

40th ANNIVERSARY OF THE RE-UNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

Aggadot About Jerusalem

(This material has been excerpted from [Rejoice With Jerusalem](#) by Jules Gutin, edited by Rabbi Stephen Garfinkel, a USY sourcebook publication, revised 1984. Reprinted here with permission.)

I. How did Jerusalem get its name?

The place on which Abraham had erected the altar [for the binding of Isaac] was the same whereon Adam had brought the first sacrifice, and Cain and Abel had offered their gifts to God – the same whereon Noah raised an altar to God after he left the ark; and Abraham, who knew that it was the place appointed for the Temple, called it *Yireh* [meaning “fear”], for it would be the abiding place of the fear and service of God. But as Shem [Noah’s son] had given it the name Shalem, Place of Peace, and God would not give offence to either Abraham or Shem, He united the two names and called the city by the name of Jerusalem. (*Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, JPS 1961; volume 1, 285*)

II. How was the site chosen for the Holy Temple?

The Hebrew word *mora*, meaning awe, fear, and reverence, is taken by some to be a component of the name Moriah: *Moraiah* – awe of God. The mountain of Moriah is identified as “the place from which the fear of God went forth into the world.” For the ancient psalmist sings: “Awful [*mora*] is God out of thy holy places; the God of Israel, He giveth strength and power unto the people.”

Others derive the name Moriah from the Hebrew word *yirah*, which also stands for awe and reverence: “It was called Mount Moriah because the reverence [*yirah*] of the Holy One, blessed be He, caused it to form into a mountain.” (*Zev Vilnay, Legends of Jerusalem, JPS, 1973; citing Ta’anit 16a; Bereshit Rabbah 55; Psalm 68:36*)

The Holy One, blessed be He, revealed himself to our father Abraham: “And [He] said unto him: ‘Abraham’; and he said: ‘Here am I’; and he said ‘Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.’ And Abraham... went unto the place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.”

The sages wondered how this place looked from afar, and they said: “We learn that at the beginning the place was low; whereas the Almighty, blessed be He, chose it to set His divine Presence and to build His Temple thereon. He said: ‘The King should not dwell in low places, but in lofty and sublime regions which appear to the eyes of all.’ Forthwith, the Almighty, blessed be He, prompted the hills around the valley to foregather in one place to form a high mountain for the seat of the divine Presence. Wherefore it is called the Mountain of Moriah, for it was created through reverence [*yirah*] for God the Almighty.”

“And [Abraham] saw the place afar off... --What did Abraham see? – He saw a pillar of fire reaching from earth to heaven. He said to Isaac: ‘My son, dost thou see anything over one of yonder hills?’

Isaac answered: ‘Yes, father!’ ‘What dost thou see?’ ‘I see a pillar of fire reaching from earth to heaven.’”

“Then Abraham knew that God had accepted and pardoned the youth Isaac as an offering.” (*Vilnay, Legends of Jerusalem, citing Exodus Rabbah 80:15, Genesis 22:1-4*)

III. The Beauty of Jerusalem

- 1) Ten portions of beauty descended to the world. Jerusalem acquired nine. (*Kiddushin 49b*)

- 2) Whoever did not see Jerusalem in her glory never saw a beautiful city. He who did not see the Temple never saw a magnificent building. (*Sukkah 51b*)
- 3) Brides in Jerusalem never had to use perfumes because of the fragrance of the incense. (*Yoma 39b*)
- 4) A snake or a scorpion never hurt anyone in Jerusalem. No one ever said to his friend, “There is no room for me to spend the night in Jerusalem.” (*Yoma 21a*)
- 5) There is no love like the love of Torah; there is no wisdom like the wisdom of the Land of Israel; there is no beauty like the beauty of Jerusalem. (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan ch. 28*)
- 6) In commenting upon Psalm 122:3, “Jerusalem, which is built as a city that is compact together,” the Talmud states that being “compact together” means “the city that unites all Jews in companionship.”
- 7) The world is like the human eyeball: the white of the eye – these are the oceans surrounding the world; the black – this is the dry land; the pupil – this is Jerusalem, and the lens – this is the Temple, may it be speedily rebuilt in our days! (*Derekh Eretz Zutah 9:26*)
- 8) There is a Midrash about Jerusalem’s capacity to absorb many pilgrims at festival times. The verse upon which the interpretation is based is, “All the rivers go to the sea, yet the sea is not full.

