

The Presence of the Lost Temple

Report of a Jewish-Christian dialogue

Shlomo Tucker
Michael Mulder

the world have fasted over the destruction of the Second Temple.¹⁰ *Tisha B'av* thus serves as living proof of our historic love for the Temple and Jerusalem.

c. In the Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b), Rav Papa says that *Tisha B'av* and the minor fast days will become days of rejoicing when there is *shalom*. Many commentators say that *shalom* means when the Temple is rebuilt. But the simple meaning of *shalom* is 'peace', and this year we seem farther from peace than ever.

d. Finally, some modern Jews argue that *Tisha B'av* should be abolished since they are not interested in the rebuilding of the Temple or in the renewal of the sacrificial system. But this is only one aspect of *Tisha B'av*. We mourn on *Tisha B'av* for the Destruction, but we also pray for redemption, as we learn in a *midrash*: the Messiah was born on the day the Temple was destroyed.¹¹

We were fortunate to witness the beginning of our redemption in 1948 and therefore we celebrate Israel Independence Day. But the redemption is not yet complete and therefore we must fast on *Tisha B'av*. As the Ba'al Shem Tov said: 'Forgetfulness prolongs the exile; remembrance is the secret of redemption'.

5. The Loss of the Temple in Judaism and Early Christianity

Marcie Lenk

1. The Temple in Judaism and Christianity

When the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 CE, how did Jews deal with the loss? The Temple was the center of Jewish life and ritual, so there is no doubt that losing the Temple was a blow to the Jewish people.

Did this event affect Christian theology and practice in any way? One might assume that it was never the center of Christian life and ritual, but there are many stories in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles about Jesus and the apostles participating in the Temple rituals, since they were all practicing Jews. Even Paul treats Jerusalem in a special way, insisting that those who are 'in Christ' participate in sending funds to 'the saints in Jerusalem' (Romans 15:25-31; 1 Cor. 16:3). After the Temple was destroyed, Christianity grew and developed without a Temple and without Jerusalem as geographical center (in fact, Rome and Constantinople quickly replaced Jerusalem as spiritual centers).

Perhaps surprisingly, Judaism continued without a Temple. A system of Jewish life was developed by rabbis who lived long after the destruction. Still, the Temple was not forgotten.

Both Jews and Christians in the centuries after the destruction used ideas about the Temple and the destruction to construct different ways to live as a Jew or a Christian.

¹⁰ See early testimony by Christians, in Golinkin, above, note 6, p. 416 and p. 175.

¹¹ See *Yerushalmi Berakhot*, Chapter 2, fol. 5a; *Eikhah Rabbah*, parashah 1, ed. Vilna, fol. 18c = ed. Buber, pp. 89-90 and parallels cited by Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. VI, Philadelphia, 1928, p. 406, note 53.

2. Jewish Reactions on the Loss of the Temple

We begin with an examination of Jewish reactions. Jews had a tradition that may have provided some hope around the year 70 CE. The Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed once before (586 BCE) and had been rebuilt close to seventy years later (around 520-515 BCE). Many Jews may have believed that the loss of the Temple was not to be a permanent loss. The Bar Kokhba revolt in the years 132-135 may have been a response to anti-Jewish edicts of the emperor Hadrian, though some scholars have argued that Hadrian's edicts were a response to the revolt.¹ It is clear that some Jews (including the great Rabbi Akiva) believed that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah, and that the timing was ripe (close to seventy years after the destruction) for the rebuilding of the Temple.² This failed attempt at Jewish independence led Jewish leaders to

¹ Joseph Geiger accepted the version of Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 69.12) that the rebellion was a reaction to Emperor Hadrian building a temple to Jupiter on the temple mount (Geiger, 'The Ban on Circumcision and the Bar Kokhva Revolt,' *Zion* 41 (1976) 139-147). Saul Lieberman, following the report in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* as well as a plethora of rabbinic sources, argued that Hadrian's edict against circumcision was the primary cause of the rebellion (Saul Lieberman, 'Martyrs of Caesarea' *JQR* 36 (1946) 239-253). According to Eusebius, the building of the temple to Jupiter was a result, not a cause, of the rebellion (*Church History* 4.6). Many recent scholars have argued that the ban on circumcision was a result of the rebellion (Aharon Oppenheimer, 'The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of the Revolt' in Peter Schäfer (ed.), *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*, Tübingen, 55-69; Peter Schäfer, 'The Bar Kokhba Revolt and Circumcision: Historical Evidence and Modern Apologetics' in Aharon Oppenheimer (ed.) *Jüdische Geschichte in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, München 1999, 119-132).

² Jerusalem Talmud *Ta'anit* 4:6 (68d-69a); Lamentations Rabbah 2.2; Peter Schäfer, 'Rabbi Aqiva and Bar Kochba,' in Green, *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, vol. II, ed. W.S. Green, 1980, pp. 113-130.

consider other ways to deal with the loss, especially after Hadrian decreed that Jerusalem was off-limits to Jews.

