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JERUSALEM: TWICE DESTROYED, TWICE REBUILT

“How does the city, once filled with people, sit alone? She who was great among the nations has become like a widow; the princess among the states, has become a tributary” (Lam. 1:1). With these words, penned by an ancient author—according to later tradition, the prophet Jeremiah—and written in the style of ancient Near Eastern city dirges, Jews annually commemorate the destruction of the ancient city of Jerusalem and its Temple. But which Temple, for there were two? Is it the First Temple which was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E. or the Second Temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.? Yes, the book of Lamentations was composed in the aftermath of the first tragedy, but its required recital is not known until much later, from rabbinic texts dated to after the destruction of the Second Temple, so perhaps its recital was meant primarily to recount that later tragedy?

Or try this: “Five [things happened to our forefathers] on the ninth of Av . . . the Temple was destroyed the first [time] and the second” (M. Ta’anit 4:6). Clearly, the tradition of memory has placed both destructions on the same day, even though they really happened on different days. The First Temple was burned on the seventh of Av according to 2 Kings 25:8, but the parallel in Jeremiah 52:12–13 dates the burning to the tenth of Av. Josephus says that the Second Temple was set on fire on the tenth of Av (*BJ* 6.250, 267–270). The Talmud has assigned the date of the ninth, thus merging or averaging the sources (B. Ta’anit 29a). The collective memory and the ritual mourning of the Jewish people, from the first century C.E. on, have consistently joined these two national tragedies into an inseparable unit. Further, is it the destruction of the ancient cult site, that of the city of Jerusalem, or that of the nation and its independence that is at stake? Is Jerusalem a concrete reality, an ideal city expressing religious or theological concepts, or both?

What follows examines the ancient history of Jerusalem, emphasizing events leading up to each destruction, the destruction itself, the rebuilding that took place in the aftermath, and the manner in which the experience of tragedy helped to provide the inspiration for and achievements of the future.

I. Early History up to the First Destruction

The city we know as Jerusalem was first settled in the Early Bronze Age (c. 3150–2900 B.C.E.). It appears in the Egyptian ex-ecration texts in the nineteenth to eighteenth centuries. By the patriarchal period (Gen. 14:18) it was a known Canaanite shrine. It appears in the Amarna Letters (fourteenth century B.C.E.) and in the king list of Joshua 14:1–24. It remained a Jebusite city until the time of King David. David took Jerusalem in order to establish a centrally located capital that would allow him to unify his rule over the northern and southern tribes. The transfer of the ark

to Jerusalem established it as an Israelite religious site as well. As David expanded his growing empire, Jerusalem, which boasted no real geographic or economic advantages, became its capital. While David completed some construction projects, it was left for Solomon to place his indelible imprint on the city.

Under Solomon Jerusalem was the political and economic center of a far-flung empire. The sumptuous court and extensive bureaucracy contributed to its flavor and its growth. Pagan shrines seem to have dotted the landscape around the city, probably encouraged by its ancient Canaanite religious role. Solomon's construction projects created a royal complex and an attached royal shrine, the Jerusalem Temple. This building turned the formerly Canaanite cult site into Israel's holy city toward which, according to the Deuteronomic editor of Kings, all prayers were to be directed. A variety of fortifications protected the city, its palace, and its Temple.

When in 930 B.C.E. the kingdom split, Jerusalem remained capital of Judah under Solomon's descendents of the Davidic dynasty. This schism led to an economic decline as Jerusalem no longer controlled the northern regions of the country. Judean kings alternately allowed pagan influence and conducted monotheistic reformations, a pattern that weakened the Judean state and contributed to its eventual downfall.

