

CHAPTER 3

JEWISH LIFE WITH OR WITHOUT THE TEMPLE

6 B.C.E.

When I woke up this morning, my legs still throbbed from yesterday's long, uphill trek. My parents and I had journeyed from our home in Jericho to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the Passover pilgrimage.

Because we arrived after sunset, I didn't get my first glimpse of the Temple complex until this morning. When I crawled out of our tent, I gasped; sprawled before me were thousands of colorful tents, and a sea of humanity. I remember my father saying that "countless multitudes from countless cities come, some over land, others over sea, from east and west and north and south for every feast." But I wasn't prepared for the enormity of it all.

A shofar blast woke my father. He leapt up, bolted outside, and dragged me into the crowd. "We'll miss the morning sacrifice if we don't hurry," he said breathlessly. We scrambled up the steps onto a broad, public square, where dozens of shopkeepers hawked their goods, urging us to buy chickens, cattle, birds, or anything we might need for the sacrifice.

Because pilgrimages are notorious for public unrest, my father urged me to stay near him, but I bulled my way through the crowd and climbed up another set of stairs. I stood face to face with the Southern Temple Wall. As I craned my neck to see the towering rows of

gleaming, five-ton stones, a scrawny foreigner crashed into me. The sacrificial lamb he was carrying jumped from his arms and scurried away. The man screamed something in a foreign tongue and ran after it.

The day had barely begun, but I knew it would be the greatest day of my life.

Shaul



KEY EVENTS

About 332 BCE

The Land of Israel becomes part of the Greek Empire

About 167 BCE

The Maccabean Revolt begins

About 142 BCE

The Jewish state in Israel wins its independence under the Hasmoneans

About 4 BCE

Birth of Jesus

The Center of Jewish Life

What do you think is the center of Jewish life in your community? Is it a synagogue, where everyone gathers to pray and read the Torah on Shabbat and holidays? Is it your religious school or a Jewish community center? In the time of the Second Temple, Jews lived in towns across Israel and in the Diaspora, but they still considered Jerusalem to be the center of Jewish life. Many traveled to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem for holidays, and the *kohanim*, priests, offered up animal sacrifices for the whole nation there. Jewish rulers and the highest court were based in Jerusalem, too, so the religious laws developed in the capital affected Jews all over Israel and beyond. The Temple was a source of pride for Am Yisrael and kept the Jewish people united.

How Do We Know...

About the Second Temple?

For an insider's view of what life in the Temple was like, the Mishnah and Talmud, our sacred books of Jewish law, are useful. The Mishnah was begun during the time of the Second Temple, and its laws give a glimpse of what went on there. The Talmud gives us detailed descriptions of what it was like to celebrate holidays in the Temple, as well as accounts of what happened there on regular days. We also have books written by the famous Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, who lived through the destruction of the Second Temple. If you visit Jerusalem, you can see the remains of buildings from the Second Temple complex and an ancient road traveled by pilgrims as they made their way to the Temple. Can you name the most famous remnant of the Second Temple?



Model of the Second Temple, in Jerusalem

66 CE

The Great Revolt against the Romans begins

70 CE

The Romans destroy the Second Temple and take Jews into exile

About 200 CE

The Mishnah is compiled

About 500 CE

The Babylonian Talmud is compiled



Lighting the Way

Did you know that the triumph we celebrate on the holiday of Hanukkah was not a complete victory? We light the Hanukkah menorah to recall how the Maccabees took back control of the Temple, but there were still many battles to go before they would win independence in Israel. So why does Hanukkah celebrate this moment? For the Maccabees, religious freedom was the most important victory, and having the Temple in Jewish hands again meant this was possible.

The Second Temple and Jerusalem were the focus of many struggles in the history of the Jewish nation. After Jews returned to Israel from the Babylonian exile, they had to learn how to live in a land that was also part of a larger empire, with limited power to rule themselves. To make matters more complicated, Jews fought among themselves over how to deal with the ruling powers, how to define the Jewish religion, and even how to run the Temple. But despite everything, this time period saw the creation of traditions in Judaism that would light the way for Am Yisrael for centuries to come, even without the Temple.

Queen Salome Alexandra: Keeping the Peace

Maintaining peace with foreign powers, solving conflicts between different Jewish groups, and even keeping things calm between competitive sons—this was the life of Queen Salome Alexandra.



Being the last ruler of the independent Jewish state, Judea, was no easy job, but Queen Salome Alexandra pulled it off. She brought peace and prosperity to the land, in the first century BCE, and she invited the Pharisees to be part of her government. This was in stark contrast to the previous ruler, her husband, Alexander Yannai, who was cruel to the sages and even had some of them killed.

Write a question that you would like to ask Queen Salome Alexandra about her life or times:

Josephus: Traitor or Hero?

The Jewish historian Josephus was a commander of the Jewish forces in northern Israel during the Great Revolt against Rome in the first century CE. When the Romans invaded, he surrendered to them, instead of committing suicide with the other Jewish fighters, as they had agreed. He was taken prisoner and then freed and brought to Rome. There he took the Roman name Josephus Flavius, and became a Roman citizen and advisor to the emperor. He wrote books about Jewish history, including the revolt against Roman occupation. Josephus's books are one of the few sources we have for Jewish history in this time period, but he wrote them for the winners of the revolt, the Romans, so historians today don't fully trust his accuracy.



