

INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 17 · 2016 · Pages 63-84

The Temple: A Multi-Faceted Center and Its Problems

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)

ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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THE TEMPLE: A MULTI-FACETED CENTER AND ITS PROBLEMS

Joshua Berman

Editor's Note: *At the request of BYU Law Professor John W. Welch, Dr. Berman graciously provided this article for publication as an introduction to a series of lectures he will be giving in Utah on October 7 and 8, 2015. The first lecture will focus on the differences between the Tabernacle and the Temple, the second lecture will discuss recent findings linking inscriptions from Ramesses II to the sea account in Exodus, and the third lecture will touch on issues in biblical law. These lectures are co-sponsored by the Academy for Temple Studies, BYU Studies, the Ancient Near Eastern Studies Department in the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, the J. Reuben Clark Law School, and The Interpreter Foundation, and details can be found online. This article is adapted from The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, first ed., 1995).*

Abstract: *One of the primary identities of the Temple is that it is the place of hashra'at ha-shekhinah, the site at which God's presence is most manifest. It is no surprise then, that the Temple is the focal point of prayer. Yet, as the site at which God's presence is most intimately manifest, the Temple is also the center of the nation in several major spheres of collective life. This centrality is exhibited in the structure of the Book of Deuteronomy. Chapters 12-26 depict commandments that are to be the social and religious frame of life in the land of Israel. Within this section the central shrine, "the place in which God shall establish His name," is mentioned nearly twenty times. The Temple is cast as the center for sacrifices (ch. 12), the consumption of tithes (14:23-25), the celebration of the festivals (ch. 16), and the center of the judicial system (ch. 17). In this chapter we will explore how the Temple constitutes the national center for social unity, education, and justice. The concentration of activity and jurisdiction at the Temple, however, renders it prone to abuse, and in the second half of this chapter, we will probe the social and religious ills that emerged as an endemic part of the Temple's existence.*

Social Unity

A reading of the commandments enumerated in the Book of Deuteronomy reveals that the Temple was a central gathering point for the Jewish people.

On the one hand, the Torah paints a picture of the demography of the land of Israel: each of the twelve tribes of Israel is to inherit its own tribal territory, within the land (Numbers 33:53-54), thereby bolstering tribal identity. Indeed, nearly all biblical figures are introduced by tribal identification, as in, “There was a *man of Benjamin* whose name was Kish son of Abiel ...” (I Samuel 9:1). On the other hand, though, tribal identity needs to be balanced by collective national identity. The Temple serves as the forge toward that end. Several commandments performed at the Temple highlight its social significance, in particular, as a force for unity and brotherhood within the nation. The commandment of *ma’aser sheni* — the second tithe — is an example. Tithes are usually thought of as a kind of tax, presented either to the Priest or to God. *Ma’aser sheni*, however, is different. Deuteronomy 14:22-26 commands us to take a tithing of our produce and to bring it to “the place where God shall choose to establish His name.” This tithe is to be consumed by the owner and anyone else he wishes to include. A tenth of a farmer’s produce could amount to quite a hefty load, and so the Torah makes the provision that the produce may be sold and the money used instead to buy goods in Jerusalem to be consumed there. The consumption of the *ma’aser sheni* is depicted in festive terms (14:26):

Spend the money on anything you want — cattle, sheep, wine or ale, or anything you may desire. And you shall feast there, in the presence of the Lord your God, and rejoice with your household.

Maimonides highlighted the social component that was an inherent part of the commandment of *ma’aser sheni*:

As for the second tithe, it is commanded that it should be spent exclusively on food in Jerusalem. For this leads of necessity to giving some of it in alms; for as it could only be employed on nourishment, it was easy for a man to have others have it little by little. *Thus it was necessarily brought about a gathering in*

*one place, so that brotherhood and love among the people were greatly strengthened.*¹

In similar fashion, the Torah calls for the fourth yield of a tree's life to be brought to Jerusalem so that it could be consumed amid jubilation (Leviticus 19:24). The reality of every household in Israel coming to the Temple on an annual basis and celebrating with great feasts rendered the Temple nothing less than a national meeting place, where families from all over Israel would convene in a singular fashion.

For many this pilgrimage was probably done in conjunction with the pilgrimages of the three festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. These national pilgrimages — whereby the entire House of Israel convened before God — represented a perpetuation of the Sinai encounter.² Yet the festival pilgrimages by their nature also bore a social component as well. In coming before God, the tribes of Israel also came together as one. This point animates the psalmist in his reflections on the ascent to Jerusalem for the festival pilgrimage (Psalm 122):

A song of ascents. Of David.
 I rejoiced when they said to me,
 "We are going to the house of the Lord."
 (2) Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem.
 (3) Jerusalem built up, a city knit together,
 (4) to which tribes would make pilgrimage,
 the tribes of the Lord,
 - as was enjoined upon Israel -
 to praise the name of the Lord.
 (5) There the thrones of judgment stood,
 thrones of the house of David.
 (6) Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem:
 "May those who love you be at peace.
 (7) May there be well-being within your ramparts,
 peace in your citadels."
 (8) For the sake of my kin and friends,
 I pray for your well being;
 (9) for the sake of the house of the Lord our God
 I seek your good.

