

Sanctuaries and Sanctity #2

Northern Synagogues

Themes of Today

Can we determine when a synagogue was built based on its style?
What were some of the great Jewish communities of the north and what were their challenges?
What is the Torah's law on images and how was this halacha interpreted over time?

Timeline

66-70 Great Revolt
70 Destruction of the Temple
73 Fall of Masada
69 - 96 Flavian Dynasty: Roman emperors Vespasian, Titus, Domitian
Yavne and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's innovations
96 – 180: "Five Good Emperors" – Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius
115 - 117 Trajan Revolt in the Diaspora
130 Hadrian visits the land of Israel, creation of Aelia Capitolina?
132 – 135 Bar Kokhba Revolt
Execution of Rabbi Akiva
Jewish life moves north, Jerusalem off limits to Jews
Sanhedrin moves north: Usha, Shfaram, Bet Shearim, Zippori, Tiberias
200 Redaction of the Mishnah by Rabbi Judah the Prince

Migdal Nunia/Tarichae/Magdala

Luke 8:2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, 8:3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

John 20:1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

20:2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 3, Chapter 10: 9. But now, when the vessels were gotten ready, Vespasian put upon ship-board as many of his forces as he thought sufficient to be too hard for those that were upon the lake, and set sail after them. Now these which were driven into the lake could neither fly to the land, where all was in their enemies' hand, and in war against them; nor could they fight upon the level by sea, for their ships were small and fitted only for piracy; they were too weak to fight with Vespasian's vessels, and the mariners that were in them were so few, that they were afraid to come near the Romans, who attacked them in great numbers. However, as they sailed round about the vessels, and sometimes as they came near them, they threw stones at the Romans when they were a good way off, or came closer and fought them; yet did they receive the greatest harm themselves in both cases. As for the stones they threw at the Romans, they only made a sound one after another, for they threw them against such as were in their armor, while the Roman darts could reach the Jews themselves; and when they ventured to come near the Romans, they became sufferers themselves before they could do any harm to the ether, and were drowned, they and their ships together.

Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Capernaum

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: 4:14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 4:15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 4:16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. 4:20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. 4:21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. 4:22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קטז עמוד א תא שמע: הגליונין וספרי מינין אין מצילין אותן מפני הדליקה, אלא נשרפין במקומן הן ואזכרותיהן. מאי לאו - גליונין דספר תורה? - לא, גליונין דספרי מינין. - השתא ספרי מינין גופייהו אין מצילין, גליונין מבעיא? - הכי קאמר: וספרי מינין הרי הן כגליונים.

גופא, הגליונים וספרי מינין אין מצילין אותם מפני הדליקה, רבי יוסי אומר: בחול קודר את האזכרות שבהן וגונזן, והשאר שורפן. אמר רבי טרפון: אקפח את בני, שאם יבאו לידי שאני אשרוף אותם ואת האזכרות שבהן, שאפילו אדם רודף אחריו להורגו, ונחש רץ להכישו - נכנס לבית עבודה זרה, ואין נכנס לבתיהן של אלו. שהללו מכירין וכופרין, והללו - אין מכירין וכופרין. ועליהן הכתוב אומר (ישעיהו נז) "ואחר הדלת והמזוזה שמת זכרוך". אמר רבי ישמעאל: קל וחומר, ומה לעשות שלום בין איש לאשתו אמרה תורה: שמי שנכתב בקדושה ימחה על המים. הללו שמטילין קנאה ואיבה ותחרות בין ישראל לאביהן שבשמים - על אחת כמה וכמה, ועליהם אמר דוד (תהלים קלט) "הלא משנאיך ה' אשנא ובתקוממך אתקוטט" תכלית שנאה שנאתים לאויבים היו לי. וכשם שאין מצילין אותן מפני הדליקה, כך אין מצילין אותן לא מן המפולת ולא מן המים ולא מדבר המאבדן רבי מאיר הוה קרי ליה אוון גליון, רבי יוחנן הוה קרי ליה עוון גליון.

Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 116a It was stated in the text: The blank spaces and the Books of the Minim, we may not save them from a fire. R. Jose said: On weekdays one must cut out the Divine Names which they contain, hide them, and burn the rest. R. Tarfon said: May I bury my son if I would not burn them together with their Divine Names if they came to my hand. For even if one pursued me to slay me, or a snake pursued me to bite me, I would enter a heathen Temple [for refuge], but not the houses of these [people], for the latter know (of God) yet deny [Him], whereas the former are ignorant and deny [Him], and of them the Writ saith, *and behind the doors and the posts hast thou set up thy memorial*. R. Ishmael said: [One can reason] a minori: If in order to make peace between man and wife the Torah decreed, Let my Name, written in sanctity, be blotted out in water, these, who stir up jealousy, enmity, and wrath between Israel and their Father in Heaven, how much more so, and of them David said, *Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.* - And just as we may not rescue them from a fire, so may we not rescue them from a collapse [of debris] or from water or from anything that may destroy them. Uncensored text adds: R. Meir called it (the Gospel) 'Awen Gilyon, the falsehood of blank paper; R. Johanan called it 'Awon Gilyon, the sin of blank paper.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה דף כז עמוד ב מיתיבי: לא ישא אדם עם המינין, ואין מתרפאין מהן אפילו לחיי שעה; מעשה בבן דמא בן אחותו של ר' ישמעאל שהכישו נחש, ובא יעקב איש כפר סכניא לרפאותו, ולא הניחו ר' ישמעאל, וא"ל: ר' ישמעאל אחי, הנח לו וארפא ממנו, ואני אביא מקרא מן התורה שהוא מותר, ולא הספיק לגמור את הדבר עד שיצתה נשמתו ומת, קרא עליו ר' ישמעאל: אשריך בן דמא, שגופך טהור ויצתה נשמתך בטהרה, ולא עברת על דברי חבריך, שהיו אומרים: (קהלת י) "ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש!" שאני מינות דמשכא, דאתי למימשך בתרייהו.

Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 27b An objection was raised: 'No man should have any dealings with Minim, nor is it allowed to be healed by them even [in risking] an hour's life. It once happened to Ben Dama the son of R. Ishmael's sister that he was bitten by a serpent and Jacob, a native of Kefar Sekaniah, came to heal

him but R. Ishmael did not let him; whereupon Ben Dama said, 'My brother R. Ishmael, let him, so that I may be healed by him: I will even cite a verse from the Torah that he is to be permitted'; but he did not manage to complete his saying, when his soul departed and he died. Whereupon R. Ishmael exclaimed, Happy art thou Ben Dama for thou wert pure in body and thy soul likewise left thee in purity; nor hast thou transgressed the words of thy colleagues, who said, (Kohelet 10) *He who breaketh through a fence, a serpent shall bite him?* — It is different with the teaching of *Minim*, for it draws, and one [having dealings with them] may be drawn after them

Images

שמות כ (ג) לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ:

Mishnah Avoda Zara 3:1 Rabbi Meir states: all statues are forbidden since they are worshipped once a year. The rabbis say the only ones that are forbidden are those with a staff in their hands, or a bird or a ball, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says, if it is holding anything in its hand (it is forbidden).

Mishnah Avoda Zara 3:4 Proklos the son of Plosfos asked Rabban Gamliel at Aphrodite's bathhouse in Akko: it says in your Torah "do not allow anything forbidden to touch you," how can you bathe in Aphrodite's bathhouse? Rabban Gamliel said, we do not speak [Torah] in a bathhouse. When he exited, he said: I have not come into her space, she has come into mine. We don't say let us make a bathhouse to beautify Aphrodite, but rather let us make Aphrodite as a way to beautify the bathhouse. Another answer: if I were to give you a lot of money, you still would not go into your house of idolatry naked and impure and urinate in front of her, and this one stands by the urinals and everyone urinates in front of her! It says "their gods," if you behave towards them as gods, it is forbidden, if you do not behave towards them as gods, it is permitted.

Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara 42b: Rav Sheshet used to collect difficult extra-mishnaic passages and expound them: pictures of all the planets are permissible except for the sun and moon, all the faces are permissible except that of a human face, all figures are permissible except that of a dragon.

Tosefta Avoda Zara 5:2 Rabbi Elazar ben Zadok said all faces were in Jerusalem excepting only a human face.

Talmud Yerushalmi Avoda Zara 3:3 In the days of Rabbi Yohanan, they began drawing on walls and no one stopped them.

Bamidbar Rabba 12:4 "his carriage is purple" (argaman): this is the sun that is placed above and rides in a chariot and lights up the world, as it is said "and he is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber," and from the power of the sun the rain falls and from the power of the sun the earth gives fruit and therefore it is

called 'argaman,' that God made it to weave (laarog) manna (man) for the world and manna is fruit and food.

Shabbat 149a: Our Rabbis taught: The writing under a painting or an image may not be read on the Sabbath. And as for the image itself, one must not look at it even on weekdays, because it is said, Turn ye not unto idols (elilim)(Vayikra 19). How is that taught? — Said R. Hanin: [Its interpretation is,] Turn not unto that conceived in your own minds.

Rashi: writing under a painting or an image: as when people draw on a wall unusual creatures or images of people doing things, like the battle of David and Goliath, and they write underneath what it is.

in your own minds: what you do from your own understanding and space (chalal) elilim=chalalim

Tosefot: the image itself, one must not look at it even on weekdays: it seems that if it is for idolatry you may not, but for beauty you may.

The Zodiac and the Jews

Bamidbar Rabba 12:4 "his carriage is purple" (argaman): this is the sun that is placed above and rides in a chariot and lights up the world, as it is said "and he is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber," and from the power of the sun the rain falls and from the power of the sun the earth gives fruit and therefore it is called 'argaman,' that God made it to weave (laarog) manna (man) for the world and manna is fruit and food

How Do You Show God's Power in the World?

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו. אלהי אברהם. אלהי יצחק. ואלהי יעקב. האל הגדול הגבור והנורא אל עליון. גומל חסדים טובים. וקונה הכל. וזוכר חסדי אבות. ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה:

Blessed are You, Lord our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob; **the great, mighty and awesome God, the most high God**, Who bestows loving kindness and goodness and is master/creator of all, **Who remembers the good deeds of the fathers**, and **brings a redeemer to their children**, in love and for the sake of His name. (First blessing of the amida prayer)

How Comfortable Were the Rabbis in the Synagogue?

"The synagogue, more than any other Jewish institution of antiquity, demonstrates a fascinating synthesis of Jewish and non-Jewish elements within a single framework. The integration of these elements in every aspect of the institution – from the physical dimensions of art and architecture to the spiritual dimension of liturgy, offers a glimpse into the diverse and dynamic nature of Jewish life at the time, socially, religiously and culturally." Israel Levine, The Ancient Synagogue

