

Beit HaMikdash

FIRST TEMPLE (Temple of Solomon)

According to II Samuel 7, David desired to build a Temple for Hashem but was not permitted to do so. Later in the chapter, Hashem declares that it will be Solomon who will build the Temple. In I Chronicles 22, we see that David had already had a large supply of material for a Temple

that he gave to Solomon and he purchases a thrashing-floor from Aravnah where the Temple was to be built.¹

The Tanach tells us that Solomon first turned to Chiram, King of Tzor, upon undertaking the task of building the Temple. Chiram was in possession of rare forests, cedars of Lebanon, and cypress trees that had no match in the world. Solomon believed that these trees would be perfect construction material for the Temple.²

The Temple was built three stories high with a series of chambers around the structure of various sizes due to the different thickness of the walls. The Temple also had windows with fixed latticework. At the rear of the Temple was the Holy of Holies – forming a perfect cube of 20 cubits – which was lined with cedar and overlaid with pure gold. Within the Holy of Holies stood two Cheruvim made of olive wood. Each Cheruv had outspread wings 10 cubits from tip to tip. The Aron HaChodesh (Ark of the Covenant) was placed inside the Holy of Holies. The veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was made of blue, purple, and crimson yarn, and fine linen, and with cheruvim woven into it. The doors of the Holy of Holies were

made of olive wood into which cheruvim, palm trees, and flowers were carved and overlaid with gold.¹

The rest of the Temple was 20 cubits wide and 40 cubits long. The walls were lined with cedar on which were carved cheruvim, palm trees, and opened flowers that were overlaid with gold. The floor was made of fir wood overlaid with gold. The door posts were made of olive wood and supported folding doors of fir. These doors have cheruvim, palm trees, and flowers carved in them and overlaid with gold. Inside this area stood the menorah, table of showbread, and the incense altar.¹

On the front of the Temple, there stood two bronze pillars called Jachin and Boaz. Each pillar was 18 cubits in heights and “surmounted by a capital of carved lilies” which were 5 cubits high.

In front of the Temple – in the court of priests – to the southeast stood a laver 10 cubits in diameter which rested on the backs of twelve oxen. There were also ten “bases” made of bronze and ornamented with figures of cheruvim, lions, and palm trees. These “bases” supported a laver on each and were made portable with wheels attached to them. The altar also stood before the Temple and was 20 cubits square and 10 cubits high.¹ In front of the court of priests, there was a series of steps which led to the women’s court along with access to various storage chambers. Outside the women’s court and the Temple area, in a large expansive area was the court of the gentiles.

When the work was completed on the Temple, Solomon had the Ark of the Covenant brought up from the City of David and placed in the Holy of Holies.² A celebration was held and

Solomon praised Hashem before all the Children of Israel and told them of David's desire to build the Temple.

I Kings 8:14-21: (14) And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel, and all the congregation of Israel stood. (15) And he said, "Blessed (be) the Lord, the

God of Israel Who spoke with His mouth unto David my father, and has fulfilled it with His hand, saying. (16) 'Since the day that I brought forth My people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that My name might be therein; but I chose David to be over My people Israel.' (17) And it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. (18) And the Lord said to David my father, 'Since it was in your heart to build a house unto My name, you did well that it was in your heart. (19) Nevertheless, you shall not build the house; but your son that shall come forth out of your loins, he shall build the house for My name.' (20) And the Lord has established His word that He spoke, and I have risen up in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord spoke, and have built a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. (21) And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein (is) the covenant of the Lord, which He made with our fathers, when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.'"³

Solomon beseeched Hashem to hear the prayers of Jew and gentile alike who offer prayers and supplication to Hashem.³ Solomon then blessed the Children of Israel – reminding them to not forsake Torah.²

I Kings 8:55-61: (55) And he stood, and blessed the entire congregation of Israel (with) a loud voice, saying, (56) "Blessed (be) the Lord, Who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He spoke; there has not failed one word of all his good word, that He spoke through Moses His servant. (57) May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our forefathers; let Him not leave us, nor forsake us. (58) That He may incline our hearts to Him, to go in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our forefathers. (59) And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the Lord, be close to the Lord our God, day and night, that He sustain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, each day's need granted on its day. (60)

So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God: there is none else. (61) Let your heart, [therefore], be whole with the Lord our God, to follow His statutes and to keep His precepts as of this day."³

The Temple became the sole place of sacrifice – replacing the local altars built in various communities. The sacrifices (korbanot) were carried out daily in the morning and afternoon with special offerings on Shabbat and holidays. Levites recited Tehillim (Psalms) at appropriate times during the offerings, for each day, and during other times of the year such as Rosh Chodesh.⁴

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem for the second time in 586 BCE. Under the leadership of his captain of the guard, Solomon's Temple was burned to the ground on Tish B'Av (Ninth of Av) and the Children of Israel were led captive to Babylon.⁵

Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar observed that archaeological evidence of Solomon's

Temple had been found in remains taken from refuse from a construction project performed on the Har HaBayit (Temple Mount) by the Muslim Waqf in November 1999. In the summer of 2007, archaeologists overseeing construction on the Har HabAyit reported “evidence of human activity” most likely belonging to the First Temple period.⁵ In October 2007, archaeological remains dating back to the First Temple period were discovered on the platform of the Har Habayit.⁴

SECOND TEMPLE (Rebuilt Solomon’s Temple/Temple of Herod)

The Second Beit HaMikdash was a reconstruction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem which stood from 516 BCE through 70 CE. As described in the Book of Ezra, the rebuilding of Solomon’s Temple was authorized by Cyrus the Great of Persia. Construction of the Second Beit HaMikdash began in 535 BCE when the exiled Jews returned from Babylonia. The Second Beit HaMikdash was completed and dedicated in 515 BCE.⁶

After the return from the exile in Babylonia under the leadership of Zerubbabel, arrangements were made to reorganize the Kingdom of Judah. The primary impulse of the returnees was to restore Solomon’s Temple and reinstitute the korbanot (sacrificial) rituals. Zerubbabel and the others proceeded to offer gifts to the treasury in order to reestablish the Beit HaMikdash.⁶

The first part of the restoration was the erection and dedication of the altar of Hashem on the exact spot where it had formerly stood. The people then cleared the debris that occupied the site of the First Beit HaMikdash. In 535 BCE – amid great excitement – the foundations of the Second Beit HaMikdash were laid.⁶

During the process of rebuilding the Beit HaMikdash, the Samaritans made proposals for cooperation in the work. Zerubbabel and the elders declined this offer.

*Ezra 4:3: ...It is not for you and for us to build a House for our God, but we ourselves shall build for the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.*³

As a result, evil reports were spread about the Jews. According to Ezra chapter four, the Samaritans sought to frustrate the purpose of the returnees and sent messengers to King Artaxerxes stating that if the city and Temple are permitted to be completed, the king will not receive his taxes. These rumors resulted in the king suspending the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash.³

Seven years after Cyrus the Great ordered the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, he died and was succeeded by his son Cambyses. Upon the death of Cambyses the “false Smerdis” occupied the throne for less than a year then Darius I of Persia took the throne in 522 BCE. In the second year of Darius I’s monarchy, the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash was resumed and eventually completed and dedicated in the sixth year of his reign under the counsel and admonitions of Haggai and Zechariah.⁶ The Second Beit HaMikdash became the center of Jewish worship – focusing on korbanot (sacrifices).

The Second Beit HaMikdash did not contain the Aron HaChodesh (Ark of the Covenant), the

Urim and Thummim, the holy oil, or the sacred fire. The Holy of Holies was separated by a curtain rather than a wall as in the First Beit HaMikdash. There is only one menorah, the table of showbread, the incense altar, and the vessels used during the services – many of which were from the First Beit HaMikdash and were returned by Cyrus, the Great.⁶

In 63 BCE, Pompey desecrated the Second Beit HaMikdash when he entered Jerusalem after its defeat.⁴ However, Pompey is reported to have permitted the cleansing of the Second Beit HaMikdash and permitted the continuation of the services.

*... for Pompey went into it [the Temple], and not a few of those that were with him also, and saw all that which it was unlawful for any other men to see but only for the high priests. There were in that temple the golden table, the holy candlestick, and the pouring vessels, and a great quantity of spices; and besides these there were among the treasures two thousand talents of sacred money: yet did Pompey touch nothing of all this, on account of his regard to religion; and in this point also he acted in a manner that was worthy of his virtue. The next day he gave order to those that had the charge of the temple to cleanse it, and to bring what offerings the law required to God; and restored the high priesthood to Hyrcanus, both because he had been useful to him in other respects, and because he hindered the Jews in the country from giving Aristobulus any assistance in his war against him.*⁷ – Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews (Book 14, Chapter 4)

In approximately 19 BCE Herod the Great began a massive expansion and renovation of the Har HaBayit and Second Beit HaMikdash. The Beit HaMikdash that was built by the returnees from Babylonia was torn down and rebuilt by Herod. This structure is the third Beit HaMikdash to be built on Har HaBayit but is also referred to as the Second Beit HaMikdash because the korbanot (sacrifices) rituals continued unabated throughout the construction project.¹⁶¹ The outer walls of the Har HaBayit from this period still stand and the Western Wall is a retaining wall from this Second Beit HaMikdash period.⁴

In 66 CE the Jewish population of Judea rebelled against the Roman Empire. Four years later, in 70 CE, the Roman legions under the command of Titus conquered and destroyed much of Jerusalem and the Second Beit HaMikdash, ending the Great Jewish Revolt. The Arch of Titus, located in Rome, was built to commemorate Titus's victory in Judea and depicts the Roman soldiers carrying off the Menorah from the Second Beit HaMikdash.⁶

