



Introduction to “The Second Temple: Persian Period”

Review of Previous Article

The overarching development of the divided monarchical period was the consistent role of the prophets, who spoke on behalf of God to the people. On numerous occasions and in diverse circumstances, the prophets repeatedly called the people to renounce possessive power structures and to witness, accept and celebrate the promised revelation of YHWH as the embodiment of compassion (“wombliness”). This prophetic concept of YHWH’s “wombliness” was the foundation for the relationship between God and Israel. “. . . [H]e, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not . . .” (Psalm 78:38).

Overview of This Article

During the Persian period both the Jewish monarchy and the prophetic office were terminated, with the priesthood assuming the primary role in Judaism. The termination of the monarchy meant that Jewish identity could no longer be that of a secular nation-state. Rather, priestly governance now moved Jewish identity to that of a religious theocracy. The termination of the prophetic office meant that the prophets’ emphasis on salvation history lost its primacy. Instead, the emphasis now moved to the primacy of law. Before, the priestly power had been curbed by the differing viewpoints of the divided Aaronic (Zadokite) and Levitical priestly lines. Moreover, the monarchy and the prophets had represented a balance of power that restrained priestly dominance. Now all that had changed. A formerly divided priesthood had been united. And with no monarchy and no prophetic office, the priestly influence and governance reigned supreme, and Judea became a recognized theocracy in a Persian empire and monarchy that were regarded in Judaism as “messianic” — since the Persian monarch, Cyrus, had supported the return of Jews from the land of their captivity.