

The Good Word

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THE LAST 40 YEARS THE TEMPLE STOOD: STRANGE HAPPENINGS!

by Dr. Seraphim Steger

Very early in the history of the Church, in *Acts of the Apostles* 6:7, we read: *And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.* In other words a great number of the priests (mostly Sadducees), believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel and joined the new “Nazarene Sect”, i.e., the Church in Jerusalem, perhaps, in part because of some of the events we will be discussing.

In contrast many of the Pharisees took a different path. One of the leading Pharisees, **Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai** (30? BC-AD 90?), was captured by the Romans and detained in Yavneh (40 km south of Jaffa on the Mediterranean coast) just prior to the siege of Jerusalem (AD 69). When meeting general Vespasian, Rabbi Yochanan greeted him, “Peace unto you, O Emperor.” Vespasian, no doubt feigning anger, threatened the rabbi’s life for uttering these words, but the rabbi calmly proved from verses of Scripture that the conquerer of Jerusalem was destined to be King.¹ In a moment of generosity Vespasian spared the lives of the Jewish sages, the family of Simeon ben Gamelial I (President of the Sanhedrin, killed during the war), and gave permission for a *yeshiva*² in Yavneh under Roman protection. Rabban Yochanan, using his newfound authority, reconstituted the Sanhedrin and proceeded to construct a new religion for the war torn and Temple-less nation centered around the Torah and

the teachings of the Pharisees: “Rabbinical Judaism.”

Some 150 years later Rabbi Yehudah haNasi recorded these teachings in a book known as the *Mishnah*. Two subsequent rabbinical commentaries on the *Mishnah*, the *Babylonian* and the *Jerusalem Talmudim*, were completed around AD 600. Together they have preserved some very interesting historical details about the Temple. Consider the following ominous events starting 40 years before the destruction of the Temple, i.e., in AD 30, the year that Christ was judged and condemned to death by the Sanhedrin:

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SEDER MO’ED, TRACTATE YOMA³, CHAPTER IV GEMARA [39b]⁴ *Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘for the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand, nor did the crimson-colored strap become white, nor did the western most light shine; and the doors of the Hekal would open by themselves, until R. Yochanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying, Hekal, Hekal, why wilt thou be the alarmer thyself? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied concerning thee: “Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars [Zechariah 11:1].”⁵*

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SEDER MO’ED, TRACTATE SHABBAT, GEMARA [15a]: *Forty years before the destruction of the Temple the Sanhedrin went into exile⁶ and took its seat in the trade Halls...They did not adjudicate in capital cases.*

(1). The *lot* refers to the selection of the *scapegoat*. On the Day of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish Festal calendar, according to Leviticus 16:7-10 ,

3. *Babylonian Talmud, Order of Appointed Feasts, Tractate Yoma*. *Yoma* refers to the Day of Atonement, popularly called Yom Kippur. The biblical name is *Yom HaKippurim* which means the Day of Coverings/Cancellings/Pardonings/Reconcillings. Quotations are taken from the *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo’ed, Tractate Yoma*, Hebrew-English Edition, Socino Press, New York, NY, 1974.

4. The number in brackets is the folio number in the *Talmud*.

5. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, founder of Rabbinical Judaism in Jamnia/Yavneh, survived the Jewish-Roman war, so this comment may have been written after the fact to make him appear prophetic.

6. They forsook their locale in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple. The trade Halls were in a different location in the Temple.

