

THE TEMPLE AND THE COVENANT OF PEACE

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There was a temple in Jerusalem for over 1000 years. There may have been a temple in the city before it was captured by King David about 1000 BCE, but there is no record of this. The temple we are considering today was built by his son Solomon and dedicated about 950 BCE. It was damaged by enemies many times, repaired and restored, and was finally destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

To reconstruct the temple and its world we depend on written sources, mostly composed long after the events they describe and so influenced by memories both affectionate and hostile. The temple built by Solomon was almost destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and rebuilt after about 70 years by people who had been taken as exiles to Babylon and were eventually allowed to return and restore their city. These people also preserved and compiled most of the Hebrew Scriptures. They did not have entirely good memories of Solomon and his temple: he was a wise man, but he married foreign women, sold territory to the king of Tyre to pay the huge debts incurred in building the temple, and subjected his own people to forced labour to build it (1 Kgs 5.13ff). When he died, the people demanded an end to forced labour, and when his son and heir refused the request, most of the kingdom seceded and the city of Jerusalem was left with a huge temple and very little territory.

A generation before it was destroyed by the Babylonians, King Josiah had purged the temple in 623 BCE. He removed many cult items, banished many priests and closed the rural holy places. The account in the Bible (2 Kgs 23) implies that this was good; Protestant scholars call it 'King Josiah's reform'. Pressure for this revolution had been building for over a century, since the time of the prophet Isaiah, and in his book we see the first signs of what was to come. The revolutionaries and their heirs collected and preserved the holy books which today form the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. It is assumed that theirs was the only voice and theirs the only story.

Other voices, however, told a very different story: the temple purges had been a disaster when the older faith was destroyed.

Among the Dead Sea scrolls was a text that modern scholars have called the *Damascus Document*. This considers the time after the temple purges to be the age of wrath, the time when the LORD hid his face. Whoever wrote this text was one of the people who fled from the new ways in Jerusalem. Another text with a similar view is *I Enoch*, which the early Christians considered to be Scripture. It includes a cryptic history of Jerusalem which says that in the time of Isaiah¹ the people in the temple lost their spiritual sight and forsook Wisdom. Then the temple was burned and the chosen people were scattered. The people who built the second temple, that is, the exiles who returned from Babylon, were an apostate generation, people who had abandoned the older faith. In their view, the Hebrew Scriptures do not describe the original beliefs of Solomon's temple, but the views of the cultural revolutionaries who destroyed the older faith just before the Babylonians destroyed the older temple.

The covenant of peace, which is our interest today, was the world view of the first temple. The name Jerusalem includes the Hebrew word for peace, *šālôm*, and the name may mean 'foundation of peace', or 'he will see peace'.² One of the great kings was named Solomon, another name which includes the word 'peace', and so a covenant of peace is almost to be expected in the temple built in Jerusalem by Solomon.

Some traces of this world view escaped the work of the second-temple scribes and so can still be detected in the Hebrew texts. More has survived in texts from the people who fled from the age of wrath. Some fragments, usually identified as later fictional additions to the biblical stories, are memories of the old ways. One of these is the story of how Isaiah and his disciples fled from Jerusalem and took refuge in the desert.³ Others, like the *Damascus Document*, give details. This text begins by describing how some people were unfaithful and forsook the LORD. He hid his face from them and from the temple, but a faithful remnant remained who fled to the desert. They were the faithful priests who would return to all the glory of Adam.

The prophet Isaiah, who lived at the beginning of this turmoil, used the same images: his people had rejected the gentle waters of Shiloah, and he warned them they would be overwhelmed by the mighty River of Assyria (Isa.8.7). The LORD was hiding his face (Isa.8.17). One of his sons was named Shear Jashub, which means 'a remnant shall return'

¹ *I Enoch* 93.8-9. We think he is Isaiah, but he is not named.

² *Genesis Rabbah* 56.10. The Greek *Ierosolyma* was understood to mean 'holy salem'.

³ *The Ascension of Isaiah*.

and the child was to be a living sign. Isaiah lived among people of unclean lips - they had false teaching (Isa.6.5); and he - or perhaps a later disciple - wrote about the *covenant of peace*. He also wrote about the Virgin who would bear a son to rule in Jerusalem (Isa.7.14); about the Virgin Daughter Zion who would defend her city against enemies (Isa.37.22-29); about the woman who proclaimed to her people the good news that they would return to their home (Isa.40.9); about the afflicted woman who was also the city, who would be rebuilt and have more children (Isa.54.11-13). Isaiah knew of a Lady who has almost disappeared from accounts of Solomon's temple. Her sacred spring was the Gihon where the kings were anointed (1 Kgs 1.38), and the waters that flowed from it were the gentle waters of Shiloah that represented her teachings which had been rejected. *I Enoch* said the people had lost their spiritual sight when they had rejected Wisdom. Wisdom, then, was one of the Lady's names or titles.

