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May, 2005

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Temple and Jerusalem in Jewish Life of the Medieval Diaspora

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This paper was presented by Asher Finkel at the 40th International Conference on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University on May 6, 2005.

40th International Congress on Medieval Studies
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI
May 6, 2005

TEMPLE AND JERUSALEM IN JEWISH LIFE OF THE MEDIEVAL DIASPORA

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The focus on Jerusalem and its Temple marks the salvific history of Israel in the Hebrew canon, that closes with the royal appeal to Jews by the Persian King Cyrus “to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild its Temple to God” (2 Chr 36:23). This canonical ending determines the eschatological hope for the Jew in Diaspora that God eventually will direct the world political order to support the return of Jews to Zion. Indeed the above call of Cyrus led to the establishment of the Second Temple that was destroyed by the Romans more than 500 years later. This canonical prospect still guides rabbinic writings to include in its study the laws of farming in the land of Israel and its sabbatical calendar, as well as the laws of sanctity and purity as they relate to the Temple and priestly worship, in anticipation of their return to Zion. Their liturgy and rituals of synagogal life in Diaspora focus on this prospect, as it appears in the thrice daily prayer as well as saying grace after their daily meals. Such hope inspired Jews throughout the centuries to return to Jerusalem as “the mourners of Zion.” They came to offer prayer at the sacred ruins and remaining walls of the Temple mount. At the sight of the ruins they tore their clothing as mourners display their sad loss of a departed beloved parent. Jews conducted a pilgrimage to Jerusalem even when there was no Temple and no sacrifice. They entered the liminal experience of the pilgrimage that affected their total reliance on providence and human fellowship, deepening their commitment to the Promised Land. Some remained impoverished as they lived between the walls of Jerusalem, while others established communities in Galilee with great hardship. Throughout the Middle Ages the holy land enjoyed continuous presence of Jews and their rabbinic leaders.

Two outstanding rabbinic scholars during the 12th and 13th centuries, at the time of the Crusades, became pilgrims to Jerusalem and Palestine. One was the great Talmudist-philosopher Maimonides of Cordova (1135-1204). He and his family escaped the forced conversion by the fanatical Almohades in Islamic southern Spain. He reached the Holy Land prior to his relocation in Egypt as Saladin's physician. The other profound Talmudist was the mystic Nahmanides of Gerona, who faced the religious disputation with the Dominican Pablo Christiani on the Talmud and Jesus as the Messiah. King Jorge invited him to Barcelona to present freely his defense and position. Upon his successful presentation, he was rewarded and urged to leave for Palestine. He arrived in Acre and departed for Jerusalem, where he died two years later at the age of seventy.

After the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula during the reign of Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492, a number of Jews who lived there over the centuries fled to Galilee and Jerusalem under the Turkish rule. They established Talmudic and mystical centers in Safed and Jerusalem, which

gave rise to Lurianic Kabbalah and the final code of Jewish law by Rabbi Yosef Karo while restoring the former rite of ordination. This development in Judaism affected deeply the life of Jews in Christian Europe and in Islamic countries. It led to 17th century Sabbatainism, a false Messianic movement seeking a physical restoration of the Temple. Their apostasy was countered by the mystical Hassidism that focused on spiritual restoration of the human being as the Temple, with the hope to return to Jerusalem.

These developments were rooted in the rabbinic view that two great Talmudists, Maimonides and Nahmanides, entertained and their positions came to determine eventually the orthodox Jewish approach in contemporary times. Two distinct views emerged with their depiction of the anticipated third Temple. These two eschatological approaches are anchored in the earlier accounts of Mishanic and Midrashic tradition, with attestation in the early Jewish-Christian writings and recent discoveries of Dead Sea Scrolls. Modern interpreters, however, seem to define the above focus on the territorial imperative in Judaism with its politico-national concern of religious Zionism, Whereas Christianity in contrast is viewed to be free from such an imperative, which led to the way Democratic government adopted the separation of state and Church as its principle.

Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism today tend to emphasize the Christian distinction and seek to show thereby that Judaism in the past was also free from its territorial demand. Following the suggestion of Prof. Abraham Joshua Heschel on the “Sabbath,” they point to the opening chapter of the Bible on Creation, when the temporal orientation is stressed. A person, therefore, can enjoy his/her faith wherever he/she resides to celebrate his/her relationship with God on a given “set-apart” day. However, Heschel in his book on “Israel” also illustrates how significant is the territorial aspect of Judaism with the prospect of return to the “set-apart” land as the final fulfillment. Moreover, the great Medieval commentator RaSHi of Troyes opens his work on the Torah with a midrashic explanation for the curious introduction of the Creation story. It appears to shed light on the compositional intent of Scriptures, in view of the didactic directive of Ps 111:6. “God relates His creative works in order to give Israel its inheritance among the nations.” Thus, both the opening of the Hebrew canon and its conclusion assert the significance of Jewish reestablishment in their promised land.