1 Meir Holder, *History of the Jewish People from Yavneh to Pumbedisa*, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., Brooklyn, NY, 1989, p. 13, referencing *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nashim, Tractate Gittin*, Gamara, [56a]. [Reminiscent of Josephus’ encounter with Vespasian]

2. In this era a *yeshiva* was a gathering of rabbis to discuss issues.

two goats were chosen by lot, one for a “sin offering” for the LORD and one *for Azazel* לְעִזָּאֵל [for (the) scapegoat].⁷ The two lots had to be identical in size, shape, and weight. In Jesus’ day they were made of wood. If the lot drawn for the LORD came up in the right hand of the High Priest it was considered a good omen for the country for that year, if in the left, it was a bad omen. The *scapegoat* had a crimson strap tied to its horns, whereas the goat chosen for the LORD had a white strap tied between its horns. The High Priest confessed the sins of the nation of Israel before the LORD while laying his hands on the head of the *scapegoat*, in essence transferring the sins of the people to the *scapegoat*. The *scapegoat* was then led out through the Eastern Gate of the Temple to the Mount of Olives, and then sent out into the wilderness.⁸ The *scapegoat* was thus used to carry away the sins of the nation of Israel: *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our iniquities from us* (Psalm 102:12 Lxx). If the LORD accepted the sacrifice of the *scapegoat* for the nation, another crimson strap tied between the horns of a bullock close at hand in the Temple miraculously turned white as a sign that the sins of Israel had been forgiven by the LORD.

(2). The *western most light* refers to the western most of the lamps on the menorah in the Holy Place in Herod’s Temple. In Solomon’s Temple THE MENORAH was a single 7-branched candlestick [crafted in Moses day by Bezaleel and Aholiab (cf. Exodus 31: 2-6)] with 7-oil lamps and three legs which was placed in an east-west orientation. The lamp closest to the Holy of Holies was the western most lamp and was to remain continually lit before the LORD. In Herod’s Temple there were 10 other menorahs in the Holy Place, 5 north and 5 south of THE MENORAH (Menachot 99a). Footnote

7. The early Old Testament translators Symmachus, and Theodotian, and those of the *Septuagint* and the *Vulgate*, understood the term to mean *the goat that departs*. Targums Jonathan & Onkelos, aramaic translations/commentaries of the Old Testament <http://targum.info/targumic-texts/pentateuchal-targumim/> did not translated the word. The Jewish commentator Rashi (AD 1040-1105) considered it to be *a strong and hard mountain, a high cliff, a precipitous land* (אֶרֶץ חֲדָרָה), meaning *a cut-off land [i.e., a sheer drop]*. — [Torah Kohanim 16:28; Yoma 67b] Rashi’s Commentary on the Tanakh, http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdoaid/9917#showrashi=true Others considered it a desert demon/deity.

8. In actual practice from the Mount of Olives, it was led out by a non-Jew into the wilderness to a desolate area and tossed off a high rugged cliff ensuring its death, or slaughtered and eaten by the non-Jews out in the wilderness, thus ensuring that the scapegoat couldn’t return to Jerusalem bringing the sins of the people back upon them.

19 in the Socino *Babylonian Talmud Tractate Menachot* [86b] on the Menorah states: “By the morning the oil in the lamps had burnt out and the priest came in and cleaned out the lamps, removing the old wicks and putting in new wicks, and pouring oil into them ready for kindling in the evening. The western lamp, however, although it had no more oil than any of the other lamps, miraculously continued to burn the whole day long, so that when the lamps were to be kindled in the evening they were kindled from this one. The western lamp itself was then extinguished and cleaned out, a fresh wick put in, oil poured in, and then relit. Thus this lamp provided the fire for lighting the other lamps, and yet was the last to be cleaned out. This miracle testified to the Divine Presence in Israel.”



THE MENORAH BEING REMOVED FROM HEROD’S TEMPLE AS SEEN IN THE ARCH OF TITUS IN ROME [CONSTRUCTED IN AD 82 BY DOMITIAN TO COMMEMORATE THE VICTORIES OF HIS OLDER BROTHER TITUS INCLUDING THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE].

(3). The *hekal* הֵיכָל is the Hebrew word for the Temple building proper, i.e., the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. It had immense hinged doors made of cedar wood from Lebanon. Cedar wood from Lebanon had been supplied by King Hiram to King David for the construction of Solomon’s Temple. Cedar had also been supplied by permission of King Cyrus of Persia for the Jews to rebuild their Temple following their return from captivity in Babylon. The Prophet Zechariah, “son of Ido”,⁹ mentioned in the text was active as a prophet in Israel when Ezra and Nehemiah were supervising the rebuilding of that Temple. The prophecy itself was fulfilled with the destruction of Herod’s Temple by the fire that consumed Jerusalem immediately upon Titus’ conquest in AD 70. Therein

9. Zechariah was the son of Berechiah the son of Iddo, cf. Zech. 1:1.

the cedar doors, paneling, and furnishings of the Temple were totally destroyed.

