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From Temple and Sacrifice to Synagogues and Prayer: The Transformation as Reflected in Late Second Commonwealth Evidence and Early Rabbinic Literature

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Contents

Digest

The first chapter of this thesis provides an introduction to the two major themes that are explored, namely, the origin of synagogues and prayer and the role of the Rabbis in each case. As an introduction, the first chapter focuses on the specific mindset and contributions of the Tannaim and the Amoraim, and how rabbinic approaches to prayer and synagogue developed over time. Some of the key issues regarding the transformation from Temple and sacrifice to synagogues and prayer are broached here before they will be discussed in greater detail in the following two chapters. In essence, this chapter introduces the issue of transformation and how the massive upheaval caused by the destruction of the Temple demanded serious rethinking of Jewish worship. Finally, this chapter discusses the Rabbis' role in society and their influence on other Jews.

Chapter Two discusses the origin of the synagogue and the Rabbis' role in its development. This chapter considers the motivation for synagogue construction and how such institutions eventually became the official locale for Jewish worship. Epigraphical and archaeological evidence sheds some light on how and why synagogues were erected, and who was involved in the various functions that took place there. From rabbinic literature we can deduce certain opinions that the Rabbis had regarding the synagogue, and we can trace how they came to find the synagogue more and more valuable through time.

The third chapter discusses prayer and how it came to be the primary method of Jewish worship following the end of the sacrificial cult. Here we discuss the rabbinic understanding of prayer and the innovations that the Rabbis made in developing a proper system of Jewish worship. This chapter discusses in detail the issues and concerns the Rabbis debated regarding prayer, and how over time prayer emerged as the method of worship that would replace the sacrifices.

The final chapter discusses how the Geonim based their system of worship on the *halakhah* set forth by the earlier Rabbis. In essence, this chapter points out that the system of worship that would ultimately be adopted and labeled as the official system of Jewish worship was based on the teachings of the Rabbis. It was their initiative and innovative thinking that allowed Judaism to maintain its ability to worship God after their primary mode of worship was destroyed. Finally, this chapter concludes with some final thoughts and assessments of the Rabbis' role in the transformation "from Temple and Sacrifice to Synagogues and Prayer."

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For

Jodi, Joel, Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa, Savta and Grandpa, and Abba Oscar

Chapter One: Introduction

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE for the Rabbis effectively ended the practical possibility of worshipping God through the medium of sacrifice. As the official corporate cultus came to a sudden and dramatic end, a new method of communicating with God and fulfilling the regular communal obligations was now required. While it may not have been immediately certain what would fill that role, the Rabbis after 70 came to ordain a thrice-daily statutory prayer as the mandated form of corporate worship. Many new guidelines and regulations would subsequently be produced throughout the tannaitic and amoraic periods in order to enable the Jewish people to correctly fulfill their cultic obligation through prayer. Additionally, the sages attempted to infuse into prayer the spirit and rituals of the Temple service, in an effort to maintain the sacred traditions that had sustained and nourished Jewish worship of God. The setting for such worship would eventually take place in the synagogue, an earlier institution whose post-70 development would come to parallel the establishment of prayer in a fixed and communal setting. Hence comprehension of the origin and development of the synagogue is germane to understanding how prayer evolved into the primary means of Jewish worship in the absence of the Temple cult.

In attempting to understand how and why prayer and synagogue achieved their ultimate roles, this study will mainly concentrate on the following areas: prayer-forms that existed pre-70 CE, particularly during the late Second Temple period; the development of statutory prayer by the tannaitic sages; and finally the interpretations and developments of the amoraic sages. In many cases, the information provided in rabbinic literature is ambiguous and elliptical, and thus has fueled debate among scholars as to the precise nature of the development of statutory prayer. Therefore many views have been asserted as to how to make sense out of the rabbinic discussions. The use of archaeological and epigraphical data, in certain areas, have assuredly benefitted modern scholarship in helping to understand both the origins of prayer and the

synagogue. Although this study is primarily concerned with the rabbinic perspective regarding the transformation from Temple and sacrifice to prayer and synagogue,we would be monumentally remiss not to consider evidence from other, non-rabbinic sources (including the other literary ones).

In determining how prayer eventually achieved its ultimate role, it is necessary to track its history from the earliest stages possible. This search, however, is not clear and has subsequently engendered much debate among scholars attempting to interpret the different genres of sources regarding the timeline of the development of Jewish prayer. Scholarly research in this field primarily began with Leopold Zunz, who first introduced the application of philological tools to uncover the historical origin and composition of Jewish liturgy.[1] Later, Ismar Elbogen contributed a refined and heavily elaborated treatment of Zunz's study of prayer as he pointed out that fixed liturgy developed rather slowly in talmudic and post-talmudic times. Modern criticism of his work contends that he oversimplified talmudic evidence for a formal and fixed liturgy.[2] As we will see below in detail, Joseph Heinemann too contributed immensely to this field. One of his main contentions is that statutory liturgy developed continually from Second Temple times all the way into early medieval times when the prayers were eventually recorded in a prayer book. However Ezra Fleischer's recent scholarly contributions have cast doubt on whether regular communal prayer existed at all before 70 CE; rather, he contends that a formal liturgy was composed in large part at Yavneh under the leadership of Rabban Gamliel. This view, which was greeted with considerable skepticism when introduced, radically challenged previous conceptions of statutory prayer, which was thought to have gradually originated well before the time of Rabban Gamliel. Fleischer argues that there is no evidence for fixed, obligatory

[1] Ruth Langer, "Revisiting Early Rabbinic Liturgy: The Recent Contributions of Ezra Fleischer." Prooftexts 19 (1999) , p.179. Also see, Richard S. Sarason, "On the Use of Method in the Study of Jewish Liturgy" in Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice, ed. W.S. Green (Missoula: Scholars, 1978), p.181.
[2] Stefan C. Reif, Judaism and Hebrew Prayer. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.3.

prayer during the Second Commonwealth. The only prayers that did exist were similar to the individual prayers often found in the Hebrew Bible: individual and incidental prayers that had no fixed formula or construction.[3] Despite Daniel's habit of kneeling and praying three times daily (Daniel 6:11), the majority of biblical prayer is improvised and not reusable, suitable only for the situation in which it arises.[4]

Fleischer does not doubt that spontaneous and individual prayers existed in the period before the destruction. Rather, his view places the liturgical composition of regular and communal prayers at Yavneh and attributes the success of their immediate adaptation into Jewish religious life to the persuasiveness of those sages in the wake of a national tragedy.[5] Subscribers to this view must then be willing to accept that the authority of the Yavnean sages was powerful and widespread enough to institute a dramatic shift in the religious way of life for the Jews of the first century CE. However, as Ruth Langer and others have noted, external evidence suggests that the range of Jewish sentiment regarding rabbinic leadership stretched from substantial indifference to active opposition.[6] While many scholars are willing to support the view that the general institution of fixed, daily prayer was begun at Yavneh, they are simply unable to support Fleischer's contention that Yavnean sages were capable of composing and imposing fixed prayer texts. While acknowledging the significance of Fleischer's contributions regarding Yavnean authorship, Langer nonetheless groups them among the various other scholarly theories whose basic premises are valuable, but "barring discovery of more evidence," cannot be taken as absolute truth.

The earliest Jewish "prayer book" known to exist dates from 875 CE. In that sense, dating of actual prayer texts before that time obviously cannot be done with any precision. One

[3] Reif's Judaism and Hebrew Prayer stresses the biblical models for later prayer development, p.22-52.
[4] Moshe Greenberg, Biblical Prose Prayer as a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 17.
[5] Langer, "Revisiting", p. 190.
[6] Ibid.

view that had been widely held, especially before Fleischer's recent contributions, was the opinion of Joseph Heinemann that there was no exact point of composition for any portion of the prayer book.[7] He contended that over the course of time, from the Second Temple period when they originated to early medieval times, various prayer-texts were gradually standardized and eventually recorded and set forth in a prayer book. Thus, in Heinemann's view, daily prayer was a phenomenon that was born during the Second Temple period among average Jews and was cultivated over the centuries by each succeeding generation. At no point was liturgy composed by a rabbinic elite and then imposed upon the Jewish masses.[8] Rather, it was a product of the people that developed gradually and was utilized as it was needed. Likewise, the synagogue developed over several centuries before it finally achieved its role as the true house of Jewish prayer.

The Origin of the Synagogue

In recognition of later discussion regarding the rabbis' utilization of the synagogue for their own agenda, it is worth first exploring how the synagogue originated. According to Lee Levine's hypothesis, the forerunner of the synagogue building before the Greco-Roman period was the city-gate. It was in this urban setting that crowds gathered for a multitude of purposes ranging from business activity to prophetic orations to judicial hearings.[9] In addition, it was at Jerusalem's Water Gate where Ezra and Nehemiah first gathered the people for the reading of Scripture.[10] Yet, during the Persian and Hellenistic periods, when the city-gate was gradually transformed both architecturally and functionally from a place of gathering to a location dedicated

[7] Langer, 180.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Lee I. Levine, The Ancient Synagogue.(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 28.
[10] Levine, p. 33 (see Nehemiah 2-3; Josephus, War 5, 142-55).

to defense, a new setting was necessitated for such public gatherings. It is possible that some other structure (maybe even indoors) was utilized to fulfill the needs previously met by the city-gate. However, archeological evidence from the Persian and Hellenistic periods is unclear with regard to Judean towns and villages. While it is possible that the synagogue had already emerged as a place of gathering (even in locations that boasted no fortifications or city-gate gathering area), it cannot be judged for certain exactly when these structures emerged on the scene.[11] Further, it must be reiterated that when discussing the nature of synagogues before the Greco-Roman period, no theory of synagogue evolution can be understood as anything more than a hypothesis.

In Jerusalem, the elimination of the city-gate as a viable location for communal activity necessitated a need for a new location. This need resulted in the movement of social, political, and religious activity to the Temple Mount, which was doubled in size by Herod to accommodate these needs as well as the pilgrimages to Jerusalem.[12] The synagogue likewise emerged as a place for communal gathering which complemented some of the new functions of the Temple Mount. These two institutions, in the Second Temple period, were not seen as competitors, but rather as separate institutions fulfilling different purposes. While the synagogue may have already been a place of religious activity, it was not specifically designated as a holy place.[13] The synagogue in the Diaspora, however, was more likely regarded as a primary religious site because the Jews in those towns and villages were surrounded by a pagan majority. In these areas, other religious communities congregated in *proseuches* (prayer-places) to facilitate their religious needs. Subsequently, the Jewish populations in these Diaspora settings utilized the *proseuche* as well as a means to express and husband their religious identity. Although the *proseuche* was a Hellenistic institution, it became for these Jewish communities a distinctly Jewish location.

[11] Ibid.
[12] Levine, p. 40.
[13] Ibid.

Recent excavations in the land of Israel have reported findings of a handful of synagogue remains dating from the pre-70 era. In places such as Herodion, Masada, Gamla, and Jericho, synagogues existed as locations for communal and public activity. Archaeological evidence points out that these structures were often the only public buildings within the settlements. It would then follow that these buildings were likely the settings for worship activities (among which only public study and exposition of sacred texts are attested in inscriptions and literary evidence), debate, critical deliberations in times of crises, judicial verdicts, and collection of charities.[14] In many cases, excavations have discovered that the chamber was set up so that attention would be focused on the center of the room because the columns and benches were arranged in a way befitting communal participation.

Despite all of the study of pre-70 synagogues, their religious nature still remains unclear. The buildings themselves were not typically marked with inscriptions or other demarcations of religious significance. In addition, unlike the synagogues of later antiquity, there was no Torah shrine in the pre-70 structure. However, the frequent presence of a *miqvah* nearby to many Judean synagogues indicates that the building probably served a specifically religious function (possibly as a location for communal meals considering the need for purification before eating).[15] However, with the exception of a few common architectural features and close proximity to *miqva'ot,* there really was no single, shared model of a synagogue in the Second Temple period. Discrepancies in the location of the entrance, layout, shape, interior decor, and seating all point out that synagogues varied from place to place in the pre-70 land of Israel . Yet, in the decades before the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue was already developing as a center for religious and communal activity. Religious identification may have been stronger in areas where Jews were the minority (such as the coastal cities of Caesarea and Dor), such that the customs

[14] Levine, p. 69.
[15] Levine, p. 70.

and traditions that developed in these places might have spread to the synagogues in the predominantly and wholly Jewish areas in Israel. It was these developments that would become the basis for the synagogue of the Rabbis in later generations.

The Issues of Transformation in Rabbinic Literature

Following the destruction of the Temple, the sages of subsequent generations began to discuss and implement a new system of public worship. Yet, the early sages who faced the pressures of transformation of religious life dealt with many issues that were not easily resolved. Although these issues will be fleshed out in depth in later chapters, it seems worthwhile to note here examples of the questions the Tannaim were attempting to answer. One crucial issue includes whether prayer should take place communally or privately. It is obviously known which side won out on this question, but it is worth noting that the very nature of the Mishnaic traditions and arguments in the Talmudim indicate that it was not always a certainty whether or not prayer had to be recited communally. Another critical issue which will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three is the question of fixity versus spontaneity in prayer. Later we will look at rabbinic discussion dealing with the implications and problems of both sides of this important issue. These examples indicate the types of questions that the Tannaim dealt with and how numerous opinions contributed to actual decisions. This section will deal with rabbinic attitudes regarding prayer and the synagogue and will note the advancements of these institutions during the tannaitic and amoraic periods.

Perhaps one of the most interesting questions regarding the origin of prayer in late antiquity as the primary means of worshipping God is the issue of whether or not prayer was the appropriate replacement for Temple sacrifices. There are several examples in rabbinic

literature of how some sages viewed Torah study as more important than prayer. R. Joshua ben Levi once argued that a synagogue could be converted into a *beit-hamidrash* because the latter held a higher degree of sanctity (and he thus implied that a conversion in the other direction was impermissible).[16] It was also stated once by Rava, when commenting on the protracted prayer of R. Hamnuna, that "such people are abandoning eternal life in order to engage in mundane matters!"[17] These amoraic statements indicate that this issue was not resolved well beyond the tannaitic period. Although prayer certainly was not without its advocates among the Tannaim and the Amoraim, there was a lack of consensus among the Rabbis regarding prayer's position atop the hierarchy of legitimate worship. Further, we cannot be sure how widespread rabbinic prayer was outside the rabbinic movement in the tannaitic period. In that regard, one might assume that it took time before an agreed-upon system of worship replaced sacrifices and was utilized consistently among the masses of the Jewish people.

