

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [218]



“And It Was Not Shmuel Hakatan”

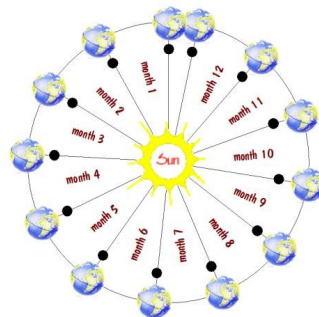
Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 11a

Background to Our Story

Hebrew calendar



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_calendar



The Hebrew or Jewish calendar is a [lunisolar calendar](#) used today predominantly for [Jewish](#) religious observances. It determines the dates for [Jewish holidays](#) and the appropriate [public reading](#) of [Torah portions](#), [yahrzeits](#) (dates to commemorate the death of a relative), and daily [Psalm](#) readings, among many ceremonial uses. In [Israel](#), it is used for religious purposes, provides a time frame for agriculture and is an official calendar for civil purposes, although the latter usage has been steadily declining in favor of the [Gregorian calendar](#).

The present Hebrew calendar is the product of evolution, including a [Babylonian](#) influence. Until the [Tannaitic](#) period (approximately 10–220 CE), the calendar employed a [new crescent moon](#), with an additional month normally added every two or three years to correct for the difference between twelve lunar months and the solar year. When to add it was based on observation of natural agriculture-related events in Israel. Through the [Amoraic](#) period (200–500 CE) and into the [Geonic](#) period, this system was gradually displaced by the mathematical rules used today. The Hebrew lunar year is about eleven days shorter than the solar year and uses the 19-year [Metonic cycle](#) to bring it into line with the solar year,

with the addition of an [intercalary](#) month every two or three years, for a total of seven times per 19 years.

Rabban Gamaliel II



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamaliel_II

Rabban Gamaliel II (also spelled Gamliel; Hebrew: רבן גמליאל דיבנה) was the first person to lead the Sanhedrin as Nasi after the fall of the second temple, which occurred in 70 CE. Gamliel was appointed nasi approximately 10 years later. Gamaliel II was the son of Shimon ben Gamaliel, one of Jerusalem's foremost men in the war against the Romans, and grandson of Gamaliel I. To distinguish him from the latter he is also called Gamliel of Yavne.

In [Yavne](#), during the [siege of Jerusalem](#), the scribes of the school of [Hillel](#) had taken refuge by permission of [Vespasian](#), and a new center of [Judaism](#) arose under the leadership of the aged [Johanan ben Zakkai](#), a school whose members inherited the authority of the [Sanhedrin](#) of Jerusalem. Gamaliel II became Johanan ben Zakkai's successor, and rendered immense service in the strengthening and reintegration of Judaism, which had been deprived of its former basis by the destruction of the [Second Temple](#) and by the entire loss of its political autonomy. He put an end to the division which had arisen between the spiritual leaders of Judaism by the separation of the scribes into the two schools called respectively after Hillel and [Shammai](#), and took care to enforce his own authority as the president of the chief legal assembly of Judaism with energy and often with severity. He did this, as he himself said, not for his own honor nor for that of his family, but in order that disunion should not prevail in Israel.

Gamaliel's position was recognized by the Roman government also. Towards the end of [Domitian](#)'s reign (c. 95 CE), he went to [Rome](#) in company with the most prominent members of the school of Javneh, in order to avert a danger threatening the Jews from the action of the emperor. Many interesting particulars have been given regarding the journey of these learned men to Rome and their sojourn there. The impression made by the capital of the world upon Gamaliel and his companions was an overpowering one, and they wept when they thought of Jerusalem in ruins. In Rome, as at home, Gamaliel often had occasion to defend [Judaism](#) in polemical discussions with [pagans](#), and also with professed [Christians](#).

Rabbi Gamaliel II directed Simeon ha-Pakoli to edit the [Amidah](#) and make it a duty, incumbent on every one, to recite the prayer three times daily. Also, he directed [Samuel ha-Katan](#) to write another paragraph against informers and heretics.

He was on friendly terms with many who were not Jews, and was so warmly devoted to his slave [Tavi](#) that when the latter died he mourned for him as for a beloved member of his own family.

He loved discussing the sense of single portions of the [Bible](#) with other scholars, and made many fine expositions of the text. With the words of [Deuteronomy](#) 13:18 he associated the lesson: "So long as thou thyself art merciful, God will also be merciful to thee." Gamaliel died before the insurrections under [Trajan](#) had brought fresh unrest into Israel. At his funeral obsequies the celebrated proselyte [Aquila](#) (Akylas [Onkelos](#)), reviving an ancient custom, burned costly materials to the value of seventy [minae](#). Gamaliel himself had given directions that his body was to be wrapped in the simplest possible shroud. By this he wished to check the extravagance which had become associated with arrangements for the disposal of the dead, and his end was attained; his example became the rule, and it also became the custom to commemorate him in the words of consolation addressed to the mourners. Gamaliel's son, [Simon](#), long after his father's death, and after the persecutions under [Hadrian](#), inherited his office, which thenceforward his descendants handed on from father to son.

