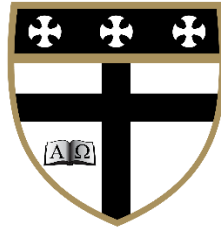


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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“The Destruction of the Second Temple, the New Testament Priesthood, and
the Early Church”¹

by

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² Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
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Introduction

Josephus: The Complete Works and the *First and Second Books of the Maccabees* remind us that the Jewish people fought valiantly to maintain what had become, by the beginning of the 4th century B.C., the ancient kingdom of Judah and its capital city of Jerusalem. The shining symbol of Jewish culture was the Second Temple, together with all of its religious pageantry and rituals.

Cyrus the Great of Persia had been a gracious emperor, but still the Jews wanted their own king and political autonomy. When the Hellenistic Greeks replaced the Persians during the 4th century B.C., the Jewish fortunes took a turn for the worse. The Hellenistic kings, together with their Hellenistic Jewish allies, committed genocidal and criminal acts against the Jewish people, thus launching the Maccabean revolts, which was designed in large measure to restore the Kingdom of Judah, if not the entire state of ancient Israel. During the entire period of the 3rd and 2nd centuries, B.C., to be a patriotic Jew was to be in favor of preserving Jewish culture, religion, and traditions—and the Second Temple was at the heart of it all.

But under Hellenism, the Chief Priest of the Second Temple was also, often, the prince, the governor, or the king of Judea who made alliances with foreign powers and carried out military campaigns. This policy continued up to the days of King Herod, who reigned as client-king of Judea on behalf of the Roman empire from about 37 B.C. to 4 A.D. For this was the political condition of ancient Judea when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

But unlike the previous Jewish zealots—such as Bar-Cochab—who came before or after him, Jesus would not use physical force or violence to overthrow the Roman empire or the powerful elites within the Second Temple. Jesus' method of warfare was quite different; he would conquer with truth and love, through a willingness to die, together with the divine power to resurrect himself from the grave. And he invited the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, the lame, the poor, the lepers, and the outcastes to join along with him. He ordained common men to be his apostles and disciples—such men as the Temple elite deemed to be “unlearned and ignorant men.”³ For it was such men as these whom Christ made “kings and

³ Acts 4:13.

priests,”⁴ inaugurated “a royal priesthood,”⁵ and rebuilt a new purified Temple not made with hands.⁶

For in Christ’s new church, which was modelled after the Jewish synagogue, there were to be no more sacrifices of animals; and, therefore, there were to be no more “priests.” Christ was now the “High Priest” for all Israel— once and forever. Christ’s new church would not be led by chief priests and Levites. The Second Temple and its priesthood were terminated. A new covenant, as described in the Book of Jeremiah (and paraphrased in the Epistle to the Hebrews) was instituted, to wit:

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.⁷

This paper is a brief theological sketch of Christ’s termination of priesthood of the Second Temple and inauguration of a new Temple that is not made with hands⁸— i.e., the actual physical bodies of all true Christian believers who comprise the “body of Christ.”

⁴ Revelation 1:6.

⁵ 1 Peter 2: 9.

⁶ Mark 14:58.

⁷ Jeremiah 31: 32-34. See, also, Hebrews 8: 9-11 (quoting Jeremiah 31:32-34).

⁸ Ibid.

Chapter One

“Jesus Prophesied the Destruction of the Second Temple at Jerusalem”

The prophet Malachi, who wrote the last book in the Old Testament, lived during the period of Persian domination and prophesied during about the period of the 520s or 530s B.C. From between that period and the birth of Christ span five turbulent centuries.

During this time span, the Persians dominated ancient Judea from between, circa, 583 – 333 B.C.⁹

The Jews returned to ancient Judea in, circa, 538 B.C., following the Edict of Cyrus the Great (the Persian emperor). Hence, the Jews lived under the grace and rule of the Persian empire from, circa, 538 to 333 B.C.

The Second Temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem during the period 520 – 515 B.C. And the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah lead a Reformation during the period, circa, 450 to 400 B.C.