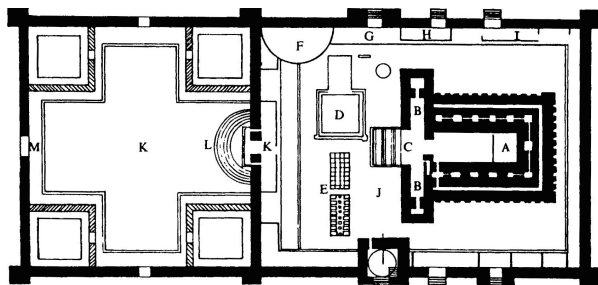


DIAGRAM OF HEROD'S TEMPLE: A = HOLY OF HOLIES, C = ENTRANCE TO THE HOLY PLACE WHERE THE DOORS TO THE HEKEL WERE HUNG AND THE LINTEL WAS BROKEN. THE VEIL WAS OUTSIDE OF THE DOORS (TO THE LEFT). D = ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING, E = AREA OF SLAUGHTER F = CHAMBER OF HEWN STONE (SANHEDRIN), I = CHAMBER OF WOOD, J = COURT OF THE PRIESTS, K = COURT OF ISRAEL, M = EASTERN GATE¹⁰

(4). Lastly, the Great **Sanhedrin**, the supreme religious body in the Land of Israel consisted of 71 "sages" who normally met in the domed Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple complex. However, they had to move to the "Trade halls", a marketplace area in the Temple [perhaps where the money changers used to sit]. The Sanhedrin never returned to the Chamber of Hewn Stones. According to the *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat [15a]* above as well as the *Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin [1.1]*, in AD 30 the Sanhedrin lost its authority to inflict capital punishment. Some academics, however, believe that it was lost in AD 6, when the Romans under Augustus Caesar created the Roman province of Judæa.

INTERPRETATIONS:

Historically we know that the Temple built by King Herod stood on Ophel above the spring of Gihon until destroyed in the 1st Jewish-Roman War by Titus in AD 70.¹¹ Thus, we can say that the last 40 years the Temple stood dated from AD 30 to 70. For those 40 years a foreboding omen occurred on Yom Kippur every year:

(1) Why? Because the *Lot for Azazel* came up in the right hand of the High Priest of Israel 40 years in a row! What happened in AD 30 that caused this? Undoubtedly it was the crucifixion of Christ Jesus, the

Son of God. From that time forward the High Priests of Israel lost any spiritual authority they might have had. Having turned away from the God of Israel they conspired to murder Christ Jesus, and, as we shall see, condemned Him to death by stoning¹² and crucifixion. So Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest for that year, who had earlier prophesied *that it is expedient for us that one man [Jesus] should die for the people, and that the whole nation should perish not* (John 11:50), was effectually replaced forever with a new High Priest appointed by the Father, a High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek, Who sprinkled His own purifying blood in the true Holy of Holies in the Heavens for us: *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the [Holies], having obtained eternal redemption for us.* (Hebrews 9:11-12).

(2) We could also say that the LORD did not accept any of the Temple sacrifices of the scapegoat by the High Priests on behalf of the nation of Israel on Yom Kippur because the **crimson ribbon** tied between the horns of the bullock **did not miraculously turn white** when the scapegoat was thrown over the cliff in the wilderness, or eaten. Thus, the sins of the nation and those of the priestly class who rejected Christ as the Son of God and Messiah of Israel, were retained. However, for the nascent Church and the priests who believed in Christ and were baptized into the Church, Jesus Christ became their **True Azazel**, Who carried their sins away as far as the East is from the West.