Prayer as a primary means of worship was obviously hard for sages such as Rava to validate, especially when study of Torah seemed so much more important in rabbinic religious culture. Prior to the destruction of the Temple, the institution of Torah study was already well known within Judaism. Evidence regarding the Torah reading in synagogues attests to the esteem with which words of Torah were held by the ancient sages. Many citations from extra-biblical sources reflect the importance of the Torah reading in the synagogue and the emphasis that was placed on expounding and teaching the words of Scripture.[18] Evidence from as early as the second century BCE indicates that the Torah had already become the holiest object in Judaism and was regarded by Jew and non-Jew alike as the foremost source of Jewish learning.[19] The Torah reading in the synagogue every seventh day was not simply ceremonial. Philo's writings indicate that the Torah reading served as a starting-off point for study and instruction; teaching was so

[16] Bavli Megillah 27a.
[17] Bavli Shabbat 10a.
[18] Levine, p. 137.
[19] Levine, p. 135.

closely intertwined with study that the synagogue was also known as a school for the learning of virtues.[20]

The New Testament, in addition to Philo and Josephus, is useful in providing a glimpse into the ancient synagogues which they discussed. While the New Testament and Josephus primarily discuss synagogues in the Galilee, Philo's writings provide information on the region of Alexandria. From these writings we learn that the sermon in these places, which expounded the laws and morals of the particular reading, was an essential component of the Sabbath service. In addition, Philo notes that the sermon was so crucial to the service that it would often last for the entire day as teachers lectured and guided the congregants in the study of Scripture.[21] It should also be noted that understanding of the Scripture was considered so important that a recitation in Aramaic accompanied the reading of Torah probably as early as the Second Temple period. For many early Tannaim, Torah study and exegesis was a far more worthy activity than prayer in regards to worshipping God. Although these particular sages may not have opposed the concept of prayer, they did not feel that significant time should be devoted to prayer when that time could better be used studying Torah.

It is unlikely that Torah reading and study would have reached such a pinnacle of importance and not be directly involved with the Sabbath activity already taking place inside the synagogue. As will be discussed in further detail later, the synagogue of the Tannaim was a place where Scripture was studied and expounded. The Torah in the first century CE was considered the holiest object in Judaism apart from the Temple, and there are several instances in the rabbinic literature after the first century that spell out a hierarchy of sanctity regarding the Torah, its appurtenances, and its location inside the synagogue.[22] Although it cannot be denied that prayer eventually developed into the primary communal mode of Jewish worship, the

[20] Ibid.
[21] Levine, p. 145.
[22] Fine, p. 69.

importance of Torah reading and study in that worship is equally undeniable.

It is clear from one statement in B. Berakhot 26b, "They established the Prayer (the Amidah) to correspond to the daily sacrifices," that prayer not only served as a replacement for sacrifices, but that it was also deemed equivalent to actual sacrifices.[23] In essence, the task of the Rabbis in instituting statutory prayer among other Jews was to convey the efficacy of prayer as a replacement for sacrifices. Thus, in order for Jews to relate to a regular statutory prayer as an effective means of worship, they had to see their prayers as replacements for the sacrifices that they themselves offered in the Temple. In achieving this end, a number of directives regarding proper worship were put forth by the Rabbis.[24] For example, the times at which the *Amidah* is supposed to be recited correlate directly to the times at which sacrifices were offered in the Temple. Berakhot 1:1 begins by stating that the time when one may recite the *Shema* in the evening begins "from the time when the priest enters [the Temple] to eat of their heave-offering." This language represents a clear intent on the part of the Mishnaic editors to reflect Temple vocabulary even when the prayer or action involved does not represent a former Temple function.[25]

In their mission to institute statutory prayer and its accompanying rituals as the primary mode of Jewish worship, the Rabbis continually impressed upon the people that prayer demanded the same precision that was exercised in sacrificial offerings. Analogies that Jews could understand, such as prayer times correlating to the times of the sacrifices, were utilized so that they would correctly embrace new rabbinic innovations in worship. It should be noted however that the Rabbis were not interested in replacing Temple activity with prayer forever. Rather, their hope was that the Temple would one day be rebuilt and a return to the sacrificial

[23] Ruth Langer, To Worship God Properly: Tension between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism, (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998), p.6.
[24] This subject will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.
[25] Langer, To Worship God Properly, p.7.

worship would ensue. As Heinemann noted, the central motif of rabbinic prayer is "unquestionably the belief in the redemption, and the longing for its realization."[26] The liturgy certainly reflects rabbinic hopes for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and a return to the Temple sacrifices as the apex of Jewish worship.

Prayer and Synagogue in the Tannaitic Period

The Tannaim were certainly concerned with the people's and their own conception of the Holy Temple's sanctity, and this had to be accounted for in their efforts to develop new liturgy and worship settings. Before attempting to underscore the role that *Imitatio Templi* played in the minds of the Tannaim (and the limits they prescribed for it), it is worthwhile to examine the role of the synagogue in the tannaitic period. The synagogue was a major source of continuity between the pre-70 Temple era and the post-destruction period. Although archaeological evidence is scant at best regarding the first two centuries CE in Palestine, the evidence that has been recovered seems to indicate that the synagogue had achieved a central role in many Jewish communities. At places such as Susiya and Qatrin, as well as other locations, synagogue remains were found at what was probably the center of town.[27] The synagogue's original purpose was to serve as a community center in which people gathered to discuss business, to socialize, take shelter in times of harsh weather, and to serve as a hostel for travelers, as well as a place of study. In that respect, rabbinic material suggests that the Rabbis needed to change the mindset of the people regarding how to behave in the synagogue. The Tosefta states,

> One should not behave lightheartedly in a synagogue. One should not enter them in the heat because of the heat.....And one should not

[26] Steven Fine, This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p.52.
[27] Levine, p.178.

eat in them nor drink in them nor sleep in them, nor stroll in them.[28]

This statement reflects the effort that was required in order to transform the synagogue from a community center to a specifically holy place where worship and study occurred. Tannaitic tradition ascribes to R. Yohanan b. Zakai a series of *taqqanot* attempting to bring Temple practices and rituals into the synagogue setting. His orders seem to indicate that blowing the shofar, carrying the lulav and etrog, and other Temple rituals should, in the wake of the Temple's destruction, take place in the synagogue.[29] It is not known how many synagogues actually complied with ben Zakkai's *taqqanot,* but one can clearly ascertain how the synagogue would be shaped by the Rabbis in the following generations.

Over time the Rabbis assigned sanctity to the synagogue in a manner that resembled the Temple, but did not mirror it. The synagogue was not to be viewed as a replacement for the Temple, but seen rather as a holy place on a decidedly lower level than the Temple. Tannaitic literature indicates that because Torah was read and studied there, and the new function of communal prayer was conducted there, the synagogue evolved into a holy place.[30] According to Fine, however, it is likely that the primary source of holiness in the synagogue was the actual presence there of the holy Torah scrolls. Nevertheless, the Mishnah traces the adoption of Temple rituals into the synagogue to the *taqqanot* ordered by R. Yohanan ben Zakkai. Examples of these rituals in the synagogue include carrying *lulavim*, priests reciting the Torah blessings on Yom Kippur, and organizing prayers according to the times when sacrifices were offered in the Temple (these prayers however were not necessarily recited in the synagogue).[31] These innovations, by perpetuating some Temple practices outside of the Temple, represent a concerted effort on behalf on the Tannaim to establish an institution as the primary location for Jewish worship in the wake of the Temple's destruction.

[28] Tosefta Megillah 2:18.
[29] Levine, p.183.
[30] Fine, p,36.
[31] Ibid.

The institution of liturgical prayer allowed the Rabbis to maintain continuity between the Temple period and *ha-zeman hazeh.* The Tannaim made every effort to align their synagogues and their prayers toward the Temple. In that sense, all of Israel would be praying toward one place, the Temple Mount from which God's presence never departs.[32] Even though the synagogue became the location of worship, the mind and the body were focused on the the place of God's presence. In a strategic sense, the initiative of the Rabbis in invoking replicas of Temple practices in the synagogue was worthwhile because the "Temple culture" following the destruction was still quite apparent.[33] Yet, the Tannaim knew that there was a fine line drawn between adopting various rituals into the synagogue and actually recreating the Temple culture in a new location.

There are a number of places in rabbinic literature that reflect tannaitic attempts to differentiate between the sanctity of the Temple and that of the synagogue. For example, the Rabbis report that once appurtenances have been dedicated or used for a sacred purpose in the Temple, they may not be used for mundane purposes. However, in reference to appurtenances used in the synagogue, the Rabbis note that even though an item is used for a sacred purpose in the synagogue, it may still be used for mundane purposes outside of the synagogue.[34] There was also concern that synagogues would be built architecturally in a way that mirrored Temple construction. The Rabbis also feared that synagogue incorporation of Temple icons and elements (such as *menorot*) would blur the distinction between Temple and synagogue.[35]

In addition to the inclusion in the synagogue of Temple forms, the Rabbis were fearful that certain liturgical phrases and rituals would replicate too closely the customs of the Temple cult. One clear example of this concern can be deduced from the Rabbis' rebuke of Rabbi Halafta

[32] Fine, p.52.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Fine, p. 55.
[35] Fine, p.49.

and Hannaniah ben Teradion for including Temple liturgical responses in the synagogue.[36] In the tannaitic period much more so than the amoraic period, the Rabbis were greatly concerned to define the differences between the synagogue and Temple. As will be discussed in greater detail later, the Amoraim were not as concerned with the distinction because there was no longer a fear of the synagogue "replacing" the Temple. By late antiquity, it was already understood that the synagogue was a separate institution that could never take the place of the Temple, and that served a wholly separate purpose in the religious life of the Jewish people.

Prayer and Synagogue in the Amoraic Period

In the amoraic period, the ideas and beliefs of the Tannaim were further developed and institutionalized by the Rabbis. Concerns that the practice of *Imitatio Templi* would blur the lines between Temple and synagogue vanished as it became understood that the synagogue was at best a diminished Temple.[37] The major issues facing the Amoraim included dictating precisely how, when, and where prayer should take place. In that sense, they took it upon themselves to further develop the laws of prayer and synagogue based on the words of Scripture and tannaitic precedent. Although they also believed strongly in the study of Torah, they wanted to assert that prayer as well was needed to worship God. In order to convince the masses that rabbinic prayer was efficacious and proper, they devised incentives and curses for those who obeyed and did not obey their directives. For example, they stated that one who recites the *Shema* at night would be protected from the demons and the evil spirits of the night. They would also promise a share in the world to come for those who prayed according to rabbinic standards, and threatened those who did not with the opposite fate.[38] These types of threats and promises indicate that the

[36] Levine, p. 189.
[37] Fine p.63.
[38] Langer, To Worship God Properly, p.17.

Rabbis did not have total authority over the people, and had to resort to such tactics in order to impose their beliefs on the masses.

In the years prior to the amoraic period, it is likely that Jews prayed at times when they deemed it appropriate, and were not concerned with whether or not they were fulfilling rabbinic guidelines. Especially for those who subscribe to Heinemann's theories, it would seem that prayer had developed in precisely this manner during the Second Temple period. Although none of the Amoraim fully invalidated the need for individual, occasional prayer outside of the synagogue, they surely believed that the future of Jewish worship could not rely on individual, non-regular prayer. Some Rabbis had such a strong need to argue for the primacy of communal worship in the synagogue that they claimed that prayers offered elsewhere fell on deaf ears and were ineffectual. To that end, Rav Huna said, "Anyone who does not enter a synagogue in this world will not enter one in the world to come"; and R. Yohanan stated that, "He who prays at home it is as if he is surrounded by a wall of iron."[39] It is fairly certain however that these admonitions were targeted at regular rabbinic prayer not recited in the synagogue. In that sense, R. Yohanan and the other adherents of communal prayer in the synagogue were also talking to rabbinic sages who still felt that prayer was best recited in the study houses where Torah was learned. Furthermore, even by the amoraic period, not all of the sages had abandoned the notion that the *beit hamidrash* was superior to the *beit hakenesset* as a location for prayer.

In order to establish the synagogue as the proper place of worship, the Rabbis set out to convince the general population that God's presence could be encountered in the synagogue. The Talmud in Tractate Megillah specifically describes the level of sanctity of each location where the Torah scroll is carried or placed, the accessories of the Torah, and the furnishings of the synagogue.[40] Although this discussion will be examined in later chapters, it is worth noting

[39] Fine, p.63.
[40] Fine, p. 70.

here that the Amoraim were quite aware of, and concerned with, synagogue holiness and sanctification. In an effort to define the holiness of each of the items mentioned, the Amoraim produced a hierarchy which listed the Torah scroll at the top of the pyramid.[41] The sanctity of the other locations and items were determined by their proximity to the Torah scroll. Therefore, items such as other biblical books and cloth wrappers for the Torah sat significantly higher on the hierarchical scale than did even the synagogue building.[42] What is left to be determined, however, is exactly which factors were the cause of the rise of sanctity in the synagogue.

It seems likely that the presence of the Torah scroll was the main cause of synagogue holiness, based on the regard in which the Rabbis held the Torah scroll. However, there are other possibilities that may also have contributed to the increased level of synagogue holiness. Rabbinic literature discusses how prayer was becoming more prevalent in the synagogue, and it is possible that the liturgy that was recited in a communal setting caused the building to achieve sanctification. Another possibility is that the Palestinian synagogues were influenced by those in the Diaspora where some form of public prayer (in addition to Torah reading) had likely been taking place since before 70 CE. Additionally, it has also been suggested that the sanctity attributed by Christians to their holy places, particularly from the fourth century onwards, influenced the Jews and the way in which they viewed their own holy places.[43] These other factors probably contributed to the increased sanctity of the synagogue in the amoraic period; however, it is difficult to imagine, based on the hierarchy established in Tractate Megillah, a synagogue whose holiness did not derive primarily from the Torah scroll and the ark that housed it.

The considerable amount of discussion dedicated to synagogue sanctification reflects the Rabbis' opinion that the synagogue ultimately is the only valid place for communal worship.

[41] Fine, p. 69.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Levine, p. 188.

