

# King Solomon and the Future of the Temple

by Ahimaaz, Court Historian



Translated and Annotated by  
**Professor Solomon**

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Illustrated by Steve Solomon



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# King Solomon and the Future of the Temple

**K**ING SOLOMON STOOD IN THE ENTRANCE TO THE Cave of the Ages. His crown glinted in the flickering torchlight. “You wished to see me?” he said.

“Yes,” said Melchizedek. “Come in. I have some pictures for you to view. And a problem for you to solve. Please, have a seat.”

The mysterious priest gestured toward a chair. Solomon entered the cavern and sat down.

“I understand that a record number of worshipers came to the Temple last week,” said Melchizedek. “It’s hard to imagine Jerusalem without the Temple. But for how long will this sanctuary endure? For how many years will it stand?”

“The Temple’s fate is in GOD’s hands.”

“To be sure. But you have built something of historical import. Aren’t you curious as to what the future holds for it? Of course you are. So let’s take a look.”

Melchizedek clicked his remote and the giant screen on the cavern wall lit up.

“This first picture shows Mount Moriah twenty years ago,” he said. “That is to say, prior to construction of the Temple. Like a lonely monument, the Sacred Rock is silhouetted against the sky. A high place with a rock of power.

“And then, behold!” he said, clicking the remote. “Here’s the mount as it is today—crowned with GOD’S House, which encloses the Sacred Rock. What an awe-inspiring sight! You may be proud of your achievement, Solomon.

“But now let’s move into the future. This next picture shows the mount *two centuries hence*. The Temple still rises majestically from the summit. Of course, the holy shrine has begun to show its age. The exterior walls have lost their sheen. The twin pillars have acquired cracks. The bronze altar is encrusted with soot and no longer glints in the

sun. Time has taken a toll on this ‘temple for the ages,’ as your architect billed it.

“Brace yourself now for the next picture. Are you ready? Here’s Mount Moriah *four* centuries hence.”

Onto the screen came a scene of desolation. Solomon let out a gasp. Gone was the sanctuary on the mount. All that remained were toppled stones, charred beams, and remnants of walls. Weeds grew in profusion.

“You are viewing the ruins of the Temple,” said Melchizedek. “For GOD’s House has been plundered and razed. An infamous deed! It was ordered by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who had conquered Jerusalem. And it left the Israelites without a sanctuary or central altar. Why was this disaster allowed to happen? In the view of prophets of the time, GOD’s people had turned from Him; and such was their punishment. In any case, the Temple has been destroyed.\*

“Take a look, however, at this next picture. Like the phoenix—the mystic bird that is reborn from its ashes—a new Temple has risen from the ruins. Behold the Second Temple! Under the auspices of their next conqueror, Cyrus of Persia, the Israelites have rebuilt their sanctuary. Admittedly, the replacement is a modest structure. Gone is the monumental masonry, the skilled bronze work, the precision of design. No cedar wood or gold adorns the inner

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\* Solomon may not have been totally surprised to learn of its destruction. According to the Book of Kings, upon the completion of the Temple he had a dream. In it GOD warned him:

“But if you shall turn from following Me, you or your children, and will not keep My commandments and statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them—then will I cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this House, which I have hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight....

“And at this House, which shall be in ruins, shall everyone that passes by it be appalled, and shall whistle. And they shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land and to this House? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the Lord their GOD, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshiped them and served them. Therefore hath the Lord brought upon them this evil.” (1 Kings 9:6–9)

walls. This is a low-cost project—a ‘budget sanctuary.’ Still, Israel has its Temple back. The sacrifices have resumed. The pæans to GOD Most High once again rise heavenward. And the Divine Presence has returned to the mount.\*

“But conquerors come and go. A few centuries later, Alexander the Great—a Macedonian Greek—routed the Persians and added Jerusalem to his empire. And one of his successors was responsible for an abomination. As seen in this next picture.

“Behold, the Temple still stands. But do you see that statue beside the altar? It’s Zeus, chief god of the Greeks! The priests were compelled to sacrifice to Zeus, rather than to GOD Most High. And to sacrifice *pigs*. Fortunately, this oppression was short-lived; and the altar was reconsecrated to GOD.