During the Bar-Kochba revolt in 132-135 CE, Rabbi Akiva wanted to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash but the revolt failed and the Jews were banned from Jerusalem by the Roman Empire.⁴ Jerusalem itself was razed by Emperor Hadrian at the end of the Bar-Kochba revolt in 135 CE.⁶

In 363 CE, Julian the Apostate ordered the restoration of the Second Beit HaMikdash as a protest against Christianity but the project failed.⁴

“To pass over minute details, these were the principal events of the year. But Julian, who in his third consulship had taken as his colleague Sallustius, the prefect of Gaul now entered on his fourth year, and by a novel arrangement took as his colleague a private individual; an act of which no one recollected an instance since that of Diocletian and Aristobulus.

*And although, foreseeing in his anxious mind the various accidents that might happen, he urged on with great diligence all the endless preparations necessary for his expedition, yet distributing his diligence everywhere; and being eager to extend the recollection of his reign by the greatness of his exploits, he proposed to rebuild at a vast expense the once magnificent temple of Jerusalem, which after many deadly contests was with difficulty taken by Vespasian and Titus, who succeeded his father in the conduct of the siege. And he assigned the task to Alypius of Antioch, who had formerly been proprefect of Britain.*⁸ – Ammianus Marcellinus, The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus (Book 23 Chapter 1)

The Talmud (Yoma 9b) provides theological reasons for the destruction:

*As the Gemara here states, “For what was the first Beis ha’Mikdash destroyed? For [the] three [cardinal] sins that were rampant then: idolatry, immorality, and murder.... But in the times of the second Beis ha’Mikdash [the Jews] busily studied Torah and performed Mitzvos and acts of kindness — for what then was it destroyed? Because they hated each other without cause. From this one may learn that baseless hatred is as great a sin as idolatry, immorality, and murder all together.”*⁹

“On September 25, 2007 Yuval Baruch, archaeologist with the Israeli Antiquities Authority, announced their discovery of a quarry compound which may have provided King Herod with the stones to construct Herod’s Temple. Coins, pottery and an iron stake found indicated the date of the quarrying to be about 19 BCE. Excavation director Ofer Sion described the findings as including cut stone blocks that match the size of the ones used in the construction of the Temple walls. He proposes that Herod must have trained 10,000 workers in order to complete the work.”⁶

THIRD TEMPLE (Temple of the Messianic Age)

Since the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash by the Romans in 70 CE, Jews have prayed that Hashem will hasten the building of the Third Beit HaMikdash on the Har Habayit (Temple Mount). This prayer is part of the three daily prayers of the Jewish people. This Beit HaMikdash will be the fourth Beit HaMikdash on the Har HaBayit but is referred to as the Third Beit HaMikdash. The Temple Scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ezekiel chapters 40-47 describe the Third Beit HaMikdash. The prophets of the Tanach state that the building of the Third Beit HaMikdash is a sign of the Messianic Age.¹⁰

Micah 4:1 – *And it shall be at the end of the days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be firmly established at the top of the mountains, and it shall be raised above the hills, and peoples shall stream upon it.*³

Ezekiel 37:26-28 – *(26) And I will form a covenant of peace for them, an everlasting covenant shall be with them; and I will establish them and I will multiply them, and I will place My Sanctuary in their midst forever. (27) And My dwelling place shall be over them, and I will be to them for a God, and they shall be to Me as a people. (28) And the nations shall know that I am the Lord, Who sanctifies Israel, when My Sanctuary is in their midst forever.*³

Isaiah 33:20 – *See Zion, the city of our gathering; your eyes shall see Jerusalem, a tranquil dwelling, a tent that shall not fall, whose pegs shall never be moved, and all of whose ropes shall not be torn.*³

“Rashi understands [Rosh HaShannah 30a and Sukkah 41a] that the Third Holy Temple is already completed in its construction and is waiting in Heaven for HaShem to allow it to descend to the Earth. However, Maimonides ruled that the Third Holy Temple will be built by the Jewish people because he describes [Sefer Avodah - Beit HaBechirah] the exact measurements and dimensions to be used in building the Third Holy Temple. Although seemingly these two great sages are indeed disputing an issue which is very essential to the doctrine of the Jewish theology, others go to great lengths to prove that Rashi and Maimonides are not at all arguing with each other.”¹¹

