the blood of sacrifices which was spilt.’ He had some blood brought, but it was not the same. He said to them: ‘If you tell me (the truth about this blood), that would be the preferable outcome; but if not, I will comb your flesh with iron combs!’ They answered him: ‘What can we say to you? There was a prophet among us who used to rebuke us regarding (our) religious affairs. We arose against him and killed him for it, and lo, for a number of years his blood has refused to rest.’ He said to them: ‘I will pacify it!’ He brought tribunals (*sanhedrins*) both great and small (and) killed (them) over it, but it did not rest. He killed young men and maidens over it, but it did not rest. He brought children out from their schools (and) killed (them) over it, but it did not rest. He said to it: ‘Zechariah! Zechariah! I have annihilated the best among them! Would you prefer that I destroy every one of them?!?’ When he said (that) to it, then it was at rest.

c. b. *Sanh.* 96b:

He saw the blood of Zechariah which was bubbling. He said to them: ‘What’s this?’ They answered him: ‘(It is) the blood of sacrifices which was spilt.’ He said to them: ‘Bring (some blood) and I will examine if it is the same (kind of) blood.’ He put (it) on it, but they were not the same. He said to them: ‘Disclose (the matter) to me. If not, I will comb your flesh with an iron comb!’ They said to him: ‘This is (the blood of) a priest and prophet who was prophesying to Israel about the destruction of Jerusalem, and they killed him.’ He said to them: ‘I will pacify it!’ He brought the scholars (and) killed (them) over it, but it did not rest. He brought children from the school (and) killed (them) over it, but it did not rest. He brought novice priests (and) killed (them) over it, but it did not rest, even when he had slain over it nine hundred and forty thousand (people) it still did not rest. He came closer to it (and) said:

‘Zechariah! Zechariah! I have slain the best among them! Would you prefer that I destroy every one of them?!?’ Immediately it stopped (bubbling).