“Now a sidelight to our history of the mount. Around this time there arose a rival temple—dedicated to GOD but located on Mount Gerizim. It was built by the Samaritans, who had had a falling-out with their compatriots in Jerusalem. Here’s a picture. Notice the stairway leading up the mountain—worship with a workout. This temple was in active use for several centuries, before its destruction.†

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\* The groundbreaking for the Second Temple was an emotional event. The Book of Ezra reports:

“And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord. . . . And they sang together, praising and thanking the Lord; for He is good, and His mercy toward Israel endureth forever. And all the people shouted with a great shout, as they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the House of the Lord was laid.

“But many of the priests and Levites and elders were ancient men, who had seen the first House; and when the foundation of this House was laid before their eyes, they wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy. So that the noise of the shouts of joy could not be discerned from the noise of the weeping; and the people shouted with a loud shout. And the noise was heard afar off.” (Ezra 3:10–13)

† The Samaritans have survived into the present day. Around three hundred of them still live on Mount Gerizim (and a few

“As Judea prospered, its sanctuary was deemed to be inadequate. Something more magnificent was needed. So the Second Temple was completely rebuilt. Footing the bill was Herod the Great—so-called for the great sums he lavished on fortresses, theaters, hippodromes, and other public works. The new shrine became known to history as Herod’s Temple—just as the original, by the way, became known as Solomon’s Temple. Take a look at this picture of it. Impressive, is it not? A wonder of the age—monumental—equal to anything in the Græco-Roman world. ‘He who has not set eyes upon the Temple of Herod,’ a rabbi would declare, ‘has not seen a beautiful building in his life.’\*

“Unlike the original Temple, it was constructed without the aid of Asmodeus and his crew of jinn. Instead, a thousand priests—trained as masons—and 9000 ordinary laborers toiled for many years. Note the enlarged platform, the porticoes and colonnades, the towering sanctuary. The courtyard was immense, yet could scarcely contain the pilgrims who crowded into it on holidays. Indeed, the courtyard was said to expand miraculously, to allow an unimpeded bowing of heads. And the Temple had a *magrefa*, or water organ—a musical instrument so loud it could be

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hundred more in a suburb of Tel Aviv). Though lacking a temple, they have kept alive an ancient rite: the sacrifice of a lamb on Passover.

The rival temples bring to mind a joke—about the Jew stranded on a desert island. When finally rescued, he was found to have constructed two synagogues. Why two? he was asked. The Jew pointed to one and said: “See that *shul* [synagogue]? That’s the one I go to. And see the one over there? That’s the one I refuse to go to!”

\* Josephus gives us a sense of its beauty:

“Now the outward face of the Temple in its front lacked nothing to surprise either men’s minds or their eyes. For it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight; and at the first rising of the sun, it reflected back a fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun’s own rays. But this Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a snow-topped mountain, for as to those parts of it as were not gilt, they were exceedingly white.” (*Wars of the Jews*, v, 5:4)

heard as far away as Jericho.

“Yet for all its glory, Herod’s Temple was fatally flawed. Look at the main gate. Attached to it is a golden eagle—the insignia of imperial Rome! For Herod was a puppet of the Romans—a vassal who ordered that sacrifices be offered to the Emperor.

“The eagle was seen as a bird of prey; the Romans, as oppressors. Finally, war broke out between the Jews and their overlords. The result was unprecedented death and suffering. And this.”

Melchizedek clicked to the next picture. And again a scene of desolation filled the screen.

“Herod’s Temple has been destroyed. Along with much of the city, it has been reduced to rubble. On the mount, only a retaining wall has been left standing.\*

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\* Months after the destruction, Rabbi Yohanan and his disciple Yoshi visited the ruins of Herod’s Temple.

“Woe to us,” said Yoshi, “that the sanctuary is wasted—the place where Israel atoned for its sins!”