In 701 B.C.E. the Assyrians under Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem after taking most of Judah, but for some reason sought a treaty with King Hezekiah and retired and abandoned the siege. After the destruction of Northern Israel in 722 B.C.E. by Assyria, the fall of Assyria in 610/609 B.C.E., and the rise of Babylonia, Judah's fortunes temporarily improved. After misplaying the cards of international diplomacy and relying on Egypt, Jerusalem soon found its feeble king rebelling hopelessly against Babylonian domination. In 597 B.C.E. the Babylonians took the city, this time exiling some of the leaders and upper classes and installing their own puppet king on the throne. When he also rebelled, the Babylonians returned, this time to destroy the city and its Temple in 586 B.C.E., exiling most of the city's inhabitants, many to Mesopotamia, others to the countryside, and the city now lay desolate for eighty years.

II. Significance of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible

To understand why the people of Israel would long for the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple and to grasp the power of this longing as a religious and national force, we must look at the understanding of this city in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, the Israelite conceptual universe of this city is what led to the drive for its speedy reconstruction.

The city of Jerusalem, Urushalim in Akkadian, meaning the foundation of the god Shalman (Shallem), is the place where Abraham encountered the priest Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18–20). This place is the same as Jerusalem, the eventual capital of the Davidic kingdom. That the Bible understands this to be the case is clear from

Psalms 76:3 where Shalem is parallel to Zion, a name for one of Jerusalem's hills often taken by metonymy as a name for the city, especially in prophetic and eschatological contexts. Zion is more often employed in poetic texts.

By popular etymology, Shalem was related to Shalom, "peace," leading to the sense that Jerusalem was the city of peace in Psalm 122 where the peace of Jerusalem is a key phrase. The interpretation of Shalem = Shalom is found in the retelling of Genesis 14:18–20 in Hebrews 7:1–2, "King of Salem," that is, "king of peace." This appellation for Jerusalem—City of Peace—persisted in biblical thought despite the ongoing strife both in the city and about it.

The pre-Israelite cult site of the god El Elyon became part of Israel's legacy as the site of Isaac's attempted sacrifice by his father Abraham. These traditions place Abraham, the first Israelite, so to speak, at the place that would become the capital of the unified Israelite monarchy of David and Solomon, and later of the kingdom of Judah at the cult site that would house its Temple. Later, to further legitimate Jerusalem, David buys it from its Jebusite ruler. When David made it his capital and religious center by installing the ark there (2 Sam. 6), he thereby unified the entire nation. It was left for Solomon actually to build the Temple to house the ark that was at rest at last (1 K. 6–8), and God's presence found its eternal abode. Nevertheless, it remained always "the City of David" (2 Sam. 5:7–9).

Jerusalem is designated the city that God Himself had chosen as His eternal home. As the city of God, the importance of the royal administrative seat paled in comparison to the city where God had elected to establish Himself. Indeed, Isaiah says that Jerusalem will never be destroyed although it would suffer at the hands of its enemies if its inhabitants were sinful. Micah (3:12), and Jeremiah (26:18–19) a hundred years later, both predicted that Jerusalem would be decimated although its population believed that Jerusalem had special divine protection. The prophets warned the people that although there was some divine providence for Jerusalem, its fate nevertheless depended on the moral behavior of its people (Jer. 7:1–15). When their sin was too great, God Himself would chastise the city or send other hostile nations to attack. The prophets balanced their predictions of doom with the promise of the eschatological, rebuilt city, also called the "New Jerusalem," (Is. 40:1–2; 52:1, 7–8), the reconstituted Temple, and newly erected walls (Jer. 30:18–19; 31:38–39).

Later biblical texts and postbiblical Judaism also saw idealized Jerusalem as the cornerstone of hopes for national and religious renaissance, or the prototype of the New Jerusalem that would be the center of Jewish aspirations for the End of Days. To some extent these ideas were nourished by the ancient Near Eastern concept of a sacred city on a high mountain, an almost heavenly city. In this respect Mt. Zion is understood to replace such mountain cities and to be the true center of the universe. Further, this notion

contributed to the later idea of a heavenly Jerusalem found in Judaism in the Greco-Roman period and beyond.