“All the rivers go to the sea” (Ecclesiastes 1:7): All Israel gather together only in Jerusalem, going up there at the appointed festivals every year. “Yet the sea is not full,” but Jerusalem never becomes full to overflowing. (*Kohelet Rabbah 1:20*)

9) Jerusalem's obvious disadvantages were often turned around in her favor. R. Dostai b. Yannai said: "Why are the hot springs of Tiberias not in Jerusalem? So that the Festival pilgrims should not say: 'Had we merely made the pilgrimage to bathe in the hot springs of Tiberias it would have sufficed for us,' with the result that the pilgrimage would not have been made for its own sake." (*Pesachim 8b*)

10) There were, of course, idealized versions of what Jerusalem would be like after it was rebuilt.

Rabbi Yochanan said: Every single tree that strangers have taken away from Jerusalem will be restored to it by the Holy One, Blessed be He. (*Eisenberg, Jerusalem Eternal, p. 67*)

11) The Holy One, Blessed be He, is destined to add to Jerusalem as far as a horse can run and cast its shadow. (*Pesachim 50a*)

12) They said to the Messiah, "Where do you wish to dwell?" What a question to ask! On Zion, my Holy Mountain. (*Yalkut Shimoni, pg. 620*)

13) Simeon b. Gamliel declared that all nations will in time to come gather together in Jerusalem. (*Avot d'Rebbe Natan 35*)

14) Jerusalem will be rebuilt only when the exiles have been gathered there. So if someone tells you that all the exiles have returned but Jerusalem has not yet been built, do not believe him, for it says (Psalms 147:2), "The Lord builds up Jerusalem" and only after that does it say, "He gathers together the dispersed of Israel." (*Tanhuma, Noah 11*)

15) Jerusalem is destined to keep rising until it reaches the throne of Glory. (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahanna, Piska 20 end*)

IV. Why was Jerusalem destroyed?

1. Why was Jerusalem destroyed?

Jerusalem was destroyed only because of the desecration of the Sabbath.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the morning and evening prayers were abolished.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the children of the schools remained untaught.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the people did not feel shame toward one another.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because no distinction was drawn between the young and the old.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because one did not warn or admonish the other.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because much of scholarship and learning were despised.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because there were no longer men of hope and faith in their midst.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because her laws were founded upon the strict letter of the Torah and were not interpreted in the ways of mercy and kindness.

(Vilnay, Legends of Jerusalem, citing Shabbat 119b, Yoma 9b, Tosefta Menahot 13:22, Zuta 15:11, Yalkut Shimoni Isaiah 394, Seder Eliyahu Zuta)

2. In dealing with the destruction of the Second Temple, the rabbis also discussed their theories as to why the First Temple was destroyed.

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of the three elements which existed in it: idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed.

...But why was the Second Temple destroyed, since at that time people were involved in study, *mitzvot*, and deeds of kindness? Because at that time there was

senseless hatred among the people. This teaches that senseless hatred is as powerful an evil as idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed! *Eichah Rabbah 1:33*)

3. The destruction of Jerusalem resulted from Kamza and Bar Kamza. A certain man had a friend named Kamza and an enemy named Bar Kamza. Once he gave a party and said to his servant, "Go and bring me Kamza." The servant went and brought Bar Kamza. When the man [throwing the party] found him there he said, "Listen, you tell tales about me; what are you doing here? Get out." The other responded, "Since I am here, let me stay and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink." He said, "I won't." "Then let me pay for half the party." "No", said the other. "Then let me pay for the whole party." He still said, "No," and then took him by the hand and put him out. The other said, "Since the rabbis were sitting there and didn't stop him, this shows that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them to the government." He went and said to the emperor, "The Jews are rebelling against you." He said, "How can I know this?" He replied, "Send them an offering and see whether they will offer it [as a sacrifice]." So [the emperor] sent a fine calf with him [Bar Kamza]. While he was on the way he caused a blemish on its upper lip, some say it was on the white of its eye. It was in a place where we [Jews] consider it a blemish [and, thus, not fit for sacrificing] but they do not. The rabbis were inclined to offer it in order not to offend the authorities. R. Zechariah b. Abkulas said to them, "People will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar." They proposed to kill Bar Kamza so that he not go and inform against them. However, R. Zechariah b. Abkulas said to them, "Is one who blemishes a consecrated animal to be put to death?" Then R. Johanan remarked, "Through the scrupulousness of R. Zechariah b. Abkulas our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt and we ourselves exiled from our land." (*Gittin 55b-56a*)