“My son, be not aggrieved,” said Yohanan. “We have another means of atonement that will be just as effective. And what is that? *Acts of loving-kindness*. As it is said: ‘For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’”

And years later, Rabbi Akiba and his fellow sages were viewing the ruins. Suddenly a fox emerged from the remains of the Holy



“Several centuries pass—bringing us to this next picture. Alas for the mount! It has been left in a ruinous state. The Sacred Rock is barely discernible amidst rubble. Here and there a charred pillar has remained upright. That retaining wall has started to crumble. And amidst the ruins has been placed the statue of a Roman emperor—his stern eye fixed upon the wages of rebellion. The sacred site is desolate.\*

“More centuries pass. And take a look at this picture, if you can.” He clicked the remote. “Behold, alas. The holy mount has been further desecrated. It is being used as a dump.”

Melchizedek shook his head—as if unable to credit the base ways of man—and moved on to the next picture.

“Now this picture requires an explanation. This domed building is located not far from the mount, which can be seen on the right. It is called the Anastasis, or ‘Resurrection.’ Built by Emperor Constantine, the Anastasis is a Christian church. What is Christianity? We can’t get into that now. Suffice it to say that, on the site of this church, an execution took place—of Jesus of Nazareth; and that for Christians, Jesus’ death was a divine sacrifice that brought salvation to mankind. The Anastasis overlooks the ruins of

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of Holies. The sages began to weep—except for Akiba, who laughed. And Akiba asked his companions why they wept.

“Because,” one of them replied, “where only the High Priest could enter, now dwells a fox.”

“Then let me tell you why I laughed,” said Akiba. “Because we have been assured—by the prophet Zechariah—that GOD will return to His Holy Mountain. And that His people will again live joyfully in the Holy City.”

\* In the fourth century the Bordeaux Pilgrim (a Christian traveler whose name is unknown) visited the mount. “Two statues of Hadrian stand there,” he reports, “and not far from them, a pierced rock, to which the Jews come every year and anoint it, bewail themselves with groans, rend their garments, and so depart.”

By this time the Romans had rebuilt the city and renamed it *Ælia Capitolina*. Jews were forbidden access, except once a year: on the Ninth of Ab—the anniversary of the Temple’s destruction—they were allowed to visit the ruins on the mount and pray.

the Temple, which it was meant to supersede. And it had physically replaced a temple to Aphrodite. Thus, it represented the ascendancy of Christianity over both Judaism and paganism. Are you following any of this?\*

“In any case, our journey through time continues. Ponder this next picture. The mount has been cleared of both rubbish and rubble. The Sacred Rock has been uncovered. Just south of it, a simple wooden structure—a house of prayer—has been built. Who was responsible for this turn of events? Omar ibn al-Khattib, a conqueror from Arabia. His army had taken Jerusalem, under the banner of a new religion. That religion was Islam, or ‘submission.’ Founded by the prophet Muhammad, Islam revered the mount—as the site of the Temple, of the Sacred Rock, and of Muhammad’s ascension to heaven. Appalled to find it being used as a dump, Omar set out to restore the sanctity of the mount. He had it cleared; waited until three rains had cleansed it; then anointed it with incense and built a house of prayer. It was the beginning of a new era for Mount Moriah.†

“Now the rabbi said: ‘He who has not set eyes upon the Temple of Herod has not seen a beautiful building in his life.’ Absolutely. But the same may be said of the building you’re about to see. One of the most exquisite of all time! Feast your eyes upon an architectural gem.”

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\* Destroyed by Persian invaders in the seventh century, the Anastasis was rebuilt as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. That church was itself destroyed in the eleventh century by Hakim the Mad. The present-day Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built by Crusaders.

† Despite his position as caliph, Omar led a humble existence. Ralph Waldo Emerson describes him thus:

“His diet was barley bread, his sauce was salt; and oftentimes, by way of abstinence, he ate his bread without salt. His drink was water. His palace was built of mud; when he left Medina to go to the conquest of Jerusalem, he rode on a red camel with a wooden platter hanging at its saddle, with a bottle of water and two sacks, one holding barley and the other dried fruit.”

Upon Omar’s arrival in Jerusalem, the Sacred Rock (according to es-Siyuti’s *History of the Temple of Jerusalem*) spoke to him and welcomed him to the mount.

Melchizedek clicked the remote; and another domed building filled the screen.