Maimonides wrote that “although the Temple that will be built in the future is written in the book of Ezekiel, it remains unexplained and unclear. Many aspects of the Temple described by Ezekiel are difficult to comprehend, since that vision contains elements of prophetic insight which, in our generation, we do not have the spiritual or intellectual capacity to understand. For example, according to the prophecy of Ezekiel, the structure of the Third Temple will necessitate vast topographical changes in the environs of the Jerusalem. This Temple will differ drastically in size from its predecessors. According to Ezekiel’s measurements, the new Temple will be so large that it will occupy the entire area of the city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s prophecy explains that both the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives will be enlarged and expanded in the future.”¹²

Traditional Judaism believes in the building of the Third Beit HaMikdash and the resumption of the traditional korbanot (sacrificial) services although there is some disagreement over this point. It is generally agreed that some sort of korbanot will be reinstated in accordance with the laws in Sefer Vayikra (Book of Leviticus) and the Talmud. It is generally agreed that the full order of the korbanot will be resumed upon the building of the Beit HaMikdash. However, Maimonides argued that Hashem had deliberately moved Jews away from korbanot toward prayer which is a higher form of primary importance (Guide for the Perplexed, III:32). Maimonides – in his Mishneh Torah (Sefer Avodah) does state that korbanot will be reestablished when the Third Beit HaMikdash is built however.¹⁰

During the Bar-Kochba revolt in 132-135 CE, the Jews attempted to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash but the revolt failed and the Jews were banned from Jerusalem by the Roman Empire. In 363 CE, Julian the Apostate ordered the restoration of the Second Beit HaMikdash as a protest against Christianity but the project also failed. In 610 CE, the Sassanid Empire drove the Byzantine Empire from the Middle East which afforded the Jews control over Jerusalem. The Jews restarted the korbanot and began rebuilding the Beit HaMikdash. Shortly before the Byzantine Empire took back the conquered territory, the Persians gave control to the Christian population which tore down the partially built Beit HaMikdash and turned the area into a garbage dump.¹⁰

Although the building of the Third Beit HaMikdash is generally felt to occur during the Messianic Age, a number of organizations have formed with the objective of preparing for the eventual reestablishment and/or building of the Beit HaMikdash.

The Temple Institute states that its goal is to build the Third Beit HaMikdash and has already made many items – such as a Menorah and clothing for the priests – for the Third Beit HaMikdash. LaMikdash is an education center for the public regarding the Beit HaMikdash as well as a training center for priests. The Temple Mount and Eretz Yisrael Faithful Movement

states that its goals are to liberate the Har HaBayit from the Muslim Waqf and build the Third Beit HaMikdash.

In 1967 Israeli troops liberated Jerusalem and the Har HaBayit but gave the Har HaBayit into the control of the Muslim Waqf while continuing to remain under Israeli sovereignty. As it currently stands, only Muslims are permitted to pray on the Har HaBayit and non-Muslims have very limited access to the area which means that the idea of building the Beit HaMikdash faces obstacles.

Currently access by Jews to the Har HaBayit is restricted for both political and religious reasons. Many religious authorities interpret halachah (Jewish law) as prohibiting entrance to the area because of the possibility that one will inadvertently desecrate forbidden areas – such as the Holy of Holies. There are other religious authorities that do permit – and promote – the idea of Jews going onto the Har HaBayit as long as certain precautions and restrictions – such as not wearing leather or walking in certain areas – are observed. According to the religious authorities, the Har HaBayit still retains its full sanctity and restrictions.

In 2006, Uri Ariel – a senior Knesset member – ascended the Har HaBayit with the suggestion that a synagogue be built on the Har HaBayit alongside the mosque. The proposed synagogue would be strategically placed in an area that would not require immersion in a mikveh before ascending and in line with the rulings of prominent rabbis.¹⁰

The most obvious and immediate obstacle to realizing the desire to build the Third Beit HaMikdash are the two Islamic structures – the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock – which are currently located on the Har HaBayit. The Dome of the Rock is currently occupying the actual space where the First and Second Beit HaMikdash once stood. Israel has undertaken to preserve access to both of these buildings as part of international agreements.¹⁰

Another obstacle to building the Beit HaMikdash is that many religious scholars and authorities reject any attempts to build the Beit HaMikdash before the Messianic Age. A major reason for this rejection is that there are doubts as to the exact location in which the Beit HaMikdash is to be built because there is a controversy as to the unit of measurement – specifically, the size of a cubit. Without the exact knowledge of the size of a cubit the altar could not be built. Without prophetic revelation – according to these scholars and religious authorities – it would be impossible to build the Third Beit HaMikdash even if the Islamic buildings no longer occupied the Har HaBayit.¹⁰

Despite these obstacles traditional Jewish services include prayers for the construction of the Beit HaMikdash and the reestablishment of the korbanot. In addition, the lineage of the Kohanim and Levi'im has been preserved and some of these descendants of Aaron are currently being trained for future service in the Beit HaMikdash. The rules of ritual purity are also currently practiced within the Jewish world in a continuation of the laws regarding ritual purity and the Beit HaMikdash.

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