

T R E E O F
S O U L S



THE MYTHOLOGY OF
J U D A I S M

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124. THE PILLARS OF THE WORLD

The world stands upon pillars. Some say it stands on twelve pillars, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. Others say that it rests on seven pillars, which stand on the water. This water is on top of the mountains, which rest on wind and storm. Still others say that the world stands on three pillars. Once every three hundred years they move slightly, causing earthquakes. But Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua says that it rests on one pillar, whose name is “Righteous.”

One of the ancient creation myths found in many cultures describes the earth as standing on one or more pillars. In this Jewish version of the myth, several theories are found—that the earth stands on twelve, seven, or three pillars—or on one. Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua gives that one pillar the name of *Tzaddik*, “Righteous,” underscoring an allegorical reading of this myth, whereby God is the pillar that supports the world. This, of course, is the central premise of monotheism. Alternatively, his comment may be understood to refer to the *Tzaddik*, the righteous man whose existence is required for the world to continue to exist. Or it might refer to the principle of righteousness, and how the world could not exist without it.

Sources:

B. Hagigah 12b; Me'am Lo'ez on Genesis 1:10.

125. THE FOUNDATION STONE

The world has a foundation stone. This stone serves as the starting point for all that was created, and serves as a true foundation.

How did it come to exist? In the beginning, when God desired to create the world, He took snow from beneath the Throne of Glory and cast it into the waters, where it congealed into a stone in the midst of the Deep. This is the center of the universe, and from it the earth expanded in all directions. God began the creation of His world at that foundation stone, and built the world upon it.

Others say that God took a stone compounded of fire, water, and air, and cast it into the abyss so that it held fast there, holding back the waters of the deep, and the world was planted in that place. Then there are those who say that God took the Foundation Stone and hurled it to the place designated for the Temple, and raised His right foot and drove the stone down into the very bottom of the deep and made it the pillar of the earth and founded the world upon it.

Still others say that God took an emerald stone engraved with mysteries of the alphabet, and threw it into the waters. It drifted from place to place until it came to the Holy Land, and there it sank, and the whole world was firmly established on it. And that is why it is called *Even ha-Shetiyyah*, the Foundation Stone.

When King David decided to build the Temple in Jerusalem, he commanded that shafts be dug to a depth of fifteen hundred cubits. And lo, they struck a stone in one of those shafts. As soon as he learned of it, King David went there with Ahitophel, his counselor, and with other members of the court. They descended into the pit, and there, at the bottom, they saw the immense stone, shining like the darkest emerald.

All those who saw it were amazed, and they knew that it must, indeed, be that fabled stone, which served as the world's foundation. Yet all at once King David was possessed by a great curiosity to see what lay beneath it. King David ordered it to be raised, but a voice came forth from the stone, saying: “Be warned that I must not be lifted. I serve to hold back the waters of the Abyss.”

All of them stood in awe of that voice, but King David's curiosity was still not sated. He decided to ignore the warning, and once more he ordered the stone to be raised. None of his advisors dared say anything, for they feared his wrath. After a great effort, a corner of the Foundation Stone was lifted up, and King David bent down and peered into the Abyss beneath it. There he heard something like the sound of rushing waters, and he suddenly realized that by lifting the stone he had set free the waters of the Deep. Once again the world was in danger of being deluged, as in the time of Noah.

King David trembled with fear, and he asked the others what they might do to cause the waters to fall back, but no one spoke. Then King David said: "Perhaps if I wrote the Name of God on a potsherd, and cast it into the depths, we might still be saved. But does anyone know if this is permitted?" Still the others said nothing, and King David grew angry and said: "If any one of you knows this and still refuses to answer, then your soul will bear the curse of the end of existence!" Then Ahitophel spoke: "Surely the Name can be used to bring peace to the whole world." So David picked up a potsherd and scratched the four-letter Name of God into it, and cast it into the bottomless pit. All at once the roar of the waters grew fainter, and they knew that they had been saved by the power of the Name.

In the days to come King David repented many times for his sin, and he gave thanks to God for sparing the world from another Flood. And his son, Solomon, had the Holy of Holies of the Temple built exactly above the Foundation Stone, for both the stone and the Temple bore the seal of God's blessing.

Others say that after King David found the stone resting on the mouth of the abyss, with God's Name on it, he put the stone into the Holy of Holies of the Temple. The sages were concerned that some young men might learn the true pronunciation of the Divine Name from the speaking stone, and thereby destroy the world. So they built two lions of brass, which they placed by the Holy of Holies, on the right and left. If anyone entered and learned the divine Name, these lions would roar when he came out, so frightening him that he would forget the Name. Further, a divine blessing was said to emanate from the Foundation Stone, which was bestowed upon Israel from the Holy of Holies. Some say that this blessing came from the wings of the angels and cherubim that hovered above the Foundation Stone, and that the stars and planets joined the blessing as well. But when the Temple was destroyed, the blessing was lost.

Others say that the angels above and Israel below all hold fast to the Foundation Stone, which rises up to heaven, and comes to rest among the righteous. And if that stone, which hovers in the air, should fall to the earth, it would be a sign that the days of the Messiah were at hand.

A myth in *Y. Sanhedrin* 29a asserts that God used a shard to hold back the waters in exactly the same way that King David did: "God prevented *tehom* (the lower waters) from rising up by placing a shard above the waters, on which He had engraved His Name. The seal was removed only once, in the time of Noah. Then *tehom* united with the upper waters, and together they flooded the earth." In *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 1:6, a clearly related midrash reports that the earth was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory. God took it up and scattered it upon the waters. Then the water congealed and became the dust of the earth. This is linked to the verse *For he says to the snow, "Become earth"* (Job 37:6).

This talmudic legend about King David demonstrates the immense sanctity of Jerusalem, and especially of the site of the Temple there. King David sets out to dig the foundations of the Temple, and strikes the Foundation Stone of the earth, upon which God built the rest of this world. This confirms that Jerusalem is the very center of the world, as it was portrayed in ancient maps.

At the same time, this tale is a divine test, not unlike the tests of Adam and Eve, of Abraham in the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, and of Job. Even though a voice from the

stone warns him not to lift it, King David, not unlike Pandora, lifts the Foundation Stone and sets free the powers of chaos, the waters of the Abyss, which threaten to inundate the earth as in the time of Noah. In a desperate moment, David writes the Tetragrammaton, the secret Name of God, on a shard and throws it into the abyss, and the power of God's Name causes the waters to retreat. (Note the echo to nuclear war in this episode. David learns that the Foundation Stone must not be tampered with, as we have learned the dangers posed by tampering with the atom.)

The *Zohar* (2:91b) states that the fate of the shard, and therefore the world, rests on man's moral conduct. Whenever a person swears falsely using God's Name, that Name on the shard disappears, allowing the waters to burst out and destroy the world. To protect the shard and all of humanity, God has appointed the angel Yazriel over the shard. The angel has 70 graving tools, which he uses to ensure that the letters of God's Name are replaced on the shard as quickly as they are erased, saving the world. Thus the rising of the waters of the abyss is a continual threat to the existence of the world.

1 *Enoch* 66:1-2 offers an alternate explanation of how the waters of the abyss are held back: "And after that he showed me the angels of punishment who are prepared to let loose all the powers of the waters beneath the earth in order to bring judgment and destruction to all those who dwell on the earth. And God commanded those angels to hold those waters in check, for those angels held power over those waters."

In the alternate version of the myth, King David brings the Foundation Stone into the Temple (despite the fact that it had not yet been built—this was done by Solomon). Still another variant of the myth describes the stone ascending to Paradise, resting among the righteous. In yet other versions, it is described as hovering in the air. In fact, the motif of a sacred object hovering in the air between heaven and earth is quite common. There are versions found among the Samaritans—where a stone is described as being suspended in the air for worship, and among both Jews and Arabs—where the Rock is said to hover in the air inside the Dome of the Rock. In another Arabic myth, the object that is hovering is the grave of Mohammed. For more on this motif, see Vilnay, *Legends of Jerusalem*, 23-24.

David Re'uvani reports an Arab tradition of a cavern carved into the Foundation Stone, where Abraham, Isaac, David, Solomon, and Elijah are all said to have prayed, and their souls still are said to gather there to pray. This cave is still there, inside the Rock.

Another source suggests that a meteor fell down in the place where the Holy of Holies was later situated. The tradition refers to 2 Samuel 24:16 and 1 Chronicles 21:26.

Sources:

Mishnah Yoma 5:2; *Y. Yoma* 8:4; *B. Yoma* 54b; *Y. Sukkah* 54d; *B. Sukkah* 49a; *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 1:6; *Genesis Rabbah* 70; 1 *Enoch* 66:1-2; *Zohar* 1:231a-b, 2:91b; *B. Sukkah* 53a-b; *Y. Sanhedrin* 29b; *Y. Pesahim* 4:1; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 35; *Midrash Tehillim* 91:7; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 26:4; *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu*, *Pekudei* 3; *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Kedoshim* 10; *Midrash Konen* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 2 : 24-39; *Seder 'Arkim*; *Midrash Shohar Tov* on Psalm 91; *Targum Yerushalmi* on Exodus 28:30; *David ha-Re'uvani* p. 25; *Zohar* 2:222a-b; *Der treue Zions-Waechter* 3: nos. 40-44; *Likutei Moharan* 61:6.

Studies:

Man and Temple by Raphael Patai, pp. 54-104.
Legends of Jerusalem by Zev Vilnay, pp. 23-24.

126. CREATION BY THOUGHT

Before the world was created, God and His Name existed alone. God first conceived of the form of the world in His mind, making a world perceptible only by the intellect. Later God completed one visible to the external senses, using the world created in thought as the model.

