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Judaism

Talmud — Megillah 2a–4a

(selection)

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Sages of the Babylonian academies

Daf Shevui (Joshua Kulp)

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About:

The Babylonian Talmud gathers the Mishnah and the Gemara, the debates of the sages of the Babylonian academies (third to fifth centuries) on it, written in Aramaic and Hebrew.

This selection opens the tractate Megillah, on the reading of the Book of Esther on Purim: the mishnah on the reading dates (the 11th to the 15th of Adar) and the discussion it prompts, touching on the origin of the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel, the precedence among Torah study, the Temple service and the burial of an abandoned corpse, and the obligation of women to hear the Megillah.

Each chapter is one page (folio) of the Talmud. In Hebrew: תַּלְמוּד בַּבְלִי, מְגִלָּה.

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1 The Megillah is read on the eleventh, the twelfth, the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the fifteenth [of Adar], never earlier and never later. Cities which have been walled since the days of Joshua ben Nun read on the fifteenth; villages and large towns read on the fourteenth, except that villages move the reading up to the day of gathering.

2 How so? If the fourteenth [of Adar] falls on Monday, the villages and large towns read on that day and the walled places on the next day. If it falls on Tuesday or on Wednesday, the villages move the reading up to the day of gathering, the large towns read on that day, and the walled places on the next day.

3 If it falls on Thursday, the villages and large towns read on that day and the walled places on the next day. If it falls on Friday, the villages move the reading up to the day of gathering and the large towns and walled places read on that day.

4 If it falls on Shabbat, the villages and large towns move the reading up to the day of gathering, and the walled places read on the next day. If it falls on Sunday, the villages move the reading up to the day of gathering, the large towns read on that day, and the walled cities on the day following.

5 Gemara. The Megillah is read on the eleventh. From where is this derived? "From where is this derived"? Surely it is as we teach further on, "The Sages made a leniency on the villages, allowing them to push the

reading forward to the day of the gathering, so that they could supply food and water for their brothers in the large towns?"

6 This is what we mean [by our question]: Since all these dates were laid down by the Men of the Great Assembly, for if you should [deny this and say] that the Men of the Great Assembly laid down only the fourteenth and fifteenth, [is it possible that] the [later] Rabbis should have come and annulled an enactment made by the Men of the Great Assembly. Haven't we learned: One court cannot annul the rulings of another court unless it is superior to it in number and in wisdom'?

7 Obviously, therefore, all these days must have been laid down by the Men of the Great Assembly. So where is it hinted at?

8 R. Shemen b. Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan: The verse says, "To uphold these days of Purim in their times." They established many "times" for them.

9 But this text is required for its literal meaning? If that were all, Scripture could say simply "at the [appointed] time."

10 What then is implied by "their times"? A large number of times! But [the expression 'their' times'] is still required to indicate that the time of one is not the same as the time of the other? If so, the verse should have just said, "their time". Why does it say "their times"? So that you may infer from this all of them.

11 But says "numerous times"? "Their times" is similar to "their time." Just as "their time" would indicate two [days], so "their times" indicates two [additional days].

12 But why not make these the twelfth and thirteenth? For the reason given [elsewhere] by R. Shmuel b. Yitzchak, that the thirteenth was the time of assembly for all, and no special indication is required for it in the text; so we may say here that the thirteenth day is a time of assembly and no special indication is required for it in the text.

13 But why not say that the sixteenth and seventeenth are meant? It is written, "And it shall not pass" (Esther 9:27).

14 R. Shmuel b. Nahmani said: The verse says, "As the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies" (Esther 9:22). "The days" [would have been enough.] "As the days" comes to include the eleventh and the twelfth.

15 But say the twelfth and thirteenth? R. Shmuel b. Yitzchak said: The thirteenth was a time of assembly for all, and does not require special indication. But say the sixteenth and the seventeenth? It is written, "And it shall not pass."

16 Why did R. Shmuel b. Nahmani not derive the rule from the phrase "in their times'? He does not accept the distinction [made above between] "time," "their time" and "their times."

17 And why did R. Shemen b. Abba not derive the rule from the expression "as the days"? He can say to you: This is meant to make the rule apply to future generations.

18 Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in the name of R. Yohanan: This [rule stated in the Mishnah] is the ruling of R. Akiva the anonymous sage who draws the distinction between "time", "their time" and "their times", but according to the Sages the Megillah is to be read only on the proper day.