Do you think Josephus was a traitor for surrendering? Or a hero for preserving Jewish history?

Taking Sides

Jews hotly debated many issues during Second Temple times. Read about some burning issues and the views of major groups about them. Decide which side makes more sense to you and explain why.

Side 1

Maccabees

The Hasmonean family

We've had enough. We want our religious freedom and our Temple back. Jewish law should rule in the Land of Israel, not Greek customs. Let's fight Antiochus!

The Issue

In 168 BCE, Antiochus, the king of the Syrian-Greek Empire, turns the Temple into a pagan house of worship and decrees that Jews cannot keep their religion.

How should the Jews react?

Side 2

Hellenizers

Jews who embraced Greek culture

Greek culture has so much to offer, with its great philosophers and beautiful art. Let's embrace their customs, not fight them.

I agree with _____

Sadducees

Jewish priests and upper class

We don't need the Oral Law to help us interpret the Torah. If anyone is to make interpretations, it should be our priests who run the Temple.

Generations of sages created the Oral Law, explanations and commentaries on the Torah.

Should Jews follow this Oral Law, or should we only follow the Torah?

Pharisees

Scribes and sages

Both the Written Law and the Oral Law were given to Moses at Mount Sinai. We need the Oral Law to help us understand the Written Law.

I agree with _____

Sages

Moderate Jewish leaders

The Roman armies are too powerful. If we surrender, we can find a way to preserve the Torah while living under Roman rule.

The year is 70 CE and Jerusalem is under siege, surrounded by the Romans.

Should the Jews surrender?

Zealots

Jewish rebels against Roman rule

We will not let Rome take over our capital city and continue choosing our leaders. We will fight to regain our glory in our own land.

I agree with _____

In some cases, when Jews fought back they won their battles, as the Maccabees did. At other times, they lost the fight, as the Zealots did. But at the same time, they found a way for Judaism and the Jewish nation to survive. Can you think of a great debate among Jews today? _____

Living without a Temple

In the year 70 CE, the Great Revolt failed. Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans, the Temple was destroyed, and the Jewish people were sent into exile. There would not be a Jewish state in Israel again for nearly 1,900 years. What was the key to the survival of Am Yisrael in its darkest times? How would the Jewish people pass down their teachings and traditions?

The famous sage Rabbi Akiva had an answer. When the Romans banned the study of Torah after the destruction of the Temple, he continued to teach it, despite the danger. He explained his reasons with a parable:



There was once a fox who tried to outwit the fish in a local river. Seeing the fish fleeing the fishermen's nets, the fox said, "Why don't you come out onto dry land? We'll live together." Recognizing the fox's wily plan, the fish replied that there may be danger in the river, but on the land they would surely die. (Talmud, Berachot 61b)

Like a fish that needs water to survive, the Jewish nation held onto its Torah when all else was lost, using its stories, teachings, and commandments to rebuild Jewish life after the great loss of the Temple. In the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora, Torah study and Jewish community became more important than ever.

Then and Now: The Shekel

The shekel coin was first mentioned in the Torah, when Abraham purchased land for "four hundred shekels of silver." (Genesis 23:16)



Then: Second Temple Period

During the Great Revolt against Rome, Jews minted their own coins. This silver shekel has the words "Holy Jerusalem" and a picture of a Jewish symbol, a red fruit with many seeds. Can you identify the symbol?



Now: Modern Israel

Today, the currency of the modern State of Israel is the New Israeli Shekel. Images on the coins help keep Jewish history alive. Why do you think a lyre is shown on the back of this half-shekel coin?

Creating Community: Synagogues and Schools

After the Temple was gone, Jewish life in ancient Israel, in Babylonia, and elsewhere began to focus more on the local community, including synagogues and Jewish schools. In the synagogue, the main activities were prayer services and the public reading of the Torah. In schools, boys learned to read the Tanakh so that they would be prepared to read the Torah portion and *Haftarah* in synagogue. When they got older, some students continued at another school where they studied the Oral Law. In Babylonia, sages studied the Oral Law in huge academies, and their discussions eventually became part of the Talmud.

Words to Know:

Beit Keneset

A synagogue, or Jewish house of worship, is called a **beit keneset** in Hebrew, which means "a place of gathering." What are some occasions on which Jewish congregants gather in the synagogue?



Uncovering Synagogue Secrets

Some of the oldest synagogues in the world have been discovered in Israel and even in Syria, Turkey, and Italy. The archaeological remains of these synagogues show us that Jews in the ancient world made sure to build synagogues wherever they lived.

The synagogue at Beit Alfa, a town in Israel, was discovered in 1929 and dates to late Talmudic times. We can learn about Jewish life at the time from artifacts such as this synagogue's mosaic floor.

What Jewish symbols can you find in the mosaic? _____

Why do you think these items were included in the synagogue floor? _____



Talk about It

Archaeology is the study of ancient remains. Israeli archaeologist Pesach Bar-Adon called it a "clasping of hands across the centuries." What do you think he meant by this?

Your Turn

Look closely at the Torah Ark in your own synagogue, and at pictures of other Torah Arks. Then design your own Torah Ark. Write a caption for your picture, describing how it is both similar to and different from others.