The formulated halakhic distinction between Maimonides and Nahmanides appears to be rooted in the Biblical mandate for reestablishment in the Holy Land. Maimonides does enumerate this injunction as one of the 613 commandments (see his “Sefer Hamisvoth”). Nahmanides, however, adds it to the list of positive commandments. He refers to the phrase in Num 33:53, “You shall inherit the land and settle it,” as a prescription and not as a promise. His view seeks to determine how each individual Jew is bound by the Biblical mandate. However, it does not bind the collective body of Israel to a policy of resettlement by force. After all the Jewish nation, following the Hadrianic war of 132-135 and Hadrian’s policy of religious persecution, issued a ban against the use of arms to conquer Judea and Jerusalem. Therefore, only individuals with their families and friends were free to come and resettle Jerusalem after Hadrian’s decree was lifted. This historical development seems to repeat the very appeal of government in power to Jewish resettlement and only peaceful return to the land governed the Mishnaic position of the post Destruction Jewry. This Tannaitic view determined that sanctity of the land is in perpetuity, for it was settled peacefully with world approval. Jewish hope of return, therefore, was guided

by this pacific approach of pilgrims settling it. Modern orthodox Jewry views the Hebrew canonical ending as their guide to the return to Palestine following the Balfour declaration (1917) and the declaration of the United Nations (1948). It refers therefore to contemporary Zionist history that led to the creation of the Jewish State Israel as the "Beginning of our redemption."

Maimonides did not view halakhically that the resettlement of the land by Jews is a Biblical mandate. Yet he did offer a Halakhic blueprint for the final return of Israel to its land as a sovereign people. He speaks of a messianic restoration of the Temple as a natural development in his final volume on "Kingship". It will take place with the world's approval. He depicts the final Messiah as a "talmudist-philosopher" who will pursue the peaceful course after the elimination of conflict that will result in a global recognition of Israel in its land. In his view, the Christian and Islamic countries will support the restoration of the Jewish state. This is because Christianity is anchored in the Hebrew Scriptures and Islam engages a monotheistic faith in recognition of its closeness to Judaism. He closes his code of Jewish law with the prospect that religio-political world order will be transformed by a Biblically oriented consciousness. This came to realize the Isaianic promise that "the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the cover the sea" (Is 11:9). Isaiah foresaw a futuristic global recognition of Israel, when all people will visit it and "no will cause harm nor desecrate my holy mount" (Is 11:9).

The position of Maimonides points to rebuilding Jerusalem and the third Temple by human hands, within the natural flow of human history. He adopted the Mishnaic account of the measurement and design of the Second Temple by Herod, as rendered in the Mishnaic tractate "Middot." It was viewed then as the eighth wonder of the ancient world. The rabbis praised its construction for it followed the measurements of the Solomonic Temple with given alterations as specified by Ezekiel's Utopian Temple but now with greater dimension that will be able to accommodate the overflow of pilgrims from all parts of the world. Maimonides also incorporated in his masterful Code the very laws governing the Biblical areas of sanctity and purity in relation to the priestly discipline and service. These very areas are not relevant to Exilic life of Jewry but are indispensable to the anticipated Temple life of Israel.

Rabbi Abraham ibn David of Posquirre in South France was a Talmudic legal expert and a contemporary of Maimonides, with whom he disagreed on given halakhic points. In the matter of rebuilding the third Temple and its sanctity, he viewed such a development from the mystic-apocalyptic perspective. He maintained that "God's mystery (*sod*) was disclosed to his obedient worshipper and it disclosed that the final Temple will be sanctified by a divine *fiat* and accordingly it will not be erected by human hands." Ibn David contrasts the fate of the second Temple with that of the eschatological model. Since Herod's Temple was built by a tyrant, it faced destruction by the Roman tyrant hands. Not so with the anticipated heavenly Temple; it will then be sanctified eternally for the transformed humanity. Nahmanides too was a mystic of the same school of Ibn David, the Provence Hassidim. He therefore viewed the final restoration of the third Temple to be not by human hands. Thus, Maimonides and Nahmanides presented two distinct views that affect contemporary Jewish orthodoxy with regards to rebuilding the final Temple. Most interestingly, these two views already appeared in early Christian writings that attest to the Jewish apocalyptic development from Herodian time to post Hadrianic time.