The Sense of Loss

1. Rahavah said in R. Judah's name: The logs of Jerusalem were from cinnamon trees. When they were lit, their aroma pervaded all of *Eretz Yisrael*. But when Jerusalem was destroyed, they were hidden, with only as much as a grain of barley remaining – and that is to be found in the queen's secret collection. (*Shabbat 62b-63a*)
2. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said in the name of Rabbi Joshua, "Since the day the Temple was destroyed there has been no day without a curse. The dew did not come down as a blessing and the fruits have lost their taste. (*Mishnah Sotah 9:12*)
3. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, "Since the day Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, it is as if there is no joy before the Holy One, blessed be He – until He rebuilds Jerusalem and returns the Jewish people to it. (*Yalkut Shimoni Eichah 1009*)
4. *And her tears are on her cheeks* (Lamentations 1:2): In memory of her young men. When the enemy entered the Temple, they seized the young men and bound their hands behind them. They wept, and the tears ran down their cheeks. They could not wipe them away, and the tears bit into their cheeks like the scars of a sore. (*Eichah Rabbah 1:25*)

The Western Wall

1. R. Aha said, "The *Shechinah* [Divine Presence] will never move from the Western Wall, for it is said: 'Behold, he stands behind our wall' (Song of Songs 2:9). (*Exodus Rabbah 2:2*)

2. At the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, four commanders were each assigned one wall of the Temple to destroy. Three of the walls were destroyed, but the fourth commander failed to carry out the instructions to destroy his part.

When the Roman Caesar reproved him, the commander replied, “Had I destroyed my wall as the others did, none of the nations coming after you could have known how glorious was the work that you destroyed, O Caesar; but as this wall is left standing, succeeding generations will be able to gaze upon it and say, ‘see what a glorious thing Caesar conquered and destroyed!’”

Legend says that this wall which was not destroyed is the Western Wall – *ha-Kotel Ha-Maaravi*. (Vilnay, *Legends of Jerusalem* citing *Kohelet Rabbah 2:22, Eicha Rabbah 1:32*)

3. The second legend tells that different segments of the population were assigned various tasks in building the Temple. Though many of the wealthy citizens paid laborers to do their work, the poor – whose job it was to build the Western Wall – could not afford to hire people in their places. When the Temple was being destroyed, angels spread their wings over the Western Wall, protecting it. “The work of the poor,” they said, “shall never be destroyed.” (*Jerusalem The Eternal Bond, Don Publishing House, 1977*)

Hope for the Future

On another occasion, they were going to Jerusalem, and when they reached Mount Scopus, they rent their garments (in mourning). When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox run out from the Holy of Holies, and they all began to weep except R. Akiba, who laughed. They said to him: Akiba! You always surprise us. We weep, and you laugh. He said to them: Why do you weep? Should we not weep, they replied, when from the place of which is written: And the stranger that comes nigh shall be put to death

(Num. 1:5) a fox runs out, fulfilling the verse: For the mountain of Zion is desolate, the foxes will walk upon it. He replied: That is exactly why I laugh. The verse says: And I will take unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the Priest and Zechariah (Isa. 8:2). What is Uriah doing next to Zechariah. Uriah lived in the days of the First Temple, Zechariah in the days of the Second? Consider what Uriah said: Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps (Jer. 26:18). And what Zechariah said: Thus says the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age (Zech: 8:4) and he continues: And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing (8:5). God says: Behold, I have two witnesses: if the words of Uriah are nullified, so will the words of Zechariah. And now, said Akiba, I rejoice that the words of Uriah have been fulfilled, for now the words of Zachariah will ultimately be fulfilled too.

Hearing these words they said to him: Akiba! You have comforted us. May you be comforted by the steps of him that brings good times. (*Eicha Rabbah 5:18, in The Walls of Jerusalem, Raphael, p. 202-203*)

(The entire sourcebook, Rejoice With Jerusalem, can be purchased by contacting the USY Headquarters or the [USCJ Book Service](#).)