1 *The Guide of the Perplexed* 3:39, trans. Shlomo Pines and Leo Strauss (U. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1963) vol. 2, 551. See also 3:46 at end.

2 See chapter three of *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*.

The first point that emerges is that Jerusalem, with the Temple at its center, is a potent force for Jewish unity; the psalmist stands at its gates not in solitude but with his fellow pilgrims: “*Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem (v. 2)*”. He lauds the fact that all the tribes of Israel gather there (v. 4) and concludes by praying for the well-being of his kin and friends, bound together by the common endeavor of pilgrimage to Jerusalem (v. 8). The unifying aspect of Jerusalem and the Temple is born out in halakhic writings as well: with all of Israel coming to Jerusalem for the festival, lodging would be at an expensive premium. The rabbis determined however, that no boarding fees could be collected from festival pilgrims, as the land of Jerusalem belongs equally to all.³

Education

An examination of the role of the Priests and Levites — those who officiated in the Temple — highlights their identity as educators. In tracing the scope of activity in the Temple, an appropriate focus falls on the role of the Priests and Levites as officiants in the Temple and their role in society at large. For the sake of simplicity we will refer to them collectively as Levites; the Priests were but a subset of the tribe of Levi and, apart from their ritual responsibilities, served in similar capacities.

The Levites constitute a brigade. Just as an army brigade executes the wishes of a ruler or government, the Torah casts the Levites in quasi-military terms, indicating that they constitute a special brigade devoted to the service of the King of Kings. Numbers 8:24 states that from the age of twenty-five and up, the Levites shall join the *legion* of the service of the Tent of Meeting. In his valedictory blessings to the tribes of Israel, Moses blessed the tribe of Levi, “May the Lord bless His *corps* and favor his undertaking” (Deuteronomy 33:11).

What were the tasks performed by the Levites? The primary duties that immediately come to mind are the various and sundry activities associated with the rites of the Temple. But this impression, easily garnered from a cursory reading of the Torah and references to the Levites in the traditional prayers, is in fact misleading.

Only a small portion of a Priest’s or Levite’s time was dedicated to service in the Temple. I Chronicles 23-24 lists the rotations worked by the families of Levites in the Temple. Both the Priests and Levites were divided into twenty-four families, each of which was responsible for a tour of duty in the Temple. According to II Chronicles 23:5-8, each tour

3 *Megillah* 26b, *Yoma* 12a.

of duty consisted of one week's work in the Temple. This means that a typical Priest or Levite would serve in the Temple for only slightly more than two weeks out of any year! What, then, occupied the members of God's corps during the better part of the year? For what purpose were they being supported by the tithes of the Jewish people?

While the Torah focuses on the role of the Levites as sanctuary officials, they served in a second capacity that gains greater amplification in the later books of the Bible: their role as *educators*.

Explicit references to this role already appear in the Torah. When the Priests are commanded to abstain from entering the sanctuary while intoxicated, the Bible writes (Leviticus 10:8-11):

And the Lord spoke to Aaron saying: (9) Drink no wine or ale, you or your sons with you, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die — it is a law for all time throughout your generations — (10) for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean. (11) *And you must teach the Israelites all the laws which the Lord has imparted to you through Moses.*

Verse 11, identifying the priests as teachers, is not an independent command but is related to the prohibition of entering the sanctuary while intoxicated. The censure against officiating while inebriated underscores the need for dignity while performing the sacred rites. This same dignity must be maintained when the Priests attend to their further responsibility of imparting God's laws to the Jewish people. The role of the Levites as educators is also central to the blessing given the tribe of Levi by Moses in his valedictory address (Deuteronomy 33:10): "They shall teach Your norms to Jacob and Your instructions to Israel."

The later books of the Bible contain numerous references to the Levites as educators, both in the poetic passages of the latter prophets and in the prose narratives of II Chronicles. When the Judean king Jehoshaphat wanted to fortify the religious awareness of the people, it was to the Levites that he turned (II Chronicles 17:7-9):

In the third year of his reign he sent his officers Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah throughout the cities of Judah to offer instruction. (8) With them were the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah the Levites; with them were Elishama and Jehoram the priests. (9) *They offered instruction throughout Judah,*

having with them the Book of the Teaching of the Lord. They made the rounds of all the cities of the Lord and instructed the people.

A similar reform took place later during the reign of Hezekiah, shortly before the destruction of the First Temple. Once again, the key to educating the people was the involvement of the Levites (II Chronicles 31:4):

He ordered the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem to deliver the portions of the Priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the Teaching of the Lord.