Gamaliel was a controversial leader. He excommunicated his own brother-in-law, Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. In a dispute about fixing the calendar, Rabban Gamaliel humiliated Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah and this led to a rabbinic revolt against Gamaliel's leadership of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin installed Rabbi Eleazar Ben Azariah as the new Nasi. After reconciling with Rabbi Joshua, Rabban Gamaliel was reinstated as Nasi, with Rabbi Eleazar serving along with him in a rotation every third week. According to the version recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer served as Av Bet Din, effectively as a viceregent.

Shmuel ha-Katan



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shmuel_ha-Katan

Shmuel ha-Katan (literally *Shmuel* the Small) was a [Babylonian Jew](#) considered a great scholar of the [Talmud](#), [Jewish law](#) and [custom](#). He was one of the second generation of [Tannaim](#), who served under the patriarch [Gamliel II](#) of [Yavneh](#), during the last two decades of the 1st century CE.

He is known for his great work on the [Hebrew calendar](#) in exilic times, which brought an end to the practice of witnesses testifying to the new moon, and in establishing some texts of the Jewish prayer book, the [Siddur](#). Particularly, he wrote the [Birkat HaMinim](#) benediction, the 13th blessing in the silent prayer said three times daily, the [Amidah](#).

The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sanhedrin 11a

מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבּוֹ גַּמְלִיאֵל שְׁאָמַר: הַשְּׂכִימוּ
לִי שְׂבָעָה לְעֵלְיָיָהּ, הַשְּׂכִימִים וּמִצָּא שְׁמוֹנָה. אָמַר: מִי
הוּא שְׂעָלָה שְׂלָא בְּרִשׁוֹת? יִרְדוּ! עֲמַד שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן
וְאָמַר: אֲנִי הוּא שְׂעָלִיתִי שְׂלָא בְּרִשׁוֹת, וְלֹא לְעֵבֶר
הַשָּׁנָה עָלִיתִי, אֲלֵא לְלַמּוֹד הַלְכָה לְמַעֲשֵׂה הוֹצֵרֶכְתִּי.
אָמַר לוֹ: שֵׁב בְּנִי, שֵׁב. רְאוּיֹת כָּל הַשָּׁנִים כּוֹלֵן
לְהִתְעַבֵּר עַל יְדֵךְ, אֲלֵא אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים: אִין מַעֲבְרִין
אֶת הַשָּׁנָה אֲלֵא בְּמוֹמְנִין לָהּ. וְלֹא שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן הוּא,
אֲלֵא אִינִישׁ אַחֲרֵינָא, וּמִתְחַמֵּת כִּי־סוֹפָא הוּא דְעֵבֶד.

There was an incident involving Rabban Gamliel, in which he said: Awaken seven judges for me early in the morning and have them come to the attic. The next morning [Rabban Gamliel] awoke and found eight judges in the attic.

He [Rabban Gamliel] declared: Whoever ascended without permission descend from here!

Shmuel HaKatan rose and said I am the one that ascended without permission. But I did not ascend to intercalate a month into the year. Rather, I needed to learn the practical laws of how to extend a year, so I came just to observe the proceedings.

[Rabban Gamliel] said to [Shmuel HaKatan]: Sit, my son, sit. It would be fitting for each and every leap year to be extended by you. But the Sages said: we intercalate a month into the year only with [judges] specifically designated for [that purpose]. Since you were not explicitly designated, you may not participate in the intercalation proceedings.

And it was not really Shmuel HaKatan who ascended without permission but rather another man. And it was only because of the embarrassment the undesigned fellow would have suffered that Shmuel HaKatan made his "admission."



Explaining the Story

What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did Rabban Gamliel call seven judges and not more to intercalate the year?

Bonus Question ? Why did Rabban Gamliel request that the one who ascended without permission descend?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Bonus Question ? Why did "the eighth" person ascend without permission?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? Why did Shmuel HaKatan confess to be the "eighth person"?

Bonus Question ? By the end of the story we know that Shmuel HaKatan was actually one of the seven original judges summoned to intercalate the year. Why did he give a reason for being in the attic even though no one asked him for such a reason?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Rabban Gamliel call Shmuel HaKatan “my son” and ask him to sit with the others?

Shmuel Hakatan means “Little Shmuel.”

? In which way is Shmuel little?

? In which way is Shmuel great?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Teaching kindness and compassion to unkind and uncompassionate leaders in a kind and compassionate way: the daunting task of Shmuel HaKatan.

EPILOGUE

Teaching compassion to your leaders can be a very overwhelming task. Rabban Gamliel ruled over his students with an iron-fist, leaving many students and colleagues emotionally hurt.

Shmuel HaKatan uses his stature and the love, which he knows Rabban Gamliel feels for him, to save a colleague from embarrassment and to try to “humanize” his teacher.

Although Shmuel HaKatan cannot directly confront his teacher, whom he admires, he hopes Rabban Gamliel will learn empathy from him.