

JERUSALEM IN THE LITERATURE
OF THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

by

Prof. David Flusser*

The present article deals with various concepts of Jerusalem in the Jewish literature of the post-biblical period of the Second Commonwealth. Its main intent is to show that eschatological hopes for the New Jerusalem came into existence and were developed not as a consequence of the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus, but as a fruit of the destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar. This has important implications for Christian concept of the New Jerusalem and for its prehistory.

The idea of the uniqueness of Jerusalem in Judaism of the Second Temple period is well known. In *Ben Sira* the future hopes for Jerusalem are linked to the eschatological ingathering of Israel, and so it was always in Judaism of the Second Temple period: in the future God will build Jerusalem and gather the dispersed Israel. These were the two central eschatological motifs of Judaism of antiquity (together with the hope that humanity would convert to the one God of Israel). The concept of the Messiah was not so central and could be ignored. In the book of *Tobit* (which according to this writer was composed before the Persian period), as in the book of *Ben Sira*, the personal Messiah is lacking; rather, the hopes of the last days are centred around Jerusalem and the ingathering of the dispersed.

This lack of messianic emphasis was evidently also the case in the presumed older form of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, the most important Jewish prayer. Originally, the only two eschatological benedictions praised God who gathers the dispersed of His people Israel and who builds Jerusalem. These two eschatological benedictions followed each other; their biblical basis was Psalm 147:2: "The Lord builds Jerusalem; he shall gather the dispersed of Israel." But over a period of time, the hope for a personal Messiah was included in the benediction for Jerusalem, or in an added special benediction for the offspring of David. This special benediction existed by the first century CE, for it is reflected in the Benedictus (Luke 1:68-71).

* Summarized in English by Prof. Flusser from his own article in *V'Im Bigvuroth*, a homage to Reuben Mass and his wife on their 80th birthdays, Jerusalem, 1974, pp. 263-294.

Between the benediction for the ingathering of the dispersed and that for Jerusalem, three new benedictions were added. It is not possible to decide if this was a gradual development, or if all three were added at the same time. The writer tries to show that these three benedictions correspond to the three religious groups of ancient Judaism: the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Pharisees. This would mean that these three benedictions originated in the Maccabean period, and that their *terminus a quo* is the time of John Hyrcanus. The second of these benedictions is the famous *birkat haminim*, the benediction concerning the heretics. The writer puts forth several new arguments in order to show that this benediction is pre-Christian, and therefore originally could not have referred to Christians at all, but rather referred to separatists such as the Essenes.

In the following pages, the writer argues that the letter at the beginning of II Macc. (1:10-2:18) actually was written by Judas Maccabeus at the time at which the Temple was purified. In this letter the hero and leader of the Jews writes to the Jews of Egypt; he speaks about the purification of the Temple, and connects this action with the hope of the ingathering of the dispersed. So also in the letter of Judas Maccabeus the two main motifs, Jerusalem and the end of the diaspora, are linked together.

In order to illustrate the hope of a better future for Jerusalem under Roman yoke, the writer quotes Luke 2:38: Anna brought the good news about the birth of the Messiah "to all who awaited the liberation of Jerusalem". This resembles the inscriptions on the coins issued during the two Jewish revolts against Rome: "the liberation of Zion" and "the freedom of Zion" from the first revolt, and "the liberation of Jerusalem" from the Bar Kochba period.

During Roman domination, the hopes for Jerusalem were linked to a sense of anguish. There were Jews who hoped that even if the Land of Israel should fall, Jerusalem itself would not be conquered (see Enoch 56:5-8). There was another hope that even if Jerusalem should fall, the House of God, the Temple, would be preserved. Others thought that, according to their interpretation of the Scriptures, the Temple would also be destroyed, as the First Temple had been. This was the opinion of Jesus (Luke 21:20-24), who hoped that Jerusalem finally would be liberated from the yoke of the Gentiles.

The writer also speaks about the Jewish concept of a heavenly Jerusalem. Normally, the belief in the Temple and Jerusalem in heaven attempted to express only the parallel between heaven and earth. The concept of an eschatological New Jerusalem was a totally separate idea: at the end of days the ideal city would be built by God. The concept of a heavenly Jerusalem is not a consequence of the destruction of the Second Temple; it developed from eschatological hopes following the destruction of the First Temple. But popular belief combined the two concepts, that of Jerusalem in heaven and

that of the ideal Jerusalem of the last days, and so came into existence the concept that the heavenly Jerusalem would descend to earth. This concept was first attested to in the Book of Revelation (3:12, 20:2, 10), and this belief became popular among Jews of the Middle Ages.

Professor David Flusser is professor of Judaism of the Second Temple period, and of early Christianity, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.