From this passage we see that in Hezekiah's eyes the primary purpose of the tithes and priestly gifts was not to support them in their role as sanctuary officiants but to enable them to devote themselves to the study and dissemination of the Torah.⁴ The notion that the Levites, inclusive of the Priests, constitute God's corps, a brigade dedicated to the service of God in the Temple and to the dissemination of His word amidst the Jewish people, is succinctly summarized by Maimonides:

And why did not Levi partake of the patrimony of the land of Israel and its spoils with his brethren? Because he was set apart to serve God, to worship Him and *to teach His just ways and righteous ordinances to the masses*. As it is stated, "They shall teach Your norms to Jacob and Your instructions to Israel." Therefore, they have been set apart from the ways of the world; they do not wage war like the rest of Israel, nor do they inherit or acquire unto themselves by physical force. They are, rather, the Lord's corps, as it is stated, "Blessed, O Lord, his corps;" and He, blessed be He, vouchsafes them, as it is stated, "I am thy portion and thine inheritance."⁵

The dual role of the Levites as sanctuary officiants and as educators is apparent. Less clear, however, is the interrelationship between these roles. If we think in terms of the modern-day synagogue, the roles of officiant and educator are usually distinct. Broadly, the rabbi serves as an educator, while the prayer services will be lead by a cantor. Was the

4 Other biblical sources also portray the Priests and Levites as educators. See Nehemiah 8:5-8, Malachi 2:6-7, II Chronicles 30:22 and 35:3.

5 Maimonides, *Yad Hilkhoh Shemitah Ve-Yovel* 13:12.

Priest — the officiant/educator of old — performing two distinct and separate roles or in capacities that integrally related to one another?

The blessing to the tribe of Levi at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy provides one approach to this question. Moses blessed the tribe of Levi, saying (Deuteronomy. 33:9-10):

[Levi] said of his father and mother,
 'I consider them not.'
 His brothers he disregarded,
 Ignored his own children.
 Your precepts alone they observed,
 And kept Your covenant.
 (10) They shall teach Your norms to Jacob
 And Your instructions to Israel.
 They shall offer You incense to savor
 And whole-offerings on Your altar.

Verse 9 lauds the courage displayed by the Levites in the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf. When Moses called for the faithful to gather, the tribe of Levi answered the call and at Moses's behest summarily killed three-thousand Israelites, in effect "disregarding his brothers, and ignoring his own children." By displaying such devotion, the Levites proved themselves as the appropriate bodies to execute God's most sacred callings — the transmission of His teachings, and the service of the Temple. Within this conception of the relationship between the Levites' roles as officiants and educators, their two functions are essentially distinct. Each task was awarded to them in recognition of their devotion, but they do not necessarily relate to one another.⁶

Another perspective on the relationship between these two roles of the Levites stems from the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Tractate Ta'anit* 16a. What is the derivation of the name of the Temple Mount as Mount 'Moriah'? One opinion there maintains that it is called 'Moriah' because *hora'ah* — instruction — stems from there to all of Israel. Rashi comments⁷:

[This] opinion says a mountain from which *hora'ah* goes out -meaning the Torah to all of Israel, "for out of Zion shall go forth the Torah (Isaiah 2:3)"; "They shall teach Your norms to Jacob (Deuteronomy 33:10)."

6 This understanding is also reflected in *Midrash Tehilim* (Buber ed.) Psalm 18 s.v. (21) *yatsileini*.

7 s.v. *mai Har Ha-Mori'ah*

The second verse cited by Rashi is, of course, the blessing to the tribe of Levi that they will serve as the educators of the Jewish people. The implication of the talmudic passage, according to Rashi, is that this capacity is integrally related to the service of the Temple. The implication seems to be that it is precisely from their point of service at the Temple that the Levites go out to all of Israel taking the word of God — the *hora'ah* — with them from Mount “Moriah.”

Amplifying on Rashi's understanding of the talmudic passage in *Tractate Ta'anit*, we may posit the relationship between the two capacities as follows: Even though the role of the Priest or Levite as Temple officiant is quantitatively dwarfed by his primary role as educator, the Temple nonetheless serves as the foundation point for that role. In the Temple the Priest or Levite encounters the divine. It is from that encounter that he then takes God's Torah and transmits it to the rest of Israel. The paradigm of chapter three of this book, that the sanctuary perpetuates the experience of Sinai, can again prove illustrative. At Sinai, Moses (himself a Levite), encountered God in His sacred precincts and then brought the Torah to all of Israel. The Levites re-enact that process by serving semi-annually in the Temple — the place God chooses to establish His name — and then taking *hora'ah* to all of Israel.

The notion that the Temple represented the educational hub of the country is recognized by the thirteenth century *Sefer Ha-Chinukh*:

As every man would take up the tithe of all his cattle and flocks year after year, to the location where the occupation with wisdom and Torah was to be found, namely Jerusalem, where the Sanhedrin were — those who had cognition and understood knowledge ... As we know, the second tithe (*ma'aser sheni*) was eaten there. Then, in any event, the owner of the stock would either go there himself to learn Torah or he would send one of his sons there, that he should study there and be sustained by that produce.⁸

The various commandments to bring produce to Jerusalem — to the place God chooses to establish His name — were seen before to highlight the nature of the Temple as a force for social unity. As the Israelites would consume their produce at the Temple, the occasion also took on an educational dimension, with exposure to Israel's greatest judges in the Sanhedrin.

