

In his class lectures, John Grassmick characterized the faith of Second Temple Judaism in four words: temple, torah, tradition, and hope. With the return of Jews to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, and later Ezra and Nehemiah, it is not surprising to see a reconstruction of the temple, a reemphasis on teaching from the torah, and a reestablishment of religious traditions. What interests me most is the hope these people could muster, after the shocking defeat and exile under the Babylonians, the continued subservience under the Persians, the lack of true independence for most of the intervening years through Christ's resurrection, and the intimidating reality of being a small group trying to hold out in Jerusalem and its environs while surrounded by hostile other groups.

Bock [*Studying the Historical Jesus*, 16] notes that thematic to the Old Testament are the concepts of hope and promise of God's justice, but belief in this must have been shaken by the inference that God allowed the Babylonians to destroy Judea in consideration of his justice [see Habakkuk, e.g.]. Stories such as Judith and Susanna [the latter a later addition to Daniel] illuminate that the Jews of this period clung to their image of God as one who would deliver the righteous in their time of need, consistent with the Old Testament portrayal. Thus, would they remain righteous now, they could expect deliverance and protection, opposite to what happened in their judgment through defeat and exile by the Babylonians.

The historical narrative 1 Esdras illuminates that, to some degree, this new hope sprang from the other three pillars of their faith, the temple, the torah, and their traditions: experiencing the reprieve granted by Persian rule to return to Jerusalem, resurrecting the temple and its traditions, and hearing the torah read by Jewish leaders in gatherings had a great effect on the morale of this group [see esp. vv. 9:45-55]. As they would view Temple worship, obedience to the torah, and adherence to traditions as signs of righteousness, again the reality of these three other pillars of their faith would generate hope, as explained above regarding stories such as Judith and Susanna.

2 Esdras is an example of contemporary apocalyptic literature, which illuminates that – while the Jews had fallen short and displeased God – there was hope for “God's Elect” [vv.16:73-74] to prevail during these “days of tribulation” [v.16:74], to be delivered by God [v.16:75] if they would keep his commands and precepts and not allow sin and iniquity to prevail in them [vv.16:76-77]. Here again we see the reliance on righteousness through obedience and the promise of deliverance by God.

In summary, this literature illuminates the sources of hope for the Jews during the formation of Second Temple Judaism as coming through three vectors: the change in fortune they were experiencing; their sense of obedience and reestablished identity in the restoration of the temple, torah, and traditions as central to daily life; and the promise of deliverance if they were to continue proving themselves righteous.