Just as the prophets of Israel, including Isaiah and Jeremiah, had in their times warned the Israelites and the Judeans that God was punishing them for their sins, so too did many Jews living in the centuries after the destruction of the second Temple interpret the events as punishments for their sins. The writings of Josephus and the rabbis are full of references to various sins that they understood as the causes of the destruction.³

Even if the destruction was justified, however, Jews had to figure out what to do, and how to live as Jews without a Temple. In the immediate aftermath of the destruction we find mourning and asceticism as one reaction. Psalm 137 ('By the rivers of Babylon') was written as a response to the destruction of the first Temple, but it continued to be interpreted and used liturgically to speak to ideas of mourning for the second Temple, as well. The psalmist declares the impossibility of singing a song of Zion 'in a foreign land.' The only possible song for those in mourning is a song of remembrance and defiance, 'If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning...' Continuing the tradition of mourning, a rabbinic text (bBaba Batra 60b) tells of a group of students whose mourning went too far.

According to this tradition, Rabbi Joshua uses Malachi 3:9 ('You are cursed with a curse, yet you rob me, even this whole nation') to teach his students that even if the destruction should be understood

³ General sins: Josephus, *War* 2.424, 43-446; 5.401-415, 429-445, 565-566; 6.95-102, 200-203; *Antiquities* 20.166; Jewish tyrants: Josephus, *War* 1.10-12; 5.257; Bloodshed of innocent people: Josephus, *War* 4.314-325, 334-344, 5.15-18; 6.200-213; Profaning the holy Temple: Josephus, *War* 2.456; 4.102-103, 402; 5.100-105; Bloodshed in or near the Temple: Josephus, *War* 4.150-51, 201, 215; 5.15-18, 100-105; 6.95-110.

as a punishment, God never intended to cut off the people completely. Their insistence on not benefiting from that which would have been offered to God in the Temple would have logically led to abstaining from even fruit and water. Rabbi Joshua acknowledged the need to remember the loss of the Temple, but insisted that the Jewish people must continue and even thrive. The symbolic mourning that he suggests allows for celebration (weddings) and building (new homes). Indeed, this Talmudic discussion concludes with a turn to the future, promising those who mourn (even symbolically) that they will 'be privileged to behold her joy.' According to Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Aibu in the following text, remembering the loss of the Temple becomes a meritorious act in itself – one that will be rewarded in the future.

Lamentations Rabbah 1:23

'She weeps at night' (Lam. 1:2)

R. Aibu said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: As a reward for weeping I will restore your captivity, for is it not written, 'Thus says the Lord: Refrain your voice from weeping... and there is hope for your future, says the Lord' (Jer. 31:16-17)?

Weeping and commemorating would not be enough to keep Judaism alive until the redemption would come. Without a Temple, Jews needed a new center for their worship and theology. First came a practical question: how can one atone for one's sins without sacrifices? The rabbis believed that there were many ways to do so. Rabbi Yochanan, known from legend as the founder of Yavneh (bGittin 56b), argued that ethical behavior atones for sins.

Avot d'Rabbi Natan (A) Chap. 4

Once, as Rabban Yohannan b. Zakkai was coming forth from Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua followed after him and beheld the Temple in ruins.

'Woe unto us!' R. Joshua cried, 'that this, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!'

'My son,' Rabban Yohannan said to him, 'be not grieved; we have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving-kindness, as it is said, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6).'

In another text, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi suggests that daily prayer replaces sacrifice (bBerakhot 26b). Indeed, the project of the Mishnah, completed around the year 200 by Rabbi Judah HaNassi, seems to imply that study of Torah, including the rules about the Temple service, can replace the Temple itself. The rabbis developed new rituals and practices that enabled Jews to live full Jewish lives wherever they were, without the need of a Temple or sacrifices.⁴ For example, Passover, which was previously the most important pilgrimage festival centering around a paschal lamb which was slaughtered and consumed in Jerusalem, became a feast celebrated at home with an elaborately choreographed ritual meal called a seder.⁵ In general, animal sacrifices would no longer be practiced, but they would be remembered in the study of biblical and rabbinic texts as well as in Jewish liturgy. Indeed, Jews remained confident that eventually the messiah would come and the Temple would be rebuilt, though Judaism would survive in the centuries that Jews would continue to wait.⁶

⁴ Baruch Bokser, 'Rabbinic Responses to Catastrophe: From Continuity to Discontinuity,' *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983), 37-61.

⁵ Mishna *Pesahim* 10; Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

⁶ *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:1, 1:2, 1:16, 3:28, 5:18.

3. *Christian Reactions on the Loss of the Temple*

As early Christians worked out the practices and theologies of Christian life, memory of the Jerusalem Temple and its destruction was used in a number of different ways. Sharing Hebrew Scripture, early Christians were aware of the ideas of the prophets that the first Temple was destroyed as a punishment for Israel's sins. Like their Jewish neighbors, Christians understood the destruction of the second Temple, too, as God's punishment to the Jewish people. Thus we find Jesus as a prophet in Mark 13, warning of the impending destruction.