(3). We could also say that for the last 40 years that the Temple stood, the westernmost lamp on **THE MENORAH** failed to stay lit no matter what extra precautions the priests took to safeguard against that possibility. Every night for 40 years the western lamp went out! According to the rabbis this indicated that the presence of the LORD, the *Shekhinah*, as the Jews would say, had deserted the Temple, and in Jewish tradition, settled on the Mount of Olives for all of those last 40 years. However, to the contrary, the Holy Spirit was initially given in measure to the Disciples by Christ in the upper room after the Resurrection, and 50 days later at Pentecost, was poured out upon them.¹³ The Holy Spirit now abode in the Temple of His Body, the

10. Ernest L Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha*, ASK Publications, Portland, OR, 1996, p. 13.

11. See previous issue of THE GOOD WORD Vol 3, Issue 5 at www.stseraphimstjohnsandiego.org at THE GOOD WORD Tab.

12. *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin (43a): Mishnah 6.1. GEMARA*

13. cf. Acts of the Apostles 2

Church.

(4) We could also say that during those last 40 years that the Temple stood, the **massive outer doors to the Hekal** הֵיכָל, the Temple, i.e., those leading into the Holy Place, opened repetitively by themselves, showing that access to the LORD in the Holy Place was not limited to the priests in their daily service, nor in the Holy of Holies to the High Priest but once a year. Rather, access to the LORD was now granted in the Church through the risen Christ, Jesus the Messiah, “*The Door*” as He is called in St. John 10:7-9: *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* All who desire to enter in can now draw close to the Holy God of Israel, through faith in Christ Jesus, by entering through Him, the Door of the True Temple.

(5) Again, we might say that 40 years before the destruction of the Temple the **Sanhedrin was forced to move**. But why? Was it punishment for their conspiracy in having one Man die for the nation? Was it due to catastrophic damage to their Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple complex sustained during the earthquake associated with the crucifixion of Jesus on Holy Friday? Or, more likely, was it because of both—as evidence of God’s displeasure with their actions, His chastisement of the Sanhedrin?

Regarding earthquake damage to the Temple complex, Blessed Jerome (AD c. 340-420) in his *Letter to Hedibia* wrote that the huge lintel over the Temple’s outer doors broke in two and fell. He associated this with the tearing of the Veil:

“How should we account for these words of Saint Matthew [27:50-52]: *Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit, and at the same time the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rocks were split, the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who were in the sleep of death revived...The Gospel that Saint Matthew wrote in Hebrew does not say that the veil was torn, but that the top of the portal, which was of prodigious size, was completely reversed. The earth shook, because it could not support the weight attached to its God on the cross.*”¹⁴ Naturally there are those who believe that Jerome was reading a non-Canonical

Gospel of Matthew. But St. Epiphanius in his *Panarion 29.9.4*. and St. Sophronius of Jerusalem in his *Life of St. Matthew* both testify that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, and that they personally read it.

Evangelical biblical archaeologist and historian Dr. Ernest L. Martin further speculates: “*If an earthquake of the magnitude capable of breaking the stone lintel at the top of the entrance to the Holy Place was occurring at the exact time of Christ’s death, then what would such an earthquake have done to the Chamber of Hewn Stones (a vaulted and columned structure) no more than 40 yards away from where the stone lintel fell and the curtain was torn in two?...*”

“*If this is actually what happened (and I have no doubt that it did), we then have a most remarkable witness that God the Father engineered every action happening on the day of Christ’s trial and crucifixion. It means that the judgment made by the official Sanhedrin against Jesus within the Chamber of Hewn Stones, was THE LAST JUDGMENT ever given by the official Sanhedrin in their majestic chambers within the Temple! It would show that God the Father demonstrated by the earthquake at Christ’s death that the sentence of the Sanhedrin against Jesus would be the last judgment it would ever make in that authorized place!*”¹⁵

Here, in their own words, is that last judgment:

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SEDER NEZEKIN,¹⁶ TRACTATE SANHEDRIN [43a]: MISHNAH 6.1. GEMARA...On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged.¹⁷ For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned¹⁸ because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!¹⁹ — ‘Ulla retorted: Do you suppose that he

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

16. Seder Nezekin = Order of Damages

17. The eve of the Passover is the 14th of Nisan, the day when the Paschal lambs were sacrificed in the Temple. It was also the day of Preparation [for the Sabbath]. *Yeshu* = *Jesus* in Aramaic. A footnote in the *Talmud*: Ms. M. adds ‘*the Nasorean*’. Note: *hanged* refers to being hung **on a tree**--on a live or cut tree, or post with cross bar at the top, after stoning in a deep pit (*BT Tractate Sanhedrin*, 40a-46b).

18. *stoned* This is what the Law of Moses required for sorcery (Leviticus 20:27). The charge of blasphemy as portrayed in the Gospels also demands punishment by stoning (Leviticus 24:10-16).

19. Footnote in the *Talmud*: A Florentine Ms. adds: *and the eve of the Sabbath*.

14. Jerome, “Answer to] Question #8,” in *Letter to Hedibia*, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_hedibia_2_trans.htm.

was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a Mesith [enticer], concerning whom Scripture says, Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him? [Deut. 13:8]

In this passage the Sanhedrin convicted Jesus the Nazarean of sorcery and apostasy. In their opinion, He was an enticer who shouldn't be spared, one who was then *hanged* on the eve of Passover – on the eve of the Sabbath. Note how well their testimony corresponds to the Gospel testimony of their actions. Had they not condemned Him far in advance of the Passover? Had they not sought information concerning His whereabouts so they might seize Him? Had they not threatened to cast those out of the Synagogue who believed in Him? And had they not sought [false] witnesses against Him? Did they not lie here to justify their actions as in accordance with the Law of Moses and the traditions of the elders? Yet, He was not stoned for blasphemy by the Sanhedrin who witnessed against Him [which the Law required] but was hung on a tree instead. So, for good reason they lost their coveted place in the Temple and were forced to leave the Chamber of Hewn Stones, and to retreat to the trade halls, i.e., the marketplace part of the Temple complex.

Together, these 5 miraculous signs lasting 40 years were recognized by the Jews as being the direct intervention of God against apostate Israel. But as Orthodox Christians we recognize these signs to be directly related to the crucifixion of God's Son, Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah.²⁰

MIRACLES AND IDENTITY OF SIMEON THE RIGHTEOUS

Interestingly, all these strange happenings recorded in the *Tractate Yoma* were preceded by descriptions of a certain Simeon the Righteous whose ministry in the Temple was blessed in every way for 40 years.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SEDER MO'ED, TRACTATE YOMA [39a], GEMARA... Our Rabbis taught: Throughout the forty years that Simeon the Righteous ministered,²¹ the lot ['For the Lord'] would always come up in the right hand; from that time on, it would come up now in the right hand, now in the left. And [during the same time] the crimson-coloured strap

20. *Isaiah* 52:14-53:12

21. *Jerusalem Talmud Yoma* 6,3 43c adds the following here: *the scapegoat sent into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement) would not make it to the middle of the mountain before it came apart limb by limb; once Simeon the Righteous died it would flee to the wilderness and desert-dwellers would eat it.*

[of a bullock immediately at hand] would become white. From that time on it would at times become white, at others not. Also: Throughout those forty years the westernmost light [of THE MENORAH] was shining, from that time on, it was now shining, now failing; also the fire of the pile of wood kept burning strong, so that the priests did not have to bring to the pile any other wood besides the two logs, in order to fulfill the command about providing the wood unintermittently; from that time on, it would occasionally keep burning strongly, at other times not so that the priests could not do without bringing through the day wood for the pile [on the altar]. [During the whole period] a blessing was bestowed upon the omer, the two breads, and the shewbread, so that every priest, who obtained a piece thereof as big as an olive, ate it and became satisfied with some eating thereof and even leaving something over. From that time on a curse was sent²² upon the omer, two breads, and shewbread, so that every priest received a piece as small as a bean: the well-bred ones withdrew their hands from it, whilst voracious folk took and devoured it...