Sources:

B. Shabbat 33b; *Beit ha-Midrash* 4:22; *Pesikta de-Rav Kabana* 88b; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 10:8; *Zohar Hadash, Ki Tavo* 59c-60a; *Or ha-Hamah* 1.

526. LIGHT FROM THE TEMPLE

What was the source of the light that came forth when God said, *Let there be light* (Gen 1:3)? Some say it shone forth from the place where the Temple in Jerusalem would one day be built, and from there it illuminated the entire world. Surrounded by that light, God completed the creation of the world. Then God saw to it that the light of the Temple was diffused to all the world, as it is said, *God has shined forth* (Ps. 50:2).

Others say that the light was created at the site of the Temple, and had never before existed.

This holy light continued to emanate even after the Temple was built upon that place. Its source was in the Holy of Holies, in which the Holy Ark stood, and it lit up the Temple and shone forth through the windows. For there were windows in the Temple, but instead of light coming into them, it went out of them. Indeed, the windows were built for this purpose, narrow on the inside and broad on the outside, in order to send forth light into the world. And the light that shone forth from the Temple ascended to the firmament, to God's Chariot, and to the Throne of Glory, and the light filled Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and all basked in its presence. That is why it is said that Jerusalem is the light of the world.

This myth about the origin of the first light derives from the verse *And the earth was lit up by His Presence* (Ezek. 43:2), where "Presence" is identified with the Temple in Jerusalem. There is a suggestion in this myth that the light pre-existed, and that the site on which the Temple was built was sacred from the time of Creation, if not before. *Genesis Rabbah* 3:4 states: "The light was created from the place of the Temple." This has theological implications, as it suggests that God created the universe out of existing materials. See "God's Garment of Light," p. 82.

The question of whether God used pre-existing materials in creating the world was a highly controversial one among the ancient rabbis, who considered it an esoteric matter. Rabbi Bar Kappara took the position that the Torah reveals that God did make use of pre-existing material, while Rav compared this to building a palace on a garbage dump, and Rabbi Jose ben Haninah asserted that the suggestion that God made use of pre-existing materials such as darkness, chaos, and void (*tohu* and *vohu*) impaired God's glory. (*Genesis Rabbah* 1:5).

The notion that light pre-existed also is found in Isaiah 45:7: *I form the light and create darkness*. Here the important distinction is between "form" (*yotzer*) and "create" (*borei*), with "form" suggesting that the light already existed, while "create" refers to something that was brought into being *ex nihilo*.

Midrash Tehillim presents a very terse version of this myth, asking where God diffused the light, with the answer that God had diffused it from the Temple. This is linked to the verse *And the earth was lit up by His Presence* (Ezek. 43:2) Here the phrase "the earth was lit up" is understood to mean the Temple. From this derives the interpretation that the light itself came from the place of the Temple.

Genesis Rabbah 60:19, however, offers a different source for the light: "Who is the light of Jerusalem? God, as it is said, *Yahweh shall be your light everlasting*" (Isa. 60:19).

This myth is likely of Jewish-Gnostic origin, as there was a primary Gnostic belief that light pre-existed the chaos that preceded creation. For an example of this Gnostic myth, see *On the Origin of the World* 2:97-98: "Seeing that everybody says that nothing existed prior to chaos, I shall demonstrate that they are all mistaken, because they are

not acquainted with the origin of chaos, nor with its root After the natural structure of the immortal beings had completely developed out of the infinite, a likeness then emanated and became a product resembling the primeval light."

A related myth in *B. Ta'anit* 10a states that the Land of Israel was created first, and the rest of the world came afterward. This land is watered first, according to this myth, because it is watered by God Himself, and the rest of the world is watered through a messenger of God. Both myths, that of light from the Temple and that *Eretz Yisrael* was created first, insist on the centrality of the Land of Israel.

Sources:

B. Ta'anit 10a; *B. Hagigah* 12a; *Genesis Rabbah* 1:5, 3:4, 3:6, 11:2, 42:3, 60:19; *Midrash Tehillim* 104:4; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 21:5; *Midrash Konen* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 2:27; *Sefer Eliyahu* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:68-78; *Zohar* 1:263a.

Studies:

The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths by Francis T. Fallon, pp. 10-24.

Man and Temple by Raphael Patai, pp. 54-104.

527. GOD BUILDS THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE

When the time drew near for Moses to take leave of this world, God took him up to the highest heavens and showed him his reward as well as what was destined to take place in the future days. There Moses saw God building the sanctuary of the Temple out of precious stones and pearls, and out of the splendor of the *Shekhinah*. So too did Moses see the Messiah, the son of David, standing there, as well as his own brother, Aaron.

Aaron said to Moses, "Do not touch me, for no one may enter here until he gives up his soul and tastes the taste of death. Otherwise the flame of the *Shekhinah* will consume you." When Moses heard Aaron's words, he fell on his face and pleaded, "Master of the Universe, let me speak with your Messiah before I die." God gave His consent and said to an angel, "Go, teach Moses my great Name so that the flame of the *Shekhinah* will not consume him when he sees the Messiah."

When Moses had been taught the Name, he said to the Messiah, "Will God build a sanctuary on earth like the one He is building here in heaven?" The Messiah replied: "The house that God is building with His hands in heaven will exist for Israel until the end of all generations. While your father Jacob was sleeping, he saw the Temple that God will build on earth and the one being built in heaven. Jacob understood that this heavenly House would exist for Israel forever, until the end of all generations. That is what Jacob meant when he awoke from his dream of the ladder reaching to heaven and said, *This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven* (Gen. 28:17). And when the time comes, God will bring this heavenly Jerusalem down to earth."

When Moses heard these words from the Messiah, he rejoiced greatly and turned his face toward God and said, "Master of the Universe, when will You bring down this Temple that is now being built?"

God said, "I have not disclosed this to any living being, neither to the first ones or the last. Shall I tell you?"

Moses said, "Master of the Universe, give me a hint."

God said, "I will scatter the Israelites to the four corners of the earth, but one day I will bring them back to the Land of Israel."

Moses descended from heaven contented. Then he gave his soul to God with a perfect heart and a longing soul.

Here God brings Moses into heaven before his death to show him his heavenly reward and also to reassure him about the future destiny of Israel. There Moses is reunited with his deceased brother, Aaron, and he also meets the Messiah. This myth is significant because Moses himself is the model for the Messiah. Indeed, for the Samaritans Moses was a figure of messianic proportions. The myth also confirms the inevitability of subsequent Jewish history—the building of the Temple on earth as a mirror image to that already existing in heaven, and the eventual coming of the Messiah. While God's purpose in this myth is to reassure Moses, the real purpose is to reassure the Jews that despite their trials, God's plan for Israel would ultimately be fulfilled. For a similar heavenly encounter see "Jacob's Heavenly Vision," p. 357.

This intriguing midrash builds both on the dream of Jacob (Gen. 28:12-17), and especially on the verse *This is none other than the abode of God* (Gen. 28:17), as well as on the tradition that Moses did not only ascend to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, but ascended all the way into heaven. In the most famous version of this legend, found in *B. Shabbat* 88b-89a, God reaches down and pulls Moses into heaven, so that he finds himself standing before God's Throne of Glory and sees God creating the crowns of the letters of the Torah. In the version from *Pesikta Rabbati* 20:4, Moses sees the angel Sandalphon standing behind God's throne, and God steps down from His throne to reassure Moses. In this version from *Bereshit Rabbati*, Moses sees God building the heavenly Temple. Note that in the earlier midrash, God is creating the crowns of the letters of the Torah and here He is building the heavenly Jerusalem. Thus is God portrayed as taking an active role in the process of creation, especially as it relates to the people of Israel.

This midrash also builds on the existing legends about the death of Moses. In most of these, Moses is very reluctant to die, and resists the Angel of Death. Here both God and the Angel of Death politely refrain from threatening to take Moses' soul until he is ready to release it. Still another midrash, in *B. Sota* 14a, asserts that Moses did not realize he was dying and was unaware of what was happening to him. In *Likutei Moharan* 1:4, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav explains this by saying that Moses gave himself completely to God, so that when God spoke to him he was unaware of his own existence. Therefore he was unaware of his own death.

The version of this midrash found in *Bereshit Rabbati* takes an unusual turn in suggesting that God will bring the heavenly Temple down to earth. At first this might appear to be a way to describe the messianic era as if it were heaven on earth. But, in fact, it is probably intended to be understood literally, as it is described in another text, *Tefillat Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:78-82: "Then a fire will come down from heaven and consume Jerusalem Then the perfect, rebuilt Jerusalem will come down from heaven Then the already constructed Temple will descend from heaven, for it is bound to the celestial abode, as Moses saw by the Holy Spirit: *You will bring them and plant them* (Exod. 15:17)." It seems likely that these texts are referring to the same tradition, in which the heavenly Jerusalem would descend to earth at the time of the advent of the Messiah. See "The Descent of the Heavenly Temple," p. 512.

However, the version of this myth found in *Pesikta Rabbati* suggests that rather than bring the heavenly Temple down to earth, God will see to it that an earthly Temple will be built. Also, in this version Moses asked to know when the earthly Temple would be destroyed and God tells him that although it will be destroyed and the people of Israel will be scattered among all the nations, the day will come when He will gather all those who were exiled.

See "The Ascent of Moses," p. 261.

Sources:

B. Sota 14a; *B. Shabbat* 88b-89a; *Pesikta Rabbati* 20:4; *Bereshit Rabbati* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 6:22-23; *Midrash Kohen* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 2:34; *Midrashei Geulah*.

Studies:

"The Celestial Temple as Viewed in the Aggadah" by Victor Aptowitzer.

528. THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM AND THE EARTHLY JERUSALEM

Everything that God created in heaven, He also created on earth. There is a heavenly Jerusalem that mirrors the earthly city, and a celestial Temple that is the mirror image of the one King Solomon built in Jerusalem. So too was the earthly Holy of Holies a counterpart of the heavenly one. But while the earthly Temple was destroyed, along with the Holy of Holies, the heavenly Temple still exists in all its glory.

The Jerusalem on high faces the Jerusalem below. For out of God's great love for the earthly Jerusalem, He made another one on high, as it is said, *Your walls are ever before Me* (Isa. 49:16).

The Jerusalem constructed in heaven is joined together with the one on earth. God has sworn that He will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly one is rebuilt, as it is said, *I will not enter the city* (Hos. 11:9). God said, "What is there for Me in Jerusalem after My people have been taken from there?"

God created a lofty palace on high, a holy city, the supernal city of Jerusalem. Whoever wishes to enter into God's presence may do so only from this city. That is the meaning of the verse *This is the gateway to the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it* (Ps. 118:20).

One of the key principles of kabbalah is "as above, so below." The idea is that this world was created as a mirror image of heaven. Thus Jerusalem exists in both places, and there is still a heavenly Temple standing, although the earthly one was destroyed. Just as Jerusalem on earth is the holiest Jewish city, so the Jerusalem on high is the gateway to God's presence. One of the goals of the mystics who tried to ascend to Paradise was to find their way to the heavenly Jerusalem.

"As above, so below" has another important meaning—that prayer and some kinds of mystical study in this world could affect the world above. Therefore *tikkun* or repair done below, heals the world on high and brings God and His exiled Bride that much closer.

According to one version of this myth, God has vowed to stay out of the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly one is rebuilt. This would be a great sacrifice on God's part, similar to the exile the *Shekhinah* experiences since being cast out of Her home in this world, the Temple.

Sources:

B. Ta'anit 5a; *Y. Berakhot* 4, 4:5; *Exodus Rabbah* 33:4; *Midrash Tehillim* 30:1, 122:5; *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, Pekudei* 1; *Zohar* 2:50b-51a.

Studies:

Midrash Yerushalem: A Metaphysical History of Jerusalem by Daniel Sperber, pp. 82-88.

529. HOW MOUNT MORIAH WAS CREATED

In the beginning Moriah was a vale, but God decided to make it the site of His sanctuary, so that His *Shekhinah* could reside there. So He made a sign to the mountains around the valley to come together, to make an abode for the *Shekhinah*. Then all the nearby mountains moved together and fused into one. That is how Mount Moriah was created.

Others say that God created seven mountains, and of these He chose Mount Moriah as the site of the holy Temple, for that was *the mountain which God desired as His dwelling* (Ps. 68:17).

So too was Mount Sinai created out of Mount Moriah, for God said, "Since their father Isaac was bound upon this mount, it is fitting that his children receive the Torah upon it."

So Mount Sinai plucked itself out of Mount Moriah as a priest's portion is plucked out of dough, and that is how it came into being.

Mount Moriah is the mountain where God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22). However, in the midrashic tradition it becomes identified with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and even comes to include the place where Cain and Abel made their offerings, as well as the offering of Noah at the end of the Flood. Here it is said to have had a supernatural creation, as it was God's intention from very early in Creation that it serve as His sanctuary on earth.

Just as there is a creation myth about Mount Moriah, so there is one about how Mount Sinai was created out of Mount Moriah. This powerfully links these major biblical episodes, as well as tying them both to the Temple in Jerusalem. For the mount in Jerusalem where the Temple was built and where the Temple Mount is found today is called Mount Moriah (2 Chron. 3:7).

The image of Mount Sinai plucking itself out of Mount Moriah is compared to the priest's portion being plucked out of dough. This refers to the priest's share of the bread as mentioned in Numbers 15:20.

Sources:

Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, Va-Yera 22; Midrash Haserot ve-Yeterot 19; Midrash ha-Gadol; Midrash Tehillim 68:9; Beit ha-Midrash 5:72-73.

530. THE ALTAR OF ABRAHAM

Abraham and Isaac *arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there* (Gen. 22:9). Some say that was the same altar on Mount Moriah where Adam made offerings, because the gate of the Garden of Eden was close by. Adam erected an altar to the Lord there, and on it he sacrificed an ox with one horn on its forehead. So too was it the same altar on which Cain and Abel made their sacrifices, and the same altar where Noah and his sons sacrificed.

Others say the altar that Adam built was demolished by the waters of the Flood. Noah rebuilt it, but it was demolished in the generation of the Tower of Babel. Then *Abraham built the altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood* (Gen. 22:9).

That was the site where in the future the Temple in Jerusalem would be built, and the place of the altar was the same as that of the Temple altar, where the High Priests made their sacrifices.

This myth presents an archetypal altar on which many of the key biblical sacrifices prior to the building of the Temple were made. It asserts that the same altar was used by Adam, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, and it was situated on the same holy mountain, Mount Moriah, where God directed Abraham to go to offer his son Isaac. Further, the Temple Mount, known as Mount Moriah, is believed to be set in the same place. This is an example of mythic geography, with little consideration for actual geographic location. Instead, what matters is linking together these sacrifices in order to portray the existence of this archetypal altar for sacrifices to God.

Others say that Adam and Eve lived on Mount Moriah, because the gate of the Garden of Eden was close by. Adam erected an altar to the Lord there, and on it he sacrificed a remarkable ox with one horn on its forehead. So too did Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, make use of that altar.

Sources:

Targum Pseudo-Yonathan on Genesis 8:20, 22:9; Genesis Rabbah 34:9, 34:20; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 31; Midrash Tehillim 92:6; Zohar 1:70a.

531. GOD PRAYS FOR THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

God has prayed for the building of the Temple since the days of Abraham, and even before. Why should God pray for this? Because man must build the earthly Temple first, and afterward God will send the heavenly Temple to rest upon it. All of Israel, together, is responsible for rebuilding the Temple. Everyone has an equal share, and everyone is obligated to participate. Once it is built, the earthly Temple will serve as the foundation for the one that will come from the heavens.

The ultimate stage of the messianic era will be the descent of the heavenly Temple, which will come to rest on the earthly one. See "The Descent of the Heavenly Temple," p. 512. Before this can take place, the earthly Temple must be built, or, since the first two Temples were destroyed, rebuilt. This will prepare the necessary awakening from below that must precede the descent of the Temple from on high. According to *Metzudat David*, once the earthly Temple is built, God will take so much delight in it that He Himself will carve designs on the stones in order to beautify them. Thus God prays for the building of the earthly Temple so that the time may be hastened when the messianic era begins and He can lower the supernal Temple onto it. This belief serves as one of the primary motivations of fervent groups in Israel that are devoted to the building of the third Temple despite the fact that the Muslim Dome of the Rock has already been built on what is usually regarded as the site of the Temple.

Sources:

Genesis Rabbah 56:10; *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* 21, p. 60b; *Emunot ve-ha-De'ot* 8, chap. 5-6; *Em ha-Banim S'mehah*; *Metzudat David*; *Ezrat Kohanim*.

532. THE CELESTIAL TEMPLE

God's dwelling place above is directly opposite His dwelling place below. Just as there is an earthly Jerusalem, so too is there a celestial Jerusalem; just as there was an earthly Temple, so there is a celestial Temple located in the most sacred part of the heavens, not far from the Throne of Glory. The stars are its ornaments, and the angels serve as its priests.

This is the Temple of God, standing on the summit of the firmament, its brilliance illuminating all the rooms of heaven. A thousand hosts stand before the *Shekhinah* in the celestial Temple, calling "Holy, holy, holy." And every host consists of many thousands of ministering angels.

Some say that the celestial Temple existed on high even before the world was created, as it is said, *O Throne of Glory exalted from the first* (Jer. 17:12). Thus the upper Temple existed first, and God commanded that the lower Temple be made according to the secrets of the upper one. Others say that God began the creation of His world at the foundation stone, and built the world upon it. Then He created the Celestial Temple, as it is said, *The place You made to dwell in, O Yahweh* (Exod. 15:17).

Just as there is a High Priest in the Temple below, so there is a High Priest on high. Some say that Logos, the divine word, the first angel, serves as the heavenly High Priest. Others say that it is Metatron, while still others say that it is Michael, the prince of Israel, who serves as the High Priest, and offers sacrifices on the altar every day. What does he offer up? The souls of the righteous.

When the earthly Temple still existed, the High Priest would make sacrifices and burn incense below, while Michael would do the same on high. After the earthly Temple was destroyed, God said to Michael, "From this time forward you shall offer me the good deeds of My children, their prayers, and the souls of the righteous, which are hidden beneath the Throne of Glory."

Others say that since the heavenly Temple and the earthly one were built as counterparts as long as the one stood, the High Priest offered up sacrifices and burnt incense, and the angel Michael offered up the souls of the righteous who dwell beneath the Throne of Glory, and all the angels came to the altar with incense, and they burned it until the cloud of incense covered the canopy of heaven. But once the earthly Temple was destroyed and the sacrifices abolished, the offerings on high came to an end as well. But in the future God will restore them.

At the End of Days, when the time has come for the earthly Temple to be rebuilt, the heavens will open up, and the glory of the Temple's holiness will be revealed. Then God will bring the heavenly Temple down to the earthly Jerusalem, and the footsteps of the Messiah will be heard by one and all.

Working on the principle of "as above, so below," Jewish lore postulates the existence of a heavenly Jerusalem that is the mirror image of the earthly one, except that the heavenly Temple still stands, while that in this world has been destroyed. As is apparent from the large number of sources that refer to the celestial Temple, this was a widely recognized tradition.

