REACTIONS TO DESTRUCTIONS OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

Theology, Perception and Conversion

BY

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The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70 C.E. was the last of a series of destructions and desecrations: by Nebuchadnezzar in 587-6 B.C.E., by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 169-8 B.C.E., and by Pompey in 63 B.C.E. 1). In reaction to these events, Judaism gradually developed the structures and instruments for survival as a religion bereft of its central cult place. Although the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar was followed, in about half a century, by a restoration, a heritage of diaspora remained. Some sacrificial cult was probably maintained in Jerusalem 2), while some Jews built

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1) For an overview of Jewish history of this period, see S. SAFRAI and M. STERN (eds.), The Jewish People in the First Century (Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 1.1-2; Assen, Van Gorcum, 1974-76); E. SCHÜRER, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, rev. by G. VERMÈS and F. MILLAR (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973-). The present article does not pretend to exhaust the topic. We have deliberately left aside all of the development, change and revolution that took place in the conceptual and halakahic structures of Judaism, most typically represented, but far from exhausted, by the work of R. Yochanan b. Zakkai. This subject has never been treated exhaustively in all its aspects, but a number of relevant studies may be found in G. ALON, The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 C.E.), (Jerusalem, Magnes, 1980). The work of J. NEUSNER, A Life of Yohanan ben Zakkai (Studia Post-Biblica 6; Leiden, Brill, 1970) does not set forth these issues systematically; but see his comments on pp. 183-193. See, moreover, his interesting observations in, "Map without Territory: Mishnah's System of Sacrifice and Sanctuary," History of Religions 18: 103-127 (1979). See also note 10, below. Attitudes to the destruction of the Temple in the New Testament and early Christian literature are outside the scope of this paper. Some material may be found in B. GERHARDSSON, "Sacrificial Service and Atonement in the Gospel of Matthew", Reconciliation and Hope: Festschrift L. L. Morris, ed. R. J. BANKS (Exeter, 1974), particularly pp. 26-29; cf. also L. H. GASTON, No Stone on Another: Studies in the Fall of Jerusalem (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

2) The cult seems to have survived to some extent: see Jer 41:5-6; cf. the discussion by P. R. ACKROYD, Exile and Restoration (Old Testament Library; London, SCM, 1968), pp. 25-29. This work touches on many of the issues of biblical thought as they relate to our subject. It is cited extensively below for its interesting ideas as well as for its bibliography. On the survival of the cult, see also J. BRIGHT, A History of Israel (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1959), p. 325.
temples outside the Land of Israel 3). Most did not, however, and the Babylonian exile and the developing diaspora prefigured Judaism without a temple. The religious ideas and structures thus initiated were molded and hardened by the tragedies of the following centuries 4).

If the documents of the Second Temple age that deal with these destructions and desecrations are examined, it becomes apparent that theodicy became the central issue. Israel's suffering was thought to be the result of sin; a punishment inflicted by God who covenanted with the nation 5). Israel's fate was seen as bound to Israel's action and God's justice 6). In the attempt to comprehend the destruction, the idea arose that by recounting, examining and evaluating the events of the past, a basis could be found for understanding the present 7). It


4) The situation in the Babylonian exile has been dealt with at length by Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, passim. On the evidence for the development of the synagogue and increased prominence of other religious practices, see ibid., pp. 33-36. On page 44 he analyzes factors leading to the survival of the exiles of 586 in contrast to those of 722 B.C.E. Compare also the comments by M. Smith, Palestinian Parties, p. 102. The centrality of the Temple is witnessed by the fact that the express purpose of the return from the Babylonian exile was to rebuild it. Contrast the aims of the conquest under Joshua. See Safrai, Pilgrimage, p. 7 (below, n. 14).


6) See Lev 26 and Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, pp. 89-90; Deut 27-28. Y. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, tr. M. Greenberg (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1960), pp. 280-282 sensitively traces the shift from covenant curses to threatening eschatological certainty; see also the IDB articles cited in the preceding note and bibliography there. The ideas were developed in connection with the Temple at the time of the return from the Babylonian exile: see Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, pp. 157 f. On the antiquity of these ideas see ibid., pp. 43 f.: see Baltzer, Covenant Formulary, pp. 97-175 on their development.

7) See also Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, pp. 63-102; on the role of recital in biblical thought see, for example, G. E. Wright, God Who Acts (Studies in Biblical Theology; London, SCM, 1952), especially pp. 33-58; but compare now