Furthermore, since worship should take place in a communal setting, the synagogue must be viewed as the center of Jewish worship. It was very important for the Rabbis that the prayers of the individual were identical to those of the entire community, and ideally recited at the same time and in the same place.[44] In order to achieve this end, the Rabbis mandated that a quorum of ten men must congregate before certain rituals and life cycle events could take place. Additionally, recitation of specific prayers and the reading of Scripture demanded that this quorum first be present.[45] This notion of ten men was first ordained by the Tannaim, but later refinements were added by the Amoraim to deal with specific situations. The discussions of the Amoraim seem to indicate that the tannaitic decree was not yet universally observed and that there were those who continued to pray at the time and place of their choosing. The Talmud records that R. Yohanan (in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai) interpreted the words of Psalm 44, " Let my prayer come unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time," to refer to the time when the congregation prays. Further, the Talmud continues by stating God's wishes for man to study Torah, perform acts of charity, and pray with the congregation.[46] The inclusion of the words "with the congregation" indicate that work still remained in the campaign to establish uniformity among the general population regarding communal prayer at fixed times.

Whether or not the Amoraim immediately succeeded in attaining a true consensus regarding prayer in the synagogue, they certainly continued developing the synagogue as the center of Jewish worship. By the end of the amoraic period, it was clear that the synagogue was an institution all to itself and was not meant to replace the Temple. Fears no longer existed that the Temple cult would be literally replicated in the synagogue. The Rabbis were free to incorporate Temple forms into the liturgy and mold various aspects of the synagogue to symbolize Temple elements. As was stated earlier, the Rabbis maintained hope that ultimate

[44] Langer, To Worship God Properly, p. 20.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Bavli Berakhot 8a.

redemption would usher in a Third Temple period. Yet, in the interim, they were content to utilize the synagogue to house their new system of worship. It was in the amoraic period that synagogue sanctification was ultimately defined and its role for the future was firmly established.

The Rabbis' Position in the Synagogue and in the Community

In attempting to understand how the Rabbis developed the liturgy and the role of the synagogue, it is worthwhile to consider their world view and their particular role within Jewish society. Levine points to various discrepancies between rabbinic literature and archaeological evidence, and argues that the rabbinic materials dealing with the Rabbis' influence on the synagogue must be taken with a grain of salt. One example that he provides compares the Tosefta statement that all synagogue entrances should face east with the actual archaeological remains of synagogues that have been excavated. In almost every synagogue found in Roman-Byzantine Palestine, the main entrance of the structure does not face east.[47] Whether or not this sort of example fully calls into question the Rabbis' credibility should not be decided here; it is simply worth considering how the will of the Rabbis meshed with the needs of other Jews. In bolstering this potential for disharmony, one could look at the instances in rabbinic literature where the Rabbis record how certain synagogues did not comply with their desires. One case that is mentioned notes how R. Simeon defied the will of his congregation by refusing to translate each verse of Hebrew as he read it. Instead he complied with the rabbinic ruling that instructs a translator to translate only after a whole unit is read. In this account, he continued to defy the congregation's will and they subsequently fired him.[48] Following the story in the Talmud, the opinions of two Rabbis are cited to comment on the decision of R. Simeon. One Rabbi agrees

[47] Levine, p. 446. Examples of the few that have been found to face east include Susiya, Asthma, Macon, and Animi; additionally the late Galilean synagogues did face Jerusalem.
[48] Levine, p.448.

with the congregation, while the other applauds R. Simeon's desire to comply with rabbinic law. These conflicting opinions only add to the question of what was the extent of rabbinic influence on individual synagogues. The examples given point out that in particular instances, the will of the congregation superseded the authority of the Rabbis.

Although the Rabbis left guidelines and instructions on how synagogues were supposed to conduct themselves, there was no uniformity among them on how synagogues should be set up and run. Some Rabbis were constantly involved with synagogue activity while others attended only occasionally. There were sages like Abaye who proclaimed that he would only pray in the place where he studied; and since the *beit midrash* became a wholly separate institution from the synagogue, he would not enter the synagogue for the sole purpose of worship. However, in most instances, the Rabbis recognized that the synagogue was the place where their agenda could be realized vis a vis the community.[49] By the third and fourth centuries, rabbinic involvement in the synagogue increased. This period witnessed a dramatic increase in rabbinic traditions regarding the synagogue. Many Rabbis indicated in their opinions that they strongly supported it and viewed it as the proper place for Jewish worship. However, the need to express this view of the synagogue's role suggests there were still other sages who had not yet embraced it.

The Rabbis who were involved with the synagogue functioned in three specific capacities. The first was preaching and expounding the traditions and theological lessons found in Jewish Scripture. It was recorded by Jerome that people would often flock to hear the Rabbis speak in the synagogue and they would "applaud and make a noise and gesticulate with their hands."[50] Rabbinic literature often refers to certain sages as being particularly adept at sermonizing. Some instances refer to a certain preacher who spoke regularly at a particular synagogue, and others

[49] Levine, p.451.
[50] Levine, p.462.

note only a specific occasion on which a sage would appear in various synagogues and preach.

The second function of the Sages within the community was to interpret and rule on halakhic matters. Rabbis were frequently approached with cases and were asked to make legal decisions. It is likely that courts would often convene in the synagogue, and in those cases, Rabbis would preside over the proceedings in an official capacity.[51] Their understanding of *halakhah* and their reputations as learned men merited that they would serve as judges in the community.

The third major function of the Rabbis was education of the young. The Rabbis either themselves taught in the synagogue (where elementary schools were primarily located) or trained teachers to teach the students. Although the Rabbis served under the aegis of the Patriarch and his representatives, they dictated how the schools should be run and what should be taught. They were responsible for providing education in Torah and the Oral Law for students, as well as serving as role models for them. The Rabbis revered those who taught these subjects and considered their direction of the elementary school one of their most important tasks. One rabbinic story tells of certain Rabbis who were so appalled when they could not find qualified teachers in a certain location that they ordered the citizens to produce the guardians of the city. When the guardians (sentries) arrived, the Rabbis charged that these men were not the guardians of the city. When the crowd responded and asked who then were the true guardians, the rabbis answered, "the teachers of Scripture and the teachers of Oral Law."[52]

In addition to these three very important functions, the rabbis may have played a role in conducting the liturgy during communal worship in the synagogue. However, the exact nature of their role is difficult to decipher from the evidence that remains. Moreover, because the majority of that evidence comes from rabbinic literature, it must be noted that the picture they portray is

[51] Levine, p. 462.
[52] Yerushalmi Hagigah I, 7, 76c.

often skewed to suit their needs.[53] What is unclear is how often the Rabbis presented homilies, what their role was in the reading of the Torah and the Haftarah, the recitation of the Targum, and the leading of prayers. The evidence that exists simply does not allow an unequivocal interpretation of the rabbinic role in the prayer service. Although the Rabbis desired to play a major role liturgically in the synagogue, it is not until the late Middle Ages that they fully achieved this goal.[54] The variety of practices that took place from synagogue to synagogue indicates that there was probably no uniform framework to which each community subscribed. In essence, the role of the Rabbi may have differed from place to place in accordance with the interest of the Rabbis and the will of each respective community.

One study of extra-rabbinic literature by Shaye J.D. Cohen supports the notion that the Rabbis did not exercise ultimate control of synagogue proceedings. His study analyzes specific materials from the New Testament, the Church Fathers, and Josephus that portray Rabbis as the leaders of synagogue worship.[55] However, he then notes that in each case, none of these examples can be supported by archaeological and epigraphical evidence. In other words, these other references, while attempting to place the Pharisees and the Rabbis in positions of power in the synagogue, are not consistent with the epigraphic evidence from synagogue sites. For example, Matthew 23:2 states that the Rabbis sat on the "*qatedra demoshe* (seat of Moses)", a phrase that would attribute great power to the rabbinic class.[56] However, this text does not place the "seat of Moses" in the synagogue; further, only five actual "seats of Moses" have been found in all of the synagogue excavation from antiquity. While this "seat" may indicate that the Rabbis were teachers of the Law in Judaism, it may also be the case that sitting in the "seat of Moses"

[53] Levine, p. 464.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Were the Pharisees and Rabbis Leaders of Communal Prayer and Torah Study in Antiquity? The Evidence of the New Testament, Josephus, and the Early Church Fathers," in Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress, edited by Howard Clark Eke and Lynn H. Chick. (Trinity Press International: Harrisburg, Pa., 1999), p. 92.
[56] Cohen, p. 94.

referred to the Rabbis' judicial authority.[57] Thus, from this example (and the others that Cohen cites), the extra-rabbinic literary material that most forcefully supports the Rabbis' claim to synagogue leadership is at best murky and unsubstantiated.

In actuality, rabbinic influence on synagogue activities becomes much clearer by the sixth to the eighth centuries. Tractate Soferim offers many instances in which the Rabbis are viewed as authorities who provided instruction regarding the effective carrying out of worship rituals. By the end of antiquity, the Rabbis emerged as the leaders of Jewish religious life and they contributed significantly to the development of the liturgy. Despite variations from one geographical region to another, their influence and involvement grew steadily throughout Palestine, and likely in Babylonia as well.[58] The discussions, opinions, and instructions that were developed by the Rabbis in the second to fourth centuries eventually grew to fruition by the end of late antiquity and greatly affected the manner in which Jewish communal worship would evolve.

[57]Cohen, p. 96.
[58] Levine, p. 469.

Chapter Two: The Synagogue

Regardless of how the synagogue originated and developed, there will always be questions as to the role that the Rabbis played in that process. What must first be noted however is that the *proseuche* and the synagogue originated before the tannaitic period. In that sense, whether or not the Rabbis were immediately involved in the proliferation of the synagogue and its facilitation of Jewish activity after 70 CE, it is probable that the synagogue would have continued to develop anyway as a necessary Jewish institution. It is in that vein that this chapter seeks to gain an understanding of the Rabbis' role in the synagogue and in the worshipping activities of the masses of Jews. Based on evidence from rabbinic literature and various other sources, it is possible to draw certain conclusions regarding the Rabbis' role in the synagogue and in the greater community, their relationship with other Jews, and their attitude apropos the synagogue as a proper location for Jewish worship. In addition, there is ample evidence suggesting that the Rabbis were a diverse group that varied regarding occupations (aside from Torah study), interests and opinions, financial means, and proclivities with regard to worship of God. Certainly they were a composite group whose activities are difficult to classify in uniform terms.

When discussing the Rabbis' role in the synagogue, we must be cognizant that the interest of the Rabbis in the synagogue increased drastically during the course of late antiquity. The Mishnah and Tosefta only record a handful of references to the synagogue, which is likely an indication that the Rabbis of the first through third centuries still did not view the institution as central to their activities and concerns. In other words, they probably did not consider the synagogue as the only proper place for their religious practices. Moreover, their silence on this matter through a vast amount of literature suggests that they probably were not integral in the synagogue's early development.[59] Later on we will encounter specific examples from the Talmud suggesting that the Rabbis were not the dominant voice within the majority of synagogues.

[59] Tzvee Zahavy, Studies In Jewish Prayer (New York: University Press of America, 1990), p. 49.

In one study dealing with references to the synagogue in the Mishnah and Tosefta, Tzvee Zahavy contends that because the Rabbis do not comment on rules of decorum, attendance, and synagogue upkeep, they were simply not interested in these matters.[60] It is possible that these Rabbis viewed the synagogue as a place where the masses would worship, while they themselves would pray separately (either alone or amongst themselves). Certainly we cannot say precisely how, when, and where the Rabbis or the masses prayed, but we might expect that if the Rabbis planned to pray regularly in the synagogue, they would have had more to say about the rules and regulations of synagogue practice. Hence because we do not have tannaitic materials that outline these laws, we might conclude that these Rabbis were not interested in communal prayer in the synagogue with the rest of the community. There is, however, another possible case that can be made as to why we find so few references to the synagogue in tannaitic literature. The Tannaim viewed prayer as an action that the individual performs before God through recitation of specified formulae at proper times.[61] They may have viewed the synagogue as a place where prayer could be said, but it is unlikely that they considered it a place where prayers had to be said. Despite Zahavy's attempts to disregard each instance of synagogue mention in the Mishnah and Tosefta as not referring at all to synagogue sanctity, the Rabbis may have considered the synagogue a place where Jewish religious activity occurred.[62] Yet, at this point, they probably maintained that the essence of prayer was not communal and that it could be recited by the individual wherever he choose.

For the purposes of this current argument, the tannaitic view on prayer is important only on an ancillary level. Their attitude with respect to the synagogue may be the result of a myriad of factors, not the least of which is the notion that the early Tannaim had no urgent need for it. However, it is likely that the synagogue developed without their input or approval. In that

[60] Zahavy, p.50.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Zahavy', p. 55-86. He cites and comments on each reference to the synagogue in the Mishnah and Tosefta.

sense, it may be either the control of the synagogue by others or simply their own disinterest in praying with the masses that caused tannaitic silence vis a vis the synagogue . This trend, however, as we will later examine, would change drastically from the third and fourth centuries onward as the Amoraim saw more of a need to participate in the life of the greater Jewish community.

The Rabbis and the Synagogue

There are various passages in later rabbinic literature that reflect the Rabbis' own attitudes regarding their role in governing and participating in synagogue activity. However, despite certain clear indications that the Rabbis understand that they are not the key decision-makers within the synagogue, it should be noted that these remarks are not necessarily a criticism of the synagogue as an institution. For example, in Tractate Megillah, ample discussion exists that outlines the regulations for dealing with the sale of synagogue buildings. It is quite clear from these materials that the decision-making responsibilities belong to the townspeople and their appointed representatives; yet, the Rabbis still feel compelled to comment on how the sanctity of the synagogue must be preserved.[63] One might conclude that by distancing themselves from leadership in the synagogues of the masses, they were simultaneously distancing themselves from the entire institution. While this may be the case in the minds of certain earlier sages, it is clearly not representative of the complete corpora of rabbinic literature. There are many instances where the Rabbis demonstrate their approval of the synagogue and their belief that the synagogue itself is sacred and needed by every community.[64] What can be extracted from the Megillah materials with a relative degree of certainty is that the Rabbis were aware that the synagogue was a

[63] Bavli Megillah 27a.
[64] See for example Bavli Megillah 28b and Bavli Sanhedrin 17b.

significant part of Jewish religious life and that they were not the leaders of that institution.