Isaiah 2:3 suggests the existence of the heavenly temple: "Come, let us go up to the Mount of Yahweh, to the House of the God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:3).

Philo offers an allegorical interpretation of the two temples: "There are, it seems, two temples belonging to God, one being this world, in which the High Priest is the divine word (Logos), his own firstborn son. The other is the rational soul, the representation of the universal heaven."

See "God Builds the Heavenly Temple," p. 412.

Sources:

1 Enoch 14:16-20; 2 Enoch 20:1-4; B. Hagigah 12a; Y. Berakhot 4:5; Genesis Rabbah 1:4, 55:7, 69:7; Numbers Rabbah 12:12; Midrash Tanhuma, Naso 19; Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, Pekudei 3; Midrash Eleh Ezkerah; The Testament of Levi 3:4-6, 5:1-2, 18:6; The Book of Jubilees 31:14; Philo, De Specialibus Legibus, 1:966; Philo, De Somniis 1:215; Aseret ha-Dibrot in Beit ha-Midrash 1:62; Alpha Beta de-Ben Sira; Pirkei Mashiah in Beit ha-Midrash 3:68; Wisdom of Solomon 203-205; 2 Baruch 4:3-5; The Apocalypse of Moses 33; Midrash ha-Ne'elam in Zohar Hadash 24d-25a; Sh'nei Luhot ha-B'rit 2:48b; Em ha-Banim S'mehah.

Studies:

"The Celestial Temple as Viewed in the Aggadah" by Victor Aptowitzer.

"The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran" by John Strugnell.

"The Temple Within: The Embodied Divine Image and Its Worship in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish and Christian Sources" by C.R.A. Morray-Jones.

533. THE TRUE TEMPLE OF GOD

The highest and truest temple of God is the whole universe. Heaven, its sanctuary, is the holiest part of all existence. Its priests are the angels, who serve God. Its offerings are the stars, which were placed in the pure temple of heaven that they might give light.

Here Philo envisions the whole universe as a temple of God. This is related to, but distinct from, the mythic tradition that there is a celestial temple in heaven that is the mirror image of the temple in Jerusalem. Philo's description of the heavenly temple might be viewed as a metaphor, a way of saying that God inhabits all of creation. It might also be viewed as a statement that this world is God's temple.

Sources:

Philo, De Specialibus Legibus 1:66; Philo, De Opificio Mundi 55.

534. THE DESCENT OF THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

Some say that in the future God will cause the Jerusalem on high to descend from heaven fully built, and will set it on the tops of four mountains: Mount Sinai, Mount Tabor, Mount Carmel, and Mount Hermon. Then the Temple will sing aloud, and the mountains will answer the song. So too will Jerusalem serve as a beacon to all of the nations, and they will walk in her light. Thus will God announce the Redemption.

One of the key events of the messianic era will be the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. In this myth the problem of rebuilding the Temple is solved by having the heavenly Jerusalem—including the heavenly Temple—descend to earth and settle on the tops of three (or in some versions, four) mountains.

Others say that a beautiful and great city, built of precious stones and pearls, will descend from heaven, resting on 3,000 towers. How will the people ascend these towers? Like clouds and winged doves, for they will become flying beings. The houses and gates of the pious will have doorposts made of precious stones. The treasures of the Sanctuary will be open to them, for there will be love of Torah and peace among them.

Still others say that Jerusalem will descend from heaven and station itself like a pillar of fire from earth to heaven. Then all who want to come to Jerusalem will see that pillar of fire and will follow its light until they reach Jerusalem. For that light will be greater than that of the sun and moon, and will make their light dim. And they will dwell in that kingdom until the End of Days, 7,000 years from the days of creation.

This myth of the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem is based on two biblical verses. One, from Isaiah, says, *In the days to come the Mount of Yahweh's house shall stand firm above the mountains* (Isa. 2:2). The other verse, *How welcome on the mountain are the footsteps of the herald announcing happiness* (Isa. 52:7), is given a mythic interpretation, where the messenger is the heavenly city of Jerusalem, here brought down to earth as a symbol of the transformation that will take place in the messianic era. This image, in itself, is quite beautiful, with the ethereal Jerusalem appearing as if in a vision, balanced on the tops of four key mountains in Jewish history. In some versions, however, it sits on the top of only the first three mountains listed, excluding Mount Hermon. This points to the different mythic meanings of the numbers three and four, both of which have key importance in Jewish lore.

An extensive description of the future Temple is found at the end of the Book of Ezekiel 40-48, beginning with a vision: *The hand of Yahweh came upon me, and He brought me there. He brought me, in visions of God, to the Land of Israel, and He set me down on a very high mountain* (Ezek. 40: 1-2).

Hai Gaon portrays Jerusalem as a pillar of fire, like the one that led the Israelites through the desert at night. That is to say, allegorically, that Jerusalem is the guiding light for the Jews, and the light it casts will be that described in Isaiah 30:26: *The light of the moon shall be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days.*

Sefer Zerubavel describes the rebuilding of Jerusalem, with the Temple built on five mountains: Lebanon, Moriah, Tabor, Carmel, and Hermon. Here it is the Temple on top of these mountains, rather than Jerusalem itself.

In *2 Baruch* God tells Baruch about the heavenly Temple waiting to descend: "It is not this building (the Temple in Jerusalem) that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed, with Me, that was already prepared from the moment I decided to create Paradise."

See "The Descent of the Heavenly Temple," p. 512.

Sources:

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 21:4; *2 Baruch* 4; *Pirkei Mashiah* in *Beit ha-Midrash*, 3:69;

Responsum, Hai Gaon, in *Ta'am Zekenim* 60a-b; *Nistarot Eliyahu* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3: 67f; *Sefer Zerubavel*; *Midrashei Geulah*; *Sefer Eliyahu* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:68-78.

535. THE ELEVATION OF JERUSALEM

In the future, Jerusalem will be raised up until it reaches the Throne of Glory. So too will God add to Jerusalem a thousand gardens, a thousand towers, a thousand fortresses, and a thousand passages.

This myth of the raising up of Jerusalem is the opposite of that of “The Descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem” (see p. 418). The latter speaks of the Jerusalem on high being brought down to earth, and this one of the earthly Jerusalem being raised on high. The consistent factor is the supernatural qualities associated with Jerusalem.

The myth of two Jerusalems, one on earth and one in heaven, is hinted at in the apocalyptic *4 Ezra*: In the days to come, when the signs foretold have come to pass, the city that is now invisible will appear, and the land which is now concealed be seen (*4 Ezra* 7:26-27). This notion develops in the Talmud into a myth of two Jerusalems. Rabbi Yohanan said: “Jerusalem of this world is not like Jerusalem of the World to Come. Anyone who wants to visit Jerusalem in this world can do so, but only those who are invited can ascend to Jerusalem of the World to Come” (*B. BB* 75b). At the same time, however, and in the same source, there is an alternate myth. Here, instead of bringing the heavenly Jerusalem down to earth at the time of the Redemption, it is said that God would elevate the earthly Jerusalem. Over time, the former myth of two Jerusalems became the dominant one, with the understanding that the heavenly Jerusalem would descend at the time of the Redemption.

Sources:

4 Ezra 7:26-27; *B. Bava Batra* 75b; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 20:7.

536. THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

The Land of Israel is the center of the world. Jerusalem is the center of the Land of Israel. The Temple is the center of Jerusalem. The Ark is the center of the Temple. The Foundation Stone stands before the Ark, and the entire world was founded upon it. The gate to heaven is there, and it is open.

For God created the world in the same way a child is formed in the womb. Just as a child begins to grow from its navel, and then develops into its full form, so God began with the navel of the world, and from there expanded in all directions. Thus Jerusalem is the navel of the world, and its core is the altar of the Holy Temple, built upon the Foundation Stone, which forms the foundation of the world.

On medieval maps Jerusalem is often shown as the center of the world, or, as it is often called, the navel of the world. This belief, supported by Ezekiel 5:5, derives both from the importance of Jerusalem and from the tradition of the Foundation Stone, upon which the world was built. See “The Foundation Stone,” p. 96. The reference to the gate of heaven derives from Jacob’s dream, *This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven* (Gen. 28:17).

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael offers an alternate explanation of how the Land of Israel and Jerusalem were selected, in which God did not create the world around them, but they were chosen by God after the world was created: “Before the Land of Israel was chosen, all lands were suitable for divine revelation; after the Land of Israel was chosen, all other lands were eliminated. Before Jerusalem was especially selected, the entire Land of Israel was suitable for altars; after Jerusalem was selected, all the rest of the land was eliminated. Before the place of the Temple was selected, the whole of Jerusalem was appropriate for the manifestation of the *Shekhinah*; after the place of the Temple had been selected, the rest of Jerusalem was eliminated, as it is said, *This is my resting-place for all time* (Ps. 132:14).”

Sources:

Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 10; Midrash Tehillim 91:7; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:1; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 35; B. Yoma 53b-54b; Midrash ha-Shem be-Hokhmah in Beit ha-Midrash 5:63; Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha 1:42-50.

Studies:

Midrash Yerushalem: A Metaphysical History of Jerusalem by Daniel Sperber, pp. 63-70.

537. THE PATRIARCHS SEEK TO COMFORT JERUSALEM

When Jerusalem was on fire and the Temple had been torn down, God said to Abraham, "Go and comfort Jerusalem. Perhaps she will accept comforting from you."