We must remember, however, that in the Hebrew Bible Jerusalem is not spiritualized. It is a concrete entity, a real city. Biblical authors foretold a purge of all pagan elements from the city and spoke of a future Jerusalem that would harbor only the pure worship of the God of Israel. In the end of days, Jerusalem is to be the place of pilgrimage for all the nations who will come to worship the one God. Effectively, the nation's capital and spiritual center is expected to become the spiritual center of the entire world as foretold by Haggai and Zechariah, prophets who spearheaded the building of the Second Temple.

This is the prayer which the book of Kings places in the mouth of Solomon at the Temple dedication (1 K. 8:41-43 = 2 Chron. 6:32-33). Just like the present Jerusalem, the eschatological city is, in the view of the Prophets, also to be a real one, on this earth, not a spiritualization, and the entire city is holy. It was expected that great tribulations would precede the final redemption and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. All evil would be annihilated and eternal peace will reign. Jerusalem would again be the center of the nation and would be ruled by a Davidic king.

Hence there is tremendous theological significance to the attainment of a period of relative peace and the building of the city as a sign of divine favor and the dawn of the promised redemption of Jerusalem and her people. So it is no wonder that the restoration came some seventy years after the destruction of the city.

III. The First Restoration

In 538 B.C.E., after the fall of Babylonia, the rise of Cyrus the Great allowed the return of some Babylonian exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple. This, in turn, led to the gradual resettlement of Jerusalem. The Temple was completed in 515 B.C.E., but the city remained with its walls destroyed and its gates burnt. In 445 B.C.E., with the support of King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah came to Jerusalem as governor of the Persian province of Judea for the purpose of rebuilding the city. He repaired the walls, took steps to repopulate the city, exacted taxes, and provided security. The arrival from Babylonia of Ezra the scribe soon after and his enforcement of the law of the Torah together with Nehemiah reestablished Jerusalem as the religious center of Judaism, even as the Jewish community of Mesopotamia continued to develop at the same time.

Little is known about the history of the city until its conquest by Alexander's armies in 332 B.C.E. Later Jewish tradition tried to place a meeting of Alexander himself with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, but if it happened at all, it was at Antipatris, modern Rosh ha-Ayin. By 301 B.C.E. Judea and Jerusalem were dominated by the Ptolemies of Egypt, a situation which lasted, despite constant warfare between Ptolemies and Seleucids, until Jerusalem's conquest by the Seleucids in 198 B.C.E. As in Persian times, Judea

continued to be an extended Temple state ruled by priests, a hierocracy, as it had earlier been described by Hecateus of Abdera.

Under the Seleucids, the pace of Hellenization increased despite the charter Antiochus III had granted, which even forbade the bringing of unclean animals into the city of Jerusalem. It was not long, however, before the internal struggle of priests and aristocrats—in Jerusalem for the most part—plunged the nation into the Hellenistic reform and the attendant Maccabean Wars.

The details of these central events in Judean history will not concern us. Rather we need to note that the events centered around the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Moderate Hellenistic elements sought to control the Temple as a means of bringing Jerusalem into the network of trade and international relations. More Hellenized Jews sought to reorganize Jerusalem as a polis and to further the Hellenization of the city for the same reasons in about 175 B.C.E. It was in Jerusalem that they built the gymnasium and ephebeion to further this cultural and economic symbiosis.

By 168 B.C.E. the country was in open revolt, and even though the pro-Hellenistic forces, with Seleucid assistance, introduced pagan images into the Temple, the city survived relatively unscathed, so that when finally, after 152 B.C.E., Jonathan established the Hasmonean dynasty, its capital was in Jerusalem and the Temple was fully restored to its monotheistic tradition. By 141 B.C.E., his brother Simeon had expelled the Seleucid governor from the capital and achieved full independence. Peace reigned in Jerusalem virtually uninterrupted until the Roman conquest of 63 B.C.E. in the aftermath of the collapse of the Hasmonean dynasty.