[39b] *Our Rabbis taught: In the year in which Simeon the Righteous died, he foretold them that he would die. They said: Whence do you know that? He replied: On every Day of Atonement an old man dressed in white, would join me, entering [the Holy of Holies] and leaving [it] with me, but today I was joined by an old man, dressed in black, wrapped in black, who entered, but did not leave, with me. After the festival [of Sukkoth] he was sick for seven days and [then] he died. His brethren [that year] the priests forbore to mention the Ineffable Name in pronouncing the priestly blessing.*

JERUSALEM TALMUD, SEDER MO'ED, TRACTATE YOMA 6,3 [43c-d], Forty years Simeon the righteous served Israel in the high priesthood and in the final year he said to them: During this year I shall die. They said to him: Who shall we appoint after you? He said to them: Behold Onias my son is before you...

(1). The *wood* was the firewood kept in the Chamber of Wood in the Temple in the Court of the Priests, which was placed and kindled on the altar each morning for burning various offerings to the LORD.

(5). The *omer* עֹמֶר (Lit. sheaf) referred to here was the name for the wave offering at the Festival of First-

22. *Jerusalem Talmud Yoma* 6,3 43c substitutes the blessing was removed from in place of a curse was sent.

Fruits (Leviticus 2:14-16, 23:6-14).

(2). The *two* [leavened] *bread*s (Leviticus 23:17-20) were waved before the LORD on the day of Pentecost. No part was placed on the altar because of the leaven. After the completion of an offering of 2 lambs, the priests could then eat the two loaves.

(3). The *shewbread* (show bread) were 12 loaves baked weekly and placed on the Golden Table in the Holy Place. Each Sabbath day the breads were replaced with new ones, the priests consuming the old loaves.

(4). The *Ineffable Name* is the name of the God of Israel as indicated by the tetragrammaton יהוה YHWH and usually translated as Yahweh, LORD, ADONAI, OR HA-SHEM (The-Name) in English language Bibles. With the passing of Simeon the Righteous, his brethren, the priests, ceased pronouncing God's Ineffable Name, perhaps feeling unworthy to utter His Name.

In this excerpt from the *Talmud* note the key events highlighted during the 40 years Simeon ministered as High Priest: (1). The sacrifices for Israel were wondrously blessed and the scapegoat accepted, (removing the sins of the entire nation) because the *lot for the Lord would always come up in the right hand*--of the High Priest. (2). The westernmost light of THE MENORAH, lit first, always remained burning. (3). The wood for the altar was always more than sufficient for burning the daily sacrifices. (4 & 5). The priest's portions of the omer, two loaves, and shewbread always satiated them. In other words, the priests and the people of Israel were continuously blessed by the LORD for the 40 years of Simeon the Righteous' ministry. Simeon must have been a most godly person like no other, for at no other time were such phenomena recorded for a continuous 40 year period. Interestingly, after those 40 years, sometimes the sacrifices were accepted, sometimes not. But the priests continually suffered from the curse on the omer, two loaves, and shewbread--i.e., they were not nourished by the bread of the Temple as they were before. Something was definitely amiss, punctuated by the death of Simeon the Righteous. The dramatic blessings during the 40 year ministry of Simeon the Righteous stand in stark contrast to ominous events occurring during the last 40 years the Temple stood. Consequently, one might speculate that the cause of the former would need to be of a similar importance as the crucifixion of Christ to the latter. Could it have been the Entry of the Virgin Mary as a child as well as the Entry of the Incarnate LORD with His mother, the Theotokos, into the Temple on the 40th

day after His birth (as the Torah required)? Only these could begin to approach the level of importance of the crucifixion. Therefore, I would speculate that the *Talmud's* Simeon the Righteous might be none other than our righteous and just elder Simeon the God-Receiver, a priest ministering through prayer, a prophet full of the Holy Spirit, and an elderly Israelite awaiting the consolation of his people. During those 40 years the LORD prepared the Temple to receive the Most Holy Theotokos as a young child, to sanctify her for the day that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and to prepare all Israel for receiving Emmanuel, God Incarnate, her new-born son on His 40th day.