The covenant of peace and the Lady, with her many names and titles, were both purged from the temple, and as we recover the one, so the other reappears also. The Lady passed into Christianity as Mary, the Mother of the Messiah, and the covenant of peace was restored at the Last Supper.

When Isaiah wrote about the covenant of peace, he said it would survive a flood like Noah's flood:

My steadfast love shall not depart from you,
And my covenant of peace shall not be removed (Isa.54.9-10).

It was a covenant of *hesed*, steadfast love, and this is the first of the words by which we can identify of covenant of peace.

In the biblical story of Noah's flood, the covenant was called 'the everlasting covenant' and its sign was the rainbow:

I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth ... I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth (Gen.9.13, 16).

When the oracles and writings of Isaiah and his disciples were collected into one book, someone wrote a preface which describes the great changes in Jerusalem over the centuries. The people of Jerusalem had rebelled against the LORD: the temple cult had become insincere; righteousness no longer lived there, and the faithful city had become a harlot. Instead of the Lady in Jerusalem whom Isaiah called the Virgin Daughter Zion, there was

another female figure. We see her in the Book of Revelation, the harlot city who was drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs (Rev.17.9) and who was burned as the saints rejoiced (Rev.19.1-3). Then the Lady returned, the Bride of the Lamb.

How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice.

Righteousness [once] lodged there, but now murderers (Isa.1.21).

Here are two more key-words: justice, *mišpat*, which means giving a right judgement, and righteousness, *šedeq*, which is the action that follows.

The covenant of peace can be summed up as based on loving kindness, *hesed*, which leads to right judgement/ justice, *mišpat*, which leads to right action/righteousness, *šedeq*, which leads to peace, *šālôm*.

The Lady was the Mother of the King, and he upheld the covenant of peace. Psalm 72 is a prayer for this ideal king and describes his reign:

Give the king thy justice O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son.

May he judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with justice.

The covenant words are the key here: justice and righteousness.

But the king's justice and righteousness did not just affect human society; they also impacted upon the whole creation:

Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,

And the hills, in righteousness.

Isaiah saw the covenant broken; he described the creation collapsing when the covenant of peace was abandoned. Here he uses the name 'the everlasting covenant':

The earth mourns and withers,

The world languishes and withers,

The heavens languish together with the earth:

For they have transgressed the laws,

Violated the statutes,

Broken the everlasting covenant.

Therefore a curse devours the earth ... (Isa.24.4-6a).

All the visions that are now called apocalyptic - the earth shaking, the stars falling from the sky, the heavens rolled up like a scroll (Rev.6.12 -14) - are prophetic visions of the broken

covenant. Isaiah said the catastrophe was caused by abandoning God's laws and statutes; Jeremiah said it was because people were skilled in doing evil, but did not know how to do good (Jer.4.22).

The prophet Hosea lived at the same time as Isaiah and addressed the same situation: the land was mourning and the people were languishing; even the animals, birds and fish were perishing. This was happening, he said, because there was no faithfulness, no loving kindness and no knowledge of God (Hos.4.1). 'My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge' (Hosea 4.6). The religious rites were observed, but their meaning had been lost.

Hosea also revealed, in just one reference, that there had been a covenant with Adam. Scholars often emend this line to make more sense, because a covenant with Adam is not mentioned anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures, but this covenant may well have been one aspect of the Adam story that did not survive the work of the second-temple scribes. It was the covenant of peace, although not named as such here.

I desire loving kindness and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God, *lōhîm*, rather than burnt offerings.
Like Adam they transgressed the covenant;
there they dealt faithlessly with me.
Gilead is a city of evildoers ... (Hos.6.6-8a).

Hosea and Jeremiah imply that the covenant of peace involved knowledge, and this fits well with the Adam and Eve story that survives in Genesis 2-3. They were intended to eat from every tree including the tree of life, which was a symbol of the Lady, and it imparted her wisdom. They chose the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After this choice they lost Eden, and the soil was cursed because of their choice. 'Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you ...' (Gen.3.17-18). The story Hosea knew - and we can only speculate here - described Adam and Eve in a covenant of peace and the land prospering. But they broke that covenant by abandoning loving kindness and the knowledge of God.