19 They objected: “R. Judah said: When [does this rule apply]? When the years are reckon from it, only when the years are properly fixed and Israel reside on their own soil. But today, since we can calculate [the date, the Megillah] is to be read only on the proper day”.

20 Now which authority is R. Judah here following? If I say, R. Akiva–even in these days this enactment is valid.

21 Rather, it must be according to the Rabbis, and [even according to them] we read [on the other days] at any rate when the years are properly fixed and Israel reside on their own soil! This is refutation of R. Yohanan.

22 There are those who say: Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in the name of R. Yohanan: This rule follows the ruling of R. Akiva the anonymous authority, but the Sages held that in these days since people reckon from it, we read it only on the proper day.

23 It has also been taught: “R. Judah said: When does this rule apply? When the years are properly fixed and Israel reside upon their own soil, but in these days, since people reckon from it, it is read only on the proper day.”

24 R. Ashi noted a contradiction between two statements of R. Judah,

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[1] and therefore attributed the statement in the baraita to R. Yose son of R. Judah.

[2] [He said]: Can R. Judah really have said that in these days, since people reckon from it, it is read only on the proper day? And this is contradicted by the following: R. Judah said, When [do they push forward the reading]? In places where the villagers go to town on Monday and Thursday; but in places where they do not go to town on Monday and Thursday, it is read only on the proper day.

[3] In any case, in places where they do go to town on Monday and Thursday it is read [on the earlier dates] even in these times? He accordingly ascribed the statement in the baraita to R. Yose son of R. Judah.

[4] And just because he finds a contradiction between two statements of R. Judah, he ascribe the baraitha to R. Jose son of R. Judah?

[5] R. Ashi had heard that some transmit the statement in the name of R. Judah and some transmit it in the name of R. Yose son of R. Judah, and to avoid making R. Judah contradict himself he said that the one who ascribed the statement to R. Judah was not [reporting] accurately, while the one who ascribed it to R. Yose son of Judah was [reporting] accurately.

[6] Cities which have been walled since the days of Joshua son of Nun read on the fifteenth. From where is this ruling derived? Rava said: Because Scripture says, “Therefore do the Jews of the villages that dwell in the un-

walled towns, etc." (Esther 9:19) Since the villages [are to read] on the fourteenth, the walled towns [must read] on the fifteenth.

7 But why not say that the villages [should read] on the fourteenth, and those in walled towns not at all? But are they not also Israelites? And moreover is it not written, From India into Ethiopia (Esther 1:1)?

8 But why not say that the villages [should read] on the fourteenth and those in walled towns on both the fourteenth and fifteenth, as it is written, "That they should keep the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day of the same yearly?" (Esther 9:21).

9 the text had said, "the fourteenth day and the fifteenth" you would have been right. Now, however, that it is written "the fourteenth day and [ve'et] the fifteenth — the et comes and makes a distinction, so that the one set is on the fourteenth and the other set on the fifteenth.

10 But why not say that the unwalled cities are on the fourteenth, and the walled cities can [celebrate] if they like on the fourteenth or if they like on the fifteenth? The verse says, "In their times" (Esther 9:31) the time of one is not the same as the time of the other.

11 But why not say that they should celebrate on the thirteenth? [They must do] as Shushan.

12 We have accounted for the celebration [of Purim]; how do we know that the reading [of the Megillah must be on these days]? The verse says, "And these days should be remembered and kept" (Esther 9:28). "Remembering" is compared to "keeping."

13 Our Mishnah is not like the view of the following Tanna, as it has been taught: R. Joshua b. Korha says: Cities which have been walled since the days of Ahashverosh read on the fifteenth.”.

14 What is the reason of R. Joshua b. Korha? [They must be] like Shushan: just as Shushan has been walled since the days of Ahashverosh and reads on the fifteenth, so every city that has been walled since the days of Ahashverosh reads on the fifteenth.

15 What then is the reason of our Tanna? He draws an analogy between the two occurrences of the word perazi [villagers]. It is written here, “Therefore the Jews of the villages [haperazim],” and it is written in another place, “Beside the unwalled [haperazi] towns, a great many (Deuteronomy 3:5); just as there the reference is to towns which were [not] walled in the days of Joshua son of Nun, so here the reference is to towns which were [not] walled in the days of Joshua son of Nun.

