

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Truth Topples “Replacement Theology”



The missionary screamed, “Your Torah is outdated and obsolete since your Temple was destroyed by the Romans and you can no longer offer sacrifices to God.”

This antisemitic accusation has been repeated for centuries by missionaries bent on delegitimizing Judaism and converting Jews to Christianity. Their argument is a part of “replacement theology,” which

asserts that the New Covenant through Jesus has superseded or replaced the Mosaic covenant.

This abhorrent line of thinking contradicts the Torah’s unequivocal statement, that *“despite all this, I will not utterly reject or despise them while they are in exile in the land of their enemies”* (Leviticus 26:44).

If God’s relationship with the Jewish people is unbreakable, what are we to do without a Temple and sacrifices?

This week’s Torah portion, Tzav (Leviticus 6:1–8:36), is replete with details of how a variety of sacrifices were offered. The Torah also instructs the Jews to offer sacrifices only in the Temple, as it says, *“Offer them only in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes”* (Deuteronomy 12:13-14). So yes, without a Temple we no longer offer sacrifices.

However, the destruction of the Temple did not leave the Jewish people without a path to serve and spiritually connect to God. King Solomon (I Kings 8:44-52) prophetically foretold of a time when the Temple would be destroyed by our enemies and the Jews would be taken into exile. Solomon immediately instructed the Jews that under these circumstances, they should turn toward Jerusalem from wherever they will be exiled and pray toward the site of the Temple — and their prayers will be heard.

This moving passage is the source for the ancient custom of facing toward Jerusalem when we pray. We see that Solomon’s instruction was implemented by Daniel when he was exiled in Babylon. Daniel faced west, *“toward Jerusalem; and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God”* (Daniel 6:10). Our sages note that the three times a day that Daniel prayed correspond to the three daily sacrifices.

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Prayer offered in place of sacrifices is documented in other places in the Jewish Bible. For example, when Jonah was on his way to Nineveh and unable to offer sacrifices, he said, *“I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving”* (Jonah 2:7-9). Furthermore, the prophet Hosea instructed Jews who were prevented from going to the Temple to *“offer their prayers in the place of sacrifices”* (Hosea 14:1-3).

One of the most powerful examples of turning to God without a Temple occurred when the Jewish people were exiled in Persia and faced a terrifying decree that all Jews would be killed at the hand of the evil Haman and his followers. Although there were no sacrifices at this time because the Temple had been destroyed, the decree was overturned because *“There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing”* (Esther 4:3).

The salvation of the Jews from the evil Persians was so miraculous it is commemorated each year on the festival of Purim with *“feasting, rejoicing, sending gifts to one another, and providing charity to the poor”* (Esther 9:22). The events of Purim are the perfect example of the truth of Torah refuting “replacement theology” that seeks to invalidate Judaism.

These historic events defy logic and demonstrate God’s unwavering love for the Jewish people.

Throughout our long exile, many evil leaders like Haman have raised their heads and attempted to eradicate the Jewish people. Each time, our unwavering bond to God and the Torah has stood by us and we witnessed our national survival and the demise of our enemies. These historic events defy logic and demonstrate God’s unwavering love for the Jewish people.

May we soon merit the complete and final redemption of the Jewish people when the words of the prophet will be fulfilled, *“Then you shall call upon Me, and you shall go and pray to Me and I will hearken to you...and I will restore you from your captivity and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places into which I have driven you”* (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

This passage is another powerful refutation to missionaries and demonstrates that prayer can reach the heavens and influence God to bring the redemption of the Jewish people. Let us use this auspicious time to increase in charity, and to pray from the depth of our hearts for the day when God will *“Judge between nations and rebuke many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”* (Isaiah 2:4).

Shabbat Shalom,

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