Abraham tried to comfort Jerusalem, but Jerusalem refused to be comforted. So God sent Isaac to comfort Jerusalem, and he fared no better than his father had done. Then God sent Jacob as he had Isaac, but Jerusalem would not be comforted. So God sent Moses on this mission, but still Jerusalem refused to be comforted.

Thereupon all of the patriarchs went to God and said, "Jerusalem will not accept comforting from any of us, so great is her grief." Then God said, "It is for Me to comfort Jerusalem. Since I set her on fire, I must comfort her."

The model for a biblical figure comforting Israel is found in Jeremiah 31:15, where Jeremiah imagines or has a vision of Rachel weeping over the exile of her children, the children of Israel. This myth also finds a parallel in "God's Exile with Israel," p. 61. In that case God offered to raise any one of the patriarchs from the dead to lead Israel, but Israel refused all of them. So God agreed to lead them into exile Himself.

Sources:

Pesikta Rabbati 30:3.

538. THE CREATION OF THE TEMPLE

At the beginning of the creation of the world, God foresaw that the Temple would be built, destroyed, and rebuilt. None shared in this secret, until God showed Jacob, asleep at Beth El, a vision of the Temple being built, destroyed and rebuilt again.

Since King David desired to build a Temple to God, he entreated God to show him a place for the altar. So an angel appeared to him in a vision standing over the place in Jerusalem where the altar should be located. However, the angel commanded David not to build the Temple because he had been defiled with human blood through the many years he had spent fighting wars. The angel commanded him to turn the construction over to his son, Solomon, but directed David himself to prepare the material needed for the construction—gold, silver, copper, stones, cypress and cedar wood. This David did, and when the time came for Solomon to construct the Temple, the materials he needed to build it were already in his possession.

Then King Solomon called everyone together—the rich and the poor, the princes and the priests—and he said: "People of Israel, let us build a splendid Temple in Jerusalem in honor of God. And since the Temple will be the holy place of all the people, all of the people should share in building it. Therefore you will cast lots to decide which wall you will build."

So King Solomon prepared four lots. On one he wrote North, on another South, on the third East, and on the last West. Then he had each group choose one of them. In this way, it was decided that the princes would build the northern wall as well as the pillars and the stairs of the Temple. And the priests would build the southern wall and tend the Ark

and weave its curtain. As for the wealthy merchants, they were to build the eastern wall as well as supplying the oil that would burn for the Eternal Light. The job of building the western wall, as well as weaving the Temple's curtains, fell to the poor people, who also were to pray for the Temple's completion. Then the building began.

The merchants took the golden jewelry of their wives and sold it to pay workers to build the wall for them, and soon it was finished. Likewise the princes and the priests found ways to have their walls built for them. But the poor people had to build the wall themselves, so it took them much longer.

Every day the poor came to the site of the Temple, and they worked with their own hands to build the western wall. And all the time they worked on it, their hearts were filled with joy, for their love of God was very great.

At last the Temple was finished, as beautiful as the Temple on high. Nothing in the world could compare with it, for it was the jewel in the crown of Jerusalem. And after that, whenever the poor people went to the Temple, fathers would say to their sons, "Do you see that stone in the wall? I put it there with my own hands." And mothers would say to their daughters, "Do you see that beautiful curtain in the Temple? I wove that curtain myself."

Many years later, when the Temple was destroyed, only the Western Wall was saved, for the angels spread their wings over it. For that wall, built by the poor, was the most precious of all in the eyes of God.

Even today the Western Wall is still standing. Now it is sometimes known as the Wailing Wall, for every morning drops of dew can be seen on its stones, and it is said among the people that the wall was crying at night for the Temple that was torn down. And, as everyone who has been there can testify, God's presence can still be felt in that place.

Although King Solomon had the first Temple in Jerusalem built, the idea of creating the Temple was said to have been King David's. But because of the blood on King David's hands, he was not considered pure enough by heaven to build the Temple. Therefore the responsibility fell on his son, King Solomon. The description of King David's role in conceiving the Temple comes from a fragment of Eupolemus. This is followed by a folktale about the building of the Temple.

According to Zev Vilnay, the primary folklorist of the Land of Israel, he collected this story about the building of the Temple from a Jewish youth in Jerusalem in 1922. The point of the tale is that everyone participated in building the Temple, confirming its role as a temple of all the people.

Sources:

Genesis Rabbah 2:5, 119:7; Eupolemus, Fragment Two; *Aggadot Eretz Yisrael* no. 193.

539. THE TEMPLE BUILT ITSELF

It is said that *no hammer or ax or any iron tool was heard in the Temple while it was being built* (1 Kings 6:7). How, then, was the Temple built? The truth is that the Temple built itself. The stones flew and rose up by themselves. In this way the stones moved of their own accord and set themselves in the wall of the Temple and erected it.

In this myth the existence of the Temple is so inevitable that it is said to have built itself. This corresponds with the traditions that there are earthly and heavenly Temples that are mirror images of each other. Therefore the existence of the heavenly Temple was part of God's original plan.

Sources:

Pesikta Rabbati 6.

540. THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Everything came through for him in the construction. Foreign workmen brought the slabs of marble, cut to fit together. His fingers did the measuring, and the stones rose in place accordingly. Never did a building arise as easily as this Temple, or rather, this Temple arose as a Temple truly should. Only—on every stone (in what quarry had they originated?) was carved, with tools that must have been splendidly sharp, out of anger or to defile or to utterly destroy them, the crude scribbblings of meaningless hands of children, or rather the markings of barbarous mountain dwellers, lasting an eternity that would survive the Temple.

This is one of two parables Kafka wrote about the Temple. See “Leopards in the Temple,” p. 423, for the other. This one about the building of the Temple is suggestive of the folklore about King Solomon, certainly the notion that “Everything came through him in the construction.”

While the parable has a universal quality, typical of Kafka, here the Temple can be recognized as the Temple built in Jerusalem. This is not quite as apparent in “Leopards in the Temple.” If one views them together, however, it becomes evident that Kafka had focused on the Temple, certainly aware of its central importance in Jewish tradition.

This motif is parallel to the rabbinic myth that the Temple built itself. See the preceding entry, “The Temple Built Itself,” p. 421.

Sources:

Parables and Paradoxes by Franz Kafka.

541. THE WEDDING OF KING SOLOMON AND PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER

King Solomon wed the daughter of Pharaoh on the same night he completed the building of the Temple. That way the celebrations over the completion of the Temple and that over Solomon’s wedding were held concurrently. But when the sound of the latter drowned out the sound of the former, the thought entered God’s mind that some time in the future He would destroy the Temple, as it is said, *This city has aroused My anger and My wrath from the day it was built until this day* (Jer. 32:31).

On the following morning the sacrifice was offered late. How did this happen? Bitiah had made a canopy on which she had affixed images of all kinds of stars and constellations, and she hung it over Solomon’s wedding couch. So every time Solomon opened his eyes, he saw all those stars and constellations hanging over him, and thought it was still night. Then, too, God’s anger was roused.

Bitiah is the name usually attributed to the daughter of Pharaoh who raised Moses (although not in this source). The notion of Solomon and Pharaoh’s daughter being wed is an example of midrashic time, in which all times blend together into one. While King Solomon may have married a daughter of the current ruler of Egypt, it was certainly not Bitiah.

The traditions related to Bitiah in her role in raising Moses treat her with great veneration, and prompted the rabbis to give her the name of Bitiah, “daughter of God.” In fact, she is identified as one of the nine who entered Paradise alive (*Derekh Eretz Zuta* 1). See “Pharaoh’s Daughter,” p. 374. However, in this account of the wedding of Solomon and Bitiah, there is a clear indication of disapproval, since Bitiah’s canopy caused Solomon to be late in offering the morning sacrifice.

God’s anger is provoked when the rejoicing for Solomon’s wedding drowns out that for the completion of the Temple. Likewise, God is angered when the morning

sacrifice is late because Solomon does not wake up in time. That Bitiah is somehow linked with these provocations is a clear indication that the notion of Solomon marrying Pharaoh's daughter did not receive rabbinic approval. This myth echoes God's anger at Solomon's tendency to follow other gods. See 1 Kings 11:1-10.

Sources:

Midrash Mishlei 31.

542. LEOPARDS IN THE TEMPLE

Leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial vessels dry. It happens again and again. Eventually it can be predicted. It becomes a part of the ceremony.

Here Kafka creates a completely original temple myth, which itself is an explanation about the way that ritual comes into being predictable by repetition. Kafka wrote a number of parables that closely follow biblical and midrashic models. See "Paradise, p. 445 and "The Coming of the Messiah," p. 518. Kafka also wrote parables on Abraham and Mount Sinai.

Here, as is often the case, Kafka transforms the myth into a universal one, where it is no longer certain that the temple in Kafka's parable is the Temple in Jerusalem.

An interesting parallel is IFA 16893, where lions enter a synagogue in Meron.

Sources:

Parables and Paradoxes by Franz Kafka.

543. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHERUBIM

As long as the people of Israel fulfilled the will of God, the faces of the cherubim on the curtain covering the Holy of Holies in the Temple were turned toward each other like those of a loving couple, indicating God's love for Israel. But when the people of Israel did not obey the will of God, the cherubim turned their faces miraculously away from each other, toward the walls.