Epigraphical evidence found in various synagogue inscriptions often refers to "rabbis" who were involved with synagogue functions. However, as S. Cohen points out, these "rabbis" do not necessarily refer to sages. Instead, the term may simply be used to honor prominent individuals in the synagogue community. Moreover, not only were these "epigraphical rabbis" not members of the rabbinic class, they also may not have held significant positions vis a vis synagogue functions.[65] Cohen further comments that the identities of the "rabbis" mentioned in these synagogue inscriptions cannot not be matched to any known rabbinic sages on the basis of talmudic texts. Yet, we should not rush to dismiss totally rabbinical presence in either private or public synagogues. Recent archaeological evidence from places such as Sepphoris and Beit Shean indicate that sages may have been involved in those synagogues. In Beit Shean, an inscription mentions the *benei havurtah qadishtah*, a term that also refers to a rabbinic group that studied Torah in tannaitic and amoraic times. Although this particular inscription dates to post-talmudic times, the possibility still remains that this *havurah* was carrying on a tradition of sages in the synagogue which carried over from the amoraic period.[66] However, because this term is insufficiently specific, we must take care to note that it cannot be automatically identified with a rabbinic presence. In Sepphoris, a mosaic displayed the name Yose bar Yudan and (in a separate inscription) the name of another son named Yudan. Another synagogue in Sepphoris also contained a mosaic with the donor name Rabbi Yudan bar Tanhum. It is possible that these figures were actually the Amoraim mentioned quite frequently in rabbinic literature.

What can possibly be ascertained from the seemingly contradicting evidence regarding rabbinical presence in the synagogue? Evidence presented above from Tractate Megillah

[65] Stuart S. Miller, "The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue" in Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction During the Greco-Roman Period, ed. Steven Fine. (Routlege: Taylor and Francis Group; New York, 1999), p. 61.
[66] Miller, p. 62.

suggested that the Rabbis understood that they were not in control of synagogue governance. On the other hand, we cannot ignore other evidence that supports the Rabbis' desire to play a significant role in the synagogue. In rabbinic literature, for example, there is a case in which R. Berakhiah rebukes a man for washing at the synagogue in Beit Shean. The next day the same man finds R. Berakhiah washing at the same synagogue. In disbelief, the man challenges the Rabbi and asks, "What, for my master it is permitted and for me it is prohibited?" R. Berakhiah then replies to the man, "You got [it]!" He then invokes another sage who reportedly stated that "synagogues and study houses belong to the sages and their students."[67] In addition to this incident in the Palestinian Talmud, we also have archaeological evidence (noted above) that may support rabbinic presence in the synagogue. However, in order to make sense out of the potential contradiction of whether or not the Rabbis desired to play a part in the synagogue, two factors must be taken into consideration. First, the attitude of the Rabbis vis a vis the synagogue changed drastically between the second and sixth centuries, and thus discrepancies are sure to exist between tannaitic and amoraic rulings; and second, the term "synagogue" in antiquity is multivalent because synagogues existed in so many different forms. Therefore, it is necessary to contextualize the source of each rabbinic statement and gain an understanding of what has been ascertained regarding the various types of synagogues from antiquity. In regards to the latter, comprehension of synagogue diversity is useful in judging how synagogue constituencies conducted themselves according to their own wills, and not according to the will of the Rabbis.

While a complete overview of synagogue diversity in antiquity is not appropriate here, it is worthwhile to recognize that no uniform synagogue pattern existed.[68] Just as the function of the synagogue had undergone many changes throughout antiquity, so did its form. Many synagogues borrowed or adapted architectural designs and ornamentation ideas from the cultures

[67] Yerushalmi Megillah 3, 74a.
[68] Levine, The Ancient Synagogue, p. 198.

of the surrounding world. Some of the architecture, however, was determined by the mood of the times. For example, in third century Palestine there was a marked increase in building synagogues that were more appropriate for worship services. This occurred because communities were attaining an enhanced appreciation for the religious component of the synagogue; an example would be the inclusion of a permanent *bimah*.[69] Other trends in architecture appeared as either a rejection of another group's custom or a desire to incorporate characteristics of other cultures and religions. For example, some synagogues may have been built to face a certain direction in order that they would not face the same direction as pagan temples. In other locales, diasporan synagogues were dedicated to non-Jewish rulers and were built in ways that would not irritate the rulers in their region.

In Beit Shean alone, there were five different synagogues that exhibited substantial differences among them vis a vis art and architecture. The gamut of evidence in art that has been found ranges from quite conservative to truly liberal. While one synagogue is decorated with primarily geometric designs and Jewish symbols including *menorot*, *shofarot*, *lulavim* and *etrogim*, a different synagogue contains depictions of the god of the Nile and scenes from Homer's *Odyssey*.[70] We should not dismiss the discoveries from Beit Shean as out of the ordinary, but rather consider it to be emblematic of the diversity that existed in synagogues throughout antiquity. Archaeological and epigraphical finds continue to turn up various motifs that represent the desires of the individual synagogue. In the Byzantine period, there are many indications that artisans and builders were borrowing many ideas from their Christian neighbors and adapting them for Jewish use.[71] This is simply additional proof that synagogues were proliferating according to the will of the people even in areas where the Rabbis were present. As we will now see, this trend was surely no less pronounced in the Diaspora where a rabbinic

[69] Levine, p. 181.
[70] Levine, p.201.
[71] Levine, p. 214.

presence was not in place.

Synagogues in the Diaspora were so diverse that each individual structure requires its own description. Among the differences were size, style, ornamentation, location within the city, and history of the synagogue. Much of what is known about these synagogues is a result of recovered inscriptions and mosaics that adorned the walls and floors of these structures. From these pieces of evidence, scholars have determined that some of the synagogues were converted from private homes, some were built intentionally as synagogues, and some existed as ancillary rooms adjacent to some type of building complex.[72] One example of synagogue diversity in the Diaspora comes from the Jewish community of Rome. While there are numerous inscriptions that provide a glimpse into the religious life of Roman Jewry, there is no evidence even among other sources that convincingly suggests that a central body of leaders existed in Rome.[73] In that sense, it would seem that each synagogue community fended for itself and governed itself according to its own will. The inscriptions found indicate that a wide variety of synagogue functionaries were involved in the running of each individual synagogue. We might therefore conclude that no shared rules and regulations existed among the synagogues, and that each community erected and governed its synagogue according to its own propensity.

In contrast to the situation regarding Roman synagogues, the synagogues in Babylonia are known in a quite different fashion. While many archaeological and epigraphical discoveries were found in Rome, the opposite is the case in regard to the Babylonian synagogues. Thus, the most useful evidence in understanding the nature of these synagogues is literary in form, but biased in character and scope. It is the Talmud Bavli that provides the most references to Babylonian synagogues; but because it is obviously a rabbinic product, it must be taken with a substantial grain of salt. Levine points out that the Rabbis were latecomers on the scene in Babylonia, and

[72] Levine, Chapter 8, provides a detailed description of each synagogue in the Diaspora for which sufficient remains have been discovered.
[73] Levine, p. 266.

that by the time they arrived, the Jewish community had already existed for centuries. Jews there were likely already accustomed to their own beliefs, customs, and methods of running their synagogues.[74] Hence it is unlikely that the Rabbis were capable of imposing their guidelines on a group of people who already adhered to established customs.

Despite the late arrival of the Rabbis in Babylonia, they still may have had a powerful impact on the Jewish community. They likely achieved high stature and prominence in the Jewish community because of their close relationship with the Exilarch. It was through that relationship that they also achieved backing for their judicial decisions, gained valuable political capital, and possibly material means as well.[75] Yet, despite these obvious advantages, there is no evidence that suggests the Rabbis were involved in synagogue governance. Discussion of the synagogue in the Talmud Bavli concentrates primarily on liturgical issues. It is possible that the Rabbis downplay or simply ignore the communal aspects of the synagogue because they are disinterested in parts of the synagogue that do not concern them. Another explanation for their silence might be that the Rabbis seldom utilized the communal synagogues, and instead worshipped either in the *beit midrash* or their own synagogues. In Babylonia, unlike in the Roman Empire, synagogues were likely owned by individuals and were controlled in a democratic and communal manner. In fact, some Rabbis themselves were owners of these private synagogues.[76] Hence the Rabbis had places of worship that they could control, in which they could carry out their religious lives in seclusion from the rest of the community.

The absence of uniformity from synagogue to synagogue strongly suggests that there was no pattern that each synagogue should follow. By the third and fourth centuries when the Rabbis began taking a greater interest in the synagogue, various synagogues had already proliferated according to the tastes and predilections of the local populations, both in the land of Israel and in

[74] Levine, p. 271.
[75] Levine, p. 269.
[76] Levine, p. 267.

the Diaspora. There were synagogues organized in provincial settings, and their religious practices often did not mesh well with rabbinic beliefs.[77] There were sages who were willing to put up with certain elements of these synagogues that defied rabbinic dicta, and there were some who refused to enter them (as will be pointed out below in regards to figural art in the synagogue). The Tannaim were particularly disturbed by these practices, and this anger is reflected in comments such as R. Dosa b. Hyrcanus' description of a visit to one of these synagogues as a trip that "takes one out of this world."[78] Although later sages acquiesced more to the synagogues of "the people," many of them still refused to enter such places. It is worth noting again, however, that the rabbinic sages were certainly not united in their opinions regarding worship in the synagogue and worshipping alongside the masses. Rabbinic literature contains numerous criticisms of synagogues and the practices within them recorded by sages who were displeased with certain synagogue practices and characteristics, as well as instances where sages were willing to tolerate these synagogue settings.

The Rabbis, The People, and The Synagogue

We have already seen that in the majority of synagogues the Rabbis had no control over the day-to-day activities or the decision-making responsibilities. Evidence supporting this claim may be found in rabbinic literature where the Rabbis themselves admit that the townspeople govern their own synagogues. Although we have seen cases where the Rabbis themselves owned their own synagogues, the majority of them were public (except in Babylonia) and were owned by the community.[79] These public synagogues spread throughout the land of Israel and the Diaspora, and thus existed both in places where sages were living and where they were not.

[77] Levine, p. 192.
[78] Mishnah Avot 3:10.
[79] Bavli Megillah 26a.

Recent archaeological and epigraphical evidence has shown that these synagogues were likely institutions intrinsic to a Judaism that was not necessarily dictated by the Rabbis. In other words, communities (especially in the Diaspora) were living Jewish lives independent of any rabbinic guidance.

In discussing whether or not the synagogue developed as a non-rabbinic institution, it is necessary to reconcile rabbinic and non-rabbinic evidence relating to the existence and importance of the synagogue. There are instances in the Talmudim where the Rabbis were clearly in favor of the synagogue and viewed it as the proper place for Jewish worship.[80] Yet, it is unlikely that the Rabbis, as a class, were uniformly involved in any leadership capacity outside of the synagogues they themselves owned.[81] By the third century, when the Rabbis became increasingly involved in the lives of the greater Jewish community, the synagogue institution had already had an established history of non-rabbinic leadership. Yet, it was this new initiative to take part in the lives of the masses that led to a greater willingness on the part of many Rabbis to relax their standards of Jewish law and accept (grudgingly) the religious practices of the community.[82] It is this willingness to concede to the practices of the masses on the part of some Rabbis that may have contributed to their involvement in the synagogue and the likelihood that they could affect the religious life of the community. This is one possible explanation for the positive descriptions of the community synagogue in rabbinic literature.

The Rabbis' relaxation of their norms as applied to the Jewish community did not diminish their own observance; they still lived with the same convictions that they always had in the past. However, in order to permit themselves to worship with the community, they tolerated infractions of certain rabbinic rulings. One example of such tolerance is witnessed in the

[80] For example, see Bavli Berakhot 6b.

[81] Levine, p. 270.

[82] Lee Levine, The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Press and Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1989), p.31. Levine describes how urbanization following the turmoil of the second century and the institutionalization of rabbinical academies were contributing causes of the Rabbis' increased acceptance of the masses and their practices.

Talmud where Rav, Samuel, Samuel's father, and Levi are reported to have prayed in the Nehardea synagogue, even though there was a statue of a foreign king there.[83] Although such religious laxity in the synagogue angered the Rabbis, it was their willingness to withhold their castigations that represented a new trend on their part. When commenting on such instances of rabbinic tolerance, Abaye once said, "A sage is loved by the townspeople not because he is superior, but rather because he does not chastise them over spiritual matters."[84]

Even though members of Jewish communities preferred to run their own synagogues in their own way, this did not mean that they did not view the Rabbis as holy men. On the contrary, Rabbis were often respected because of their wisdom and scholarship in religious matters. They were likewise looked to to settle disputes pertaining to religious practice and sit in judgment in various other types of court cases. The Rabbis were also respected for the lifestyle they led and their devotion to God; they often fasted, took vows of abstinence, and some were inclined to live lives of isolated study and asceticism.[85] These traits likely garnered respect for the sages among the masses, and by the time the Rabbis felt comfortable entering into the synagogues in the third century, there was certainly a place for them to play a part in the religious life of the greater Jewish community.

There are many situations recorded by the Rabbis in which a sage intervenes on behalf of an individual or the community. It seems that by the second and third centuries, the Rabbis became comfortable with the motif of "miracle making." Several accounts in the Talmud describe how the Rabbis were called upon to cause rains to fall, to heal the sick, to cause the death of someone, or to resurrect the dead.[86] The Yerushalmi, in recording the power of the Rabbis to perform such miracles, tells a tale in which Kahana was ridiculed in Tiberias by some local Jews

[83] Bavli Rosh Hashanah 24b.
[84] Bavli Ketubot 105b.
[85] Levine, The Rabbinic Class, p. 105-6.
[86] Ibid.

because of his pious behavior. Apparently fed up with their treatment of him, he invoked a heavenly decree and they died.[87] While this story emphasizes the powers inherent in a sage (at least as far as the Rabbis report), there are other stories that describe how the people petitioned the Rabbis to provide a miracle on their behalf. In one case, the people of Sepphoris asked R. Hanina to join them in a fast so that his presence would cause rain. At the same time, R. Joshua ben Levi was fasting with the people of Judea to cause rain to fall for that community. Following these communal fasts in the presence of these two sages, rain fell in Judea but not in Sepphoris.[88] While this episode greatly angered the people of Sepphoris, it is apparent that the Rabbis wanted to convey the notion that they were considered to be bona fide rainmakers. Not only was R. Joshua ben Levi able to cause rain to fall in Judea, but the obvious disappointment of the Sepphorans indicates that they truly expected that R. Hanina's intervention on their behalf would cause the rains to fall.