8 *Sefer HaChinnukh — The Book of [Mitzvah] Education*, trans. Charles Wengrov (Feldheim: Jerusalem, 1984) vol. 3, 509.

Justice

When tracing the role of the Temple in the life of Israel as prescribed in the Bible, attention must be drawn to its function as the focal point of the judiciary system.

In modern bureaucracies, the ministries within government devoted to education and to the administration of justice are distinct. The administration of justice attends to the adjudication of the competing rights of citizens. It has little to do with the endeavor of teaching the young how to function in society, or any of the other aims of a ministry of education. Within the biblical conception, however, the two realms are inextricably bound.

From a biblical perspective, the judicial and educational realms both stem from the same source — the authority of the Torah. When the Levites teach the masses, the course of study is God's laws. When the courts adjudicate — whether it is a question of torts or of ritual law — their criteria are likewise God's laws. Because the Temple represents a perpetuation of Sinai — the point at which God's laws were originally transmitted — the Temple becomes the natural center for the adjudication of those laws.

Let us examine the dynamics that govern the relationship between the judiciary system and the Temple. The primary source for this relationship is Deuteronomy 17:8-10:

If a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault — matters of dispute in your courts — *you shall rise and ascend to the place which the Lord your God has chosen*, (9) and come before the levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at that time, and present your problem. When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, (10) you shall carry out the verdict that is announced to you from the place which the Lord chose, observing scrupulously all their instructions to you.

This passage is the basis for two fundamental concepts concerning the relationship between the judicial system and the Temple: the role of the Levites within this system and the significance of God's presence in the Temple for the execution of proper judgment.

Verse 9 implies that the members of the high court are in some fashion Levites. The designation of the Levites as judges is akin to their designation as teachers. The tithing system creates a system of support

for the Levites which allows them to devote themselves to the mastery of God's laws. As masters of God's laws, it follows that they should serve not only as the teachers of those laws, but as their adjudicators as well. The Bible attests to the degree to which the Levites served in this capacity. At the end of his reign, David divided the Levites into units. Of the 38,000 Levites numbered, 6,000 were set aside to be judges and officers (I Chronicles 23:4).

The notion that judges were to be drawn, largely, if not exclusively, from the ranks of the Levites, gains expression in the Oral Law as well. The *Sifrei* to the phrase in Deuteronomy 17:9, "and you shall come before the levitical priests," states:

It is a commandment that the high court contain members who are Priests or Levites. This does not mean, however, that the court is disqualified if it has no such members — for the verse says, "and you shall come before the levitical priests *or the magistrate in charge at the time.*"

The second concept that stems from Deuteronomy 17 which pertains to the relationship between the judicial system and the Temple, concerns God's presence in the Temple. As we have noted, the book of Deuteronomy consistently refers to the Temple as the place God chooses to establish His name. It is no surprise, then, that when the Torah locates the high court in the Temple, in verse 8, it uses this terminology. But the phrase is repeated redundantly two verses later, in verses 9-10: "When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, (10) you shall carry out the verdict that is announced to you *from the place which the Lord chose.*" The repetition of this phrase is instructive — not of the site of the court, but of the nature of its authority. As R. Yehuda Ha-Levi writes in the *Kuzari*,⁹ the ruling of the judges of the high court is to be heeded because they are endowed with divine inspiration symbolized by their presence at the site where God's immanence is at its highest degree.

This concept should not be simplistically mistaken. The inspiration that R. Yehuda Ha-Levi mentions is not some power magically invested in the judges by their mere presence in the Temple complex. We posited in the previous chapter that God's presence in the Temple is reflective of the strength of the covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people. Conversely, then, the removal of God's presence from the Temple, or the Temple's destruction, reflects a weakening of that bond. This axiom bears directly on the authority of the entire court system. Because

9 *Kuzari* 3:39.

the authority of the court is a function of God's inspiration, the court accordingly loses some of its authority when God distances himself from the Jewish people. The very highest power of the Jewish court, indeed of any court, is the power to render capital decisions. The license to put a man to death is a power associated with God himself, as the One who naturally grants and takes life as He wishes. The high court only has this power when the covenantal bond is strong, and the Sanhedrin resides in God's presence in the Chamber of Hewn Stone in the Temple. Basing himself on *Tractate Sanhedrin* 52b, Maimonides describes this function as follows:

Capital offenses are adjudicated only when the Temple is standing, and the high court resides in its chamber in the Temple ... when the priests offer sacrifices upon the altar, capital cases are heard, providing that the high court is situated in its place.¹⁰

Until this point, our portrayal of the Temple has emphasized its positive aspects; its power as a multi-layered symbol and its multi-purpose function within the life of the nation. We saw how the Temple's identity as the place of *hashra'at ha-shekhinah* made it also the national center for social unity, education and welfare.

The Temple, however, engendered several social ills by the very virtue of its existence. Without losing track of all its symbolic and functional value in the life of the nation, we can only gain a full understanding of the Temple's implications by probing the social problems attendant to the existence of the Temple.

