

Easter Teaching No. 17
Talmudic Evidence for the Messiah

So we have ridden the journey with Jesus from his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on the donkey at Palm Sunday, witnessed the travesty of his trials, been shocked by his flogging, devastated at his crucifixion and grieved with the women at his burial. Yet amongst the sadness of this week, we have also rejoiced at his resurrection, wondered at his victory and captured our breath and reminded ourselves that this was all part of God's ultimate plan for the redemption of his creation.

Everything we know about the Easter story is recorded in the Scriptures, that is where our source of knowledge is from, and a rich source it is too, however are there any Jewish writings about the person of Jesus, or the consequences of the crucifixion?

Yes, there are, and these are found in the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. Following the destruction of the Temple in 70AD the Jewish leaders wrote two versions of Jewish thought, one of religious history and the other commentary. The Jerusalem Talmud was written in Palestine and the other written in Babylon and became known as the Babylonian Talmud. These recorded several events that occurred but are always referred to as '40 years before the destruction of the Temple', i.e., 30 AD, the year our Lord was crucified.

We will see how these are significant to both Jews and Christians alike:

The Miracle of the Lot

On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the High Priest would select two goats, one would be sacrificed as a sin offering and the other would be set free into the wilderness, as the scapegoat (Azazel). The High Priest would pray over the goat to be set free, placing the sin of the nation upon it. The goat would then be released into the wilderness whilst the other goat was sacrificed and its blood shed as an atonement for sin. There would be two stones cast for the lot, one white and one black, the lot for Azazel was a black stone.

In the 200 years since this practice had been carried out, the black stone and the white stone were randomly picked as one would expect. However after the year 30 AD, it was only the black stone which was picked, the odds against this occurring each year for 40 years is astronomical. The Jews knew that something fundamental about this event at Yom Kippur had changed and signified something important, something unexplainable, and perhaps sinister.

The Miracle of Azazel

A portion of red cloth was tied to the Azazel goat before it was released into the wilderness. A piece of that cloth was torn off the goat and placed on the door of the Temple. Each year the portion of red cloth tied to the Temple door turned white, a miracle which became known as the 'Miracle of Azazel'.

To explain the miracle: the red cloth represented the sins of the nation, the turning of the cloth from red to white, showed that God accepted the atonement sacrifice and by a miracle turned the red cloth to white.

As in:- Isaiah 1:18 'though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow'

This 'Miracle of Azazel', stopped 40 years before the destruction of the Temple, the red strip remained red, the conclusion of the religious leaders was that God had not forgiven their sin; the sin of the nation had remained unforgiven and unremoved.

The Miracle of the Temple Doors

40 years before the destruction of the Temple, the Temple doors swung open of their own accord. This is recorded by both Josephus and the Talmud. The doors were heavy and took several men to open them but in 30 AD they swung open of their own accord and continued to do so each night until the Temple was destroyed. In the Jewish mind-set this either demonstrated the departure of God's presence from the Temple or an invitation to invaders. It is recorded that Rabbi Yochannan Ben Zakkai saw this event as a sign of the future destruction of the Temple.

Quote from the Talmud Sotah 6:3

"Said Rabban Yochannan Ben Zakkai to the Temple, 'O Temple why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed'".

For information: Rabbi Yochannan Ben Zakkai was a distinguished first century disciple of Hillel, called by the Jewish people 'father of wisdom and the father of generations' because he ensured the continuation of Jewish scholarship after the destruction of the Temple.

The Miracle of the Temple Menorah

The menorah, the seven branched candlestick in the Temple continued to go out despite the priest's attempts and precautions to prevent this happening. This western light was the centre lamp standing in the first room of the Temple, the Holy place. According to tradition it symbolised God's presence and blessing and was to

be kept continually alight at all costs. Yet despite the priests keeping extra oil and implements, the light kept going out.

Quote from the Jerusalem Talmud - tractate Yoma 6:3

"It has been taught: Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the western light went out".

Legend of the Lintel

The lintel of the Temple doorway, an enormous stone of at least thirty feet long, cracked and fell in 30 AD. Jerome, one of the early church fathers connected the tearing of the curtain and the earthquake as being responsible.

Interestingly, the Jewish writers never recorded the tearing of the curtain in the Temple but all the above miracles are recorded as happening '40 years before the destruction of the Temple', the very year of the crucifixion of our Lord.

We see the significance of these legends very clearly. In the Miracle of the Lot, the black stone for the scapegoat was continually chosen. Why? The other goat was not needed to be sacrificed, Jesus himself had been the ultimate sacrifice, no further shedding of blood needed to be done.

With the Miracle of Azazel, the cloth remained red. No longer was animal sacrifice required, Jesus the Paschal Lamb had shed his blood and sprinkled it in the Heavenly Tabernacle to cleanse us from our sins. Azazel was superfluous, he was no longer needed, our sin had already been removed:-

Hebrews 10:11 "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstall".

The Miracle of the Temple doors. The temple was a building of segregation, separating Gentiles from Jews, males from females, priests from the High Priest. Only one man a year entering into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. The temple doors remaining open showed that everyone had access to God at all times, there was no longer a barrier between man and God, sin had been dealt with.

Galatians 3:26-28 "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The Miracle of the Temple Menorah. Jesus became the light of the world. Light is defined as life, as seen in

John 1:4, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it".

Those having faith in Jesus will have eternal life. Jesus brought light into the world to those who walk in darkness and do not have eternal life because they are unknown to God. The representation of God's light in the Temple was no longer needed. Jesus had become that light.

We can see that there are no natural explanations as to the ceasing of these Jewish miracles. Even Jewish writings record them as being unexplainable.

Yet we, having journeyed with Christ, having studied the Easter Story can see very well the explanation of these bazaar happenings from a Jewish perspective.

Lastly, are there any Jewish writings recorded as to why they had Jesus killed. Yes, in the Babylonian Talmud (Soncino Edition)

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone 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.

— [Sanhedrin 43a](#), *Babylonian Talmud (Soncino Edition)*

This tractate confirms the very reason that the Jewish authorities rejected him in Matthew chapter 12, denying that his power was from God, saying rather that his power was demonic, from Beelzebub. Note, the name Yeshu, this was not recording his name, it was recording him with a derogatory acronym, the acronym (Yimmach Shemo Ve-zikro) meaning, 'May his name and memory be blotted out'.

What can we take away from this Easter Story:-

John 3:16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that he who believes in Him shall not perish but will have eternal life.'

Thank you for listening or maybe reading these teachings I hope you have found them interesting and learned something new. If you want to discuss anything further, then please feel free to contact me. May God Bless you this Eastertide