That the year 70 marked a turning point in the history of Roman attitudes to Jews,¹ in the Jewish leadership of Judea,² and in the economy of Jerusalem and its environs,³ is not in doubt. Harder to pin down is (perhaps surprisingly) the most obvious change to be expected as a result of the destruction of the Temple—that is, a change within Judaism.

It is of course clear that at some time in late antiquity, some rabbis began to assert that, despite the clear injunctions in the text of the Torah for Jews to worship through sacrifices, incense, and other offerings in the place specified by divine command (which rabbis, like other Jews, took to be the site where the Temple had stood in Jerusalem),⁴ there were other ways to worship which were just as effective. Later tradition ascribed to Yohanan b. Zakkai, in the aftermath of 70, the claim that deeds of loving-kindness are just as effective as sacrifices as a way of atonement.⁵ By the time of Maimonides, it was possible to view the sacrificial rituals of the Temple as a necessary but now otiose stage in the religious development of Israel.⁶ But the question is when such ideas, which ran directly counter to the centrality of sacrificial ritual in most cultic practice in the ancient world, were first adopted by Jews—and, in particular, whether such ideas did in fact occur to Yohanan, or indeed to anyone in the traumatic sixty years

² See J. Choi, Jewish Leadership in Judaea after 70 CE (Leiden, 2012).
³ On the pilgrimage economy, which came to an end in 70 CE, see M. Goodman, Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays (Leiden, 2007), chapter 5. But note that the establishment in Jerusalem of a legionary garrison, which Josephus gave as a reason for his lands there becoming unprofitable (Vita 422), should in fact have provided a ready market for those Judean farmers who survived the war.
⁴ On the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem in general, see E.P. Sanders, Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE (London, 1992), chapters 5–8.
⁵ ‘Abot R. Nat. 4.21.
⁶ For Maimonides on sacrifices, see Guide of the Perplexed, 3.32, 46.
which followed the Destruction. Is it, perhaps, rather the case that they were historically retrojected onto the post-Destruction generation by religious thinkers of much later centuries—who had had time to come to terms with the need to survive without the Temple?  

For any Jews to think they could live and worship satisfactorily without a Temple is in many ways surprising. In the years before 70 CE, while the Temple still stood, it would have been hard to overestimate the significance for all Jews of the public cult, carried out on behalf of all Israel by the priests, in daily, festival, and Sabbath offerings, and the solemn ritual of the Day of Atonement. So long as such offerings were made, it was possible to remain secure in the hope that Israel remained under divine protection. When the cult came under attack, as in the horrendous plan of Gaius Caligula to intrude his statue into the Temple, Jews across the world—including Philo and Agrippa in Rome—dedicated themselves to saving the sanctuary from sacrilege, and the Jews of Judea presented themselves in open opposition to the might of the emperor, suicidal though such opposition might be expected to be.

And once the Temple was destroyed, its memory loomed large in the religious mentality of all Jews. A large proportion of the Mishnah discusses the service in the Temple in purely practical terms. In the year 358/9 CE the grieving relatives of a Jew who was buried in Zo‘ar, on the southern edge of the Dead Sea in the province of Arabia, dated his death to “year 290 after the ḫurban.” And in the centuries after this tombstone was erected, synagogue mosaics in different parts of Palestine recalled the Temple service in their imagery of the Temple utensils, such as incense shovels, and via the depiction of the Temple itself, albeit in the service of a new liturgy. In the light of such evidence, can one really imagine that Jews already in the time of Yohanan ben Zakkaï were seeking new forms of Judaism to substitute for the sacrificial cult enjoined by the Torah?

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9 Ibid., 18.279–288.