Overexpansion

The Temple was the culmination of a long historical evolution.¹¹ It was the climax of processes of change in the religious, social, political, and economic realms. It is quite tempting to read the opening chapters of the

10 *Yad, Hilkhot Sanhedrin* 14:11. This law is an application of the *halakhic* principle of *ha-makom gorem* — literally, "a function of location." Its meaning is that the courts only possess certain powers by virtue of God's inspiration, which is extant only when the Temple is standing and the seat of the Sanhedrin is in the Chamber of Hewn Stone. See *Avodah Zarah* 8a, *Shabbat* 15a, and *Sanhedrin* 14b. For the distinction between the four forms of capital punishment biblically enumerated, and the broader powers given to the king to enact the death penalty, see *Derashot Ha-Ran of Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona*, essay no. 11.

11 See chapter four of *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*.

book of Kings and conclude that Solomon's age represented a plateau of bliss and that all the people needed do now was live off the fat of the land.

Yet for all its accomplishments, the age of Solomon was subject to the same social and political dynamics that face any culture in any era. Nearly every positive social force can bring in its wake undesired consequences; in our time critics of capitalism will point out that while capitalist societies encourage the entrepreneurial spirit and a healthy work ethic, they often breed greed and devolve into cultures of materialism. Pluralism, a hallmark of contemporary western culture, is heralded as the foundation of tolerance and social stability. Many will say, however, that the pluralism of our times has begotten a culture of moral relativism and an effacement of values.

By their very nature, the evolutionary processes that culminated with the Temple's construction were dynamic ones. No society ever reaches a climax and then stands still. Unless the entire gamut of social and political forces is carefully and continuously monitored, even a great society can quickly find itself thrown out of kilter, hurtling down a dangerous course. The political and social progress of Solomon's age brought about the Temple's construction. Yet it was precisely those currents that later engendered pitfalls that would plague the Jewish people for centuries to come.

Less than twenty years after Solomon completed work on the Temple and palace, the Jewish state found itself torn asunder between the kingdoms of Judea and Israel. The dissolution of Solomon's empire can be seen as an unintended result of the forces that led to Israel's greatness and the Temple's construction in the first place.

Perhaps the dominant impression one gets from a reading of Solomon's reign in I Kings 5-10 is the incredible scope of his building projects. The work of constructing the Temple and palace took twenty years (I Kings 9:10). Following that he embarked on a project to build a citadel and wall around Jerusalem and erected seven major fortresses across the country, and an unspecified number of garrison towns, chariot towns, and cavalry towns (9:15-19), home base to 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses (10:26). To bolster his contacts abroad, Solomon erected a separate palace for the daughter of Pharaoh in proximity to the Temple (9:24), and built a fleet of ships at the port of Eilat (9:26).

While these projects manifested Solomon's strength, and were undoubtedly recognized by the surrounding nations, they constituted an enormous burden on the country and engendered dramatic changes in the fabric of the society. To build the Temple and palace, Solomon

conscripted 30,000 laborers who were sent to Lebanon in rotating shifts of 10,000 workers on a tri-monthly basis (5:27-28). For his later projects, Solomon again conscripted men broadly to serve as warriors, attendants, officials, and commanders, who manned his army and oversaw the gargantuan construction efforts (9:22). Solomon's projects may have magnified his greatness, and even God's — but it came at the expense of the people.

The dissolution of Solomon's empire, then, may be analyzed from a social and political perspective. When we look to the arguments put forth by Jeroboam to stir revolt, we can discern arguments whose roots were in the social upheaval caused by Solomon's expansion. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ascends the throne, God turned to Jeroboam the son of Nebat to be the catalyst that would split the kingdom (11:31-39). Jeroboam had directed the work efforts of an entire tribe (11:28) during Solomon's expansion, and was keenly aware of the toll it had taken in human terms. His challenge on behalf of the people to Rehoboam highlighted the popular discontent Solomon's expansion had aroused (12:4): "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke which your father laid on us and we will serve you." When Rehoboam rejects the request of the people, they secede. Immediately after the succession, the people executed Adoram, who had been Solomon's chief officer for work projects, venting all their anger at the person who most directly symbolized the disruption of life that had been wrought by the expansion.

While Solomon's expansion produced social ill-effects, the period was one of great cultural upheaval as well. The Temple was universal in its scope, a place where gentiles were welcome to pray alongside Jews, a symbol designed to broadcast God's name to the entire world. The cultural ramifications of this openness were that under Solomon, Jerusalem became a cosmopolitan center, accessible to peoples from many different cultures. While the notion that the Temple is an ecumenical center for the whole of mankind is a lofty ideal, its implementation on the plane of reality brings with it the risk of cultural dilution. When a host country opens its doors to an influx of foreigners, the danger lurks that foreign influences will overwhelm or corrupt the indigenous host culture. When the Bible depicts Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, it offers no objections. Her entry into the Jewish king's court was a sign of political achievement, a royal marriage indicative of a political alliance. With time, though, Solomon became distracted from executing God's will, influenced by the women he had married from all

of the neighboring countries (11:1-4). The influence of foreign culture on the court had repercussions for the nation as a whole. Israel lost its own identity as God's nation, falling victim to foreign influence (11:33): "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hands ... for they have forsaken Me; they have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites."