In contrast, whom do the Jews and scholars believe Simeon the Righteous to have been? Here are their four candidates with their years ministering as High Priest:²³

- (1) Simon I (280-260 BC), son of Onias I;
- (2) Simon II (218-185 BC), son of Onias II;
- (3) Simon Maccabeus, the Hasmonean, (142-135 BC);
- (4) Simeon, the son of Rabban Gamaliel I.

Both the *Jerusalem Talmud* and *Babylonian Talmud* insist that for *forty years Simeon the Righteous served Israel in the high priesthood* and was greatly blest. Yet, **no** High Priest of the Second Temple period with the name Simeon/Simon ever met these criteria.

Simeon son of Gamaliel I is easily eliminated. Gamaliel I was a Pharisee and a highly respected teacher of the Torah and the Oral Law--not a priest. He was *Nasi* (Prince or President) of the Sanhedrin and teacher of the Apostle Paul in Judaism. Gamaliel died c. AD 50. His son Simeon reigned as *Nasi* for 7 years (AD 63-70) before his own death at the hands of zealots in the civil war. Those 7 years were anything but blest.

The Biblical book *2 Maccabees*²⁴ and Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*²⁵ contain accounts of Simon Maccabeus the Hasmonean (High Priest 142-135 BC). He was primarily a warrior until 142 BC. He leveled both the citadel and Mt. Zion on which it stood. But historically he was High Priest for only 7 years which would disqualify him as that Righteous Simeon.

The earlier Simons I & II would remain potential contenders were they High Priest for 40 years, which neither was. The *Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Yoma [43c,d]* also states that Simeon the Righteous appointed

23. *The Jewish Temples: High Priests of the Second Temple (516 BCE-70 CE)* at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/priests.html> Only Onias I (320-280 BC) son of Jaddua served 40 yrs.

24. *1 Maccabees* 4:36-61

25. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chap 6, §7.

his son Onias to succeed him as High Priest. According to the listing of the Jewish High Priests, Simon I (280-260), despite having an infant son named Onias, was succeeded as High Priest by his son Eleazar (260-245 BC), thus eliminating him. Simon II (218-185 BC) was succeeded by his son Onias III (185-175 BC) as High Priest.²⁶ So modern academics favor Simon II to be the "Righteous" one despite only a 20 year ministry. So the identifying criteria in the *Talmudim* for all these "Simeons" are untenable.

The *Wisdom of Sirach* 50: 1-14, describes a Simon the son of Onias²⁷ as a great priest. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and repaired the the foundations of the Temple. But nowhere is he called "Righteous" or "Just." This Simon is generally felt to be Simon I, whose son Eleazar, not Onias, succeeded him.

Nevertheless, the current academic consensus that favors Simon II to be Simeon the Righteous suffers from the very nature of Jewish rabbinical literature, its late redaction, the errors it contains, let alone the events surrounding Simeon. The sayings attributed to him cast significant doubt on Simon II as well.²⁸ Indeed, Shamma Friedman has shown that the word "olam" translated as "world" in a saying attributed to Simeon the Righteous in *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers)* only came to have that meaning about the first century CE. Prior to that time it meant "forever".²⁹ So Simon II is out, but not necessarily our Symeon († c. 3 BC).

Oxford scholar Amram Tropper, who has written an entire book on the subject: *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented*, Brill, Boston, MA, March 2013, suggests that in crafting the persona of Simeon the Righteous, the rabbis were guilty of refashioning Simeon to suit their own purposes.³⁰ What were their source materials? We don't know. So there remains the distinct possibility that the persona of a High Priest Simeon the Righteous may have been fabricated and embellished from fragmentary knowledge of our Righteous Symeon the God-Receiver mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 2:25-36.

