

Second Temple Lecture Notes
Humanities 124
Spring 2009

March 30, 2009
Kaplan

Outline

Guiding question: How did Jews survive the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE?

I. Earlier Jewish history

Origins of Jews
Connection to Sumeria and Egypt
Kingdom of Israel and First Temple
Religious role of the Temple
Literature: Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations

II. Lessons from the Exile

Split of Israel and Judah
Assyrians conquer Israel
Babylonians conquer Judah
The exile and guidance of Ezra
Acculturation

III. Return to Israel

Cyrus the Great
Rebuilding the Temple
Political and Religious turmoil
Guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah
Other Jewish populations
Literature: Job, Esther

IV. Hellenism

Alexander the Great
Spilt of the Greek Empire
Problems of Greek assimilation
Maccabees
Cultural adaptations
Spread of Judaism
Literature: Ecclesiastes, Maccabees I, II, III and IV

V. Romans

Pharisees, Sadducees and the Essenes
Seeds of Christianity
Failed Revolt
Destruction of the Second Temple
Second Failed Revolt

VI. Diaspora

Roman Empire
Shift to Babylonian community
Shift to rabbinic Judaism
Ethiopia
India

VII. Lessons of Survival

Terms

BCE – “before common era,” a non-denominational reference to BC (before Christ)

CE – “common era,” a non-denominational reference to AD (Anno Domini, i.e. In the year of our Lord).

Jew – a member of the Jewish people. Named for the tribe of Judah, the larger surviving tribe from the nation of Judah. There are about 14 million Jews in the world today (about 0.2% of the world population).

Hebrew – One of four Semetic languages. The language of Caanan prior to and during the First Temple Period. It is the lingual of (most of) the Torah. Modern Hebrew is spoken about seven million people in and around the modern state of Isreal.

Torah – The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Also called the Five Books of Moses or the Pentateuch.

Tanak – An acronym for the Hebrew Bible. The collection of books is broken into three sections, the Torah (law), the Neviim (prophets) and the Ketuvim (writings). The first letters of each section forms TaNaK.

Sanhedrin – A Jewish court system dating back to at least the First Temple. In addition to a national Sanhedrin that would decide social/political/religious matters, every Jewish community had such a court. Until the destruction of the Second Temple, members of the national Sanhedrin included Jewish aristocracy and high priests (kohanes).

Septuagint – The Greek Jewish community in the Ptolemaic Empire translated the Tanak into Greek. They also included other Jewish texts they thought were critical. This Greek bible become the Catholic Old Testament.

Apocrypha – This term refers to the books in the Septuagint that are not found in the Tanak. These same books are absent from the Protestant bible.

Diaspora – A reference to Jews outside the land of Israel (Palestine/Caanan) after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Synagogue – A building that serves as a center of local Jewish ritual and religious life. It comes from a Greek word meaning to “bring together.”

Assimilation – The process of being absorbed into a wider culture or society. Connotes the loss of identity

Acculturation – The process of adapting to a wider culture to one’s own culture or beliefs.

Timeline

First Temple Period

1050 – 920 BCE

Kings Saul, David and Solomon rule over a united Israel

993 BCE

King David attacks and captures Jerusalem. Jerusalem becomes City of David and capital of the United Kingdom of Israel.

950 BCE

King Solomon builds the First Temple.

920 BCE

Israel to the north and Judah to the south split. Jerusalem becomes the capital of the Judah.

722 BCE

Northern kingdom destroyed by the Assyrians. Population deported (ten lost tribes). Israel becomes a province of Assyria.

606 – 586 BCE

The Babylonians destroy Jerusalem in three waves of attacks. King Nebuchadnezzar burns Solomon's Temple in 586 BCE.

580 BCE

Exiles from Judah are settled near Babylon.

Second Temple Period

537 BCE

King Cyrus the Great, having conquered Babylon, allows the Israelites to return from the Babylonian captivity and rebuild the Temple.

515 BCE

Completion of the Second Temple. Judah (now a province of Persia) is called Yehud.

450 BCE

Jerusalem fortified.

455 BCE

Jewish Persian official, Nehemiah is sent to Jerusalem to supervise the community. He completes the walls of the city and improves the local economy. He enforces observance of the Sabbath and bans intermarriage of Jews with non-Jews.

428 BCE

Ezra, a Jewish priest and scribe arrives in Judah with authorization to instruct Jews there in the Laws of Moses. He begins a tradition of textual interpretation rather than prophecy to infer how to live as good Jews.

325 BCE

Judah now under Alexander. The region thrives as Judeans enjoy full citizenship of the Greek Empire.

312 – 175 BCE

The Greek Empire splits into Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires. The province of Judah is on the boundary. With border skirmishes, high taxes and invitations from both Empires to resettle in new cities in Egypt and Antioch, many Jews leave Judah to settle through the Greek world. Those who stay in and around