IV. Jerusalem in the Dead Sea Scrolls

In the Second Temple period, numerous texts spoke of the significance of Jerusalem from a religious and national point of view. The holy city was a specially important subject for the sectarians who left us the Dead Sea Scrolls. For them there was a need for restoration even after the successful Maccabean revolt.

Because Jerusalem had been the capital of the united monarchy, the high point of Israel's political history, it became a symbol of hope for all future generations. The Psalms reiterate the beauty of Jerusalem—the place which is the source of blessing, the holy place from which the priests and Levites minister—and the thrice yearly pilgrimages. The Qumran sect, which had rejected the Temple cult and pilgrimages to Jerusalem, still saw Jerusalem as an idealized city which, if reconstituted according to their plan, would command the allegiance of all. We might say that they had rejected the Jerusalem of history—the city which, in their time, according to them, harbored an impure cult and corrupt rulers. They mourned the destruction of the First Temple, while condemning the ill-gotten gain of wealthy priests who served in the extant Second Temple.

Yet the Dead Sea sect never rejected the Jerusalem of Jewish law. Jerusalem remained central to Jewish ritual because of the

unique place assigned to it by God Himself as the place where His presence and His ark would rest forever. Jerusalem for the Qumran sectarians had more stringent rules than were being obeyed in their time. They maintained that animals could not be slaughtered in Jerusalem outside the Temple, that the Temple should be rebuilt to enormous proportions, and that a more stringent adoption of the purity laws would ensure the eradication of the slightest hint of impurity. The present Temple was, by contrast, seen as polluted by mistaken interpretations of the law and political power plays resulting in unholy alliances.

The ultimate redemption of Jerusalem at the End of Days would restore the cult to its purity and the Temple service to its rightful procedures. The Qumran sect predicted that this would come about through the War of the Sons of Light, the sectarians, against the Sons of Darkness, everyone else in the surrounding nations and all Jews who had not joined the sect. In this final struggle, the sect, aided by angelic hosts, would maintain its purity even in battle, and vanquish all evil in the world. They would then march triumphantly into Jerusalem and reconstitute sacrificial worship according to their own laws. The city would once again be ruled by a Davidic king, a messianic figure, and be praised throughout the world. Jerusalem would fulfill the prophetic visions of greatness and perfection. Even while the Temple and the city of Jerusalem stood, these Jews called for its reconstruction and reconstitution, based on the ideas of their understanding of biblical tradition.

V. The Second Destruction

The conquest of Judea and Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. by Pompey paved the way for the second destruction. The Romans appointed the weakling Hasmonean Hyrcanus II as high priest over their newly won territory, but de facto, the Idumean Antipater was the real power. After a series of intrigues, his son, Herod, was appointed king by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C.E. By 37 B.C.E., with the help of Rome, he had taken Jerusalem and established his capital there. His massive building projects have left a lasting mark on the civic and religious character of the city. Most important, the Temple Mount was widened by him and he erected the magnificent Temple building that was considered an architectural wonder throughout the ancient world. For all intents and purposes, Herod built the city that the Romans, his backers, would soon destroy. Herod died in 4 C.E.

By 6 C.E. Judea was under procuratorial rule as a full province in the Roman Empire. With Caesarea as capital, Jerusalem ceased to be the capital of Judea. But its city government remained in the hands of the high priests, now appointed at will by the procurators. Throughout this period there was civil strife, and the Romans imposed stiff punishments, the crucifixion of Jesus c. 30 C.E. by Pontius Pilate being an example of this. Despite all of this Jerusalem functioned as the informal capital of the Jewish people and a place of pilgrimage to Jews all over the world. Yet inter-

Jewish strife marred this religious landscape and eventually contributed to the city's destruction.

By 66 C.E., the misrule of the procurators finally led to the outbreak of open revolt, which soon became a full-scale war. For an initial three years, the city was free of Roman domination, but internecine strife by the rebels soon weakened their position. Vespasian and his son Titus arrived with four legions and after a protracted siege, sacked the city and its Temple, slaughtering untold numbers of Jewish inhabitants. The Temple was set on fire, and the city soon fell. Judea all around had been laid waste. Jerusalem had been destroyed again.