“Behold, the Dome of the Rock. It was commissioned by Abd-al-Malik, who succeeded Omar as caliph. The work of Byzantine architects and craftsmen, the Dome of the Rock is a masterpiece. Its golden dome dazzles the eye. Its walls form a perfect octagon. And they are sheathed in mosaic—millions of tiny colored cubes.”

Melchizedek clicked to the next picture.

“Here’s a view of the interior. Note the elegant proportions, intricate decoration, rich carpeting. And see how the Sacred Rock emerges from the floor—an eruption of stone! Centerpiece of the shrine, the Rock is surrounded by screens and ringed with marble columns. During the day, the Dome’s interior is lit by sunlight from the lunettes. At night, hundreds of lamps are kindled. Incense is frequently burning—hence the otherworldly haze.

“The Dome of the Rock was meant to replace the Temple—and to outdo it in splendor. Proud to have sponsored such a work, and not a little vainglorious, Abd-al-Malik declared upon its completion: ‘Behold, a man greater than Solomon is here!’\* ”

“So the Divine Presence had returned to the mount, proclaimed the adherents of Islam. This magnificent shrine was its new home. For the Jews, however, the Divine Presence had never left. They insisted that, despite the destruction of its abode, it had lingered on the mount. Where exactly had it lingered? *Here.*”

Onto the screen came the picture of a ruin—a massive wall, half-buried in rubble.

“In order to enlarge the Temple platform, Herod’s engineers had built retaining walls. One of those walls survived. For some reason, the Romans left it standing.

“The Jews revered this wall, as the sole remnant of the Temple. Allowed now to reside in the city, they gathered

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\* Similarly, when Emperor Justinian completed the Hagia Sophia—the monumental church in Constantinople—he said: “Glory be to GOD who has thought me worthy to accomplish so great a work. O Solomon, I have vanquished thee!”

here to bask in the Divine Presence. They wept and prayed. And they begged GOD to restore the Temple.\*

“Now here’s the Dome of the Rock a few hundred years later, as seen from Mount Scopus. Thrice damaged by earthquakes, the shrine has been rebuilt and still dominates the city. Crowned with a crescent, it proclaims the Glory of GOD and the triumph of Islam.†

“But then one day the chandelier snapped loose. An elaborate fixture with 500 lamps, it came crashing down on the Rock. The occurrence was deemed an ill omen. And such was indeed the case. For take a look at this next picture.

“Here’s the Dome of the Rock a century later—seemingly unchanged. But look closely. Atop the dome, *a cross has replaced the crescent*. The shrine has passed into Christian hands. It has been converted to a church and renamed *Templum Domini*—the Temple of the Lord.\*\*

“But the change was short-lived. Jerusalem fell to the Seljuk Turks, led by Saladin; and the building was reconsecrated as an Islamic shrine.

“And we come now to the sixteenth century and the rule of the Ottoman Turks. Their greatest sultan was Suleiman the Magnificent—your namesake, by the way. And one of Suleiman’s accomplishments was to renovate the Dome of the Rock. The exterior walls were reclad in marble and blue ceramic tile. The doors were restored to their original splendor. Stained glass was added to the lunettes. Here’s a

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\* Heaven, too, was said to weep at night for the lost Temple. The morning dew that clung to the wall was its tears.

† “At dawn,” writes al-Muqaddasi, a tenth-century traveler, “when the light of the sun first strikes on the cupola, and the drum catches the rays, then is this edifice a marvelous sight to behold, and one such that in all Islam I have never seen its equal.”

According to al-Muqaddasi, the Dome of the Rock was meant to surpass in grandeur the churches of Jerusalem.

\*\* During the Crusader era, the mount became the headquarters of the Knights Templar. These warrior-monks studied the architecture of the Dome of the Rock (which they believed to be Solomon’s Temple), and incorporated their findings into the design of cathedrals.

picture. As you can see, the shrine is more impressive than ever.

“And what of the holy place of the Jews? What had become of that venerated wall? Suleiman improved it too. The space in front of it was cleared, to create an enclave for prayer—as seen in this next picture.

“Behold the wall. And behold a melancholy ruin. Fifteen centuries of rain have eroded the massive blocks of limestone. Snapdragons have sprouted from the cracks between them. Sparrows have nested in crevices. And the lower stones have become polished, from the hands of innumerable worshipers. Those stones have also been cleansed—by tears. For there has been much weeping at the Wailing Wall, as the ruin shall become known.\*

“And we come now to the final—and most pertinent—picture. I want you to look at it, then go home and ponder. For I have a problem for you to solve.”

