

The Temple of G-d¹

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In this article, I will show; 1. That the temple remained the fundamental constituent of authenticity for every aspect of Jewish life, for both the messianic and non-messianic communities, until its destruction in 70 CE. 2. The consequences of the tragic loss of their most sacred icon for both communities. 3. The steps taken by both communities to stabilize their respective doctrinal beliefs.

The Temple: The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in seventy CE had far reaching significance which has affected both Judaism and Christianity in ways not easily understood. For traditional Jews the destruction of the temple had more obvious consequences. What is not so obvious is the significant role that the temple played in the minds and lives of Messianic Jews. Most "Christians" do not consider the early Messianic Jews to be Jews but the Bible clearly shows this to be untrue. Acts 21: 18-20 "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. ... You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: ... We have four men which have a vow on them; They take, and purify yourself with them, and pay their expenses (temple sacrifices), that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, which they were informed concerning you, are nothing; but that you yourself also walk orderly, and keep the law. ... 26) Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, at which time an offering (sacrifice) should be made for every one of them." Temple offerings were sacrificial in nature. The vow mentioned here is the vow of the nazer, as is indicated by the shaving of their heads. The reason for making the nazerite vow is to serve in the temple along with the Kohanim (priests) and Levites. Their duties included work in the altar area where sacrifices were made. Had the temple been unimportant to Messianic Jews, why would they be making the Nazerite vow?

Why the temple was necessary: The G-d of Avraham was uniquely identified by His lack of outward appearance. This reflects on His true nature as being a G-d who will ultimately tabernacle within man and not live in a physical building built with human effort. From the beginning, His most notable attribute is influencing a change in the nature of man as is reflected in "The Ten Commandments". These go contrary to the nature of mankind, requiring us to put forth effort to change the way we react to one another. G-d has always desired to tabernacle within man. In days of old, He chose men who would listen to his voice and sacrificially obey Him. Noach was the most notable patriarch in which G-d lived prior to the flood. He used Noach to "save" mankind. The next patriarch of note in whom G-d lived was Avraham who willingly listened to the voice of the "G-d who is one" and obeyed Him. Skipping over a few notables, we come to Moshe, an extraordinary prophet of G-d in whom the G-d lived and who was used by Him to bring us the first oracles of this deity with no face, and up till that time, no name.

Moshe received instructions to build a tabernacle which was an earthly manifestation of a house which was in reality a copy of what is in the Heavens. It was portable and contained two internal chambers, one of which was called the holy of holies. Within this most sacred of rooms the Ark of the covenant was placed. On the Ark were two cherubim covering the "mercy seat". When the L-rd spoke to Moshe or the Koen Gadol (High Priest), it was from the empty space between the cherubim, over the mercy seat. Moshe was also given instructions to write down the Torah (law) of HaShem so that it could be carried forward throughout the generations. The reason for doing this is that Moshe heard HaShem in the most clear and unmistakable terms, as speaking "face to face" with HaShem. To our knowledge, no one but HaMoshiach has ever had such a relationship with HaShem.

In the mean time, people need a daily reminder that HaShem is and was the one true G-d and that he was with them. The tabernacle served this purpose. People could look to the tabernacle and see with their eyes something that represented the Kingdom of HaShem. It was full of mystery to those who watched from afar, but they knew the significance of that place. The tabernacle and later the holy temple, became the central focal point of their lives. Everyone was continuously aware of HaShem's presence and the High priest was his authorized representative. Not that there weren't others who carried the mantle of oracular prophet among the people. At times, G-d chose individuals as a tabernacle, who spoke the words of HaShem to the people. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Elisha were among the more notable of these oracular prophets. Ultimately, King David wanted to build a real house for HaShem, but because of his sins HaShem told him that he would not be allowed to build the temple. Sholomo (Solomon) his son was the one HaShem selected to build a house for G-d.