During this “Second Temple” period, the Hellenistic Greeks dominated ancient Judea from between 333 B.C. to 63 B.C.¹⁰ The priesthood of the Second Temple was unquestionably political and likely corrupted. In the Apocrypha, the *First and Second Books of the Maccabees* cover this period of political corruption. And it likely for this reason, that in the New Testament, during the period of the Roman imperial occupation of ancient Judea, Jesus of Nazareth himself prophesied that this Second Temple would be destroyed, saying:

“I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon one another, that shall not be thrown down.”¹¹

⁹ “Timeline of Judaism after Babylonian Exile (538 B.C. to 70 A.D.)

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/timeline-of-judaism-after-the-babylonian-exile-538-bce-70-ce>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Matthew 24:2.

At that time, the ancient Roman empire had already established itself as the imperial power in ancient Judea, following the internal Jewish civil war between rivals Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II in 63 B.C.

Up to that period, as stated in the *First and Second Books of the Maccabees*, the Jews had been fighting against themselves as well as against foreign Greek or Roman imperialism.¹² Jews loyal to the Old Testament covenant and the Law of Moses were forced to defend themselves against disloyal Jews who were ready to embrace Greco-Roman religion, culture, and political power and influence.

The Hasmonaean (“Maccabees”) Dynasty c. 140 BCE to 37 BCE



¹² “Maccabee,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maccabees> (“The name Maccabee is often used as a synonym for the entire Hasmonaean dynasty, but the Maccabees proper were Judas Maccabeus and his four brothers. The name Maccabee was a personal epithet of Judah, and the later generations were not his direct descendants. One explanation of the name's origins is that it derives from the Aramaic maqqəḇā, "the hammer", in recognition of Judah's ferocity in battle. The traditional Jewish explanation is that Maccabee (Hebrew: מכביים Machabi) is an acronym for the Torah verse that was the battle-cry of the Maccabees, "Mi chamocho ba'elim YHWH", "Who is like You among the heavenly powers, Lord!", as well as an acronym for "Matityahu haKohen ben Yochanan" (Matthias the priest, son of John). The correlating Torah verse Exodus 15:11, The song of Moses and the Children of Israel by the Sea, makes a reference to elim, with a mundane notion of natural forces, heavenly might, war and governmental powers. The scholar and poet Aaron Kaminka argues that the name is a corruption of Machbanai, a leading commando in the army of King David.”)

For the traditionalist and loyal Jews believed that the Second Temple was the symbol of their culture and political independence. At the same time, many of those same Jews also saw the Second Temple elites as being corrupt. Not only was the priesthood corrupt, but many of the Jewish synagogues (i.e., ruling elders, scribes, lawyers, etc.), which bolstered the corrupted priesthood of the Second Temple, was also corrupt— thus forcing Jesus into hiding and into a defensive posture, upon his revelation as being the Messiah, the Christ, and the son of God. (See, e.g., John 19:12, stating,

And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.

For this was the context of the explosive political situation in which Jesus of Nazareth had predicted that the Second Temple would be destroyed.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus described the explosive political and social conditions that would occur when the Second Temple would be destroyed.¹³ The historian Josephus described those same conditions in his description of the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D.,¹⁴ his masterpiece *The War of the Jews*, subsection titled “From the Great Extremity to Which the Jews Were Reduced to the Taking of Jerusalem by Titus.”¹⁵ The Rev. Algernon Sidney Crapsey has written:

The Jewish wars, waged at the end of the sixth decade of the first century were among the most frightful in the history of human warfare. The Jews were inspired with religious enthusiasm, and fought with the desperateness of fanatics. Every hill in Judea and Galilee became a fortress; every valley, a battlefield; city after city was taken by storm and sacked by the Roman soldiery. The siege of

¹³ Matthew 25: 4-51.

¹⁴ *In Josephus: the Complete Works*, it is pointed out by the editor that even the great Jewish historian of antiquity, Josephus, who had descended from an elite Jewish family of priests and was himself a member of that esteemed priesthood, but he had nevertheless joined the Roman legions during the siege of 70 A.D., and “[a]fterwards, he retired to Rome, became a Roman citizen, and spent his days writing about his life and exploits.” *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1998), p. vii.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 872-899.

Jerusalem lasted for years, and was attended with horrors that disgrace the name of man.¹⁶

And so, just as Jesus had prophesied, the Second Temple was ultimately destroyed in 70 A.D., within a generation of his death and resurrection.¹⁷

¹⁶ Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), p. 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter Two

“Malachi’s Purified and Restored Second Temple and Priesthood”

Both theologians and historians must therefore come to terms with the Book of Malachi and its prophetic predictions about the Second Temple and its priesthood, because the prophet Malachi, who wrote the last book in the Old Testament, prophesied that the priesthood and the Second Temple would be restored.