An aerial view appeared on the screen. It showed both the Dome of the Rock and the surviving wall of the Temple.

“Here’s the mount in the twenty-first century. Some further changes have occurred. The golden dome has been restored. The environs have been landscaped. And in front of the Western Wall, as it’s now known, a spacious plaza has been created.

“Muslims and Jews share the city. But a violent antagonism exists between them. The focal point of their conflict is the mount—the Haram es-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, to the Muslims; the Temple Mount to the Jews. For both it is a holy place—a gateway to heaven. Both revere the site. Yet their antagonism precludes an amicable sharing.

“Moreover, there are Jews who want to build a Third Temple upon the mount. Indeed, one group—the Temple Mount Faithful—has already hewn the cornerstones. Needless to say, their plan enrages the Muslims. So how are these conflicting claims to be reconciled?

“You are renowned, Solomon, for your wisdom. For your mental acumen. You have won acclaim as an arbiter of legal

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\* The wall is known to Muslims as “al Burak”—after Muhammad’s winged horse, whom he tethered here during his Night Journey.

disputes and a solver of riddles. So here's the problem that I want you to ponder. *How can the mount be shared?* How can it serve both parties? How can this rivalry be resolved? What is the answer? *Is there an answer?* Return to your palace and put your mind to work. All right? Go then. Before you leave, however, I could use your help with something."

With a weary groan, Melchizedek rose and tapped on the giant hourglass beside his seat.

"This confounded thing is about to run down," he said. "It needs to be turned. Could you lend me a hand?"

Together they took hold of the hourglass and inverted it.

"That's quite an hourglass," said Solomon, watching the sand trickle down. "What's its function?"

"It's purely decorative. Lends some 'atmosphere' to the Cave of the Ages. But I've wrenched my back trying to turn it. So your help was appreciated."

"Glad to help."

"If you solve the problem, come tell me," said Melchizedek. "Though even the wisdom of Solomon may fail to crack this nut."

"I'll do my best. One quick question before I go?"

"Surely."

"What exactly is time?"

"The antechamber of Eternity."

Solomon nodded and departed the cavern.\*

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\* Of the marvels that Ahimaaz describes in his tales, the Cave of the Ages (which appears several times) may be the most problematical for modern sensibilities. Our skepticism may relent sufficiently to admit the possibility of a magic ring—a flying carpet—even a jinni. But the notion that time is an illusion, and may be explored from a cave near Jerusalem, seems far-fetched. And even if the Cave of the Ages is just a literary conceit, how could Ahimaaz have known the future of the mount? Surely this tale—glaringly anachronistic—is the interpolation of a latter-day editor. Or else Ahimaaz (supposedly a member of Solomon's court) was himself latter-day, and his work, pseudepigraphic. How else to account for his knowledge of future events?

Yet time may be more mysterious than we imagine. And for

any reader wishing to explore that mystery, I would recommend a forgotten book entitled *An Experiment with Time*.

Written by J.W. Dunne, a British engineer and philosopher (and gentleman—some of the experiment was conducted from an armchair in the library of his club), *An Experiment with Time* created a stir when published in 1927. Despite his assurances that it “demands from [the reader] no previous knowledge of science, mathematics, philosophy, or psychology” and “is considerably easier to understand than are, say, the rules of Contract Bridge,” much of the book is abstruse. But the philosophical portions—which delve into ontology and epistemology, and employ such terms as infinite regress, retro-causality, and quantum-interconnectedness—may be skipped. At the core of the book is a simple experiment, which Dunne performs, explains, and urges the reader to repeat.

Dunne had been bewildered by a series of precognitive dreams. In one of them, he had dreamt of the eruption of a volcano on a French island and the death of 4000 islanders. When the day's newspaper arrived, it headlined the eruption of Mount Pelée on Martinique and a death-toll of 40,000. Seemingly, the horrifying dream had been prompted by his *later* reading of the newspaper account. Of his predictive dreams, this one was the most dramatic; but all were perplexing. They seemed to violate rules far more fundamental than those of contract bridge.