The lessons of the dissolution of Solomon's empire, then, are two. Ideally, the Temple is to be universal in its scope. But in welcoming the nations of the world to Jerusalem, the Jewish people must post a vigilant watch to maintain the purity and authenticity of Jewish values. The second lesson that emerges is that in the aspiration to build a great society — a healthy aspiration in and of itself — the Jewish people must maintain a sense of proportion that will safeguard against the social burnout that plagued Israel as a result of Solomon's expansion.

The Kingship of God — Kingship of the Davidic King

An issue that is critical for an understanding of the social and political dynamics surrounding the Temple is that of *kingship*. A dominant theme throughout the Bible is that God is the King of Kings. What, then, is the nature of the kingship of the Davidic king. In what senses are both man and God "king"?

In biblical as well as contemporary times, the fame and fortune of a nation is often associated with its leadership. Within the biblical scope, this means that when the Israelites are respected, the respect and credit focus on the king. From the perspective of the Bible, of course, the true glory is that of God. But in the eyes of men — Israelites and gentiles alike — the hand of God is not miraculously overt, and thus credit is given to the king. The biblical conception of a king, therefore, is that his kingship, or rule, is but an extension of the rule of the King of Kings, God himself. In this vein I Chronicles 29:23 can state, "Solomon successfully took over *the throne of the Lord* instead of his father David." Clearly, the Bible does not mean to say that Solomon superseded God. Rather, Solomon sat on the throne of God because his kingship was an extension of God's. It is in this light that the psalmist declares that God invites the king to sit with him, figuratively speaking, saying, "The Lord said to my lord (i.e. the

king), ‘Sit at My right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool’” (Psalm 110:1).¹² Credit to the king, therefore, is credit to God.

When David is told in II Samuel 7 that his descendants will rule dynastically, his tribute to God reflects the concept that the glory of the Jewish people and their king is only to be seen as the glory of God himself (II Samuel 7:22-26):

You are great indeed, O Lord God! There is none like You and there is no other God but You ... And who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation on earth, whom God went and redeemed as His people, winning renown for Himself and doing great and marvelous deeds for them [and] for Your land — [driving out] nations and their gods before Your people, whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt. You have established Your people Israel as Your very own people forever; and You, O Lord, have become their God.

And now, O Lord God fulfill Your promise to Your servant and his house forever; and do as You have promised. And may Your name be glorified forever, in that men will say, ‘The Lord of Hosts is God over Israel; and may the house of your servant David be established before You.

The concept that the kingship of the Davidic king is an extension of the kingship of God sheds great light on the relationship between the Temple and the king. The Temple is a house for the name of God: a structure that symbolizes His acclaim as sovereign in the world. But God’s power and virtue are expressed only through the agency of His people Israel, with the Davidic king leading them. It is through David and his descendants that God is accorded glory.

The integral link between the monarchy and the Temple is also exhibited in the account of the Temple’s construction in I Kings 6:1-7:51. Wedged within the narrative of the erection of the Temple, the Bible depicts the construction of Solomon’s palace (7:1-12) and heralds the completion of the Temple together with the completion of the palace in I Kings 9:1 and 9:10.¹³

12 Psalm 2:1-2 equates war against the king with war against God: Why do nations assemble/ and peoples plot vain things;/ kings of the earth take their stand,/ and regents intrigue together/ against the Lord and against His anointed.

13 See Jon Levenson, “The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience,” *Jewish Spirituality* [vol 1]: *From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed.

Because the king's glory is so integrally linked to God's, however, a counterbalance is necessary to remind the mortal monarch of the limit of his hegemony. The king is sovereign over the entire country and all of its inhabitants — with the exception of one sphere: the Temple. In many of the surrounding cultures one of the primary roles of the king was to serve in the capacity of high priest to the local deity. In contrast, the Jewish king, a descendant of David, can never be the high priest, and is forbidden from performing any of the rites of the Temple service.

This dynamic of the relationship between the king and the Temple is seen in the conduct of the Judean king Uzziah. The Bible casts Uzziah as a king of exemplary conduct, a devout leader who was attentive to the prophets of his time (II Chronicles 26:4-5). In return, his campaigns to fortify the country and establish more secure borders were all successful (26:5-10). Following the account of these achievements, the Bible portrays in detail Uzziah's ensuing military build-up. It tells of Uzziah's 2,600 officers who commanded a standing army of 307,500 and of all the armaments that were allotted them (26:11-15). This build-up, however, had corruptive consequences (26:15-21):

His fame spread far, for he was helped wonderfully, and he became strong. (16) When he was strong, he grew so arrogant he acted corruptly: he trespassed against his God by entering the Temple of the Lord to offer incense on the incense altar. (17) The priest Azariah, with a brigade of eighty priests of the Lord followed him in (18) and confronting King Uzziah said to him, "It is not for you Uzziah, to offer incense to the Lord, but for the Aaronite priests, who have been consecrated to offer incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed; there will be no glory in it for you from the Lord God." (19) Uzziah, holding the censer and ready to burn incense, got angry; but as he got angry with the priests leprosy broke out on his forehead in front of the priests in the House of the Lord

Arthur Green (New York:Crossroad, 1986) 49. Levenson sees this idea expressed in Psalm 2:6: "But I have installed My king/ on Zion My holy mountain."

