

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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## SCANDAL IN THE TEMPLE! TRACTATE SUKKAH IN THE YERUSHALMI

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Scandal, it appears, has a long shelf life. Here we see that one whole segment of the Jewish community, 1/24th of Israel and particularly its priests who served in the Temple in Jerusalem, are tainted by what one woman from among them did:

The priestly watch of Bilgah is somewhat disgraced because of Miriam, a daughter of Bilgah, who became an apostate and went and married an officer from a Greek royal family. [When the Greeks conquered the Temple] she went and banged on the altar. She said to it: Wolf! Wolf! You have destroyed the property of the Jews and not stood by them in their hour of need.

But others say: The priestly watch of Bilgah is somewhat disgraced because it was their time to arrive but they weren't there, so the priestly watch of Yesheivav went in and served in their place. Therefore, Bilgah always appears to be among the outgoing priestly watches, in the south, and Yesheivav always appears to be among the incoming watches, at the north. Neighbors of the wicked normally receive no reward, except for Yesheivav, neighbor to Bilgah, who received a reward. (T. Sukkah 4:28 in Y. Sukkah 5:8)

And why not remove the priestly watch of Bilgah entirely? You cannot do so, for Rabbi Simon said in the name of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: It is difficult for God to uproot a genealogical chain from its rightful place. (Y. Sukkah 5:8)

Tosefta, quoted here in the Yerushalmi, records what must have been quite a scandal. Miriam, from the priestly group of Bilgah, not only adopts Greek culture and religion, she accompanies the conquering Greek army into the Temple precincts itself and, in the sign of ultimate disrespect, takes off her shoe, beats the altar, and declares that its sacrifices are useless.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What might have caused Miriam to rebel so strongly against her family? Or did she simply assimilate and throw her defiance into the "establishment's" face?
2. What do you think she expected the altar (and its sacrifices) to do for the Jewish people? Should it have saved the Jews from the marauding Greeks?

3. Why is it that, no matter how badly a Jew (or a tribe) may act, we do not expunge them from the Jewish people? Are we always hoping for repentance? How can repentance happen, though, when everyone remembers the scandal?
4. How do we bring back people who have strayed from the Jewish people?