His experiences led Dunne to make a study of the relationship between time and dreaming. He went to sleep each night with a notebook and pencil under his pillow. And in the morning he quickly recorded his dreams, before they faded from memory. When he compared their images with the occurrences in his daily life, Dunne made a startling discovery. Generally, a dream derived its imagery from vivid or unusual happenings within a space of 24 hours—24 hours *in either direction*. That is to say, his dreams were influenced by events of both the past day and the next! Impossibly, they were “comprised of images of past experiences and images of future experiences blended together in approximately equal proportions.”

Extending his study to the dreams of friends and relatives, Dunne found similar correlations. He realized that he had discerned a “hitherto overlooked peculiarity in the structure of Time.” And he concluded that the standard model of time—a series of events flowing into the future—was simply a mode of human perception. Indeed, “past” and “future” were nothing more than artifacts of the waking mind. Beyond our daily experi-



“Yes?” said Melchizedek, awakening from a nap. He squinted at the figure standing in the entrance to the Cave of the Ages. “Who’s that there?”

“’Tis I, Solomon. You gave me a problem to solve—and said to report the solution, if I came up with one.”

“Which problem was that?”

“It concerned the rivalry over Mount Moriah.”

“O yes. A knotty problem indeed. A real puzzler. So, have you found a solution?”

“Possibly.”

“Come in and let me hear it.”

King Solomon entered, approached Melchizedek, and stood before the priest.

“The situation that you described was dire,” said Solomon. “Two parties were at odds over the mount. They were clashing violently. What could be done? I considered a couple of solutions. One was to build the Temple elsewhere—to find an alternative site. But I quickly rejected that idea. After all, the original site had been specified by a prophet. And the Sacred Rock was an essential part of it.

“Another solution was to declare the Temple unneeded,

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ence existed a timeless Present.

What was the significance of his findings? For one thing, Dunne pointed out, they provided an explanation for the curious phenomenon of *déjà vu*. (Why do we feel that something has happened before? Because we *dreamt* of it the previous night.) But more importantly, they supported belief in the immortality of the soul. For if time was an illusion, Eternity was real.

Can it be then? Are dreams a window into the nature of the cosmos? Can they afford us a glimpse into the meaning of existence? Can we explore the deepest of mysteries while lying in bed (or lounging in an armchair at our club)?

The reader may repeat Dunne’s experiment and decide for himself.

since a shrine to GOD already graced the mount. I am referring to the Dome of the Rock. But I rejected that idea too. To be sure, the Dome was a worthy shrine. But it was not GOD's *House*—His personal residence—His earthly abode. It could not serve the special needs of the people He had designated as His servant. So what possibilities remained? Though I racked my brains, I couldn't think of any.

"Then I tried a mental stratagem. I asked myself: What is the essence of the Temple? What is its prime function? What is the *main thing* that happens there? By focusing on that, perhaps I'd get a glimmering of the solution. So I pondered the purpose of the Temple. What was it for? Why do we go there?"

"And a number of things came to mind. We visit the Temple to pray to GOD. To give thanks unto Him and praise Him. To bask in His Presence and commune with Him. And to ask for His help or forgiveness.

"But above all, we go there to *sacrifice*. We bring offerings to the altar, in homage to GOD. We give up something that is alive or precious. In return, He listens to our prayers—watches over us—forgives our sins. For nothing pleases Him more than a sacrifice. Except, perhaps, a good deed."

"To be sure," said Melchizedek.

"Now if the Temple were rebuilt, the sacrifices could resume. Once again gifts could be offered up to GOD. And presumably, He would take His usual pleasure in them. He would welcome our oxen and sheep and doves.

"Yet perhaps—in that time of contention—GOD would prefer a different sort of sacrifice. Which brings me to my proposed solution."

"I'm listening."

"My solution would be this. Sacrifice the Temple itself."

"How now? The Temple itself, you say?"

"Why not? GOD yearns for peace among men, does He not? Yet here is His own House, His earthly abode—the *cause* of enmity and strife. So why don't we just relinquish it? Let it go? Surely the Lord of the Universe can get along without an abode. And surely He would be pleased by our sacrifice—our giving up of something so precious. Anyhow,

that's my idea."