The functions of the temple: •Expiation of sin; Sin sacrifice was the only offering we made to G-d that was fulfilled by Yeshua's death. •Sacrifice; Thank offerings, burnt offerings, vow offerings, offerings of cleansing, redemption of the first born son, offerings of dedication, first fruit, tithes, and many more were all sacrifices made at the temple. Animals were sacrificed before being consumed. •Justice; The court system in Israel derived its authority from the priesthood (supreme court) located at the temple in Jerusalem. When brothers had a conflict, the ultimate authority to resolve community disputes was the High Priest at the temple. When the Temple was destroyed, there was no place of authority remaining to resolve these issues. •Official records; The lineage of all the families of the tribes of Israel were kept at the temple. When the temple was destroyed, there was no more record of inheritance. This is critical because land possession was to revert to the families of the original owners in the year of Jubilee. Without lineage records, it would be impossible to tell who rightly owned what. Considering that all disputes were settled at the temple, it is easy to see how important these records were. •Oracles of G-d; Among the duties of the priesthood was the office of oracular prophet. The high priest was consulted by individuals seeking guidance or instruction from G-d. •Blessings and dedications; We went to the temple to dedicate our children to the L-rd. No greater joy can come to a believing parent than to see their child dedicated to the service of HaShem. •Torah study; Only at the temple could we find those who we trusted to be knowledgeable in Torah and temple practice. Only here could we have our questions answered about the most difficult aspects of Torah study and observance. •Benevolence; Those needing aid could always go to the temple and receive benevolence. After the temple was destroyed where could a person having needs go for assistance?

There were other roles that the temple played in Jewish life such as weddings, Holy Day observances and other community events but the ones highlighted above are the most significant. None of these sacrifices or events stopped after we believed in Yeshua. Now that we can see how important the temple was in our daily lives, how do we fulfill the requirements of the Torah without the temple? As was shown at the beginning of this document, questions of how to live Jewish life without a temple, were and still are as important to Messianic Jews as to mainline traditional Jews. First century Jews had not yet understood that HaShem would actually tabernacle within them just as He did the prophets of old. At the time of this writing we are preparing to observe Chanukah 5758, the festival of rededication. My thoughts are gravitating toward a new day when

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the temple will be rebuilt. If the dedication of the second temple was so important, how much more will we rejoice when the next one is built?

The Destruction of the Second Temple: According to rabbi Joseph Telushkin's book, "Jewish Literacy", chapter 67, Rome did not invade Israel by force. They were invited to come to Israel to assist king Hyrcanus II in 63 BCE, to help keep the throne from his brother Aristobulus, who had mustered some following for an insurrection. It created a civil war which was of great concern to Hyrcanus. Rome had just annexed Syria so Hyrcanus asked for Rome's help. They were happy to respond, but it turned Hyrcanus into little more than a puppet. The outcome of this action caused Rome to be able to put into power whoever it wanted for both the crown and Priesthood. Herod the Great followed Hyrcanus II in 37 BCE. He was placed into power by Caesar and was twice run out of Israel by the people to no avail. Herod and Caesar replaced the priesthood with their own selection which explains Yeshua's unfriendly attitude toward the high priest saying, "My house called a house of prayer but you have turned it into a den of thieves", and why the priesthood was so anxious to see him executed.

In 66CE the Jews revolted against Rome and won a critical battle against great odds. This proved to be catastrophic. When the Romans returned they had over 60,000 heavily armed and trained troupes which virtually raped the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Torches were thrown at the Temple which burned to the ground only leaving the western wall (HaKotel) also known as the wailing wall. It is all that remains of the second temple to this day. Several actions were spurred by its loss. Around 100 CE the rabbis met to compile the Mishnah, taking eye witness accounts of procedures for temple service and answering questions raised regarding how to comply with the Torah where answers were unclear. Examples of this nature follows. The Mishnah covered not only how the temple functioned during the days of the priesthood, but also answered questions of the following nature;

1. When a baby decides not to wait until after the Sabbath to be born, as though he/she has a choice, are the mother and midwife breaking the commanded rest on Shabbat due to the birth? The answer to this one is quite easily discerned. If there were a choice, then one should wait until after the Sabbath, however, no-one has figured out how to communicate this to the baby in question.