Psalm 78:68-69 also attests to the connection between the Temple and the monarchy: "He did choose the tribe of Judah/ Mount Zion, which He loved/ (69) He built His sanctuary like the heavens/ like the earth that He established forever." The choice of the tribe of Judah may be a geographic reference to Jerusalem and the site of the Temple, or it may refer to the choice of the Davidic line to rule over Israel. According to this second interpretation, verse 69 pairs the choice of the Davidic line with the choice of Mount Zion as the site of the Temple.

beside the incense altar. (20) When the chief priest Azariah and all the other priests looked at him, his forehead was leprous, so they rushed him out of there; he too made haste to get out, for the Lord had struck him with a plague. (21) King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He lived in isolated quarters as a leper, for he was cut off from the House of the Lord.

What were the motivations that drove Uzziah to violate the sanctity of the Temple by entering its inner precincts? At first blush, it would seem that Uzziah's motivations were no different than those of the other kings who misused the Temple for the purposes of their own glory. In violating the sanctity of the Temple, Uzziah wished to demonstrate that he was above the law. Indeed, there are several indications in the passage that support this reading. His actions, according to verse 15, were motivated by haughtiness in the wake of his great military build-up. It is also evident that Azariah saw personal distinction as the driving force in the king's actions: "Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed; *there will be no glory in it for you* from the Lord God (v. 18)." On the strength of these supports the midrash contends that Uzziah desired for himself the title of High Priest.¹⁴

An alternative reading is possible, however, that portrays Uzziah in a more favorable light. Recall, that the chapter opens by praising Uzziah for his loyalty to God. Even at the moment of infraction, the Bible hints at Uzziah's positive intentions: "he trespassed against *his* God by entering the Temple of the Lord (v. 16)." Uzziah's actions stemmed from devotion — albeit misplaced — to God. He is struck with leprosy — a most fitting punishment, for the primary law pertaining to the leper is that he may not enter the Temple complex. Uzziah unlawfully trespassed the precincts of the Temple. His punishment signals this to him by restricting his access to any part of the Temple complex while in his state of affliction. When he is struck with leprosy, the Bible notes, he rushes to leave, dutifully obeying the law of the leper, and compliantly suffers his punishment until the end of his life. If, in fact, Uzziah was acting out of misplaced loyalty, what was it that motivated his infraction? A second voice in the midrash plumbs Uzziah's motivations:

He was motivated not for the sake of personal aggrandizement, nor for the sake of personal glory, but for the sake of his

14 *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:3.

Master — for he said to himself, “It is good that a king should serve the Glorious King.”¹⁵

In one sense, Uzziah’s sentiments were quite appropriate; he seems to have realized that God’s glory is a function of how the king is perceived. Acting on this premise, he wished to publicly demonstrate by serving in the Temple that even a powerful sovereign is servile before God. What Uzziah failed to grasp was that the limits of a powerful sovereign are most sharply demonstrated by the law that a king may not serve in the Temple at all.¹⁶

God Destroys His Own House?

Many of the religious and social problems attendant with the Temple’s existence, arose out of the misconceptions of the kings of the period. Perhaps the greatest risk engendered through the presence of a Temple, however, is one that stems from a misconception of the masses. As a symbol of God’s acclaim in the world, the Temple can be misconstrued as inviolate, even during a period of waywardness. This is the focus of Jeremiah 7:3-12:

Thus said the Lord of Hosts ... (4) Don’t put your trust in illusions and say, “The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these [buildings].” (5) No, if you really mend your ways and your actions ... (7) then only will I let you dwell in this place ... (9) Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Ba’al, and follow other gods whom you have not experienced, (10) and then come and stand before Me in this House which bears My name and say, “We are safe”? — [Safe] to do all these abhorrent things! (11) Do you consider this House which bears My name, to be a refuge of thieves? As for Me, I have been watching — declares the Lord. (12) Just go to My place at Shiloh, where I had established My name formerly, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

Viewing the Temple through the eyes of Jeremiah, it is difficult for us to comprehend the mentality of his audience. Couldn’t they see the hypocrisy in their actions? Further, it is evident that they were aware

15 *Sifrei Bemidbar* 99.

16 See in this vein, Nachmanides, *Genesis* 49:10.

that they were behaving contrary to God's will. Jeremiah observes that they come to the Temple and declaim, "we are safe" — a declaration that implies a consciousness of guilt, a knowledge that offenses have been committed. How, then, could they think that God would be desirous of their visits to the Temple?