'Knowledge of God, *lōhî'm*' - or perhaps we should translate this 'knowledge of the angels' - was part of the covenant of peace, but the work of the second temple scribes has obscured what this knowledge was. Isaiah knew that when the Spirit of the LORD came upon the anointed one, his mind would be changed by:

The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isa.11.2).

Then there would be peace in the whole creation and ‘the earth would be full of the knowledge of the LORD’ (Isa.11.9). The second temple teachers replaced this heavenly knowledge with the Law of Moses:

For this commandment ... is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ (Deut.30.11-12).

A passage in the Book of Proverbs, however, which once described how the king went to heaven to receive this wisdom and knowledge, has been edited to hide its original meaning. The Greek translation says: ‘God taught me wisdom, and I have learned the knowledge of the holy ones’, but the current Hebrew says ‘I have not been taught wisdom and the knowledge of the holy ones’. Someone has changed just two letters: the Hebrew has *lamedh-aleph*, meaning ‘not’ and giving ‘I have not been taught wisdom...’ but the Greek was translated from a text that had *aleph lamed*, meaning ‘God’, and giving ‘God taught me wisdom ...’ (Prov.30.3). It is transmission such as this that has obscured the covenant of peace and the Lady of Solomon’s temple.

Hosea described the land of the broken covenant:

There is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery;
They violently cast off restraint ... (Hos.4.2, my translation).

The Old Greek translation here is slightly different; instead of ‘cast off restraint’ there is ‘poured out on the land’, giving:

There is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and adultery poured out on the land.

Isaiah used his parable about the LORD’s vineyard to describe the same situation. It produced no good grapes: there was bloodshed instead of justice, and a cry of despair instead of righteousness (Isa.5.7). Here, the two covenant words justice *mišpat*, and righteousness, *šēdhāqâ*, are replaced by words that sound very similar: *mišpāh* and *še‘āqâ*. Wordplay like this was characteristic of first-temple discourse, and is one of the ways we can recover details of the older ways.

When he was called to be a prophet, Isaiah received a vision of the LORD enthroned and he heard heavenly voices proclaiming that the whole earth was full of the glory of the LORD

(Isa.6.3). He knew that his people had adopted false teaching - they had unclean lips - and he was sent to warn them of the consequence of this choice; they would hear and not understand, see and not perceive, They would not understand and so could not change their minds and be healed (Isa.6.9-10). This state of stupidity would persist until the land and its cities were destroyed.

Perception, understanding and spiritual sight were the gifts of the Lady. In Enoch's enigmatic history, when the people of the temple abandoned Wisdom, they lost their spiritual sight, the temple was destroyed and the people were scattered.

Isaiah looked forward to a time when the older covenant would be restored, when a king would reign in righteousness and princes rule with justice - two covenant words (Isa.32.1). The catastrophic results of the broken covenant would be removed.

Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
And the ears of those who hear will hearken,
and the mind of the hasty will discern knowledge ... (Isa.32.3-4a, my translation).

The land would be desolate until the Spirit was poured out from on high.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
And righteousness in the fruitful field,
And the effect of righteousness will be peace ...' (Isa.32.16-17a).

The covenant of peace, then, was the work of the Lady, here called the Spirit, giving her knowledge, which the Bible calls wisdom, so that the creation prospers. The story of the garden of Eden encodes this: Adam and Eve were intended to eat from the tree of life which gave wisdom, and when they rejected this food and chose the knowledge of good and evil, they lost Eden and found that the soil was cursed and barren. The Christian story in the New Testament reverses this situation. Jesus promises his faithful followers that they will again eat from the tree of life (Rev.2.7) and the Spirit promises that they will drink again from the water of life (Rev.22.17). Paul explained that those led by the Spirit were sons of God who would set creation free from futility, *mataiotēs*, and decay, *phthora* (Rom.8.14, 19-21).

One of the first Dead Sea scrolls to be found was a relatively well preserved text of eleven columns which scholars have called *The Community Rule*. This copy was made about one hundred years before the time of Jesus, but nobody can say when the original was composed. It describes a group who have entered the covenant of *hesed* and committed themselves to

practising truth, righteousness and justice. They prayed to be enlightened with life-giving wisdom, their master taught them the wisdom of the sons of heaven, and they believed they were chosen for the everlasting covenant, to regain all the glory of Adam. Here the covenant of peace is called the everlasting covenant and also the covenant of *hesed*, loving kindness. There are the familiar covenant words - justice, *mišpat*, and righteousness, *šedeq* - and the people of this covenant knew the wisdom of the angels. The people who used this text were contemporaries of Jesus.