RIGHTEOUS SYMEON THE GOD-RECEIVER

26. *The Jewish Temples: High Priests of the Second Temple (516 BCE-70 CE)* at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/priests.html>.

27. Simon I was the son of Onias I. Simon II was the son of Onias II.

28. Amram Tropper, *Simon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented*, Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 2013, pp. 249.

29. Amram Tropper, p. 79. Cf. *Pirkei Avot*, 1.2.

30. *Ibid.*

In the Orthodox Church Symeon the God-Receiver, commemorated on February 3, died at an advanced age shortly after Christ's presentation in the Temple (c. 3 BC). Although nothing is said concerning his having been a priest in Luke's Gospel, St. Demetrius of Rostav states that some have thought this Symeon to have been a priest.³¹ Also, in the *Menaion* for Vespers on Feb 2, in the *Aposticha*, he is called *the elderly Priest*.³²

In the Gospel of Luke 2:25-35 Symeon's meeting in the Temple with the infant Jesus and his parents 40 days after His birth is described as follows:

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Symeon, and this man was just [righteous]³³ and pious, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been divinely revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he should see the Christ of the Lord. And he came in the Spirit into the Temple. And when the parents were bringing in the little Child Jesus, in order to do for Him according to the custom of the law he also received Him into his arms and blessed God and said, "Now lettest Thy slave depart in peace, O Master, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou didst prepare before the face of all the peoples, alight of revelation to the nations and the glory of Thy people Israel." And Joseph and His Mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning Him. And Symeon blessed them, and said to Mariam His Mother, "Behold, this One is set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign which is



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31. St. Demetrius of Rostov, "Commemoration of the Righteous Symeon the God-receiver," in *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Volume VI: February*, Chrysostom Press, Hot Springs, MO, 2003, p. 26.

32. *Menaion, Volume Six, The Month of February*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA, 2005, p. 16.

33. "the just" or "the righteous" are both translations of the Greek δίκαιος, and correspond to the Hebrew הצדיק *HaTzadik*.



THE GOOD WORD

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contradicted, and as to thee a sword shall go through thine own soul also, in order that the reckonings of many hearts might be revealed.”

Our Symeon the Righteous recognized the infant Jesus to be the Salvation of Israel, the Light of revelation to the nations, the Glory of His people Israel, i.e., Christ the LORD. Consequently, he could now die in peace as had been revealed to him ahead of time by the LORD. Both *Talmudim* emphasize Simon’s death was revealed to him in advance, on the Day of Atonement (10th of Tishri), that he was sick for 7 days and that he died 7 days *after the festival [of Sukkoth]* which lasted from 15-21 Tishri), so on 28 Tishri (i.e., early to mid-October).

Immediately following Righteous Symeon’s death, all these wondrous happenings in the Temple ceased. Then, 33 years later, following the death of Christ on Golgotha, the foreboding events began and continued for another 40 years culminating in the destruction of the Temple. Thus, the Temple with its priests and sacrifices as well as the Sanhedrin lost their usefulness in the face of the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit Who was poured out upon the Apostles and the nascent

Church. The Shadow of the Mosaic Law was disappearing before the True Light Who was enlightening all men. Emmanuel, God-Incarnate, had come into the world. Our Saviour and Redeemer Christ Jesus has become our new and Eternal High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. The Eternal Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world, has been sacrificed for us. Having taken upon Himself all our iniquities and infirmities, as the True Scapegoat, He has carried them away as far as the east is from the west, redeeming us. Through Christ the Door the Heavenly Temple has been opened to all to worship the Holy Trinity in Spirit and in Truth. A new priesthood has been raised up in the Church to minister the Bloodless Sacrifice (John 6:31-59) of the Eucharist from which both clergy and laypeople alike could be spiritually nourished and strengthened against the noetic wolves--Satan and his demons.

The final blow for the Jews was the total destruction of their Temple and of Jerusalem herself on the 9th of Av (*Tisha B’Av*) by the Roman General Titus, thus leaving the Church to flourish and recalcitrant Jews to flounder in the unbelief of Rabbinic Judaism.