Is there a contradiction between Malachi’s and Jesus of Nazareth’s two prophecies about the Second Temple—the former being a prophecy of restoration, while the later being a prophecy of destruction?

Historically, what ever happened to the renewed Second Temple and its deficient priesthood that were predicted or prophesied in the Book of Malachi? “According to W. Gunther Plaut:

Malachi describes a priesthood that is forgetful of its duties, a Temple that is underfunded because the people have lost interest in it, and a society in which Jewish men divorce their Jewish wives to marry out of the faith.¹⁸

And the commentary section to the Thomas Nelson KJV, “The Book of Malachi,” states:

Malachi, a prophet in the days of Nehemiah, directs his message of judgment to a people plagued with corrupt priests, wicked practices, and a false sense of security in their privileged relationship with God. Using the question-and-answer method, Malachi probes deeply into their problems of hypocrisy, infidelity, mixed marriages, divorce, false worship, and arrogance. So sinful has the nation become that God’s words to the people no longer have any impact. For four hundred years after Malachi’s ringing condemnation, God remains

¹⁸ “Malachi,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malachi>

silent. Only with the coming of John the Baptist (prophesied in 3:1)¹⁹ does God again communicate to His people through a prophet's voice.

Moreover, the Book of Malachi seriously arraigns the people of ancient Judah as well as the priests of the Second Temple, stating:

Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible....²⁰

And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.

If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

¹⁹ Malachi 3:1 ("Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.")

²⁰ Malachi 1:7.

But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god....

Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?²¹

Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?

And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered....²²

Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with **the statutes and judgments.**²³

Finally, the Book of Malachi speaks of a “messenger”²⁴ and “Elijah the prophet”²⁵ who shall “prepare the way”²⁶ before the coming the Lord, and “before

²¹ Malachi 2:17.

²² Malachi 3:14-15.

²³ Malachi 4:4.

²⁴ Malachi 3:1.

the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”²⁷ Christological interpretations of these Scriptures point us to John the Baptist (who is the “messenger” and “Elijah the prophet”)²⁸ who prepared the way for Jesus of Nazareth (i.e., the Lord).

This Book of Malachi, most significantly, states that the Lord “shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”²⁹ But does this mean that the Lord (i.e., Jesus) shall rehabilitate and store the Levites to the Second Temple?

²⁵ Malachi 4:5.

²⁶ Malachi 3:1.

²⁷ Malachi 4:5.

²⁸ Jesus said of John the Baptist: “He is Elijah who is to come” (Matt 11:14).

²⁹ Malachi 3:3.

Chapter Three

“Jesus Instituted a New Temple and a New Priesthood”

In the Gospel of Matthew, the symbolic ending of the Second Temple is mentioned, when Jesus was on the cross, bowed his head, “cried again with a loud voice [and] yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom...” And the same is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark, to wit:

And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.³⁰

And so, we are to conclude that the Second Temple and the Levitical priesthood were *officially ended*, and the New Covenant commenced, upon the death and resurrection of Christ.³¹

Here, again, the Christological interpretation of this Sacred Scripture (i.e., Malachi 3:3) is provided in 1 Peter 2: 5-9, to wit:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up **a spiritual house, an holy priesthood**, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

³⁰ Mark 15:37-39.

³¹ Hebrews 7: 1-28.

And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

But ye are **a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation,** a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light....

Thus, the Second Temple, along with its priesthood, were forever changed with the death and resurrection of Christ's fleshly body. For, as the Apostle John explained:

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

But he spake of the **temple of his body.**

When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.³²

And according to the Apostle Paul, the very bodies of every Christian is a "temple of God," to wit:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are....³³

Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ?....³⁴

³² John 2:18-22.

³³ 1 Corinthians 3: 16-17.

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:15.

What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's.³⁵

And, finally, one of the greatest theologians of the Western Church, Augustine of Hippo, leads us to the same conclusion in his masterpiece, *The City of God*, whereby he painstakingly explains the whole theological scheme, to wit:

There is no priest after the order of Aaron; and whoever is a man of his lineage, when he sees the sacrifice of the Christians prevailing over the whole world, but that great honor taken away from himself, his eyes fail and his soul melts away consumed with grief.

