

More on “Let Us Remove Hence”

Copyright by Ed Stevens. All rights reserved.
Fulfilled Magazine – Volume 8 Issue 1 (2013)

After my article appeared in the last issue, one reader mentioned another interpretation of the event that he had found on the Internet. He wanted my evaluation of it, so I thought I would share it here. I will summarize the other theory, list the sources that support it, and then provide my analysis.

- *Summary of the theory:* Just before the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s temple in 586 BC, the prophet Ezekiel (chs. 10-11) saw the glory cloud depart from the Temple and come down upon the Mount of Olives. Two futurists, Ernest L. Martin and John D. Keyser, assert that a similar departure of the Shechinah from the Temple occurred in AD 66, just three-and-a-half years before the Temple was destroyed in AD 70. They quote statements from Rabbi Jonathan (*Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations*) and Eusebius (*Proof of the Gospel*) to support this view. Martin and Keyser then assert that this alleged departure of the Shechinah from the Temple in AD 66 was the event to which Josephus was referring when he reported what the priests heard, felt, and experienced in the Temple during Pentecost in AD 66 [Josephus, *Wars* 6.5.3 (6.299-300)]. If the reader is unfamiliar with that story, simply email me (preterist1@preterist.org) and request a .pdf of the article (“Let Us Remove Hence”) and its associated files.
- *Sources for the theory:* (1) *Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations* 2:11, Prologue 49-50 [Preface to *Echa Rabthi* folio 56.1]; (2) Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, Book 6, Chapter 18 (288); (3) Ernest L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha*, (Alhambra, CA: ASK Publications, 1988), 83-84; and (4) John D. Keyser, “Glory,” Hope of Israel, <http://www.hope-of-israel.org/glory.htm>.

Examination of the Sources

Before analyzing the interpretation that Ernest Martin and John Keyser offer of Josephus’ account, we need to examine the supporting sources. What do Rabbi Jonathan and Eusebius actually state? Are Martin and Keyser interpreting and applying those sources correctly? *Even if the sources are teaching a departure of the Shechinah in AD 66, are they authoritative?*

Rabbi Jonathan in the Midrash Lamentations

This is a lengthy text focused on the destruction of Solomon’s temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The text quotes numerous passages from the Old Testament prophets in reference to that former destruction in order to explain Lamentations 2:7 (“*The Lord . . . has abandoned His sanctuary . . .*”) in relation to Ezekiel 10-11 where the Shechinah left the temple and went to the Mount of Olives. I could find no indication in the context that R. Jonathan was applying Ezekiel and Lamentations to the Temple’s AD 70 destruction. Rather, R. Jonathan immediately quotes three other Old Testament prophetic texts that refer to the Temple’s 586 BC destruction (Jer 3:14; Mal 3:7; Hos 5:15), implying that the entire context refers to 586 BC. Therefore, it appears that both Martin and Keyser have misapplied this Midrash to AD 70.¹

Eusebius' Proof of the Gospel

In Eusebius' comments on the meaning of Zechariah 14:1-10, he explains how the restoration from Babylonian captivity was fulfilled typologically in Christ and the Church. He suggests that, just as the Shechinah glory left the Temple and migrated to the Mount of Olives in 586 BC, so also the Church (the post-Pentecost repository of the Spirit) had abandoned the earthly city of Jerusalem and worshipped on the Mount of Olives (during Eusebius' lifetime) where Jesus Himself stayed after leaving Jerusalem on the evening of His betrayal. Eusebius quotes Ezekiel's vision of the Shechinah leaving the temple and migrating to the Mount of Olives in 586 BC, but makes no reference to the three-and-a-half years idea. Josephus does not mention it either. That idea is only found in the Midrash mentioned above, and it was only in reference to the 586 BC destruction of the temple, not AD 70.

After reading the entire context, it seems that Eusebius was referring to the movement of the Shechinah just before the destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586 BC. For instance, he says that the Christians in his day (fourth century AD) worshipped on the Mount of Olives instead of in Jerusalem, "whither the glory of the Lord migrated when it left the *former* city." Notice the word *former* here. In the previous context, Eusebius seems to be referring to the *former* destruction of the city by the Babylonians (Ezek 11:22-23), not the AD 70 destruction. Eusebius sees the Shechinah departure as a literal event that occurred in Ezekiel's day, and then interprets that literal event as a *type* of the first-century *departure of the church from the physical Temple system*. Eusebius does not state that there was another departure of the Shechinah from the Temple just prior to AD 70. Rather, he views the AD 70 departure as the Church departing from Judaism and its physical Temple sacrificial system, thus fulfilling the type seen in the Babylonian restoration. Once again, it seems that Martin and Keyser have misapplied this Shechinah reference to the AD 70 destruction.²

Why Their Theory Cannot Be Right

Martin and Keyser suggest that this alleged removal of the Shechinah in AD 66 was what the priests in the Temple were describing had occurred during Pentecost of AD 66. However, their misapplications of the Midrash and Eusebius do not lend any credence to that interpretation, since there is nothing in the Midrash or Eusebius to support the idea of an AD 66 departure of the Shechinah.

Furthermore, even if it could be proven beyond a shadow of doubt that both the Midrash and Eusebius were referring to an AD 66 departure of the Shechinah, it would still only be *external* tradition, which can never overturn *internal* biblical evidence. Moreover, since we can show from both *biblical* and *historical* evidence that the Shechinah had departed the Temple long before AD 66, their arguments using the Midrash and Eusebius statements become moot. If the Shechinah was no longer in the Temple at AD 66, there could obviously be no departure of the Shechinah in AD 66. Therefore, Josephus' account of the priests' experience must be describing something other than a departure of the Shechinah!