Great mystery is associated with the two cherubim that were said to be sculpted on the cover of the Ark in the Temple in Jerusalem. They were believed to be enchanted, as demonstrated in this myth, where they are said to face each other like a loving couple if Israel fulfilled God's will and to turn away if Israel did not. For more on the role of the cherubim, see "The Ever-turning Sword of Flame," p. 404. The earliest reference to the cherubim is found in Genesis 3:24, where God places them at the gates of Eden. That passage does not indicate their sex, but the description of the cherubim on the Ark cover in the Holy of Holies implies that of a couple, and some sexual element is assumed. This is made very explicit in the talmudic tradition in *B. Yoma* 54a: "Whenever Israel came to the Temple for the Festival, the curtain would be removed and the Cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another, and they would be addressed: 'Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.'" This almost certainly refers to the uniting of God's masculine and feminine aspects. When there is harmony between God and Israel, these aspects are in harmony, but when there isn't harmony, the forces of exile predominate above and below. These notions were much further elaborated on in kabbalah, where the separation of God's masculine and feminine aspects is portrayed as the exile of the *Shekhinah*.

Sources:

B. Bava Batra 99a; Introduction to *Lamentations Rabbah* 9; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 19; *Yalkut Shim'oni* 474; *Eliyahu Rabbah* 1:3.

551. ABRAHAM IN THE TEMPLE

When the Temple was destroyed, God found Abraham standing in the ruins of the Temple. He said to him, "*Why should My beloved be in My house?*" (Jer. 11:15).

Abraham replied, "I have come concerning the fate of my children."

God said, "Your children sinned and have been sent into exile."

"Perhaps," said Abraham, "they only sinned in error."

God answered, "*She has wrought lewdness*" (Jer. 11:15).

Abraham said, "Perhaps only a few sinned?"

"*With many*" (Jer. 11:15), came the reply.

"Still," Abraham pleaded, "You should have remembered the covenant of the circumcision."

God replied, "*The sacral flesh has passed from you*" (Jer. 11:15).

"In that case," said Abraham, "perhaps if You had waited for them, they would have repented."

God replied, "*For you exult while performing your evil deeds!*" (Jer. 11:15).

Then Abraham put his hands on his head and wept bitterly and cried, "Perhaps, heaven forbid, there is no hope for them."

Then a heavenly voice came forth and said, "*The Lord named you verdant olive tree, fair, with choice fruit*" (Jer. 11:16). As the olive tree produces its best only at the very end, so Israel will flourish at the end of time."

Here Abraham confronts God over the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the children of Israel, and proceeds to bargain with God as he did over the fate of Sodom (Gen. 18:22-33). God's replies are taken from Jeremiah 11:15-16. Although God does not reverse His decree against the Jews, a heavenly voice holds out the promise that in the end Israel will flourish.

A related midrash is found in *Lamentations Rabbah*, Proem 24. See "Abraham and the Alphabet," following.

Sources:

B. Menahot 53b.

552. ABRAHAM AND THE ALPHABET

God said to Abraham, "Your children have sinned and transgressed against the whole Torah, all twenty-two letters in it. Let the letters of the alphabet testify against Israel." All at once the twenty-two letters appeared. The *aleph* came forth to testify that Israel had transgressed the Torah.

Abraham said to the *aleph*, "You are the first of all the letters, and you have come to testify against Israel in its time of danger? Have you forgotten that God opened the Ten Commandments with you and that every nation turned you down except for the children of Israel, and you have come to testify against them?"

The *aleph* immediately stood aside and gave no testimony. Then the *bet* came to testify against Israel.

"My daughter," Abraham said to the *bet*, "have you come to testify against My children who cling to the Torah, of which you are the first letter, as it is said, *In the beginning God created* (Gen. 1:1)?"

The *bet* quickly stood aside and gave no testimony.

When the remaining letters saw how the *aleph* and *bet* had been silenced, they felt ashamed and did not testify. Abraham then began to speak before God, saying, "Master

of the Universe, when I was a hundred years old You gave me a son. When he was a young man you ordered me to offer him as a sacrifice before You. I steeled my heart and bound him on the altar myself. Will You not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on my children?"

At this the mercy of God was stirred, and he said, "For your sake and that of your children I will restore Israel to their place."

Here Abraham intercedes with God to spare Israel from condemnation. This is condensed from a longer myth in which not only Abraham, but Isaac, Jacob, and Moses all come before God to defend Israel. Finally the matriarch Rachel breaks her silence and tells of her suffering when Jacob was given in marriage to her sister, Leah, instead of to herself. God's heart is softened, and this myth then identifies Rachel's plea with the verse *Rachel weeping for her children* (Jer. 31:15).

Sources:

Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 24.

553. MOSES AND THE SUN

When Moses learned that the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and the people killed or taken into exile, he lifted up his voice, saying: "Cursed be you, sun! Why did you not become dark when the enemy entered the Temple?"

The sun replied: "By your life, Moses, how could I become dark when they beat me with sixty whips of fire, saying, 'Go pour forth your light! I had no choice.'"

At that Moses spoke to God, saying, "Master of the Universe, You have written in Your Torah, *No animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young* (Lev. 22:28). Yet many mothers and sons have been killed. Why are You silent?"

Here Moses confronts first the sun—the earliest primitive symbol of God—and then God Himself over their failure to prevent the destruction of the Temple. There is substantial anger revealed, which, of course, is actually the anger of the rabbis, the authors of these myths. Abraham is not afraid to question or bargain with God, as was demonstrated in the case of Sodom (Gen. 18:22-33). But Moses has such an intimate relationship with God, and such an intense interest in the fate of his people, Israel, that he can even confront God as He did in Exodus 32:9-14, and as He does here.

Sources:

Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 24.

554. THE INVISIBLE TEMPLE

It only appears that the Temple was destroyed. Actually, it remains in existence, hidden from the sight of ordinary mortals, and sacrifices are still offered in the invisible sanctuary.

This is an unusual variant on the theme that the heavenly Temple continues to exist although the earthly Temple was destroyed. Here the earthly Temple is still said to exist, although it is invisible, and we are told that sacrifices are still offered there. There are other examples of invisible things found in Jewish lore. For example, some versions of the myth of the primordial light say that it was never removed from the world, but is visible only to the *Tzaddikim*. See "The Light of the First Day," p. 83.

Sources:

Emek ha-Melekh 3:389.

Zohar 1:73a asserts that Aaron's sons drank wine in the Holy of Holies, the same wine that intoxicated Noah. One commentary on the *Zohar*, *Ziv ha-Zohar*, identifies this destructive wine with secular knowledge.

The linkage between the deaths of Aaron's sons and the biblical ritual of sacrificing the two goats on Yom Kippur grows out of the fact that the chapter beginning *Yahweh spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron* (Lev. 16:1) prescribes the Yom Kippur ritual. For a description of the ritual of sacrificing the goats, see "A Scapegoat for Azazel," p. 295.

Sources:

B. Sanhedrin 52; *Exodus Rabbah* 45:5; *Zohar* 1:73a, 3:56b.

596. THE SPIRIT OF IDOLATRY

When the Israelites returned from the Babylonian exile, they found the Temple in Jerusalem destroyed and cried in a loud voice to *Yahweh their God* (Neh. 9:4). They said: "Woe, woe, it is the evil spirit of idolatry that has destroyed the Sanctuary, burnt the Temple, killed all the righteous, and driven Israel into exile. And behold, he is still dancing among us." And they prayed to the Lord: "You, who brought this evil spirit into being so that we could receive a reward through resisting him—we want neither him, nor the reward!" Thereupon a tablet fell from heaven among them, on which the word "Truth" (*emet*) was inscribed.

After this miracle had taken place, the people fasted for three days and nights, and at the end of that time the spirit of idolatry was delivered into their hands, and he came forth out of the Holy of Holies in the form of a fiery lion. But they approached him and plucked out one of his hairs, causing the lion to raise his voice and roar so loudly it could be heard for four hundred parasangs. And when the people heard this, they said among themselves: "Let us hope that heaven does not have mercy upon him." Then they cast the lion into a huge leaden pot, and sealed its only opening with lead, because lead absorbs sound.

They imprisoned the evil spirit for three days, then they discovered that there was not a fresh egg in all of the land. From this they realized that if they killed him, the whole world would end. So they blinded him and let him go.

Here a paradox about the nature of sexuality and creation is presented, since this myth clearly indicates that they both spring from evil. The spirit that is captured in this talmudic tale is the incarnation of the *Yetzer ha-Ra*, the Evil Inclination. (There also is a Good Inclination, the *Yetzer ha-Tov*.) Rabbinic literature shows considerable ambiguity on this subject. While always urging that this impulse be resisted, the rabbis also recognized its essential role in the world, as this tale makes clear. Here the spirit of idolatry is overcome and captured. It is only then, however, that the people discover its role in the divine scheme—for without the Evil Impulse, the *Yetzer ha-Ra*, sexual desire in all creatures ceased, causing all procreation to stop. And not only fertility, but creativity was also lost. Had this continued, all animal life would have died out. In this way the rabbis acknowledge a necessary and perhaps even positive role for the Evil Inclination. Note the strongly mythical aspects of this tale, in which the Evil Impulse is personified as a fiery lion. It has strong echoes of the rabbinic legends about the golden calf, which was said to have come alive and charged around out of control (*Midrash Shir ha-Shirim* 13a-13b and *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 45). The roaring of the lion in this tale is reminiscent of that in the well-known talmudic tale, "The Lion of the Forest Ilai." See "The Lion of the Forest Ilai," p. 149.

The blinding of the spirit of idolatry is intended to indicate that the Jews curbed the unbridled passion of the *Yetzer ha-Ra*. Since they could not destroy the impulse—all earthly propagation depended on it—they attempted to curb it instead.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav regarded the spirit of Idolatry as the evil angel who causes sexual lust. He identifies the blinding with the self-restraint of those who find it difficult to control their natural impulse to look at women.

A variant of this myth about the *Yetzer ha-Ra* is found in *B. Kiddushin* 81a. Here Rabbi Amram was exposed to a strong sexual temptation, which he resisted. Then he forced the Evil Inclination out of his body, and it shot out of his body in a flame.