- Jerusalem endure political and economic turmoil and occasional periods of semi-autonomy.
- 175 – 165 BCE
Antiochus IV (Seleucid ruler of Syria) offers full citizenship to everyone who takes on a Greek lifestyle. He begins to appoint the high priests of the Temple, placing those willing to Hellenize Jews. After a revolt, Antiochus IV plunders the Temple.
- 165 BCE
The Hasmonean family from the Judean town of Modein lead a revolt against Hellenic Jerusalem. Essentially a civil war, the Hasmonean revolt led by Mattathias, seeks to oust assimilated Jews from Jerusalem and the Temple. The guerilla war is led by Mattathias' son, Judah the Maccabee (Judah the Hammer). The revolt succeeds and the Maccabees rededicate the Temple. The event is commemorated with the holiday Hannukah (which means "dedication" in Hebrew).
- 161 BCE
Judah signs an alliance with Rome. Beginning of Jewish settlements in and around Rome.
- 161 BCE – 63 BCE
Judah continues as an autonomous state ruled by a Hasmonean monarchy. The rulers become more and more Hellenized and embroiled in international politics.
- 63 BCE
Pompey conquers Judah and Judea becomes a vassal state of Rome.
- 50 BCE
Jews in Rome number in the tens of thousands. They begin to spread to other towns in Italy, Spain and North Africa.
- 37 BCE – 92 CE
Herod, a Roman-appointed governor, begins the Herodian Dynasty, ruling over Judea (or parts of it) until his great-grandson, Agrippa II, died in 92 CE. The rule is marked by opulence, high taxes and oppression.
- 25 CE
Census data suggests as many as three million Jews living in the Roman Empire.
- 65 CE
Different groups of Jews plan to revolt against Rome. Roman documents indicate about 600,000 people living in Jerusalem at this time.
- 67 CE
Vespian dispatched by Rome to put down the revolt. Infighting between factions in Jerusalem prevent any unified front to repel the Roman legions.
- 70 CE
After several months of siege, Titus takes the city and destroys the Second Temple. With the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, authority for Jewish practice and law falls to the rabbis (teachers). An academy is established at Yavneh by Yohanan ben Zakkai, a long-standing proponent of pacifism to Rome and vice-president of the Sanhedrin.

A primer on Jewish Holidays

Time

Day: A Jewish day starts at sunset and ends at the next sunset. This is based on Genesis; first there darkness and then there was light. So, all holidays begin at sunset.

Month: In the Jewish calendar, a new month begins with the first sliver of light after a new moon. This is a lunar calendar. Since the moon cycles every 29.5 days, Jewish months alternate between 29 and 30 days. The first day of any month is a half-day festival called Rosh Hodesh (literally head of the month.).

Year: Twelve lunar months is 354 days, 11 days short of a solar year. To keep the calendar close to the agricultural cycle, every few years, a thirteenth month is added to the year. There are seven leap-months every nineteen years.

Because the calendar is lunar, Jewish holidays move year-to-year relative to the Gregorian calendar we use today.

Sabbath

When: Every Friday at sunset to Saturday at sunset

Mood: Festive

Source: Genesis 1:31 – 2:3

Observance: Lighting candles, blessing over wine, breaking bread, refraining from work, community prayer, time with family, study of Torah

High Holidays

1. Rosh Hashanah (New Year)

When: Tishri 1 and 2

Mood: Festive

Source: Leviticus 23:24-25

Observance: Community prayer (all day), blowing the shofar (ram's horn), giving charity, refrain from work

Other: The ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur are called the Days of Awe and are a time of reflection, giving charity and asking forgiveness from those you have wronged.

2. Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)

When: Tishri 10

Mood: Reflective, sober

Source: Leviticus 23:24-25

Observance: Fasting, community prayer (all day), refrain from work

Pilgrim Festivals

1. Passover

When: Nissan 15

Mood: Festive

Source: Exodus, Ch. 12-15

Observance: A special dinner called a seder (literally 'order') which recounts the story of Exodus and how God brought the Jews from slavery to freedom.

Certain foods are symbolic of different parts and moods of the story. The name of the holiday refers to the tenth plague when the angel of death passed over the Jewish homes. For one week, Jews do not eat any food with yeast.

2. Shavuot (Weeks)

When: Sivan 6 (exactly 50 days after Passover)

Mood: Festive

Source: Exodus, 23:14-16

Observance: Bringing first fruits to the Temple (when there was a Temple), it is customary to stay up all night the night before Shavuot to study Torah with friends. The name refers to the counting of seven weeks between Passover and the giving of first fruits.)

Other: Also celebrated is the giving of the Torah

3. Sukkot (Booths)

When: Tishri 15 -21

Mood: Festive

Source: Leviticus 23:33

Observance: Build and "dwell" in a sukkah (a temporary building with at least three walls as our ancestors did in the wilderness, refrain from work the first two days.

Minor Holidays

1. Hannukah (Dedication)

When: Kislev 25 – Tevet 1

Mood: Festive

Source: Commemorate the Maccabee's victory and restoration of the Temple

Observance: Lighting candles, giving gifts, eating latkes (potato pancakes) and playing dradel

Other: Read Maccabees I in the Catholic Bible for more information. The miracle of hannukah is stressed (invented?) by later authorities after Israel is no longer a nation. This holiday began after the Torah was written.

2. Tu B'Shevat (Shevat 15)
When: Shevat 15
Mood: Festive
Source: Lev. 19:23-25
Observance: This is a standard for beginning to count the age of a tree for tithing purposes. Eating fruit is common on this day as is planting new trees. Sometimes called the New Year of the Trees. There is no reference in the Torah for setting this date over any other.
3. Purim (Lots)
When: Adar 14
Mood: Festive
Source: Book of Esther
Observance: Read the Book of Esther aloud, drinking heavily
Other: In Northern Europe, a Purim play as well, usually a parody in a contemporary setting. The name refers to the lots Haman drew to randomly pick a day for the destruction of the Jews.
4. Tisha b'Av (Av 9)
When: Av 9
Mood: Mourning
Source: Obscure of the day of the destruction of the Temple (both were destroyed on the same day of the year by tradition)
Observance: Half-day fast, no leather, reading the Book of Lamentations

New Holidays

1. Yom ha-Shoah (Day of the Holocaust)
When: Nissan 27
Mood: Mourning
Source: Holocaust
Observance: Community service of remembrance,
2. Israel Independence Day
When: Iyar 5
Mood: Festive
Source: Founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948
Observance: No common observance of liturgy has been established