The Shechinah: What, When, and Where

What is the Shechinah, when did it depart from the Temple, where is it now, and when did it go there? In both the Mosaic Tabernacle and Solomon's temple, the *glory cloud* was the visible

sign of God's glorious presence dwelling above the mercy seat between the two cherubim (Exod 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4). This was the cloud that veiled the brightness of God's unapproachable light. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* reminds us that this cloud disappeared after the 586 BC destruction:

Shechinah (*dwelling*). . . . [It dwelt] in the tabernacle and in the temple of Solomon, but **not in the second temple**. . . . [emphasis added]

Ezekiel 10:18f and 11:22f indicate that the Shechinah departed from the Temple before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. As Smith noted above, the *visible* Shechinah glory cloud *never reappeared in the second Temple* that was built by the returning exiles, or in the greatly expanded structure that Herod built. Nevertheless, God's presence remained with His people both during their exile and restoration to the land (Ezek 11:16; 28:25; 37:26-28; 39:27-29). Ezekiel predicted a time after Judah's restoration from captivity when God would build a more glorious temple and make His abode there (Ezek 43:1-9; cf. Rev 21:3). This, of course, is referring to the Church, the new spiritual temple that was built by Christ, where His Glorious Presence dwells in His people.

The day of Pentecost was both the beginning of the Church (the new temple) and the beginning of the outpouring, indwelling, and empowering of the Holy Spirit. There is a tight connection throughout the Old and New Testaments between the Shechinah and the Holy Spirit. Just as there was a visible manifestation of the Shechinah in the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, so there was a visible manifestation of the Spirit (as tongues of fire) coming down upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. Throughout the book of Acts we see the Spirit dwelling in the Church and operating through the Church. Jesus said the Spirit was "with them" before the cross, but would dwell "in them" after Pentecost (John 14:17).

Was the Shekinah (God's abiding presence) in two different places (the physical temple *and* the spiritual temple) at the same time? That is what we would have to conclude if Martin and Keyser are correct. But we simply cannot have it both ways. Either the Church is the new temple where the Spirit now dwells, or the old Temple is still the place where God resides.

Since the Bible tells us the Holy Spirit dwelt in the Church during the forty years leading up to AD 70, we know that the theory of Martin and Keyser cannot be correct. However, that only tells us what the Josephus story *cannot mean*. We now need to look deeper into Josephus' story to see what it *does mean*.

Interpreting the Josephus Story

Another downside to the theory of Martin and Keyser is its failure to match what the multiple credible priestly witnesses had to say about this event, as described in the various parallel accounts and translations:

. . . they heard a sound as of a **great multitude**, saying, "Let us remove hence."
(Josephus, *Wars* 6.5.3, trans. Whiston, 6.299-300)

. . . a voice as of a **great multitude**, saying, 'Let us go hence.' (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. McGiffert, Book 3, Chapter 8, Sections 1-6)

. . . the sound of men going and the sound of men **marching in a multitude going into the Temple**, and a terrible and mighty voice was heard speaking: "Let us go and

leave this House.” (*Sepher Yosippon: A Mediaeval History of Ancient Israel*, trans. Steven B. Bowman, chapter 87)

What the priests witnessed in the Temple during Pentecost in AD 66 could not have been the *Shechinah* leaving the temple, because according to *Yosippon* quoted above, the priests said it was a *great multitude of men* “going into the temple” before it departed to another place.

So, it was a “great multitude of men,” not the *Shechinah*, and it was a large multitude of voices (not just the voice of the *Shechinah*). If it had been the voice of the *Shechinah* (i.e., the *Bath Kol*), the priests would have known what it was, and Josephus would have explained it. The fact that neither of them explained it as the voice of the *Bath Kol*, tells us that it was not the *Shechinah* departing.

Prior to departing the Temple, this “great multitude” of men was heard “going into the Temple.” What would be the point of the *Shechinah* going into the temple, only to turn around and go back out? This is further confirmation that it was not the *Shechinah* leaving the Temple in AD 66. Rather, it was a *great multitude* of people in the unseen realm *coming into the Temple* from out of Hades, and then departing from the Temple to meet Christ in the air of the unseen realm where they would dwell with Him forever afterwards (i.e., the resurrection and rapture).

Conclusion:

Martin and Keyser have misapplied the Midrash and Eusebius’ statements. Even if the Midrash had claimed a removal of the *Shechinah* in AD 66, it would still not match either the description of this event found in Josephus, or the biblical data about the Holy Spirit descending upon the Church at Pentecost in AD 30. Therefore, the concept of an AD 66 departure of the *Shechinah* has to be rejected, not only as a proper application of the Midrash and Eusebius, but also as a credible interpretation of the story in Josephus.³

¹If you would like to read this Midrash, simply email me (preterist1@preterist.org) and request the .pdf entitled “Let Us Go (notes).”

²If you would like to see the whole context of this statement by Eusebius, simply email me (preterist1@preterist.org) and request the .pdf entitled “Let Us Go (notes).”

³I did a special study on the *Shechinah*, quoting rabbinic material and referencing related biblical texts. If you would like to have that, simply email me (preterist1@preterist.org) and request the .pdf entitled “The *Shechinah*.”