But what follows belongs properly to the house of Eli, to whom these things were said: 'And every one of thine house that is left shall fall by the sword of men. And this shall be a sign unto thee that shall come upon these they two sons, Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.' This, therefore, is made a sign of the change of the priesthood from this man's house by which it is signified that the priesthood of Aaron's house is to be changed. For the death of this man's sons signified the death not of the men, but of the priesthood itself of the sons of Aaron. But what follows pertains to that Priest whom Samuel typified by succeeding this one. Therefore the things which follow are of Christ Jesus the true Priest of the New Testament....

What then does he say who comes to worship the priest of God, even the Priest who is God? 'Put me into one part of Thy priesthood, to eat bread.' I do not wish to be set in the honor of my fathers, which is none; put me in a part of Thy priesthood. For 'I have chosen to be mean in Thine house;' I desire to be a member, no matter what, or how small, of Thy priesthood. **By priesthood he here means the people itself**, of which He is the Priest who is the Mediator between

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

God and men, the man Christ Jesus. This people the Apostle Peter calls ‘a holy people, a royal priesthood’....³⁶

For we see that priests and Levites are now chosen, not from a certain family and blood, as was originally the rule in the priesthood according to the order of Aaron, but as befits the new testament, under which Christ is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, in consideration of the merit which is bestowed upon each man by divine grace. And **these priests are not to be judged by their mere title, which is often borne by unworthy men, but by that holiness which is not common to good men and bad.**³⁷

Hence, the whole history of the Jews, from the period the building of the Second Temple—when Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah prophesied and administered the Old Covenant in ancient Judah—up to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., lead us to the inauguration of the Christian religion (as the extension of Old Covenant) to priestly communion of the common man, who has been elevated to the status of “kings and priests unto God”³⁸—and hence, the foundation of Western and Anglo-American conceptualization of civil polity and constitutional government.³⁹

³⁶ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950, pp. 580-582.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 746.

³⁸ Revelation 1:6.

³⁹ See, e.g., *The Works of John Witherspoon*, Vol 8 (Edinburgh, Scotland: Ogles, Duncan & Cochran, 1815); Reinhold Niebuhr, “Happiness, Prosperity and Virtue,” *Major Works on Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 2015), pp. 496-510; David Yount, “How Quaker Values Infused the Constitution,” *How the Quakers Invented America* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Pub., Inc., 2007), pp. 14-17; William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852), p. 484 (“[T]he people of Great Britain are indebted to the Puritans. What is wanting, both in England and America, to the completeness and the security of human freedom, is an undeviating fidelity to those principles of Christian democracy which the Puritans in some measure restored.”); and Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), p. 244 (“It was the belief of the Puritan that was the motive power of the American Revolution. It was the stern conviction of the Puritan that not King George, but God, was the rightful sovereign in America, not the Parliament of England, but the people of the united Colonies, were the sole keepers of the purse and the only source of political power; and it was this conviction of the Puritan that sustained the people of the country through the long years of the Revolutionary War.”)

CONCLUSION

The Second Temple's priesthood— i.e., the High Priest, the chief priests, priests, Levites, etc.—were terminated through the New Testament Covenant.

And so, in a certain way, with his heavenly power and authority, Christ purified and restored the Second Temple, as prophesied in the Book of Malachi, but he did so in a radically different way than what was popularly supposed by the Jewish elites of his day.

Jesus of Nazareth instituted a radically different religion whereby every Christian believer would become a “king and priest.” The very body of a Christian believer, wherein dwells the Holy Ghost, is the “temple of God.”

Therefore, in the church of Jesus Christ, every lay Christian is a “priest.” This is why the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) stated that:

"A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it."⁴⁰

Collectively, all lay Christians, wherein dwells the Holy Ghost, comprise the “temple of God” or the “body of Christ.” They are true, authentic “priests” whom Christ addressed in his “Sermon on the Mount.”

For it is upon this sacred principle, that the Protestant Reformation, which was led by Luther, Calvin, the Puritans, and many others, freed the common man and woman from the arbitrary ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Catholic priesthood, and eventually laid the foundations of western democracy.

THE END

⁴⁰ Michael Collett, “Reformation: Here's what Martin Luther thought the Catholic Church was wrong about” <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-31/what-martin-luther-thought-the-catholic-church-was-wrong-about/9031732>

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