It is probable that the masses viewed the sages as holy men who should be afforded a considerable amount of stature and prestige. Additionally, as we have already pointed out, the Rabbis were increasingly willing to make themselves a visible part of the greater Jewish community. Levine further notes that the rise of Christianity and its growing presence in Palestine, particularly after the Christianization of the Empire in the fourth century, may have caused all Jews to become closer and, in the process, diminished the animosity between the sages and other Jews that had originated in the tannaitic period.[89] However, it is also possible that the Rabbis considered their involvement in the community an opportunity to teach the masses about the laws of proper Judaism as they saw it. There is evidence in rabbinic literature suggesting that the Rabbis believed their advice to be extremely valuable and sought after by the people. In numerous cases, either individuals or communities approached a sage with queries regarding the

[87] Yerushalmi Berakhot 2, 8, 5c.
[88] Yerushalmi Ta'anit 3, 4, 66c.
[89] Levine, The Rabbinic Class, p. 117.

correct practice of Jewish law.[90] One well known case that illustrates a community seeking out a Rabbi to help provide such guidance is the story of the Jews of Bostra, who sought out Resh Laqish and asked him to help them find a religious leader who would carry out all of their religious needs.[91] It is likely that the reliance of communities on the Rabbis for religious direction helped facilitate the Rabbis' desire to preach their own agendas to other Jews.

Another way that the Rabbis conveyed their beliefs to the people was through their discourses and sermons in the synagogue. While not all sages were active or even remotely involved in the synagogues of the masses, some of them were quite well known for their public speaking in the synagogue. On one occasion, R. Hiya bar Abba and R. Hanina witnessed hordes of people in Sepphoris running in the street where they were walking. When R. Hanina asked his counterpart why all of the people were rushing about around them, R. Hiya bar Abba responded that they were hurrying to hear the sermon of R. Yohanan (who had a reputation for expounding Jewish law in public).[92] Additional evidence for the importance with which the Rabbis viewed their own discourses appears in Rava's statement condemning Jews who schedule Sabbath meals during a sage's public discourse in an academy.[93] While many sages spoke only in the academies and not in the synagogue, the interaction between the sages and the Jewish public through homily and discourse, no matter what the setting, likely served as a bridge connecting the worlds of these respective groups.

Animosity between these two groups had not totally disappeared by the third century, but there was certainly a greater willingness on both sides to coexist in harmony. Some sages were unable to overcome their elitism and thus could not subdue their distaste for what they considered to be laxity of the Jewish masses in fulfilling the *mitzvot*. Yet, as we have already seen, some Rabbis were willing to assume a greater part in the lives of the masses. One example

[90] See, for example, Yerushalmi 2, 6, 58c Ta'anit 2, 1, 41b; and Yevamot 2, 4, 3d.
[91] Yerushalmi Shevi'it 6, 1, 36d.
[92] Yerushalmi Horayot 3, 7, 48b.
[93] Bavli Gittin 38b.

of such tolerance can be seen in R. Yose's refusal to rebuke a congregation who recited the *Shema* more than three hours after sunrise on a fast day (an act contrary to rabbinic practice).[94] The discussions in rabbinic literature about the synagogue practices of the people reflect the rabbinic threshold for non-conforming popular practices of the masses. However, what might also be deduced is that these rabbis were concerned that the masses were worshipping in the synagogue incorrectly.[95] That the Rabbis actually cared about what the masses were doing in the synagogue should not be overlooked. It is likely that these discussions represented the beginning of a trend in which the Rabbis believed that the synagogue should be the location for prayer for all Jews, including themselves.

In the next chapter, we shall take up the discussion of liturgy in the synagogue and the rabbinic understanding of liturgy. However, for now we are concerned with the synagogue itself and its atmosphere. Above we have mentioned briefly some of the arguments the Rabbis presented vis a vis synagogue practices. Now it is worthwhile to consider as well rabbinic attitudes toward the construction, figural art, and other forms of ornamentation that adorned the various synagogues in antiquity. Such discussion will also attest to the notion that many Rabbis viewed the synagogue as the proper place of worship for all Jews.

A case demonstrating a sage's willingness to worship with the community despite objectionable decorations found in the synagogue is reflected in Rav's instructions to his household vis a vis worshipping in a communal synagogue. Rav ordered them not to prostrate themselves at any point during their worship in the synagogue so that they would not appear to be bowing before any decorated image. The same pericope, however, notes that R. Abbahu had

[94] Yerushalmi Berakhot I, 5, 3c.

[95] For examples of rabbinic displeasure with certain synagogue practices of the people, see Bavli Shabbat 32a (noting the fate of those who call a synagogue a *beit am* or an ark a chest), Bavli Megillah 22b (dealing with Rav's refusal to adhere to a certain synagogue's custom of bowing), and Bavli Shabbat 29b (discussing an incident where a synagogue overseer dragged a bench in the synagogue, and thus violated a rabbinic rule).

no problem bowing in his usual manner in the same synagogue.[96] Obviously it is clear that the rabbis were not united in their willingness to worship in the same manner as the community, but Rav's statement indicates that he saw a benefit in having his household worship with the rest of the community even though he did not feel comfortable in their synagogue.

This distinction between the practice of Rav and R. Abbahu is just one example of how figural art was clearly endorsed by the members of the synagogue in a manner that disregarded the rules (and the needs) of the Rabbis. Much information can be gleaned from discoveries of figural art in the synagogues of antiquity, and hence we have learned much about the artistic proclivities of certain synagogue communities (as each community decorated its synagogue according to its own tastes and preferences). The tannaitic sages, perhaps in an effort to discredit the synagogues of the masses, took a harsh stance against the representation of any foreign figure in the synagogue. In the Mishnah, R. Simeon b. Gamliel charged that anyone who found an object bearing the engraving of the sun or the moon was obligated to get rid of it.[97] A statement in the tannaitic midrash, Mekhilta de R. Ishmael, clearly states that any display of figural art is a violation of the Second Commandment.[98] While some exceptions may be implied based on certain actions of tannaitic sages (especially Rabban Gamliel, whose behavior may have been a result of his political status as the Patriarch), it is probable that the sages only developed their tolerance for figural art in later antiquity.

The actions of the Amoraim who would allow themselves to enter synagogues in which objectionable figural art was found may indicate the changing political climate that existed in later antiquity. The prevailing tendency among non-rabbinic Jews by the third and fourth centuries was to decorate their synagogues and their private domiciles with objects of figural art. The Rabbis likely understood that this trend could not be reversed, and, to their credit, they made

[96] Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 4, I, 43d.
[97] Mishnah Avodah Zarah 3:3.
[98] Mekhilta de R. Ishmael, Yitro, 6 (Also see Levine's comments p. 451-2).

efforts to moderate their own positions on the subject.[99] One rabbinic expression that touches on the Rabbis' relaxed attitude regarding figural art maybe found in the following statement: "In the days of R. Yohanan, they began to make [figural] representations on the walls and he did not object; in the days of R. Abun, they began making such representations on mosaic floors and he did not object."[100] These rabbinic statements do not indicate approval, or even support, for the decorations that these Rabbis found in the synagogues. Rather, they are indications that some Rabbis were willing to tolerate these expressions, in all likelihood because they knew their admonitions would not reverse the popular will.[101] Thus, in order that they would still be able to worship along with the rest of the community, many Rabbis developed a greater tolerance for these figural representations. In that sense, we may be able here to support the previously made assertion that the Rabbis in later antiquity saw it in their own interest to become involved in the religious lives of the local community.

In the first chapter, we noted how the Rabbis participated in the synagogue through teaching and preaching, and were involved elsewhere in the community as judges with respect to disputed halakhic matters. Their presence in the religious life of the community increased dramatically in the amoraic period, and hence the Rabbis emerged from their isolated, elitist enclaves. Perhaps the increasing penetration of Christian communities in Palestine and the reverence that that religion displayed for its "holy" men influenced Jews already living there. In regard to the synagogue, its transformation from a multipurpose community center in the first century CE to a predominantly religious institution in later antiquity, may have compelled the Rabbis to enter its doors and take part in its functions.[102] In that sense, it may have been the evolving synagogue itself that was the vehicle needed to unite the Rabbis and the masses, and allow them to worship God together as a community.

[99] Levine, p. 456.
[100] Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 3, 3, 42d.
[101] Levine, p. 456.
[102] Levine, p. 469.

In concluding this chapter, it is worthwhile to turn our attention to the pertinent discourse found in Bavli Berakhot 8a. The section relevant to our purposes begins with R. Isaac attempting to convince R. Nahman to join the congregation in the synagogue for prayer. We see that R. Nahman is not only insensitive to the issue of praying alongside the community in the synagogue, but he also does not see the need to pray with the community in another location (in this case his own home), or even at the same time when the rest of the community recites their prayers. In response, R. Isaac provides three scriptural references cited by other sages that refute all three of R. Nahman's "excuses." Finally, God is referred to as having included prayer with the congregation alongside of Torah study and charity as the three deeds that cause one to "redeem Me and My children from among the nations of the world."[103]

In order that one would not discount the importance of prayer with the congregation taking place in the synagogue (at least in the amoraic period), several comments from Amoraim immediately follow and reiterate the importance of the synagogue. Resh Laqish first mandates that whoever has a synagogue in his town and does not go there for the express purpose of praying is considered an evil neighbor. This is because his actions may influence others to behave similarly, and hence diminishes the importance of the synagogue in the eyes of his neighbors. The second vote of confidence involves R. Yohanan's (a Palestinian Amora) surprise upon hearing that there were elderly men living among the Jewish community in Babylon. Previously, he had understood Deuteronomy 11:21 to mean that length of years was only possible for Jews living in the Holy Land. However, when he heard that these elderly individuals arrived at the synagogue early in the day and left it late, he realized it was for this reason that they had been rewarded with lengthy lives. In support of this insight, the Gemara cites R. Joshua b. Levi's

[103] Bavli Berakhot 8a.

statement, "Come early to the synagogue and leave it late that you may live long."[104] Finally, R. Hisda demonstrates the importance of *kavannah* while in the synagogue. He mentions that one should enter the synagogue by a measure of two doors, so that it does not appear that he is anxious to leave. When one enters a synagogue he must appear as if he has come to pray without regard for how long his stay will last.

Further on in Berakhot 8a, the Rabbis return to topic of the synagogue, probably in an attempt to discredit those Amoraim who spoke so reverently about the significance of the synagogue. Abaye's statement that he only prays in the place where he studies indicates that a camp of Rabbis still remains who prefer to worship in the *beit midrash*. Some of the Rabbis holding this opinion simply may not have been ready to lower their religious standards and worship alongside the Jewish public. Others may still have believed that Torah study was a far superior form of serving God than prayer, and hence their time, even for prayer, was best fulfilled if spent in the academy. Even though R. Ammi and R. Assi did not take advantage of the thirteen synagogues available to them in Tiberias (as is reported in Bavli Berakhot 8a), there were many other sages who did take an interest in the synagogues of the Jewish people.

[104] Ibid.

Chapter Three: Prayer

The origins of Jewish statutory prayer in many respects remain unclear in terms of determining how it evolved to become the centerpiece of Jewish worship of God. The theories outlined in the first chapter revolve around whether or not certain rubrics were introduced at Yavneh under the authority of Rabban Gamliel, or if they were the result of years of liturgical development dating back to the Second Temple period. For this reason, it would be nonsensical to attempt to produce an accurate portrayal of Jewish liturgical development. Instead, it would seem more fitting to concentrate on the use of liturgy in rabbinic Judaism, how its purpose was understood by the Rabbis, and the specific issues that the Rabbis dealt with in creating the guidelines and framework for a new worship system. Rabbinic literature is obviously replete with the opinions and arguments of the Sages as to how these issues should be dealt with and how Judaism could be sustained in light of the tremendous upheaval following 70 CE.

It is certainly unlikely that prayer would have achieved its role had it not been for the destruction of the Second Temple and the elimination of its cult. However, caution must be exercised when considering the actual point of origin of statutory prayer. We have already discussed the biblical inspiration for prayer and even the possibility that some form of prayer existed within the walls of the Temple. As we shall see later, the Rabbis were acutely aware of these instances and were certainly willing to attribute prayer's origins to these sources. Yet, there is also evidence in late Second Temple times that some Jews were dissatisfied with the sacrificial system then in place. Jews who were geographically isolated from Jerusalem could not relate to the experiences of those Jews who had access to the Temple. Others who did enjoy geographical proximity were disillusioned with the corruption they perceived within the priesthood.[105] The embrace of Hellenism by members of the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem coupled with the abuses of the high priesthood and the favoring of this aristocracy caused many

[105] Reif, p. 68.

Jews to seek alternate forms of worship. In one known extreme case, some Jews abandoned the Temple cult altogether and relocated to the Dead Sea region where they practiced a brand of Judaism without any sacrifices. However, for many Jews who did not choose to relocate, other forms of piety may have developed to address different religious needs. As the Second Temple period reached its last years, religious ferment was apparent. The early movement of Jesus and his followers at this time is yet another example of criticism of the Temple and the search for alternative modes of religious fulfillment.[106] These are some of the reasons that by the time the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, the time may have been ripe for a revolutionary change in the way the Jewish people worshipped their God.

Developing A New System of Worship

It would be imprudent to view the rabbinic dialogue vis a vis prayer and worship after 70 CE as a uniform effort on the part of an organized rabbinic elite. We must be cognizant that the emerging rabbinic class following the destruction of the Temple was dynamic and continued to evolve, as reflected in the later corpora of rabbinic literature. Among these sages, many held different ideas regarding prayer, and as mentioned earlier, some felt that it should never become the primary focus of Jewish worship. The Talmud reflects these differences in the arguments presented by different sages. It was not until almost a full millennium later that the first prayer order was written down; thus we might conclude that the Rabbis were not in agreement on whether or not prayers with fixed wording could produce the same results as spontaneously worded prayers. Some Rabbis believed that fixed prayer deprived the individual of truly expressing his praises and emotions authentically. In light of the myriad arguments among the Rabbis, our present goal should not be to seek out a clear-cut history of rabbinic liturgical

[106] Reif, p. 70.

creation, because we cannot accurately reconstruct the textual details of liturgical frameworks from the rabbinic era. Instead, we should focus on understanding how the Rabbis utilized received liturgical customs, the sacrificial cult, and their own biases to construct the basis for what would eventually become a new system of Jewish worship.