The people of Jeremiah's time were well aware that stealing, adultery, and the like were wrong. But they assumed that their actions could be atoned for if followed by proper action. Their premise was not entirely mistaken. God may look unfavorably at one who willfully commits an infraction. But a wrong committed in one sphere does not cancel out the merit of a right carried out in another. It is meritorious for a person to keep kosher, for example, even if he desecrates the Sabbath.

The value of Temple worship, however, cannot be viewed in such a compartmentalized fashion, where merits and demerits stand in separate columns of the tally sheet. There is a fundamental difference between Temple worship and the fulfillment of other ritual commandments. When a Jew is called upon to fulfill a ritual obligation he is called upon to *obey*. If he complies, he is considered meritorious, for with regard to that particular commandment he has done his duty; he has obeyed. The commandment to worship in the Temple, however, is not merely a calling to obey. As Jeremiah expresses it here in verse 10, to worship in the Temple is to come before God in His House. It is a step beyond complying with God's commands; *to come to the Temple is to address God directly*. If a person does not display fidelity toward God or if he acts immorally, then the very basis of his relationship with God is found wanting. Under these circumstances Temple worship not only loses its meaning; it becomes an abomination, because it is a statement that the individual has the audacity to address God directly in His House when the very core of the relationship has rotted.

By contrast, Jeremiah's audience saw Temple worship not only as a good deed that would stand unaffected by their transgressions but as the very key to their salvation. Aware of the significance of Temple worship, they assumed that an appearance in God's House would surely be enough to atone for even the most grievous offenses. Jeremiah's message to them, however, is that one can only contemplate coming to the Temple if the total scope of his behavior is upright. One can only appear directly before God if the totality of his relationship with God warrants it.

Jeremiah's admonition highlights a second aspect of the Temple's presence that the people had misconstrued. What perspective stands behind their statement, "the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the

Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these [buildings]”? Jeremiah’s audience mistakenly believed that if the acclaim of God in the world was represented by the Temple’s construction, then its destruction must symbolize God’s defamation. Thus, they reasoned, the Temple could never be destroyed — for why would God ever let His name be so defamed? Taking this one step further, the people of Jeremiah’s age assumed that since God’s Temple could never be destroyed, Jerusalem was therefore inviolable to enemy attack, and there was no need, therefore, to heed the prophets like Jeremiah who were forecasting impending doom. It was in this spirit that the people confidently declared, “The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these [buildings].”

While Jeremiah’s contention that the Temple can be destroyed is apparent to us, there seems to be some merit in the claims of Jeremiah’s detractors. How can God allow the Temple be destroyed if that will lead to a defamation of His name?

This requires us to examine some of the basic premises concerning the conditions necessary for the Temple’s construction. The Temple could only be built once Israel’s actions and stature constituted a sanctification of God’s name in the world.¹⁷ But what happens when that level of achievement begins to deteriorate? The Book of Kings is a record of how Israel failed to maintain the standards achieved during the time of Solomon. Yet the Temple remained standing for over four hundred years. Apparently, then, the standards needed to sustain the Temple’s existence were not as high as those needed to warrant its erection.

This was so because Jeremiah’s detractors were, in fact, partially correct in their basic premise about the implications of the Temple’s destruction: when the Temple is destroyed, the name of God *does* suffer deprecation. In an age when the Temple stands but Israel sins, the Temple will not be destroyed quickly. Even if the people are no longer worthy of His presence in their midst, God will refrain from destroying the Temple because His name will be diminished amongst the nations. At a certain point, however, Israel’s iniquity becomes so great that her actions inherently constitute a defamation of God’s name.

The prophets regarded the relationship between God and Israel as a bond of marriage. The marriage paradigm is useful in understanding why the Temple stood for so long while Israel sinned. Generally, a couple will decide to marry only once each side has become convinced of the high merits of the other. Once married, however, the couple will remain

17 The process that culminated with the Temple’s construction is explored in chapter four of *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*.

wed in spite of sever strains on the relationship. Had these strains expressed themselves during courtship the marriage would never have been consummated. But once the marriage exists, separation and divorce will only be a measure of last resort. Only when shared life becomes entirely intolerable will the couple move to separate.

Within this conception, we can return to the Book of Kings and offer an explanation of why the Temple stood for so long while Israel sinned. Although Israel's actions were wayward, they were not so corrupt as to warrant the Temple's destruction, for that would have led to a defamation of God's name. When Israel's very behavior became the cause of God's defamation, however, no further purpose was served by the Temple's standing. Whether the Temple stood or fell, God's name would be defiled by the actions of the Jewish people. Israel's highest covenantal calling is fulfilled when her actions are a tribute to God's name. Conversely, then, her greatest failure occurs when her actions lead to the deprecation of God's name among the nations. Under these conditions, God sees no purpose in the Temple's existence and leads the effort to bring about its destruction (Ezekiel 24:21):

Thus said the Lord God: I am going to desecrate My sanctuary, your pride and glory, the delight of your eyes, and the desire of your heart.

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Menachem Leibtag for his guidance and assistance during the research of this material.

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