Sources:
B. Yoma 69b.

597. THE FIERY SERPENTS

The Israelites set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to skirt the land of Edom. But the people grew restive on the journey, and the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food." The Lord sent fiery serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Intercede with the Lord to take away the serpents from us!" And Moses interceded for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery figure and mount it on a standard. And if anyone who is bitten looks at it, he shall recover." Moses made a copper serpent and mounted it on a standard; and when anyone was bitten by a serpent, he would look at the copper serpent and recover.

Greatly frustrated with the constant complaints of the Israelites, God punishes them with "fiery serpents." Exactly what these serpents are is not explained, but their bite was often fatal, and the people begged Moses to protect them from them. Moses does so in a strange way—he sets up a copper serpent on a pole for the people to look at when they have been bitten. This seems to have every earmark of idol worship (cf. 2 Kings 18:4), yet Moses sets up the copper serpent at God's direction. *Numbers Rabbah* 19:22 suggests they were called fiery serpents because they burned the soul.

According to the *Midrash Rabbenu Bahya*, the Torah commentary of Rabbi Bachya ben Asher on Numbers 21:6, the fiery serpents were offshoots of the primeval serpent in the Garden of Eden. He quotes *B. Bava Batra* 16a, which identifies the fiery serpents with the *Yetzer ha-Ra*, the evil inclination, stating that "the serpent, Satan, the *yetzer ha-ra*, and the Angel of Death are one and the same."

Sources:
Numbers 21:4-9.

598. THE DESERT SHUR

The children of Israel journeyed through the desert Shur, a wilderness full of serpents, lizards, and scorpions. So deadly are the serpents that dwell in this desert that if one of them merely glides over the shadow of a flying bird, the bird falls dead in that place.

As terrible as was the desert wanderings of the Israelites, rabbinic myths make it even worse, presenting the desert Shur as the worst of the deserts the people crossed. It is supernaturally bad, as illustrated by what happens when a reptile glides over the shadow of a bird.

Sources:
Exodus Rabbah 24-25.

599. THE DEAD OF THE DESERT

A mysterious Bedouin led the sage Rabbah bar Bar Hannah to the bodies of those who died during the forty years of wandering in the desert. When they reached them, they

The notion of a Messianic Torah grows out of the tradition that there are two Torahs in Judaism, an Oral Torah and a Written Torah. See "The Two Torahs," p. 277. For more on the tradition that the Messiah will teach Torah in the World to Come, see "The Messiah's Yeshivah," p. 518.

Sources:

Etz Hayim, Introduction to *Sha'ar ha-Hakdamot 4a-b*; *Likutei Torah*.

Studies:

"Not All is in the Hands of Heaven: Eschatology and Kabbalah" by Rachel Elior.

"Good and Evil in the Kabbalah" in *The Mystical Shape of the Godhead* by Gershom Scholem, pp. 56-88.

The Messianic Idea in Judaism by Gershom Scholem, pp. 59-81.

"From Theosophy to Midrash: Lurianic Exegesis and the Garden of Eden" by Shaul Magid.

648. A TABERNACLE FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

In the time to come God will bring the skin of Leviathan and make a tabernacle for the righteous, as it is said, *Can you fill his skin with tabernacles?* (Job 40:31). If a man is worthy, a tabernacle will be made for him. If he is not worthy, a mere cover of fish skin will be made for him, as it is said, *And his head with a fish covering* (Job 41:7). The rest of the skin of Leviathan will be spread by God on the walls of Jerusalem and the roof of the sanctuary, and its splendor will shine from one end of the world to the other. Then the righteous of Israel will sit, eat, drink, be fruitful, multiply, and enjoy the splendor of the *Shekhinah*.

This myth is obviously a companion to "The Messianic Banquet." Just as "The Messianic Banquet" describes the extravagant banquet God will provide to the righteous in the World to Come, so this myth describes the kind of shelter they will receive, as food and shelter are a person's most essential concerns. The implication is that each person will have an individual shelter, a *sukkah* made of the skin of Leviathan, or, if one is not worthy of that, made of fish skin.

A further example found in Talmud says that God will provide a necklace for the righteous in the World to Come, but if they are not worthy of it, they will receive an amulet instead.

These related myths not only describe the kind of rewards expected in the messianic era, but also imply that people can expect to retain their individuality as well as their desire for privacy in the World to Come, and that God will fulfill these needs. Even the need to be fruitful and multiply will be fulfilled. As *Seder Gan Eden* puts it, "Every woman among the Israelites will give birth to children every day."

Sources:

B. Bava Batra 75a; *Seder Gan Eden* (version B) in *Beit ha-Midrash 3:131-140*.

649. THE NEW JERUSALEM

It is stated that "New moon after new moon, and Sabbath after Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship Me" (Isa. 66:23). How is it possible that "all flesh" shall fit into Jerusalem every new moon and every Sabbath? Because in the End of Days, when there is a *new heaven and a new earth* (Isa. 66:22), Jerusalem is destined to expand its length and breadth, and become as large as the whole of the Land of Israel, and the Land of Israel as large as the world.

The mystical transformation of Jerusalem so that there will be room for “all flesh” to enter there from one new moon to the next as well as from one Sabbath to the next is linked with the myth of the transformation that will take place in the messianic era, so that all the righteous, including those living outside the Land of Israel, will come to Jerusalem, and there will be room for all of them. That will be the initiation of messianic Jerusalem.

Sources:

Pesikta Rabbati 1; *Yalkut Shim'oni*, Isaiah 472, 503; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 143b; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 7:4; *Yalkut ha-Makhiri*, Isaiah 49:19; *Arugat ha-Bosem* by Abraham ben Rabbi Azriel.

Studies:

Midrash Yerushalem: A Metaphysical History of Jerusalem by Daniel Sperber, pp. 111-117.

650. MESSIANIC JERUSALEM

When all the population is resurrected and gathered together in the messianic era, where will they all stand? They will all say, *The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle* (Isa. 49:20). So God will add to Jerusalem a thousand gardens, a thousand palaces, and a thousand mansions, until the future Jerusalem is three times the size of the present one. Then God will enlarge Jerusalem until it rises to the heavens. God will raise it from one heaven to another, until it reaches the seventh. Some say: until it reaches the Throne of Glory.

How does it rise? With clouds sent by God, while each of the righteous has a canopy of his own, as it is said, *Over all the glory shall hang a canopy* (Isa. 4:5). As soon as Jerusalem reaches the Throne of Glory, God will say, “You and I will walk together through the universe.”

Others say that Jerusalem will expand on earth until it reaches Damascus, for Jerusalem is destined to widen on all sides, and the exiles will come and repose beneath it as they would beneath a fig tree.

This myth wrestles with the problem of where to fit all the righteous who are resurrected at the End of Days. Jerusalem just isn't big enough to hold everyone, so it is proposed that God will raise Jerusalem to heaven. An alternate version suggests that the boundaries of the city will simply be expanded, something that has already happened with the modern state of Israel, though not all the way to Damascus. See “The New Jerusalem,” p. 510.

Some versions say that God will provide seven canopies for every righteous person, or that God will make a canopy for every one according to his status.

Sources:

Song of Songs Rabbah 7:5; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 31; *B. Bava Batra* 75a; *Sefer Eliyahu* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:68-78.

651. THE GOLDEN GATE OF THE MESSIAH

At the End of Days, God shall lower the heavenly Jerusalem to take the place of the earthly Jerusalem that was destroyed. The Temple will be established, and a pillar of fire shall burst forth from inside the Temple as a sign to all who witness it.

Then, at God's command, two angels shall recover the Golden Gate of Jerusalem from where it is hidden under the earth, and they shall raise it back to its original place. Abraham shall stand to its right and Moses and the Messiah shall stand to its left, and all Israel shall come forward through the gate.

The Golden Gate is another name for the Gate of Mercy in Jerusalem, which has long been covered over. Here God restores it to its original place, and it becomes the gate that Israel passes through to enter the new world created at the End of Days. The Gate of Mercy is also linked to the *Shekhinah*, who is said to have left Jerusalem through this gate after the Temple was destroyed, and who will one day return to Jerusalem through that same gate. See "The Wandering of the *Shekhinah*," p. 55.

Sources:

Ma'aseh Daniel in *Beit ha-Midrash* 5:128.

Studies:

"The Gates of Righteousness" by Julian Morgenstern.

652. THE DESCENT OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE

In the End of Days the celestial Temple will descend from on high and come to rest on four golden mountains, as it is said, *In the days to come, the Mount of Yahweh's house shall stand firm above the mountains* (Isa. 2:2). Its height will reach to heaven, to the stars and to the wheels of the Chariot. And the Bride of God will fill it, and God's glory will fill its hall, and inside each angel will be busy with his work, Gabriel and Michael and their myriads. And at Zion's restoration, the very mountains will burst into song. The mountain of the Lord's house will lead in the singing, and the lesser mountains will answer.

The Holy of Holies of the future Temple will be built of twelve onyx stones. The radiance of the Holy of Holies will illuminate the entire world and ascend to the Throne of Glory.

How will people go there? They will fly like clouds and like doves. In this way great multitudes will enter the Temple to be blessed with eternal life.

In some myths all of the heavenly Jerusalem descends to earth, coming to rest on three or four mountains. In others, such as this myth, it is the Temple alone that descends upon the mountains. Here the image of the Temple dominates the upper world, while the Temple itself is filled with God's presence, both His Bride, the *Shekhinah*, and His glory.

In *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 21:4 it is said that God will bring three mountains, Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel, together and build the Temple on top of them.