We do not find in rabbinic literature any lengthy discourses regarding how exactly prayer is to achieve its ultimate end (although there does exist discussion regarding proper etiquette of prayer, how one should address one's petitions to God, and how one should one approach God with the understanding that God is listening to his prayers). An interesting supplement to our understanding of prayer comes from the mystics. Mystical texts such as the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* attempt to describe how Israel's prayer comes before the heavenly throne and how God responds to it.[107] Mystical literature is useful in portraying beliefs about the efficacy of prayer and how it allowed individual Jews or groups of Jews to approach their God in the wake of 70 CE. Yet, we must be cognizant that such mystical beliefs may not have been readily accepted by all of the Rabbis or even all of the Jewish masses. However, as Langer notes, there is a certain degree of harmony between the mystical and non-mystical rabbinic literature regarding the nature of prayer.[108]

Michael Swartz notes that the demise of the Temple cult facilitated a rise to prominence of sages who filled the void left by the seemingly powerless priests. He acutely points out that the shift from a sacrificial religion, which put the priests at the top of the ladder, to a scholastic culture altered the hierarchy of religious leadership. The importance of the sages, who relied on "written revelation, human reasoning, and tradition," was emphasized in early rabbinic literature at the expense of the seemingly out-of-favor priests.[109] Although there may have been

[107] Langer, p. 37.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Michael D. Swartz, "Sage, Priest, and Poet: Typologies of Religious Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue", in Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period ,edited by Steven Fine. (New York: Routledge, 1999) , p. 102.

disagreements among the Rabbis as to the proper role of prayer, there is no doubt that the rabbinic concept of prayer eventually became crystallized as the official mode of worship. Thus, in recounting how the Rabbis developed such a system, it is worthwhile here to dissect some of pertinent rabbinic arguments in order to understand why the Rabbis believed prayer to be the proper replacement for sacrifices.

Bavli Berakhot 32b records the oft-quoted statement by R. Eleazar, "From the day that the Temple was destroyed the [heavenly] gates of prayer were locked." This statement appears as part of a series of five statements in which R. Eleazar attempts to exalt the efficacy of prayer and to mourn the loss of the Temple (which subsequently disturbs the efficacy of prayer). In the final statement of the series, R. Eleazar says that, after the destruction of the Temple, "a wall of iron has intervened between Israel and their Father in heaven." It would seem that this conclusion to the series would indicate that R. Eleazar believed prayer to be no longer efficacious. However, a closer understanding of R. Eleazar's comment (as well as its context in the Gemara) indicates that R. Elazar is solidly in favor of prayer. What he is illustrating through such strong language is that prayer is not as efficacious as it was before the Temple's destruction. This understanding should be afforded even more credence when one considers the other comments made by R. Eleazar and R. Chanina in the same Gemara. First, R. Eleazar comments that fasting is greater than charity because it is accomplished through one's person rather than through one's offering. Then he states that prayer is greater than sacrifices, and it can be inferred that prayer is greater than sacrifices for the same reason that it is greater than charity. R. Chanina then follows R. Eleazar's statement concerning the locked gates by stating that "anyone who prolongs his prayer [is assured that] his prayer will not return void [of response]." His statement thus supports R. Eleazar's point that prayer must come directly from the heart (accompanied by tears), and must be offered in a worthwhile and respectful manner. In other words, if one expects

his prayer to reach God, he should invest a proper amount of energy in offering his prayers. In light of these explanations of R. Eleazar's comment about the locked gates, one would hope that this Gemara would not be seen as a refutation of the efficacy of prayer, but rather as a description of how prayer must be properly utilized in the post-70 world.

The hope of the Rabbis was that statutory prayer would direct the attention of Jews, who normally would not think about God except in times of joy or sadness, to the Divine. The goal then of fixed prayer was to force Jews to transcend their mundane thoughts to the Divine, and provide them with the impetus to do so on a daily basis.[110] In addition to fixed prayer, the Rabbis instituted blessings to be said throughout the day that were meant to sanctify man's daily activities. Through articulating a blessing corresponding to daily functions such as eating and drinking, man infuses his day "with a sense of holiness and with the consciousness of the Divine Presence."[111]

In Bavli Menahot, R. Meir holds that "a man is required to recite one hundred blessings each day."[112] As his proof text for this claim, R. Meir cites Deuteronomy 10:12, which states that God requires man to love and revere Him and to serve Him with all his might and soul. When we look at the context of this Gemara, it becomes clear that R. Meir's statement is identifying prayer as the proper means through which man complies with the demand of the Deuteronomy verse. R. Meir's statement is preceded by a discussion regarding the importance of the *tefillin*, *mezuzoth*, and *zizit* in man's daily activity. All of these objects involve the recitation of a blessing or contain words of Scripture, and R. Eliezer b. Jacob notes that in order for man to avoid sinning, he should make sure that he routinely uses each of these objects. R. Meir argues that if a person recites one hundred blessings daily, then he will be consistently focused throughout the day on the Divine, which ideally is the purpose of prayer. The blessings

[110] Joesph Heinemann, Prayer in the Talmud, p. 18.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Bavli Menahot 43b.

were composed in such a way that their recitation would praise and thank God for the goodness that He has given His people.[113]

In recalling the rabbinic hope that fixed statutory prayer would focus the individual on the Divine Presence, we can also here state that blessings were meant to accomplish the same feat. As noted, R. Meir's statement regarding the one hundred blessings follows a talmudic discussion about the importance of proper use of *tefillin* and *zizit*, instruments that are used at times of prayer. Thus, we might conclude that R. Meir did not feel that fixed statutory prayer maintained human focus on God for a long enough period of time. Instead, he felt that blessings were needed in addition to prayer so that man could maintain his focus on God throughout the day. Perhaps it was possible for man to account for his one hundred blessings during the course of his daily prayers, but it is certain that R. Meir's ultimate point was that man should remember God throughout the activities of his day (such as before meals, before going to bed, etc.), and, at the proper times, thank and praise God for the gifts He has given him.

In Bavli Berakhot 6a, Abba Benjamin states that a man's prayer can only be heard by God in the synagogue. This statement is a polemic stressing that statutory prayer should be recited only in the synagogue. We might then think also that those blessings recited outside of the synagogue might fall on deaf ears. Since we know that the Rabbis advocated that blessings be recited outside of the synagogue as well, it is necessary to elaborate further on the intent of Bavli Berakhot *sugya*. Abba Benjamin's words begin a series of statements that seek to explain how it is known that the Divine Presence stands with man at certain times.[114] After the Gemara explains that the Divine Presence stands with man during his prayers in the synagogue, the text continues

[113] Heinemann, p. 18. In this way, many of the daily blessings differ from the benedictions found in the *Tefillah*, which are mostly petitionary in content.

[114] I Kings 8:28 is cited by Abba Benjamin as a proof text for his statement regarding God hearing man's prayer only in the synagogue. The next statement in the series is from Rabbi b. R. Dada, who cites Psalms 82:1 as proof that God is found in the synagogue.

by mentioning other times when God stands together with man.[115] The *sugya* concludes by stating that when one man sits and studies Torah, the presence of God is with him. The proof text of this statement is Exodus 20:21, where it is written, "In every place where I cause my name to be mentioned I will come unto thee and bless thee." Although this final statement in the Gemara refers only to an individual who is studying Torah, we might infer that if an individual recites a blessing using the proper formula and uttering God's name, that individual is acting in accordance with Exodus 20:21, and hence can expect that God's Divine Presence will stand with him.

The Rabbis' initiative to focus the minds of Jews on the Divine through blessings and fixed statutory prayer constituted a radical change from Temple practice.[116] The dialogues that we have focused on above describe the efforts that Rabbis took in rationalizing and constructing an effective mode of Jewish worship. The Rabbis did not set out to limit individual prayer or private supplications that some individuals chose to add on to their fixed prayers.[117] In fact, some of their own personal prayers eventually became incorporated in the established liturgy. For example, the private prayer of Mar, "My God, keep my tongue from evil..." was instituted in the prayer book of Amram, and has since remained as part of every Jewish worship service.[118] The Rabbis did, however, emphasize emphatically that the obligation of Jewish worship can only be fulfilled through performance of fixed communal prayer. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Rabbis' desire that fixed prayer and recitation of blessings be the daily stimulus for Jews to focus on the Divine would eventually constitute a new official mode of Jewish religious worship.

[115] These other times include whenever a quorum of ten men is gathered for prayer, whenever a *beit din* comprised of three judges convenes, and when two men sit to study Torah together.
[116] Heinemann, p. 17.
[117] Bavli Berakhot 29b and Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 8a mention the Rabbis desire that something fresh be inserted into every prayer.
[118] J.J. Petuchowski (ed.), Understanding Jewish Prayer (New York: KTAV, 1972), p. 12.

The Nature of Rabbinic Prayer

The massive amounts of legal dicta that fill voluminous pages in rabbinic literature discuss virtually every aspect of prayer from a variety of viewpoints. In the second chapter we dealt with issues of communal and private prayer, and discussed how the Rabbis over time modified their view vis a vis worshipping alongside the masses. Assuredly this issue represents one of the most important considerations of the Rabbis in regard to their new system of worship. However, in defining the nature of rabbinic prayer, there are various other topics which the Rabbis needed to work out for themselves. Their theological debates were aimed at developing an effective system of worship to replace the sacrificial cult while still maintaining the honor and lifestyle of the Jewish community.

One very prominent tension among the Rabbis is the debate over *keva* and *kavannah*, and whether specifically worded prayers could evoke proper *kavannah*. R. Eliezar argues that fixity in prayer is not appropriate because it cannot meet the requirement of genuine, heartfelt supplication. This statement succinctly expresses the displeasure of some Rabbis with those who fix the recitation of their prayer (in either wording or attitude).[119] The Palestinian Talmud expands on this concept, and provides later interpretations of the mishnaic statement. These new interpretations modify the original statement by saying that fixity could refer to a person's state of mind when he is actually praying. R. Abahu attempts to describe what R. Eliezar really meant by saying that "[R Eliezar means] one should not [recite one's prayers] as if he were reading a letter."[120] Following that opinion, R. Aha mentions that a person should add something new to his prayer every day. Others maintain that fixity assures the individual that his prayers will be recited correctly and will eradicate confusion.[121] However, Reif argues that eventually the

[119] See Mishnah Berakhot 4:4 and Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 4a.
[120] Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 4, 1a.
[121] See the statement by R. Zeira on the danger of inserting fresh prayers, in Bavli Berakhot 29b.

Rabbis became less concerned with spontaneity and more concerned with actual behavior during prayer.[122]

Although the formalization of prayer may have lent itself better to fixity rather than spontaneity, we should not claim that fixity in prayer became the standard form of prayer. In truth, there is no way of knowing how exactly prayer was recited before the appearance of the first prayer book. We can, however, be sure that opportunity for self-expression existed in some form and that even some Rabbis continued to offer new prayers and blessings daily.[123] Petuchowski notes that many individual Rabbis had private prayers that they would add following the *Tefillah.*[124] Whether they were always recited within the structure of formalized and fixed prayer is not ascertainable. Swartz notes that in the early Byzantine period, sources of liturgical creativity often came from prayer leaders and *hazzanim*, who composed and performed hymns (*piyyutim*) in the synagogue. These individuals used language to dazzle their listeners, and it was in the synagogue where they attempted to invoke the encounter between the Divine and the human.[125] While their *piyyutim* sometimes clashed with the wishes of the Rabbis, it was these sages and poets whose words connected with the masses in the synagogues. Hence, the masses attending such "liturgical performances" were exposed to creativity and the points of view of the *payetan* leading them in worship. Yet, despite the creativity employed by the *payetanim* to entertain their audiences, they did not veer away from the values and lore of the rabbinic structure of prayer.

Another issue that was debated amongst the Rabbis was the question of '*Iyyun Tefillah,* which literally means "looking closer into prayer." Unfortunately, from the talmudic evidence that discusses or mentions this phenomenon, we cannot clearly make out what exactly it meant

[122] Reif, p. 111.
[123] Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 4, 1e and f.
[124] Petuchowski, p. 11. Here the author cites the following formula: Rabbi X, after his Prayer (of the Eighteen Benedictions), said the following.
[125] Swartz, p. 112.

for the Rabbis; the reason being that some *sugyot* praise it while others condemn it. Reif has suggested that the term refers to a type of mystical meditation, but that the Rabbis eventually understood it to mean concentration during prayer (i.e. *kavannah*). He also cites Israel Ta-Shma's opinion that by geonic times, '*Iyyun Tefillah* referred to the composition of liturgical poetry.[126] Whichever definition is more suitable will likely only be known with the discovery of new evidence. Yet, it is still worthwhile to look at how some Rabbis commented on the term and how it appears in rabbinic literature.

In expressing his distaste for those who prolong their meditation during prayer, R. Chiya Bar Abba states that such an individual will eventually suffer heartache.[127] Additionally, Rav counts '*Iyyun Tefillah* among the three transgressions from which no man escapes even for a single day.[128] However, both of these statements contradict a well known statement at Bavli Shabbat 127a that counts '*Iyyun Tefillah* as a highly desirable precept for which there is no limit. This Gemara regards '*Iyyun Tefillah* so highly that it maintains that the joy a person receives from such activity in this world remains intact for him in the world to come. It is possible that '*Iyyun Tefillah* angered the early Tannaim because it was a form of meditation practiced by other groups, or because it actually referred to the lack of concentration during prayer.[129] The Bavli suggests that the Rabbis opposed meditation in prayer only when that meditation was based on reaping reward for prayer (or simply the fulfillment of that prayer).[130] However, we cannot truly be sure whether or not those Rabbis who spoke out against '*Iyyun Tefillah* opposed the phenomenon altogether, or if they simply opposed it when it was not purely concentrated on worshipping God.

The nature of *kavannah* in prayer as the Rabbis understood it is elucidated in Bavli

[126] Reif, p. 113. For more on Ta-Shma's opinion, see, I. Ta-Shma, "On the Beginning of the *Piyyut*", Tarbiz 53, 1984, p. 285-8.
[127] Bavli Berakhot 32b.
[128] Bavli Baba Batra 164b.
[129] Reif, p. 113.
[130] Bavli Berakhot 32b.

Berakhot in a *baraita* that deals with the proper preparation that must precede one's recitation of the *Tefillah.* The Rabbis teach that one should not begin the recitation of the *Tefillah* in a state of sorrow, laughter, laziness, lightheadedness, or idle chatter.[131] Preparation for prayer is compared with the proper manner for taking leave of a friend; then the Gemara turns to the proper place, time, and manner in which one should pray. Regarding the place of prayer, R. Chiya bar Abba states that a person should always pray in a house possessing windows.[132] His proof text is Daniel 6:11 where Daniel defied King Darius and continued to pray to God three times daily in the upper story of his home with the windows open. It is possible that praying with the windows open might help direct one's thoughts towards heaven, but it is also possible that R. Chiya bar Abba was alluding more to the notion that one should pray three times daily with the same *kavannah* exhibited by Daniel. Finally, R. Chiya bar Abba's quotation from Daniel also contains a reminder that when an individual recites his prayers, he should face Jerusalem and direct his thoughts towards the holy city, as was the custom of Daniel.