16 I can understand why R. Joshua b. Korha did not adopt the view of our Tanna; he does not accept the analogy of perazi and perazi. But why does not our Tanna accept the view of R. Joshua b. Korha?

17 [You ask] why does he not? Why, because he draws the analogy of perazi with perazi, of course! What he really meant to ask was this: [On the view of our Tanna], whom did Shushan follow? It followed neither the villages nor the walled towns!

18 Rava, or, some say, Kadi said: Shushan was an exception, because a miracle was performed in it.

19 We can understand according to the view of our Tanna, for that is why it is written, “city and city, town and town” (Esther 9:28) “city and city” to distinguish between those which were walled in the days of Joshua son of Nun and those which were walled in the days of Ahashverosh; “town and town” likewise to distinguish between Shushan and other towns.

20 But according to R. Joshua b. Korha, it is true we can account for “city and city”, to distinguish between Shushan and other cities, but what is the purpose of “town and town”?

21 R.Joshua b. Korha could answer: And can our Tanna explain the words satisfactorily? Since he draws the analogy between perazi and perazi, why do we require the words “city and city”? The truth is that the text is there for a midrash, and to teach the rule of R.Joshua b. Levi. For R. Joshua b. Levi said: “A city and all that adjoins it and all that is taken in by the eye with it is reckoned as city.”

22 Up to what distance? — R. Jeremiah, or you may also say R. Hiyya b. Abba, said: As far as from Hamtan to Tiberias, which is a mil. Why not say [simply] a mil? It teaches us what is the measure of a mil—as far as from Hamtan to Tiberias.

23 And R. Jeremiah — or you may also say R. Hiyya b. Abba —said: The [alternative forms of the] letters M’N’Z’P’K were prescribed by the Watchmen.

[24] Do you really think so? Is it not written, “These are the commandments” (Leviticus 27:34) which implies that no prophet is permitted to introduce anything new afterwards? And further R.Hisda has said: The mem and the samekh in the Tablets

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[1] remained in place by a miracle.

[2] That is so; they were in use, but people did not know which form came in the middle of a word and which one at the end, and the Watchmen came and ordained that the open forms should be in the middle of a word and the closed forms at the end.

[3] But when all is said and done, [we have the text] "These are the commandments" which implies that no prophet was destined ever to introduce an innovation hereafter? Rather, they forgot them and then they went back and reestablished them.

[4] Jeremiah — or some say R. Hiyya b. Abba — also said: The Targum of the Torah was composed by Onkelos the convert under the guidance of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. The Targum of the Prophets was composed by Jonathan ben Uzziel under the guidance of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and the land of Israel [thereupon] quaked over an area of four hundred parasangs by four hundred parasangs, and a Heavenly Voice came out and exclaimed, "Who is this that has revealed My secrets to mankind?"

[5] Jonathan b. Uzziel stood up and said: "It is I who have revealed Your secrets to mankind. It is fully known to You that I have not done this for my own honor or for the honor of my father's house, but for Your honor l have done it, that disputes may not increase in Israel."

[6] He wanted to reveal [by] a targum [the inner meaning] of the Writing, but a Heavenly Voice went forth and said, Enough! What was the reason? — Because the date of the Messiah is foretold in it.

[7] But did Onkelos the convert compose the Targum to the Pentateuch? Did not R. Ika said in the name of R. Hananel in the name of Rav: What is meant by the verse, "And they read in the book, in the law of God, with an interpretation and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading?" (Nehemiah 8:8): "And they read in the book, in the law of God": this refer to the [Hebrew] text; "with an interpretation": this refers to Targum; "And they gave the sense" this refers to the verse stops; "And caused them to understand the reading": this refers to the accent marks, or, according to another version,

[8] the massoretic notes? They forgot them and went back and established them.

[9] Why did the land not not quake because of the [translation of the] Torah, while it did quake because of that of the Prophets The meaning of the Torah is expressed clearly, but the meaning of the Prophets is in some things expressed clearly and in others enigmatically. [For instance,] it is written, "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon" (Zechariah 12:11) and R. Joseph said:

[10] Were it not for the targum of this verse, we should not know what it means. [The Targum (in Aramaic) is as follows]: 'On that day shall there be great mourning in Jerusalem like the mourning of Ahab son of Omri

who was killed by Hadadrimmon son of Rimmon in Ramot Gilead and like the mourning of Josiah son of Ammon who was killed by Pharaoh the Lame in the plain of Megiddo."