But the suffering of the holy city was not yet over. While most of the country began an economic and cultural recovery after the final defeat of the last rebels at Masada in 73 C.E., Jerusalem lay desolate for some 61 years. Apocalyptic tendencies as well as some of the same Roman malfeasance, soon led to the flaring up of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 132–135 C.E. It is possible that, for a time, the rebels occupied Jerusalem and may have attempted to restore sacrifices, but by 135 C.E. the Romans brutally suppressed the revolt in Jerusalem. At the start of the revolt the Romans had set up a temple to Jupiter and established Aelia Capitolina, having plowed up the Temple Mount. Jerusalem became a forbidden city to Jews, so that even the Christian bishop of Jerusalem now had to be a Gentile. In effect, the second destruction of Jerusalem was now complete.

VI. Jerusalem and Destruction in Rabbinic Sources

The spiritual consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple precipitated a delayed reaction among the rabbis of the Roman period. This reaction was visible mainly in the area of Jewish ritual, for example, the transferal of Temple rituals to the synagogue and home. In the absence of the festival sacrifices and celebrations that were unique to the Temple, by the third century the question of how to deal with them had been settled. One such accommodation was the substitution of the Passover Seder meal for the paschal sacrifice which once took place exclusively in the Temple.

In addition, the rabbis instituted the mourning and fast days of the tenth of Tevet, seventeenth of Tammuz, and ninth of Av to commemorate the events leading up to the destruction of the city. These commemorate the setting of the siege, the breaching of the walls, and the burning of the Temple, respectively.

The synagogue, and prayer as a substitute for animal sacrifices, was already growing in importance before the destruction. The Qumran sect, who refused to participate in the Temple rituals, and others who were too distant from the Temple to do so had already instituted prayers to substitute for the daily sacrifices. The rise of the synagogue as a house of prayer in the first century coincided with the loss of the Temple. By the time the Temple was destroyed, its replacement had already been created.

Similarly, the aftermath of the failed revolt brought about a new political and religious alignment as well. The Pharisaic rabbis remained ascendant while the Temple priesthood and other sects disappeared from the stage of history. The Romans aided the rabbis in recognizing their leadership over the remnant of the Jewish community. Rabbinic authority was established with the tannaitic sages under a patriarchate as the system of self-government for the Jews, replacing the Temple priesthood.

Jerusalem was considered the "city" par excellence by the Talmudic rabbis but it was also seen as the Temple-city (*miqdash*) in some texts. It had a particular legal status in Temple times, most of which was lost with the end of Temple service in 70 C.E. As the unifier of the Jewish people, it was understood by the rabbis either to have been built in territory assigned to two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, or to none, to emphasize that all of Israel had an equal portion in God's holy city. No one could permanently own property in the city. For this reason all the city walls and public works had been paid for by the Temple donations. Further, the city was seen as maintaining higher standards of ritual purity than the rest of the country in order to welcome always pilgrims to the Temple who had to be pure in order to enter. It was forbidden to leave refuse there or to have cemeteries. Jerusalem was so holy that either spouse in a marriage could compel the other to live there, and neither could force the other to leave. Special blessings were placed in the liturgy asking God to bless and protect the city, and after 70 C.E., prayers for the restoration of the city, its Temple, and ritual were a mainstay of Jewish practice. It was this aspect that instilled the age-old attachment to this city in the Jewish people. This pattern simply continued that of Babylonian Jewry after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. (Ps. 137).

The city was understood to be of a higher state of sanctity than the rest of the holy land. As one proceeded further in, the sanctity was greater, entering the Temple Mount, going through the Court, finally (if you were a priest) entering the Temple and the holy of holies. These ascending levels of holiness symbolized the climb of each Jew toward closeness to God, a fundamental Jewish idea. Certain offerings were eaten anywhere in the city, but some only in the Temple courts. The high court—the Sanhedrin—met in the Temple while it stood. Even when the Temple no longer stood, the rabbis saw the holiness of the city as eternal. Even in ancient times, following the Solomonic speech of Kings and the book of Daniel, Jews all over the world prayed in the direction of Jerusalem and built their synagogues accordingly.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the ninth of Av was continued as a day of mourning for both Temples, and various other mourning customs, such as breaking a glass at weddings—still practiced—were instituted. The rabbis decreed that buildings should be built such that a small piece was left unfinished for this reason.