The Gemara later reiterates that one should pray in the morning, evening, and night, and that he should face Jerusalem. Then the text proceeds to discuss the order of recitation of the *Tefillah* blessings. The question posed is whether one should first praise God by reciting the first three blessings, or if he should first attend to his own needs by reciting the middle thirteen blessings first. A proof text from I Kings 8:28 is cited in which Solomon asks God to first hearken to song (*rinah*) and then to prayer.[133] The Rabbis understand that song here refers to words of praise to God, and prayer refers to supplication. Thus, just as Solomon first praised God, the Rabbis decree that all others should do likewise. However, the Rabbis note that while an individual may not recite supplication before the first three blessings are recited, his supplications following his recitation of the *Tefillah* may be as long as he desires. This section of

[131] Bavli Berakhot 31a.
[132] Ibid.
[133] In the biblical context, the term *rinah* can also refer to a form of petition.

the Gemara also serves as a reminder that even though one may have already have praised God by reciting the *Shema* and its blessings, he still must begin his *Tefillah* with the first three blessings of praise before beginning his supplications.

In the second chapter, we discussed other important issues that likewise factored into the rabbinic perception of prayer. Issues of prayer length, which direction to face during prayer (and subsequently how synagogues should be set up), and which language to pray in were all major points of contention for the Rabbis.[134] Eventually, as we will examine in the next chapter, these discussions would become the focus of *halakhah* pertaining to Jewish liturgy. While this study cannot possibly delve into each aspect of prayer law discussed by the Rabbis, it is important to note that the Rabbis were intimately concerned with mapping out every possible detail of their new worship system. For example, they rule on such issues as how a blind man should pray (since he cannot see in which direction to face for prayer or when the sun rises and sets), what to do if one is riding his ass at the time of prayer, and how an individual's prayers should be shortened when he finds himself in a place of danger.[135] These types of rulings indicate how the Rabbis attempted to frame their system to meet the daily needs of the average Jew. In explaining this contention, let us look at the ruling regarding one who is riding his ass when the time arrives for reciting the *Tefillah*. The Rabbis rule that if this person has someone accompanying him who can hold his ass for him, then he should dismount and pray. If he does not, then he may remain mounted on his ass and pray. The logic behind this decision is that if the man does not have someone to hold his ass, he will be distracted during his prayers because he is worried that his ass might run away. In that sense, the Rabbis are concerned for the man's property, and they fear that his prayers will lack *kavannah* because he is worried that he may lose his ass. Hence, this example underscores how the Rabbis went about applying their principles of prayer to peoples' everyday activities.

[135] Bavli Berakhot 30a and Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 4, 1b.

Perhaps the most important issue for the Rabbis was the notion that prayer was to be performed in precisely the correct manner. Various *sugyot* in the Talmudim spell out exactly how rubrics such as the *Tefillah* and the recitation of the *Shema* are supposed to be executed.[136] The execution of each aspect of worship was commented on by the Rabbis. One example of such a liturgical activity that is outlined in great detail is the performance of the priestly blessing by the *kohanim*. R. Joshua ben Levi states that any *kohen* who has not washed his hands should not raise his hands to bless the people (because just as his prayer is sanctified, so should the hands that offer the prayer be sanctified, as they were during the Temple service).[137] In the same Gemara, the Rabbis rule that once the Torah scroll is opened, all *halakhic* discourse must cease and attention must be directed to the Torah service. The Rabbis provide scriptural references to lend credence to their decisions, which will ultimately formulate *halakhah* regarding prayer. These examples thus far seem relatively obvious. In order to demonstrate the lengths to which the Rabbis pondered in developing such *halakhot*, let us consider the following references. The Rabbis discuss in Bavli Berakhot 23a the validity of a man's prayer if he feels the urge to defecate or urinate while he is reciting the *Tefillah*. They also discuss what course of action should be taken if a man suddenly finds himself in the presence of excrement once he has begun his prayer. Rabbinic literature is replete with rules and regulations that are meant to monitor every possible aspect of prayer so that it is carried out in precisely the correct manner.

The Rabbis paid particular attention to prayers that directly affected people's livelihoods and sustenance. They felt very strongly that the prayer for rain (*v'tein tal umatar*) must never be omitted from the *Tefillah* during the winter because of its necessity for agricultural growth. Thus, they argue that one may recite the abbreviated of the *Tefillah* (called *Havinenu*) all year long, except during the winter.[138] This is because the Rabbis want the individual to recite the entire

[136] See Bavli Megillah 17b.
[137] Bavli Sotah 39a.
[138] Bavli Berakhot 29a.

Tefillah and insert the prayer for rain into the ninth blessing of the *Tefillah* (which is the blessing of the years). While the Rabbis argue over finding alternative arrangements so that one may still recite the abbreviated *Tefillah*, it is enough for our purposes to point out the length to which the Rabbis go to make sure that the prayer for rain is recited daily during the rainy season.

Thus far, our discussion has focused on the nature of prayer as it pertains to the individual. However, it is worthwhile here to point out how the Rabbis viewed the prayers of the community as superior to those offered by individuals. While some sages maintained that effective prayer could be achieved individually, we cannot overlook the concept of *davar shebikedushah.*[139] Just as Bavli Berakhot 6a establishes that the Divine Presence is found in the synagogue, a comment in Megillah states that nothing involving sanctity or sanctification may be recited if not in the presence of at least ten men.[140] This statement is based on Mishnah Megillah 4:3 which rules that certain rituals (such as the public recitation of the *Tefillah* and the priestly benediction) may not take place unless there is a quorum of ten men. Langer notes that the Amoraim recognized the rituals listed in this Mishnah as *devarim shebikedushah*, and they further asserted that a higher degree of sanctity could be achieved for prayer recited communally rather than individually.[141]

As we have already discussed above, it is difficult to ascertain precisely when communal prayer began. Heinemann has written that its foundations likely began to take root centuries before the destruction of the Second Temple. However, he concedes that the earliest definite evidence we have dates only to the end of the Second Temple period. He also notes that while certain prayer rituals inside of the Temple are attested to, there is no mention of any such prayer by the people outside of the Temple.[142] Yet, it is clear from Mishnah Megillah 4:3 that, by tannaitic times, there were some Sages who truly valued the experience of communal worship;

[139] Bavli Megillah 23b.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Langer, p. 20-21.
[142] Heinemann, p.21.

and this idea was expanded upon by the Amoraim in their efforts to assign increased efficacy to the prayers of the community. We have thus been able to infer from certain rabbinic discussions how communal prayer should be conducted. The ultimate goal of the Rabbis in creating such a system of prayer was to allow each individual to feel as if he was contributing to the prayers of the community. In the sacrificial era, people were simply onlookers who had no active role in the offering of sacrifices.[143] However, in this new system, even individuals who were unfamiliar with the liturgy were able to actively listen to the prayer leader and respond "Amen" at the appropriate time.[144] The shift of worship from an activity primarily carried out on behalf of the community by a certain elite to an activity that involved each member of the community was in essence one of the revolutionary concepts instituted by the Rabbis.

Innovations and Adaptations in Worship and Liturgy

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Amoraim desired that prayer occur communally in a fixed location. They were also determined to continue the tannaitic tradition of correlating prayer times with the sacrifice times of the Temple era.[145] The Amoraim often undertake great efforts to build upon tannaitic notions of prayer replacing the actual sacrifices.[146] Both Talmudim introduce discussion about prayer times being based on sacrifice times by referring to the prayers of the Patriarchs. References to the prayers of Abraham , Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 19:27, 24:63, and 28:11 respectively) that were offered in the morning, afternoon, and evening according to biblical accounts, give rhetorical credence to the argument about to be put forth by the Sages. In a similar rhetorical vein, R. Joshua b. Levi maintains that "the prayers were

[143] Heinemann, p. 16.
[144] For examples of rabbinic opinions regarding the Amen response, see Bavli Berakhot 45b and 53b and Bavli Shabbat 119b.
[145] Tosefta Berakhot 3:1.
[146] Ibid.

instituted [by the men of the Great Assembly] corresponding to the *tamid* offerings."[147] This view of the correspondence between times of prayer and sacrifice is found earlier in tannaitic traditions.

The Gemara cites a *baraita* maintaining that the morning prayer may be offered until noon, because it was permissible to offer the morning *tamid* until noon.[148] Similarly the afternoon prayer may be recited until evening because the afternoon *tamid* was offered until the evening. Finally, in reference to the evening prayer, the *baraita* notes that the evening prayer does not have a fixed time and may be recited all night long because the limbs and the fat that were sprinkled on the altar before sunset were not fully consumed by the fire of the altar before the arrival of the evening, and could be burned all night long[149] Levine further argues here that by saying the *Tefillah* corresponds to the *tamid* offering, R. Joshua b. Levi indicates amoraic support for the belief that communal prayer was originated by the Yavnean sages. This contention is made based on the notion that if replacing sacrifices was the main agenda of prayer, it would likely develop in a period relatively close to 70 CE. However, it is then also possible that this statement refers to a pre-70 development of prayer, and emphasizes the value of prayer even during the sacrificial era.[150]

The Bavli and the Yerushalmi both offer precise descriptions of the correspondences between the sacrifices and prayers. That is to say that for each sacrifice that occurred on any given day, there must be (for the Rabbis) an appropriate prayer that symbolizes that sacrifice. The Yerushalmi succinctly explains the ability of prayer to replace sacrifices in its exposition of Deuteronomy 11:13; "Is there [such a thing as] a service of the heart? And what is it? It is

[147] Bavli Berakhot 26b and Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 1, 4h.
[148] Bavli Berakhot 26b. R. Yehuda disputes this as he maintains that prayer may be recited only until four hours into the day because the a morning does not extend beyond the fourth hour, and the morning *tamid* was not offered after the fourth hour.
[149] This argument is also explicit in Tosefta Berakhot 3:1.
[150] Levine, p. 516-17.

prayer."[151] The intent of this statement is to make clear that the *avodah* as understood in Mishnah Avot 1:2 referring to Temple service can now refer as well to prayer.

While the rubrics of rabbinic liturgy were set by the Tannaim, many details remained in flux for the Amoraim. The lack of uniformity in prayer texts is vividly illustrated in the Talmud, where differences of wording appear in practically every liturgical passage.[152] The Bavli records that Rav and his disputant R. Yohanan still did not agree even on the basic pattern of the benediction.[153] We must also consider that the Rabbis' efforts to develop fixed liturgy was stymied by geography. Jews living in different regions had tendencies to develop their own rituals regarding liturgy and other customs.[154] Elbogen points to the divergences between Palestine and Babylonia as the most significant. Although many differences in liturgical style have not been recovered, one may still see that the Babylonian style of worship was more fixed and standardized, while in Palestine a more fluid observance was customary. It is difficult to determine exactly how fixed Babylonian prayer was but, from what is known, it does not seem to involve certain Palestinian practices which lend themselves to a more fluid worship style. These known Palestinian practices include *piyyut*, variation of haftarah reading among different communities, and the fluid amount of time that Palestinian communities took to complete the cycle of their Torah reading (between three and a half to four years).

Despite the many variations in the liturgy of the amoraic period, the commitment of the Amoraim to establishing fixity in prayer is easily recognizable. It would appear from halakhic discourse in the Talmudim that the Rabbis were devoted legalists dedicated to the composition of a legal liturgical framework that mandated a fixed prayer system. Yet, these same Rabbis did not overlook issues of attitude and religious intensity. As Elbogen acutely points out, directly in the

[151] Yerushalmi Berakhot 4, 1, 1a. Sifre-Deuteronomy 41 also compares the *Tefillah* explicitly to sacrifices.
[152] Elbogen, p. 209.
[153] Bavli Berakhot 40b.
[154] Levine, p. 536-8, lists the differences between Palestine and Babylonia in regard to liturgy, Torah reading, and synagogal practice.

middle of halakhic discourse, we find such notions as the importance of *kavannah,* which should serve to remind us that the Rabbis felt a divine obligation to construct a system of prayer capable of sustaining Jewish worship until the day when the Temple would be built again.[155] The Amoraim inherited a ready-made liturgical system, but they continued to build upon it so that it could effectively be utilized as *the* mode of Jewish worship. They added their own ideas based on their religious outlook, they expanded on inherited texts to meet their own needs, and they customized them so that they would fit inside the larger liturgical framework.[156] While the Amoraim were not the originators of statutory prayer or even its primary framers, they developed it considerably. Although differences were inevitable as a result of geography and the predilections of individuals and communities, the Amoraim presented their descendants with a fully articulated system of worship.

[155] See Elbogen, p. 212.

[156] Elbogen, p. 213-18, describes the various expansions and embellishments of statutory prayer in the amoraic period.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

As we discussed in the previous chapter, the formation of Jewish liturgy was a process that likely began unfolding centuries before prayer was formatted into standardized rabbinic prayers. The Amoraim who are credited with composing many of the prayers found in the Talmudim in some cases may have used received materials to create their liturgical compositions, while in other cases they clearly composed their own liturgical material. Yet, despite the recording of these prayers in the Talmudim, liturgical data was primarily transmitted from generation to generation orally, and thus there is a widespread absence of any written materials bearing liturgical writings. We must then infer that no matter how precise the Rabbis and other Jews attempted to be in transmitting prayer formulae, there must have been accretions and omissions to many prayers among the different generations and throughout the various geographic locations. As we shall soon see, it is only in the era of the codex when the medium of liturgy is transformed from oral to written transmission.

Before we conclude with the ultimate contributions of the Rabbis in regard to the issues presented in the previous chapters, it would first be beneficial to discuss the liturgical activity of late antiquity and the subsequent efforts of the Geonim. In that sense, it is necessary to expand on the role of the liturgy and the synagogue immediately following the end of the amoraic period, and the role that rabbinic guidelines played during that period. It would appear that the religious leadership had every interest in maintaining order through implementation of *halakhah.* Thus, we might assume that late antiquity brought with it an end to liturgical production and a reliance on the work of the Rabbis to direct religious life. Yet, as we shall soon see, the Jewish communities of Palestine and Babylonia were influenced by a myriad of internal and external factors that greatly affected their own religious practice. We shall now turn our attention to some of these factors, and examine the role they played in affecting the Jewish mode of worship in late

antiquity and beyond.