Justin Martyr argued that the blame that Israel's prophets attribute to the people leading to the destruction of the first Temple applies equally to the Romans' destruction of the second Temple. He insisted that the sacrificial worship in the Temple was never what God desired, but was only a concession to wean the Israelites from worship of idols (*Dialogue with Trypho* 22). The Epistle of Barnabas 16 taught that God destroyed the Temple to put an end to the Jews' misguided worship and misunderstanding.

I will also speak with you concerning the Temple, and show how the wretched men erred by putting their hope on a building, and not on the God who made them, and is the true house of God. For they consecrated him in the Temple almost like the heathen. But learn how the Lord speaks, in bringing it to naught, 'Who has measured the heaven with a span, or the earth with his outstretched hand? Have not I? says the Lord. Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool, what house will you build for me, or what is the place of my rest?' (Isa. 40:12; 66:1) You know that their hope was in vain.

The author uses verses in Isaiah to imply that God never wanted to be worshiped in the Jerusalem Temple. The context of those verses in Isaiah, however, is God's promise to return Israel to Jerusalem, a promise of future redemption. Indeed, those verses evoke

Solomon's prayer 'Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!' (1 Kings 8:27). Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem and then declared that the Temple could not contain God! Despite the seeming contradiction, for the ancient Israelites the Jerusalem Temple was the actual dwelling place of a God who cannot be limited to one place. For the Epistle of Barnabas, and other early Christian writers, scripture is used selectively to prove that the destruction of the Temple was God's will.

While many Jews believed that the destruction was a punishment for their sins, and some wondered why it seemed that God had abandoned them, Jews never believed the idea that the Temple service itself was the problem. Some Jews did abandon Judaism and some even converted to Christianity, but the vast majority of Jews continued to believe that God still cared for them, that they were still a special covenant people of God, and that there would be redemption for the Jewish people at some future time.

Christian leaders, on the other hand, used the idea of the destruction as a way to draw boundaries between Jews and Christians, between Judaism and Christianity. Thus John Chrysostom (*Against the Judaizers* 4.4), trying to convince Christians in Antioch not to join with Jews in their festivals, argued that Jews were sinning in celebrating Passover in fourth century Antioch, since Exodus 12 teaches that Passover is celebrated through the sacrifice of a Paschal lamb, and Deut. 16 teaches that sacrifices can only be brought in the Jerusalem Temple. Chrysostom taught that without that Temple there can be no celebration of Passover. Of course, Jews used a different logic. Agreeing that sacrifices could not be brought without the Jerusalem Temple, they developed other ways to celebrate the festivals, with prayers and other liturgical elements, and without sacrifices. For John Chrysostom the destruction could be used to

construct boundaries which (he hoped) would keep Christians away from synagogues and Jewish festivals.

Still, the Temple was not only portrayed in negative ways in Christian sources. Consistent with the theology of the Gospel of John, where Jesus calls himself the light, life, and bread, Jesus is portrayed as the Temple (John 2:13-22). This idea is picked up in Revelation 21:22-23, where the New Jerusalem has no need for a Temple, 'for its Temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.' Paul transfers the idea of the sanctity of the Temple to the Church and to individual believers in the Church (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:18-20). According to Hebrews 9:23-28, the Jerusalem Temple was replaced by a heavenly Temple, an idea found in the rebuke of Stephen in Acts 7:44-51, and picked up by the Epistle of Barnabas 16. Christian martyrs were often described as sacrifices (Ignatius of Antioch, *Romans* 4). In much Christian liturgy the Church is viewed as a Temple, where the Eucharist is the sacrifice brought upon the altar in the Temple. In all of these sources, the Church and Christ replace the previous need for the Jewish rituals, yet one must appreciate that the idea of the Temple itself is taken seriously and respectfully. The Temple is kept alive as a potent symbol for Christian faith and worship.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that both Jews and Christians developed different strategies to make meaning out of the loss of the Jerusalem Temple.

For Christians, the destruction served the purpose of demonizing Jews as sinners, both in the past (and thus the destruction was a punishment) and the present (in continuing to practice rituals). However, the sanctity of the Temple itself remains present and meaningful in the body of Christ, the body of the martyr, and the body of the individual believer, and the Temple

rituals continue in the architecture of churches and in the Eucharistic offering.

Jews mourned the Temple (and continue to mourn it in the form of a fast-day called *Tisha B'Av*), and developed different ways to fulfill the needs that were previously fulfilled through Temple sacrifice. Torah study, prayer and good deeds all become new forms of sacrifice. In a sense, the Temple is replaced. I emphasize 'in a sense' because the memory of the Temple and the connection between redemption and a rebuilt Temple and a rebuilt Jerusalem become Jewish aspirations into the modern era. The hope for redemption found in many Jewish prayers includes the hope that the Temple service will be restored. In the two millennia since the destruction of Jerusalem, Judaism has developed rituals to serve God without animal sacrifices or a central location. For Jews, however, the missing Jerusalem Temple remains a symbol of an incomplete world.