Aggadic traditions about the First Temple say much about the rabbinic attitude to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is seen as the gate to

heaven for prayer. It was considered a city of great beauty, of courts of justice and synagogues, always able to accommodate visitors, and free of what we would call public health hazards. It was seen as a city of great scholars and pious men and women.

The rabbis were convinced that both destructions resulted from transgressions by the Jewish people, both in the sphere of religious commandments between God and humanity and also social commandments among individuals. Lack of justice, ethics, and piety had made the ritual of the Temple a farce, and so God had destroyed His Temple and His city. In particular they sketched the terrible sins that led, in their view, to the failure of the revolt against Rome and the destruction in 70 C.E. They understood the first destruction in a similar way.

Only repentance, observance of the laws, prayer, and charity could bring about its rebuilding, for which the rabbis and their people dreamed. The rebuilt city would be enormous, and its Temple even more beautiful than those of Solomon and Herod. For most rabbis, the rebuilding could take place only in the messianic era when a city of immense beauty would descend from heaven and all the nations, living in peace, would come to worship the one God. In this way, the ideal city, seen in some circles as existing in heaven all along, would be joined to its concrete, earthly reflection, in eternal harmony in the End of Days.

VII. Rebuilding Jerusalem under Christians, Muslims, and Jews

The first stage in the rebuilding of Jerusalem was undertaken by the Byzantine rulers after 324, under Constantine, when the name of the city was changed back to Jerusalem. Constantine began major building projects, but all of them were at religious sites connected with Jesus' career, most prominently the Holy Sepulchre. Julian the Apostate in 363 ordered the reconstruction of the Jewish Temple, but work ended when an earthquake caused a fire. Julian soon died while on a military campaign, ending what would have been a rejudaization of Jerusalem. Building was again intensified in the fifth to sixth centuries, and from 438 Jews were again permitted to live there.

Many Christians immigrated to the holy land at this time as well, and some of them settled in Jerusalem and contributed to the continued Christian building projects. Peace was briefly shattered by the Samaritan revolt of 529, but it did not extend into the city itself. In 614 Jerusalem was besieged by the Persian Chroeso II, who breached its wall, and many were slain. Most of the churches were destroyed. By 629 Byzantium had retaken the city, and Jews were again banished.

Jerusalem was taken by Arabs in 638, and it remained in their hands until 1099. Jews were readmitted and built schools and synagogues. The Muslims built beautiful palaces and the Dome of the Rock (691), which covered the ancient Jewish site of the altar, revered by Muslims as the place from which Mohammed had ascended to heaven. El Aksa Mosque was also built then.

From 1099 to 1187 Jerusalem was ruled by Crusaders who had invaded from Europe. Jews and Muslims were forbidden from living in the city, but it was also a time of intense building, especially of churches and fortifications.

In 1187 it again passed into Arab control. Under Saladin important buildings were refurbished, and Jews and Muslims returned. Many new mosques and medrasas were built in Mamluke times, 1244–1517. By the rise of the Ottoman Empire in 1517, Jerusalem was in decline and poverty-stricken. New city walls were built (1537–1541), and numerous buildings were repaired. From then until World War I and the British Mandate, Jerusalem—indeed the entire country—was in decline.

From the end of the nineteenth century on, the Jewish part of Jerusalem expanded greatly, creating the new city to the west of the walled old city. After 1948, development of the western city continued under Israel, while Jordan controlled the “old,” eastern part of the city. The city was unified in 1967, but as we all know, it has still not truly been rebuilt as the city of peace.

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