As we look also at the role of the synagogue in the wake of the rabbinic era, we notice that the institution of the synagogue has become the undeniable location for worship in Judaism. Jews living under foreign rule were not surprisingly influenced by the role the mosque and the church served in Islam and Christianity respectively, and they were likely inspired to utilize their "sanctified" settings in a similar fashion.[157] By the geonic period, the synagogue was a central part of Jewish life, and the Geonim made efforts to accumulate liturgical materials and assemble them for use inside of the synagogue.[158] The Jews, in the years following the seventh century, relied heavily on *halakhah* to govern their religious practices, and it was in that era when the vision of the Rabbis would reach true fruition.

The Geonim took great strides in transforming talmudic study and ideology into mainstream Jewish practice. Under their guidance, talmudic writings were copied and distributed and commentaries were composed. They inspired the establishment of talmudic academies where students discussed and examined issues at length through a halakhic lens. These houses of study additionally served as the seat of Jewish lawmakers who utilized rabbinic materials in order to develop a comprehensive system of Jewish law.[159] Communities from all over the Jewish world would reach out to these academies and request answers to their religious questions. In essence, the transformative work of the Rabbis following the destruction of the Temple would emerge in the wake of the rabbinic era as the structure upon and which all Jewish law and practice would eventually be based.

For our purposes here, it is worthwhile to note how the geonic institutions of prayer and synagogue compared with that of their predecessors. While we cannot conclude with any degree of certainty what rabbinic prayer looked like, we can evaluate which liturgical innovations were

[157] Reif, p. 148.
[158] Reif, p. 141.
[159] Reif, p. 142.

developed in the post-talmudic era. We should not be quick to claim that everyone in the geonic period, in a liturgical sense, was primarily interested in using materials received from rabbinic literature. Reif claims that the geonic period was characterized by an urge for expansion and creativity in all forms of liturgy.[160] That is to say that while they attempted to build their mode of worship on rabbinic foundations, the age of liturgical innovation was assuredly not over. Further, the completion of the Talmud did not necessarily end discussion over some of the issues that troubled the Rabbis. While liturgical innovation continued, tensions still existed regarding issues of language for prayer, location, fixity and spontaneity, and other problems that were likewise debated by the Rabbis. It was not until the end of the geonic period that standardization of liturgy under halakhic authority was established, and liturgical variation was discouraged.[161]

Even though it may have taken time for such standardization of liturgy to take place, we should not minimize the efforts taken by the Geonim to consolidate liturgical materials. Two major works that recorded the liturgical practices of the period include Tractate Soferim and a comparative composition entitled "The Differences in Customs between the People of the East and the People of Eretz-Israel." A need for these works arose as a result of the accumulation of customs from late antiquity, and the differences in practice between Palestine and Babylonia.[162] As we mentioned earlier, the first prayer book was compiled by Rav Amram, whose *Seder Tefillah* was written as a responsum to the Jewish community of Barcelona's request for geonic guidance regarding how they should fulfill their rabbinic prayer and blessing obligations. Sa'adiah Gaon, in his *siddur* (written almost a century after Amram's), noted three reasons for the urgent need to consolidate prayer: neglect, addition, and deletion of original materials. He believed that the meaning of the prayers and blessings of the rabbinic period had been neglected to the point where they were only remembered by a handful of individuals. In addition he argued

[160] Reif, p. 146.
[161] Reif, p. 147.
[162] Levine, p. 557. Levine here also discusses the internal and external forces affecting the Jewish community that may also have contributed to the composition of these works.

that throughout antiquity, many prayers and blessings had been expanded or abbreviated to the point where their original meaning had been lost.[163] In essence, these factors constituted his motivation to author a *siddur* that would formally standardize prayer in writing.

In addition to the earliest *siddurim*, the above-mentioned Tractate Soferim (composed around 600 CE) is another source that is useful in synthesizing some of the liturgical traditions discussed in rabbinic literature. However, it is certainly not a comprehensive tractate on the subject of prayer, as it remains virtually silent with respect to the *Tefillah* and the *Shema*.[164] Yet, it is useful in that it provides information on portions of the liturgy not otherwise mentioned in the Talmudim. For example, it is in Soferim where the Kaddish is first seen as a fundamental part of the worship service. Although its full text appears for the first time in Rav Amram's *siddur,* we learn from Soferim that the Kaddish was to be recited at the conclusion of the Torah-reading ceremony and as part of the afternoon service.[165]

In accordance with the Tosefta statement forbidding the writing down of prayers and benedictions, prayer collections and *siddurim* were not composed until after the Talmudim were redacted, when the reasons expressed above by Sa'adiah Gaon necessitated that prayers and benedictions be recorded in writing. Although Zunz contended that collections of prayers already existed when Tractate Soferim was written, there is a clear difference between these compilations and official "prayer books."[166] Still, such prayer compilations have been quite useful in providing evidence for practices dating well before the completion of the Talmudim. For example, one of the main contributions of Tractate Soferim is that it serves as a witness to some of the liturgical practices of Palestinian Jewry. Since most of the customs and practices of the Jewish people were subsequently influenced on a much greater scale by Babylonian Jewry,

[163] Ibid.
[164] Levine, p. 558.
[165] Elbogen, p. 83. For more on the Kaddish, see Elbogen p. 80-84 and, D. de Sola Pool, Kaddish. (Leipzig: R. Haupt, 1909).
[166] Elbogen, p. 7. Here Elbogen refers to Zunz's statement in *Die Ritus der synagogalenGottesdienstes* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1859), p. 18

the Palestinian liturgical rite has for the most part been silenced.[167] Tractate Soferim records aspects of the Palestinian practices that otherwise may not have been recovered.

While some, including Elbogen, consider the post-talmudic era to be a period lacking in individual creativity when Jews were hindered by external persecution, others such as Salo Baron believe that the contributions of the Saboraim and the Geonim were innovative in their own respect. Baron contends that their efforts to consolidate liturgical material in a concise way and champion the need for a halakhic liturgical structure was a major accomplishment.[168] Their main initiative was to create a system that would be authoritative and steeped in tradition. We should note here that the heads of the academies in Sura and Pumbeditha wanted all Jewish communities to follow their customs in prayer. However, we should be aware that the *siddurim* of the geonic period did not begin to appear until the ninth century. In the years preceding Rav Amram's prayer book, we actually have evidence that religious expression in the forms of *piyyut*, midrash, and *targum* were likely all encouraged (especially in Palestine). Texts from the Cairo Genizah seem to indicate a variety of activity in these genres.[169]

Thus far in this chapter we have introduced the developments of the immediate post-talmudic era as a way of demonstrating how rabbinic literature was viewed as the basis for subsequent practice. The Geonim, who saw themselves as the successors of the Amoraim vis a vis religious leadership, embraced the teachings of the Babylonian Talmud, and utilized its teachings in their effort to conduct worship according to the guidelines of Jewish tradition (i.e. the teachings of the Rabbis). They also sought to centralize prayer by promoting the synagogue as the main locus of Jewish worship, a task that was aided somewhat by neighboring Christians and Muslims who considered their mosques and churches to be their primary worship locations.

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[167] Elbogen, p. 8.
[168] Reif, p. 140-141. Also see Hoffman, The Canonization of the Synagogue Service (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).
[169] Reif, p. 146.

Yet, it was the previous work of the Rabbis in documenting their opinions that gave post-talmudic Jewish authorities the ability to base their decisions on rabbinic precedent and custom.

Some Final Thoughts

In the second chapter, our account of the development of the synagogue contended that the Rabbis were clearly not unified from the outset in favor of praying in the synagogue.[170] We discussed some of the major arguments against the use of the synagogue as a location for statutory communal prayer, noting that many Rabbis did not even subscribe to the need for a fully fixed prayer, let alone communal worship outside of the study hall. Yet, even as the early Tannaim debated whether or not communal prayer in the synagogue was worthwhile, other Jewish groups were congregating in synagogues and performing some type of Jewish worship together. Eventually, as we have shown, the Rabbis understood that the synagogue would play a major role in the Jewish community, and that they should at the very least have some presence there as religious authorities. Yet, by the time they had come to this realization, the synagogue as an institution was already viable, and was governed primarily by its non-rabbinic members.[171]

Evidence of the gradual development of the synagogue in Hellenistic and Greco-Roman times demonstrates that the institution was in existence before the tannaitic period (although not so long before in Palestine). It is difficult to say specifically what the religious role of the synagogue was in first century BCE, but it is fairly certain that at least the reading of Torah occurred there.[172] There is evidence from the Mishnah that, in the case of the *ma'amadot*, Torah reading took place in these synagogues in order to represent the sacrifices that were taking place at the same time in Jerusalem. The Mishnah holds that the early prophets initially ordained that

[170] See note 59 above.
[171] For example, see Bavli Berakhot 27a.
[172] The Theodotus inscription (See Fine, p. 30) and Luke 4:16 provide evidence for this contention.

when the priests and Levites of a given region came to present their sacrifices in Jerusalem, the Israelites of that region would gather in their own cities and read Torah.[173] While this division of the priests and Levites by region was already known to the author of I Chronicles, it is more likely that the customs described here were implemented in mishnaic or late Second Commonwealth times.[174] It would seem then that the gathering of Jews in specific locations for a specifically religious function was already in process sometime before the destruction of the Second Temple.

Many scholars have stated that the synagogue was from the outset a Pharisaic innovation that developed as a reaction to the Sadducean-run Temple.[175] However, Levine notes that there are simply no clear references or evidence in the early synagogue liturgy to make such a claim. We might also note that if the synagogue was known to be a Pharisaic institution, there might not have been so much opposition to the synagogue by the early Tannaim. In addition, if the first synagogues were in fact run by the Rabbis, we might expect there to be more references to the synagogue's importance to religious life in the literature of that period. Yet, Ben Sira does not mention it at all, and neither book of Maccabees mentions any restrictions placed on synagogue functions by Antiochus (whereas they do mention restrictions on the Sabbath, festivals, *kashrut*, and the Temple). In comparison to the writings coming from the first century CE such as Josephus and Philo, where numerous references are made to synagogues, it is noteworthy that these earlier writings do not refer to the synagogue at all.[176] Hence, we can conclude that either the synagogue was hardly considered an important religious institution at this time, or that it was not yet in existence in Palestine. It is unlikely though that, if the synagogue was a Pharisaic institution, it would be of such little religious significance.

[173] Mishnah Ta'anit 4:2. In 4:3, the Mishnah delineates which sections of creation are to be read during each day of the sacrificial offering.
[174] Levine, p. 36. See I Chronicles 24:1-18.
[175] Levine, p. 37. Footnote 67 on this page lists the scholars and their publications in which they make this claim.
[176] Levine, p. 38.

For our purposes, we have discussed with great interest the nature of the rabbinic relationship with the synagogue since one of the major goals of this study has been to assess how the Rabbis evolved from a group that did not uniformly embrace the synagogue institution to a group that strongly advocated the performance of statutory communal prayer *only* in the synagogue. In that sense, we must assess the nature of the Rabbis' realization that in order to be religious leaders and to impose their own agenda of worship on other Jews, they needed to establish and maintain a presence inside the synagogue. This notion developed over the centuries, and only truly crystalized as an official rabbinic conviction towards the beginning of the amoraic era. In essence, the Rabbis' influence on the synagogue was delayed because they were latecomers onto the synagogue scene, and they were not involved in the erection of most of these synagogues. Yet, eventually, amoraic insistence that public statutory prayer take place in the synagogue would characterize the *halakhah* upon which subsequent generations would base their religious observance.

While the synagogue developed gradually over many centuries before it finally reached its function as sole locus for public statutory prayer, the concept of prayer likewise maintained its own course of gradual development. Similar to the the origin of the synagogue, prayer also was not originally a rabbinic invention. Heinemann's description of the prayers in the Temple takes note of the nature of prayer in that locale, when it was considered to be only an accompaniment to the Temple cult.[177] Whether or not these prayers were recited alongside of Temple rituals or were strictly peripheral functions, they would eventually serve as the impetus for what would become the primary mode of Jewish worship.

In order to understand how prayer may have been used in the Second Temple, let us look at the Mishnah's discussion of the recitation of the priestly benediction and the singing of the

[177] Heinemann, p. 123.

Levites that used to take place there. We see in Mishnah Tamid that the priest, following the morning incense offering, would recite the priestly blessing on behalf of the people. The Mishnah also notes that, unlike locations outside of the Temple where the priestly benediction was split into three separate blessings, the priest inside would recite this benediction as a single continuous blessing. Further, he would pronounce the Tetragrammaton instead of using an epithet for the name of God, which was the custom outside of the Temple.[178] The priestly blessing was fixed and recited daily by the priest for the benefit of the people. Similarly, the levitical chants which followed the daily sacrificial rite and the priestly blessing were regularly chanted in the same fashion.[179] While significantly more evidence of prayer in the Temple exists, this example for our purposes illustrates the existence of prayer as part of Jewish worship before the tannaitic period (even though the texts here are fixed biblical recitations).

In retrospect, while it may have seemed natural for prayer to replace sacrifices in the wake of 70 CE (since it already existed in some form), such a statement would oversimplify the efforts of the Rabbis to develop a proper system of official worship. We have already outlined in detail the developments that took place in the tannaitic and amoraic periods that would eventually result in a system capable of replacing the sacrificial cult. However, by this point, it has hopefully been made clear that until the Talmud was redacted and the first prayer rites were disseminated, it was difficult to judge the character and uniformity of worship throughout the Jewish world. We have also detailed the process by which fixedly worded prayers and formulae were established, and how the Rabbis attempted to develop paths, through prayer and blessings, for individuals to focus their attention on the Divine. We have not necessarily attempted to trace the origin of the various rubrics that would eventually make up the order of prayers in the geonic prayer books, except to note certain theories of scholars as to the earliest composition of such

[178] Mishnah Tamid 7:2.
[179] Heinemann, p. 125. See also Mishnah Tamid 7:4.

rubrics. Instead we have focused on the gradual attempt of the Rabbis to maintain Jewish worship of God in the wake of catastrophic upheaval to the official Jewish mode of worship in 70 CE. Rabbinic instructions regarding prayer and synagogue were not always heeded by other Jews, but by the geonic period, the teachings of the Rabbis had been adopted as the basis for traditional Jewish worship. Hence we may now claim that the rabbinic effort to develop an official corporate system of worship following the Destruction would eventually become the mode of worship that allowed for the maintenance and perseverance of the Jewish people's relationship with their God.

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