When the Solomon's temple was purged and Isaiah's disciples fled, they took with them the older ways and teachings and they preserved them. They hoped to return to their homeland and to the ways of the older covenant. One of Isaiah's disciples described that time: someone would be anointed to bring the good news, to build up the ancient ruins, and to restore the priests of the LORD: 'I, the LORD, love justice, *mišpat* ... and I will make an everlasting covenant with them' (Isa.61.8). This is part of the passage that Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth, identified by its opening verse: 'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because he has anointed me ...' (Luke 4.18). It was the everlasting covenant, the covenant of peace, that was the framework of Jesus' ministry and teaching, and Jesus restored it at the Last Supper, as we shall see.

The Hebrew word 'covenant' is *b^erîth*, which is closely linked to two other words: *bārā'*, meaning 'create' but a verb only used of divine actions; and *bārāh*, meaning 'bind'. The covenant, then, was imagined as a web of bonds that held creation in place. When Ezekiel described sinful people returning to the covenant he said that the Lord GOD would make them pass under his sceptre and bring them back into the bond, *māsoret*, of the covenant (Ezek.20.37, my translation)⁴.

A poem about the Lady shows that she wove this covenant. She was with the Creator as he shaped the world (Prov.8.23). The Greek understood the first verb after this as 'he set me as the foundation', but the Hebrew has a word with two meanings, both of which describe the work of Wisdom in creation: *nāsakh* can mean 'weave' or 'pour out'. Isaiah spoke of the Spirit 'poured out' to renew the creation (Isa.32.15), and Hosea mocked this when he said

⁴ The word *māsoret* also means tradition.

‘There is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and adultery poured out on the land’ (Hos.4.2, Lxx). The Lady herself called out to her foolish children:

Behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you,

I will make my words known to you (Prov.1.23).

She warned them that they had chosen the way to calamity, but they had despised her.

The Lady weaving her bonds of the covenant is more difficult to trace; the first evidence is in Origen’s transliteration of Genesis, the so-called second column of his Hexapla. He read the first line of Genesis not as ‘In the beginning, *b^erēšîth*, God created ...’ but as ‘by means of the net, *bārešeth*, God created ...’ The letters of the Hebrew text can be read either way. The Lady held the creation in place with her net. The Neofiti Targum combined both possible ways of reading the line and has ‘in the beginning with Wisdom the LORD created ...’ The net here is the equivalent of Wisdom⁵. Christian tradition also remembered the Lady’s net: one of the Orthodox hymns for Pentecost includes the line ‘blessed art Thou ... sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and thereby catching the universe as in a net’. The poem in Proverbs 8 begins with Wisdom weaving at the beginning of creation, and ends with her by the Creator’s side, ‘holding all things together’. The Hebrew word here is *’āmôn*, which can mean a nursing woman or a faithful person or an artisan; it probably means all three. The Greek chose *harmozousa*, ‘the woman who holds together in harmony’. This was her covenant bond, described elsewhere as ways of pleasantness and paths of peace’ (Prov.3.17).

When the bonds were broken, her son the Messiah had to restore them with atonement. Once thought to be a late addition to temple practices, the Day of Atonement is now recognised as one of the earliest rituals whose real significance was largely lost in the second temple.⁶ The ritual was not about appeasing an angry God, but about repairing something that had been torn. The language used, according to the distinguished anthropologist Mary Douglas, ‘means making good an outer layer that has rotted or been pierced’.⁷ Atonement was restoring the covenant of peace.

The ritual involved two goats; one was chosen by lot to represent Azazel, the leader of the fallen angels; the other represented the LORD.⁸ The goat representing the LORD was

⁵ Wisdom as co-creator is also found in Prov.3.19 and Ps.104.24

⁶ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, New York: Doubleday, 1991, 3-12; W R Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 3rd edn, London: A&C Black, 1937, 26.

⁷ M Douglas, ‘Atonement in Leviticus’, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993-94), 117.

⁸ This is how Origen understood Leviticus 16.8, *Celsus* 6.43.

sacrificed and the high priest took its blood taken into the holy of holies, which represented heaven. Then the high priest sprinkled and smeared the blood in various parts of the temple, which represented the creation, to cleanse and to consecrate, to remove the effects of sin (Lev.16.19). He ‘absorbed’ the effects of sin into himself and carried them out to the second goat, which then bore them away. Atonement was a ritual to cleanse and heal creation and human society.