The early testimony of preDestruction Jewish-Christian writing is presented in the Gospel of Mark, which is attributed to Peter's disciple. The early church elder Papias describes Mark as Peter's hermeneutes (= Meturgemman), a translator-interpreter of Sabbath preaching in the synagogue. He composed the first Gospel from the preaching of Peter, who recalls the teachings of his master. Mark therefore relates the testimony offered by two false witnesses about Jesus' statement in the hearing before the High Priest. He adds the words "that is made with hands" to Jesus' saying "I will destroy this sanctuary" (Mk 14:47). Jesus continued with the contrast, "But in three days I will build another," to which Mark adds the words "not made by hands." Matthew omits this contrast between the human (with hands) and the heavenly (with no hands) Temple. Even John's Gospel does not refer to this contrast, whereas Luke, the only non Jewish evangelist, omits it all together. John is focusing on the higher Christology of preexistence and Luke is adding to the hearsay the Christological concern of sonship. Mark, however, is sharing a common mystico-apocalyptic view with John the revelator. John on the isle of Patmos enjoyed a final vision of a heavenly Temple descending onto the corresponding location of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Their view contrasts with the didactic scribal approach of the Matthean school on the Messianic task of rebuilding the final Temple to God. Thus, on the issue of cleansing the Temple, Mark 11:17 relates how Jesus taught that the Temple of God "shall be called a house a prayer for all the nations." He cites Isaiah 56:7 with reference to all the people in the end time. However, in Luke 19:46 and Matt 21:13, the reference "to all the nations" is omitted. They are focusing on the second Temple as the house of prayer. John 2:14-16 relates the incident early in Jesus' ministry on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. He supplies a different verse to explain Jesus' action that addresses the second Temple, namely Ps 69:10. (His action is the result of offensive behavior of pilgrims and money changers.)

The mystico-apocalyptic orientation of early Judaism is rooted in the principle of coalesced correspondence, "*Urzeit wirdt Endzeit*." In our case it is the heavenly-earthly correspondence for Temple worship in Judaism of the first century. Thus, in the Jewish-Christian apocalypse the opening vision in Rev. chapters 4-5 depicts the angelic worship in the heavenly sphere. Paul too refers to his ascent to the third heaven that is called Paradise (2 Cor 12:2-4). The early mystical tradition of the rabbis refer to the third heaven as *Pardes* (the Persian equivalent to "Gan", garden.) It is the heavenly garden also called *Zevul*, where the angelic service with Michael, the archangel, is presiding (Bab Talmud Hagigah 14b). This early rabbinic tradition gave rise to the Hekhalot mystical writing ascribed to Enoch (see the Third Book of Enoch by H. Odeberg and now by Charlesworth's edition of The Old Testament Apocrypha). Early Jewish-Christianity was rooted in angelology, as J. Daniélou demonstrates in his book Jewish Christian theology. It also governed the Pharisaic and early rabbinic tradition. Moreover the recent Dead Sea discoveries attest to such a development. Qumran yielded three distinct items, the Vision of New Jerusalem, the early version of Enoch (ed. Milik) as well as the earliest angelic Hymns for the cycle of Sabbath Services of Priests in the Temple (see Carol Newsome's work *Sabbath Sacrifices*). These are astonishing examples how the mystical stream of consciousness evolves from pre-Destruction period of Judaism unto the Second Millennium, the time of Nachmanides and Ibn David with the early Hassidim of Provence. Scholarship in the past erred in viewing the mystical development of Judaism as a Medieval phenomenon.

The early apocalyptic principle of correspondence formulated the coalescence of two events separated by space as well as the coalescence of events separated by time. In our analysis, the

spatial correspondence is presented in early Rabbinic reference to four scriptural proof texts (Exod 15:17; I Kings 8:14; Jer 17:12; Ps 11:4). The rabbinic reading of the first two texts relates the consonantal script of MKWN as MeKHuWaN (in correspondence), namely the earthly Temple is “in correspondence to your eternal dwelling,” the heavenly sphere (see further Mid Rabba Exod, pas 33,4 and Pal Tal Berakhot 4,4 in the name of R. Shimeon ben Yohai, who is the early Tanna dealing with the mystical tradition). This view was shared by the Essene priests and Jesus in contrast to the Sadducean priests. Early Christianity anchored it in the prayer of Jesus, the Matthean version. The third petition of *Pater Noster* reads “Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth”. Doing God’s will is to worship him as the earthly community in correspondence with the heavenly community. Thus, the notion of sanctity in early Judaism is determined by its set-apartness or uniqueness. What determines the holiness of the Temple is God’s presence in correspondence with the heavenly reality.

The classical mysticism that emerged in Medieval time preserved the focus on the Temple and its angelic liturgy of “trishagion” as one of the streams crucial to the visionary experience. The vision of the holy temple with God as holy omnipresent comes to determine human concern for a spiritual transformation, especially when it occurs as an ultimate eschatological event. What makes the spirit of the human being unique is the ability to relate to the sacred. God, however, is free to enter human history but he can also be free to withdraw from it since humanity enjoys the challenge of free choice that God stamps on each person with His image. Temple as in the Biblical tradition of the Tabernacle is formed by reference to its heavenly model, the “*Tavnit*” (see Exod 25:9). Thus, a typological or symbolic significance is attached to its structure, priestly service, the vessels and vestments, sacrifices and angelic hymnology, sacred music and liturgy. These dynamics of Jewish hope for the world transformation flow from the reality of the Jerusalem Temple that signals the final event in human history.

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