11 "And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves" (Daniel 10:7). Who were these "men"? Jeremiah — or some say, R. Hiyya b. Abba — said: These were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

12 They were superior to him [in one way], and he was superior to them [in another]. They were superior to him, because they were prophets and he was not a prophet. He was superior to them, because he saw [on this occasion] and they did not see.

13 But if they did not see, why were they frightened? Although they themselves did not see, their star saw.

14 Ravina said: We learn from this that if a man is seized with fright though he sees nothing, [the reason is that] his star sees. What is his remedy? He should recite the Shema. If he is in a place which is foul, he should move away from it four cubits. If he cannot do this, he should say this formula: "The goat at the butcher's is fatter than I am."

15 Now that you have said that the words "city and city, town and town" are there for a derashah, what is the purpose of the words "family and family" [in the same verse]?. Yose b. Hanina replied: This refers to the families of the priests and Levites, that they should stop their [Temple] service in order to come and hear the reading of the Megillah.

16 For so said R. Judah in the name of Rav: The Priests at their [Temple] service, the Levites on their platform, the Israelites at their station — all stop their service in order to hear the reading of the Megillah.

17 It has also been taught: Priests at their [Temple] service, Levites on their platform, Israelites at their station — all stop their service in order to come and hear the reading of the Megillah. From this the members of the house of Rabbi relied that they were to stop the study of Torah in order to come and hear the reading of the Megillah. They argued a fortiori from the case of the [Temple] service. If the Temple service, which is so important, may be abandoned, how much more the study of the Torah?

18 But is the [Temple] service more important than the study of the Torah? Surely it is written, "And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold there stood a man over against him, . . . and he fell on his face" (Joshua 5:13).

19 Now how could he do such a thing, seeing that R. Joshua b. Levi has said that it is forbidden for a person to greet another by night, for fear that he is a demon? It was different there, because he said to him, "I am captain of the host of the Lord."

20 But perhaps he was lying? We have learned a tradition that they do not utter the name of heaven vainly.

21 He said to him: This evening you neglected the regular afternoon sacrifice, and now you have neglected the study of the Torah. Joshua replied: For which of them did you come? He answered: I have come now. Straightway, “Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley [ha-emek]” (Joshua 8:9), and R. Yohanan said:

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[1] his shows that he spent the night in the depths [omkah] of the halakhah. And R. Shmuel b. Unia also said: he study of the Torah is greater than the offering of the daily sacrifices, as it says, “I have come now.”

[2] There is no contradiction; in the one case [the study] of an individual is meant, in the other that of the whole people.

[3] But is that of an individual unimportant? Have we not learned: Women [when mourning] on a festival may make a dirge but they do not beat their chests. R. Ishmael says: If they are near the bier, they can beat their chests. On Rosh Hodesh, Hanukkah and Purim they may make a dirge and beat their chests, but on neither the one nor the other do they wail.

[4] And in reference to this, Rabbah b. Huna said: The festival involves no mourning restrictions in the case of a scholar, still less Hanukkah and Purim.

[5] You are speaking of the honor to be paid to the Torah. The honor to be paid to the learning of an individual is important, the study of an individual is less important.

[6] Rava said: There is no question in my mind that, as between the Temple service and the reading of the Megillah, the reading of the Megillah takes priority, for the reason given by R. Yose b. Hanina. As between the study

of the Torah and the reading of the Megillah, the reading of the Megillah takes priority, since the members of the house of Rabbi based themselves [on the statement of R. Yose].

7 As between the study of the Torah and attending to a met mitzvah, attending to a met mitzvah takes precedence, since it has been taught: The study of the Torah may be neglected in order to take out a dead body or to bring a bride to the canopy. As between the Temple service and attending to a met mitzvah, attending to a met mitzvah takes precedence,

8 as we learn from (the verse) "or for his sister" as it has been taught: "Or for his sister" (Numbers 6:7). What is Scripture saying? Suppose he was on his way to slaughter his pesah sacrifice or to circumcise his son, and he heard that a near relative had died, shall I assume that he should defile himself?

9 You should say, he should not defile himself. Shall I assume then that, just as he does not defile himself for his sister, so he should not defile himself for a met mitzvah? It says, "or for his sister," it is for his sister that he may not defile himself, but he may defile himself for a met mitzvah.