2. Another not quite so clear question deals with milking cows. A milk cow that is being milked every day cannot skip the Sabbath just because you want to take the Sabbath off. Therefore, milking a cow on the Sabbath, while considered work, is pre-empted by the command to show kindness on the Sabbath. It would be cruel to skip milking the cow on Shabbat. Likewise a animal which falls into a ditch or pit on Shabbat must be rescued or life endangerment could result. For very devout Jews these questions need resolution. What may seem to you to be a clear cut case may not be so clear when considering all the facts.

3. Yom Kippur (day of Atonement) is one of the most sacred days in Judaism. In it we are commanded to fast. The Torah tells us that those who do not fast on Yom Kippur will be cut off from their people. A question arose regarding those who were sick, with diabetes for example. Those who suffer with this illness cannot skip eating due to the life threatening nature of the situation. The rabbis therefore concluded that persons who were ill and who would risk complications due to not eating were exempt from the command to fast on Yom Kippur.

The book of Hebrews, written to Messianic Jews, in reaction to the destruction of the temple, at about the same time period, began by declaring that Yeshua came in similar manner as the prophets before Him and that his ministry is greater than that of prophets or angels. Evidentially messianic believers were gravitating toward any doctrine that might fill the void of this tragic loss. Since the high priest no longer was available to fill the role of oracular prophet, doctrines of angels began to fill the hopes of the people. In chapter five the writer (I believe it to be Rav. Shaul i.e. Paul) discusses the work of the high priest pointing out how messiah has entered in on our behalf, and saying that He was a priest of the order of Melchizedec. Chapter eight contains a summary of what is being said, 8:1) "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2) A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. 3) For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer." In chapter nine the writer discusses the things which are found in the Holy Place in the Temple. And on it goes.

In about 230 CE the rabbis met again to resolve further complications in practicing Torah due lack of a Temple and various other aspects of Judaism. The rabbis argued the pros and cons and reached conclusions. The whole process was recorded in "The Jerusalem Talmud". The two major schools of the day, Shammi and Hillel, were involved in the discussions along with second and third generation students of famous rabbis such as Simion the Just. In the traditional Jewish community, the Pharisees brought us the oral traditions and were responsible for guiding our people through this dilemma. The Jerusalem Talmud was very important to ALL Jews living in Israel, but during the Diaspora, when Jews were driven from their homeland, how do we create the same level of "separated" living that identifies us as Jews? How can Jews from Poland recognize Jews from Texas? How can we know when to celebrate the festivals? Should we observe the beginning of the Sabbath and Holy Days synchronized with Jerusalem time and calendar or are we to use local calendar and times to know when to observe these days?

In about 500 CE the rabbis found it necessary to come together once again to clarify these gray areas of concern having to do with the Diaspora. The process was the same as for the Jerusalem Talmud and everything being duly recorded as before but this time it was called "The Babylonian Talmud", because many of the questions had to do with the dispersion of the Jews from their homeland. The term "Galut" refers to Jews not living in Israel and legislates Jewish life in the Diaspora.

The primary reason for the writing of the Talmud is to respond to a lack of the Temple. The book of Hebrews responded to the havoc and tendency in Messianic Jews toward diverse doctrine, because of the destruction of the temple. If Messianic Jews were affected so profoundly by the loss of the temple, it would be ludicrous to assume that there was no effect on Gentile believers. The nature of the consequences of the loss of the temple on messianic gentiles is no more difficult to observe for the trained eye, but it is apparent that G-d's providential hand was guiding both the messianic Jews and gentiles by this loss. It is doubtful that any of the "modern" traditions of Christianity would be as they are today had the temple and priesthood survived.

We are looking for the day when the temple will be re-built and sacrifices once again are offered upon the holy altar. Should this come to pass, the Mishnah will be an invaluable tool in this re-construction process, not only for the temple itself but also for the priesthood. In that glorious day, G-d himself will rule over us and will be king of the whole earth. All the nations will come before the L-rd at Jerusalem to worship and observe the Feast of Tabernacles. The lion will lie with the lamb and the small child will play over the serpent's den. No harm will come to anyone in HaOlam HaBah (the age to come). Baruch haShem!