Solomon concluded with an expansive gesture, and awaited Melchizedek's response.

The priest took a sip from his goblet. "An interesting line of thought," he said.

"But not a solution?"

"I must refrain from further comment. You see, the rivalry over the mount is no accident of history. It is a part of GOD's plan. He *arranged* it to happen—as a test."

"What kind of test?"

"Of man's capacity to resolve his differences. Can these bitter enemies make peace with one another? Can they figure out how to share the mount? Will they place its sanctity ahead of their own advantage? It is a test for them—and for mankind, whom they represent. Let's hope they can work things out. In any case, I just wanted to hear your thoughts on the matter. You may go now."

"One quick question before I go?"

"Certainly."

"Why did GOD select the Hebrews, and not some other people, to be His servant? Why us? Were we especially virtuous?"

"Are you kidding?" said Melchizedek. "You're as prone to wrongdoing as any people. Perhaps even more so. Why the Hebrews, you ask? Take a look at this."

He clicked his remote. The screen lit up, showing a map of the world.

"Here's the geography of the earth," said Melchizedek. "Now where might GOD have placed His sanctuary? Way out in Australia? I think not. He wanted a central location, from which knowledge of Him might emanate to the ends of the earth. Canaan was just such a place. Look how it is situated, at the point where Asia, Africa and Europe come together. Moreover, it is crisscrossed by trade routes. A central location and a crossroads—just what was needed for His Name to go forth. In other words, the *place* was selected, not the people. The Hebrews happened to be in the area. So they were asked—or commandeered, if you will—to serve as GOD's people."

"A case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

“You can put it that way, if you like. GOD needed a people to serve Him; and the locale was to be Canaan. But the people could be anyone—the Philistines, the Hittites, the Edomites. Whoever was around and willing. If the *Eskimos* had been residing in the region, it might have been them.”

“Who are the Eskimos?”

“I’ll show you,” said Melchizedek, clicking the remote.

Onto the screen came the image of a man in a parka. He was holding a spear and grinning. Behind him stretched a desolate expanse of ice.



“Behold, an Eskimo,” said Melchizedek. “His people inhabit the frozen Arctic, the northernmost part of the earth. They claim no land—for there is no land up there. Only shifting sheets of ice. Roaming about on the ice, the Eskimo hunts and fishes. For a dwelling he takes blocks of snow and builds an igloo—a temporary hut. Within its narrow confines he shelters his family, prays to his gods, dines on raw meat. And dozes at night, as the Arctic winds howl about his hut and the ice crackles beneath him.”

Solomon looked at the Eskimo and shook his head. “How

diverse are the peoples of the earth,” he said. “And how manifold the works of GOD.”\*

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\* How serious is the wish for a restored Temple?

In *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, Samuel Sandmel writes: “The question of whether, historically, Christians broke with the Temple before its destruction in 70, or only thereafter came to view Jesus as their ‘temple not made with hands,’ is difficult to answer. But it is clear that the Temple was not an abiding force in Christianity. Neither was it an abiding force in Judaism, though prayers for its restoration continue in traditional Judaism. But such prayers are more traditional piety than reflective of genuine desire for such a restoration.”

With the destruction of the Temple, substitutes were devised for the sacrificial rites that had been performed there. Yom Kippur (the day on which a goat had been sacrificed to atone for the nation’s sins) was adapted for the synagogue. And with the rise of the Talmud, the *study* of the laws of sacrifice replaced the actual sacrifices.

But the prime substitute was the Jewish home. With its prayers and sanctifying rituals, it became a *mikdash ma’ot*, or miniature sanctuary. The family table took the place of the altar. Said Rabbi Yohanan: “So long as the Temple stood, the altar made atonement for Israel. Now a man’s table makes atonement for him.” In particular the Sabbath table. Its white tablecloth represents purity. Its candles recall the great menorah that illumined the Temple. The washing of hands, the blessing of bread, the ceremonial drinking of wine—all are echoes of the Temple service.

An Orthodox Jew still prays for the restoration of the Temple. But it may be simply a pious ideal—a remembrance of the ancient seat of the Divine Presence.