In 1860, Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer, an early Zionist, defined his anti-mythological view in *Derishat Zion*: "God will not suddenly descend from on high and command his people to go forth. Neither will he send the Messiah from heaven in a twinkling of an eye, to sound the great trumpet for the exiles of Israel and gather them into Jerusalem. He will not surround the holy city with a wall of fire or cause the holy Temple to descend from heaven." Here we find a list of supernatural events that were traditionally expected to occur in the time of the Messiah, including the descent of the heavenly Temple. But Kalischer dismisses all of these, writing instead that "the redemption will come through natural causes by human effort . . . to gather the scattered of Israel into the Holy Land."

Sources:

Pirkei Mashiah in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:69; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 21:4.

653. THE CREATION OF THE THIRD TEMPLE

At the End of Days, the Ingathering of the Exiles will take place, the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and the footsteps of the Messiah will be heard. Even now, God is secretly building the third Temple far under the earth. When the days of the Messiah are upon us, the third Temple will rise up from below, with the Dome of the Rock balanced on top of it.

One of the primary requirements that the Messiah must fulfill in order to demonstrate that he is indeed the true Messiah is to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This requirement appears impossible at this time, since the Dome of the Rock has been built on the Temple Mount, on what is commonly regarded as the place where the Temple once stood. Indeed, some messianic groups in Israel have plotted to blow up the Dome to pave the way for the Temple to be rebuilt. But such a reckless act could inflict a disaster on Israel.

Under these circumstances, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (1924-) has offered this ingenious myth, which resolves the problem of how the third Temple can be built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It is a peaceful solution to an otherwise unresolvable dilemma.

Sources:

Oral teaching of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, collected by Howard Schwartz.

654. REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

In the hour of the Redemption, when God remembers His covenant with Israel, the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt. God will say to the *Shekhinah*, "Rise from the dust," and she will answer, "Where should I go, since My house is destroyed and My Sanctuary is burnt to the ground?" Then God will say, "Do not grieve, for I Myself shall rebuild it, a perfect structure."

Some say that God will then bring the mountains of Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel together and rebuild the Temple upon their peak. That is the meaning of the verse *And nations shall walk by your light, kings, by your shining radiance* (Isa. 60:3). Then the Temple will sing aloud, and the mountains will answer the song. So too will Jerusalem serve as a beacon to all of the nations, and they will walk in her light.

Others say that God will raise up the Temple from the dust and renew it, and its gates, which are buried in the earth, will rise up, every one in its place. And God will reestablish the Sanctuary, and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Then the *Shekhinah* shall arise and shake off the dust and the Ingathering of the Exiles shall begin.

One of the key events of the messianic era will be the rebuilding of the Temple. This is one of the requirements that must be fulfilled prior to the return of the *Shekhinah* from exile. It is understood that this Third Temple, of divine origin, will be eternal, and will never be destroyed. An extensive description of the future Temple is found at the end of the Book of Ezekiel, chapters 40-48, beginning with a vision: *The hand of Yahweh came upon me, and He brought me there. He brought me, in visions of God, to the Land of Israel, and He set me down on a very high mountain* (Ezek. 40: 1-2).

In one version of this myth from *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, it is said that God will bring three mountains together and build the future Temple there. In most other sources, the rebuilding of the Third Temple takes place in Jerusalem. And as soon as the Temple is rebuilt, the *Shekhinah* will return from Her exile at the time the Temple, Her home in the world, was destroyed.

In *Pesikta Rabbati* 31:5, God describes the covenant between Himself and Israel, where both are responsible for bringing about the End of Days: "My Torah is in your hands, and the End of Days in Mine. Each of us has need of the other. If you need Me to bring the time of redemption, I need you to keep My Torah so as to hasten the building of My Temple and Jerusalem. And just as it is impossible for Me to forget the time of redemption, so you must never forget the Torah."

Sources:

Pesikta Rabbati 20:3, 28:1; *Pesikta de-Rabbi Eliezer* 51; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 21:4; *Zohar* 1:134a, 2:7a.

655. THE MESSIANIC SPRING

In the future, when the voice of the Messiah proclaims salvation from a high mountain, waters will rise up from under the threshold of the Temple, as it is said, *A spring from the house of Yahweh will go forth and water all the valley* (Joel 4:18). Every field and vineyard watered by those streams will yield fruit, even those that had never yielded fruit before. And everyone who is ill who bathes in those waters will be healed, as it is said, *The water will become wholesome* (Ezek. 47:8). Those waters will generate all kinds of fish, and those fish will ascend in that stream as far as Jerusalem, where they will leap into the nets of fishermen. And those fish will be as sweet as manna. Floating above that spring, the Temple court will appear to be a small vessel, as it is said, *Behold water from a vessel* (Ezek. 47:2).

Some say that spring will branch into twelve streams, one for each of the twelve tribes. Others say that it will form a river that will cleanse every impurity, uncovering treasures that have been hidden for centuries. Even the Angel of Death will not be able to cross it.

Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer identifies the Dead Sea as the place where the waters will heal, and gives the proof-text from Ezekiel 47:8.

There is a parallel tradition about a river that cannot be crossed—the River Sambatyon, which is said to flow wildly six days a week, trapping the Ten Lost Tribes on one side of it, and only ceasing to flow on the Sabbath, when they are not permitted to cross. There is also a parallel tradition about a place where the Angel of Death cannot enter—the city of Luz. Therefore all the inhabitants of that city are immortal, as long as they do not leave the city. See “The City of Luz,” p. 476. For another account of a miraculous spring, see “The Healing Spring,” a Hasidic tale about the Ba’al Shem Tov, in *Gabriel’s Palace*, pp. 207-298.

Sources:

Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 51; *Sefer Eliyahu* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:68-78.

656. A MAGICAL TREE IN JERUSALEM

When the third holy Temple is built, a magical tree will grow in Jerusalem. Some say that the leaves of that tree will cause the dumb to speak. Others say that the leaves of that tree will cause barren women to bear children.

The image of the magical tree is well known in Jewish folk and rabbinic texts, although it is usually associated with the Garden of Eden, especially with the two trees in the center of the garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. The image of the tree is also closely associated with that of the Torah, because of the verse *She is a tree of life to those who grasp her* (Prov. 3:18).

Here the tree is associated with the building of the Third Temple, which will only take place at the time of the coming of the Messiah. This demonstrates an important parallel between the story of the Garden of Eden and the messianic era—in both enchanted trees can be found. Indeed, there is a direct parallel in Jewish myth between the prelapsarian world and the messianic era. Thus one function of the coming of the Messiah is to restore the world to its pre-fallen state. This parallel is an implicit part of the myth of the Ari. See “The Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks,” p. 122.

The theme of healing leaves is found in world folklore. See, for example, “The Wonderful Healing Leaves,” a universal fairy tale of Jewish origin, in *Elijah’s Violin*, pp. 163-168. This theme is found in Jewish lore as well. Abraham is said to have col-

lected leaves from the Garden of Eden and Sarah to have crushed them on the eve of the Sabbath and scattered their powder into the air, creating the spice of the Sabbath. See "The Spice of the Sabbath," p. 316. For a Hasidic tale on this theme, see "Leaves from the Garden of Eden" in *Gabriel's Palace*, pp. 134-135, where a man finds enchanted leaves on his bed when he awakes after a dream in which a stable boy who has died brings him leaves from the Garden of Eden to heal the man's sick daughter. Her mourning over the boy's death provoked her illness, and his miraculous assistance heals her.

Sources:

B. Sanhedrin 100a; *Likutei Moharan* 1:60.

657. THE PLEADING OF THE FATHERS

In the hour that Israel was exiled, the fathers of the world, along with the mothers, were raised from their graves in the Cave of Machpelah and brought up to the firmament and began a great mourning before God.

God joined them from the highest heaven and said, "Why are you mourning?"

They replied: "Master of the Universe, what sins did our children commit that You did this to them? Are You not going to have mercy on them? Are You not going to show compassion?"

God replied, "Because of their wickedness, they were punished by exile."

The Fathers said, "But will You remember them in their exile among the nations of the world, or will You become oblivious to them?"

God answered, "I cannot now save them from their exile, but I swear by My name that I shall never forget them, and one day their exile shall come to an end."

These words of God greatly comforted the fathers and mothers, and they returned and lay down in their tombs. That is why, when the Messiah comes, he will go to the Cave of Machpelah to wake them first.

Here the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives gather before God to plead for their children, Israel, who have been sent into exile. Because of their elevated roles, the patriarchs are able to speak their mind to God. In effect, they give voice to the sense of injustice felt among Jews in the Diaspora. The plea of the patriarchs and matriarchs moves God, who assures them that one day—the day the Messiah comes—their exile will come to an end.

This myth finds its source in Jeremiah's vision or imagining of Rachel haunting her tomb and weeping for her exiled children: *A cry is heard in Ramah—wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone* (Jer. 31:15). (According to 1 Sam. 10:2, Rachel's tomb was located near Ramah.) Indeed, Jeremiah's account of Rachel weeping is the biblical source for all subsequent myths about biblical figures reappearing to comfort Israel.

This myth is also parallel to those found in the *Zohar* in which the *Shekhinah*, the Bride of God, confronts God over the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel. This myth also explains why the patriarchs and matriarchs will be the first to be resurrected in the messianic era.

In the version of this myth in *Seder Gan Eden*, there is a less consoling ending. The angel Michael, the prince of Israel, weeps in a loud voice, "Why, O Lord, do you stand aloof" (Ps. 10:1). See the following myth, "Waking the Fathers," as well as "The Patriarchs Seek to Comfort Jerusalem," p. 420.

Sources:

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana p. 464; *Seder Gan Eden* (version B) in *Beit ha-Midrash* 3:131-140.