Two observations:

The high priest in Solomon’s temple was the king, and he was the earthly presence of the LORD. He was called Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’. When he sacrificed the goat that represented the LORD, he was sacrificing a substitute for himself. In other words, one element of the atonement ritual was healing by self sacrifice.

The later storytellers said that it was Aaron’s duty to make atonement. He was entrusted with the covenant of peace, because he made atonement for the people of Israel (Num.25.12-13).

Mary Douglas made a further observation about the biblical way of dealing with contagious and destructive impurity: ‘We cannot avoid asking the question why the priests defined laws of purity that did not make parts of the congregation separate from or defined as higher or lower than the rest’.⁹ It was because the covenant of peace held all things together.

Atonement was a ritual to include not to exclude. Thus Paul knew that nothing in heaven or earth could exclude him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom.8.38-39).

The clearest account of the ancient ritual of atonement is Isaiah 53, the fourth of his poems about the Servant of the LORD. The text exists in various forms, and the Christian use of it shows they knew the form found among the Dead Sea scrolls.¹⁰ It is significantly different from the text in the current Hebrew Scripture.¹¹ The Servant has understanding, he is raised up on high, he is anointed and his appearance is changed. The central verse of the song reveals his role:

He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
And with his stripes we are healed (Isa.53.5).

⁹ Douglas, 114.

¹⁰ 1QIsa^a

¹¹ Isaiah 52.14 has ‘anointed’ rather than ‘marred’; and 53.11 says the Servant sees the light.

The key words here have another meaning: ‘chastisement’ can also mean ‘covenant bond’¹²; and ‘stripes’ more often, means ‘joining together’.¹³ This gives a very different picture of the role of the Servant:

The covenant bond of our peace was his responsibility,
And by his joining us together we are healed.

The poem ends by affirming that the Servant was the sin bearer: ‘He bore the sin of many’.

The covenant of peace was the covenant renewed at the Last Supper. There are many covenants in the Hebrew Scriptures, and Matthew, writing for a community of Jewish heritage, specified which covenant Jesus renewed. ‘My blood poured out for many for the taking away, *aphesis*, of sins’ (Matt.26.28). No covenant mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures deals with sin, except the covenant of peace that was renewed on the Day of Atonement by the self sacrifice of the Great High Priest to restore and heal the whole creation. From earliest times, the Eucharistic prayers have included the Sanctus: Holy Holy Holy, declaring that the whole earth [or heaven and earth] are full of the glory of the LORD. This is because the whole creation is restored as the covenant is renewed.

The Book of Hebrews links the death of Jesus to the Day of Atonement (Heb.9.11-15), emphasising that he offered himself, not an animal as a substitute.

Paul said that those led by the Spirit were sons of God, who would set creation free from its bondage to decay (Rom.8.14-23). He exhorted the Ephesians to lead ‘a life worthy of their calling ... forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph.4.1-3).

John recorded Jesus’ teaching after the Last Supper: ‘By this will all men know that you are *my* disciples, if you have love one for another’ (John 13.35).

And the Book of Revelation describes the Day of judgement as the time when the creation is set free and restored. As the woman clothed with the sun gives birth to her Son who is set upon the throne in heaven, the seventh angel blows his trumpet and the elders in heaven proclaim the beginning of the Kingdom: the time for judging the dead, rewarding the saints, and ‘destroying the destroyers of the earth’ (Rev.11.18).

¹² The two words *mōsēr*, bond, *mūsār*, discipline / chastisement, are written the same way.

¹³ The two words are *ḥabhurâ*, blows / stripes, and *ḥōbhereth*, joining together.

The covenant of peace, the eternal covenant, the covenant of loving kindness, is the most fundamental idea in the Bible, and yet has been almost completely neglected. Isaiah's warning that his people of unclean lips would lose the gifts of spiritual sight and discernment (Isa.6. 9-10) is the most-quoted Isaiah text in the New Testament. The original vision saw all creation and human society bound into one great web which is the net of the Lady Wisdom. Breaking those bonds brings disaster. The covenant of peace is based on love which leads to right judgment, right action, and peace. Wisdom rather than knowledge is the key to upholding this covenant, and it is sustained by self sacrifice that enables healing. It is the covenant we celebrate and renew at the Eucharist. ,

Paul had this covenant and its imagery in mind when he wrote to the Christians in Rome about the Christians' new way of thinking: :

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed *by the renewal of your mind* ... (Rom. 12.1-2).