

TARGUM SHENI TO ESTH 1:2¹

When the gate of the Temple saw that an impure nation was standing opposite it (poised to enter), it closed itself and was unwilling to open. All of the forces of the Chaldeans came and brought with them three hundred and sixty camels which were loaded with iron axes,² but the outer precinct³ of the Temple absorbed them (i.e., their blows had no effect). The gates would not allow themselves to be opened until Parniṭos (?)⁴ came, slaughtered a pig, and sprinkled some of its blood on the Temple and (thus) defiled it. After it had been defiled, the gate opened itself and the wicked Nebuchadnezzar entered the Temple. Proceeding onward, he took a seat beside the courtyards of Zechariah b. Yehoyada the high priest, and Nebuchadnezzar noticed his blood bubbling on the ground. He asked the elders of Israel, saying to them: 'Whose blood is this?' They responded, saying to him: 'A certain prophet was among us and he was rebuking us. We did not accept what he was saying, so we rose up and killed him in the Temple.'

When the wicked Nebuchadnezzar had heard about this matter, he said them: 'Go and bring to me four thousand choice priests!' He slaughtered them over that blood. Up to now it (Zechariah's blood) had not been absorbed in the ground until Nebuchadnezzar got provoked at it. He addressed it (saying): 'Must all of your nation be destroyed over you?!?' After this (threat) it was absorbed.

This particular version of the legend is of interest because it features Nebuchadnezzar in the role of the one who allays the 'bubbling blood' with a gory human sacrifice, whereas the remainder of the rabbinic sources credit Nebuzaradan, the Chaldean general, with this outrage. The *Ta'riḳh* of Ṭabarī (Leiden edition 1/2:713-16) similarly has Nebuchadnezzar confront and attempt to quiet the frothing blood of the murdered John the Baptist.

¹ Translated from the versions provided by Moritz David, *Das Targum Scheni nach Handschriften herausgegeben und mit einer Einleitung versehen* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1898), 11-12; Paulus Cassel, *Zweites Targum zum Buche Esther* (Leipzig & Berlin: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1885), 28-29.

² Compare *b. Sanh.* 96b, where Nebuchadnezzar dispatches to Nebuzaradan three hundred mules loaded with iron axes to use in the siege of Jerusalem.

³ Cf. Jastrow, 1218 *s.v.* פרותא.

⁴ Corrupt for אַנטיפטרוס 'Antipater'? So Jastrow, 1231.