10 Rava asked: Is between the reading of the Megillah and [attending to] a met mitzvah, which takes precedence? Shall I say that the reading of the Megillah takes precedence in order to publicize the miracle, or does perhaps [the burying of] the met mitzvah take precedence because of the respect due to human beings? After he asked the question, he himself answered it saying, Burying] the met mitzvah takes precedence, since a Master has said: Great is the [obligation to pay due] respect to human beings, since it overrides a negative precept of the Torah.

11 The text [above states]: R. Joshua b. Levi said: A city and all that is next to it and all that is visible with it is reckoned as city. It was taught: Adjoining, even if it is not visible, and visible even if it is not adjoining.

12 Now we understand what is meant by visible even though not adjoining: this can occur for instance with a city situated on the top of a hill. But how can there be adjoining but not visible? Jeremiah said: If it is situated in a valley.

13 Joshua b. Levi said: A city which was first settled and then walled is reckoned as a village. What is the reason? Because it is written, "And if a man sells a dwelling house of a walled city" (Leviticus 25:29), one, [that is,] which was first walled and then settled, but not first settled and then walled.

14 And R. Joshua b. Levi said: A city in which there are not ten men of leisure is reckoned as a village. What does he tell us? We have already learned this: What is a large town? One in which there are ten men of leisure. If there are fewer than this, it is reckoned as a village. He had to point out that the rule applies to a city, even though [leisured] people come there from outside.

15 Joshua b. Levi also said: A city which has been laid waste and afterwards settled is reckoned as a city. What is meant by "laid waste"? If you say, that its walls have been destroyed, in which case if it became settled it is reckoned as a city but otherwise not? But has it not been taught: R. Elazar son of R. Yose says: [The text says], "which has a wall" [which implies that it is to be reckoned as a city] even though it does not have a wall now, provided it had one previously?

16 Rather, What then is meant by “laid waste”? Laid waste of its ten men of leisure.

17 Joshua b. Levi further said:

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1 Lod and Ono and Ge' Haharashim were walled in the days of Joshua son of Nun.

2 But was it Joshua who built these? Was it not Elpaal who built them, as it is written, "And the sons of Elpaal Ever and Misham and Shemed, who built Ono and Lod, with the towns there of?" (I Chronicles 8:12). But according to your reading Asa built them, as it is written, "And he built fenced cities in Judah?" (II Chronicles 14:5).

3 Elazar said: These places were walled in the days of Joshua son of Nun. They were laid waste in the days of the concubine of Gibea, and Elpaal came and rebuilt them. They again fell, and Asa came and repaired them.

4 There is an indication of this in a precise reading of the text, as it is written, "For he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities" (II Chronicles 14:6). From this we can infer that they had already been towns beforehand; learn from this.

5 Joshua b. Levi also said: Women are obligated to read the Megillah, since they were also part of the same miracle. Joshua b. Levi further said: If Purim falls on Shabbat, they ask questions and they offer derashot on the subject of the day.

6 Why specify Purim? The same rule applies to festivals also, as it has been taught: Moses established for all of Israel that they should ask questions and offer derashot on the subject of the day — the laws of Pesah on Pesah,

the laws of Shavuot on Shavuot, and the laws of Sukkot on Sukkot!

7 It was necessary to state the rule [separately] in the case of Purim. For you might suggest that we should forbid this because of the prohibition of Rabbah. We are therefore told that this is not so.

8 Joshua b. Levi further said: One must read the Megillah in the evening and repeat it in the day, as it is written, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not answer, and in the night and I have no rest" (Psalms 22:3).

9 They thought this means that t hey should read the Megillah at night, and teach the Mishnah [about it] in the morning. Jeremiah said to them: It has been explained to me by R. Hiyya b. Abba [that the word "repeat" here has the same meaning] as when, for instance, people say, I will go through this section and repeat it.

10 It has also been stated: R. Helbo said in the name of Ulla of Biri: One must read the Megillah in the evening and repeat it in the day, as it says, "To the end that my glory may sing praise to you and not be silent. O Lord, my God, I will give thanks to thee forever" (Psalms 30:13).

11 The villages, however, may push the reading forward to the day of gathering. Hanina said: The sages were lenient on the villages by allowing them to push the reading forward to the day of gathering, in order that they might provide food and water to their brothers in the cities.

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