EXPLAINING THE TEXUAL VARIATIONS FOR מחיה המתים

How did the text of the ברכה of מחיה המתים develop all the variations that we saw in last week's newsletter? That so many variations existed seems to violate the following rule:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מ עמ׳ ב׳–כל המשנה ממטבע שטבעו חכמים בברכות – לא יצא ידי חובתו.

The short answer is that the **גמרא** was concerned that the חתימות of the ברכות not be changed and were not concerned with the balance of the contents of each ברכה. Another answer may lie in some historical facts found on page 50 of Professor Ezra Fleischer's book: תפלה ומנהגי תפלה ארץ–ישראליים תקופת הגניזה:

אבחנות אלו לא סוף דבר שהן מאפשרות לקבוע בנוסחי התפלה שלנו רשויות נבדלות לפרוזה ולשירה; הן גם פותחות לנו שער לחשיפת מוצאם של אחדים מקטעי התפלה העולים לפנינו כנוסחי קבע, ולזיהוי מקורם ברמה של התפילה הקומה, היא רמת תפילתם של שליחי הציבור במעמד הרבים. מן המפורסמות היא שבהרבה בתי כנסיות קדומים בארץ ישראל נתקיימו זמן רב ביחד, זה ליד זה, שתי מערכות תפילה, ששתיהן היו קבועות כמעט באותה מידה: אחת של היחידים, ואחת של החזנים. למן זמן היווצרותה של השירה הפייטנית כך נערכה התפלה בציבור: הקהל אמרו את נוסחי הקבע הפשוטים בלחש, איש כהרגלו, אבל שליחי הציבור לא חזרו בקול רם על אותה לשון עצמה, אלא אמרו במקום זה תפילה אחרת, נמצלת ומסולסלת יותר, מסודרת בצורות של שיר.

It is Professor Fleischer belief that the freedom allowed to the שליח ציבור to add to the standard text of שמונה עשרה gave birth to the composition of פיוטים. That practice arguably explains how other variations entered into the text of some ברכות. It has already been noted that פסוקי דזמרה in the form that we have it today may have been the result of a desire to amplify the שבח portion of שמונה עשרה by adding פסוקים and פרקים of שמונה עשרה. Words from פסוקים in תנ״ך may have entered תפלת שחרית to שבח through the same door. That may explain why some of the variations to the ברכה of סומך נופלים ורופא חולים ומתיר אסורים involve the words: מחיה מתים which are borrowed from תהלים פרק קמו׳.

פסוק ז–עשה משפט לעשוקים נתן לחם לרעבים ה׳ מתיר אסורים. פסוק ח–ה׳ פקח עורים ה׳ זקף כפופים ה׳ אהב צדיקים: פסוק ט–ה׳ שמר את גרים יתום ואלמנה יעודד ודרך רשעים יעות. פסוק י–ימלך ה׳ לעולם אלקיך ציון לדר ודר הללו י–ה:

That the שליח ציבור would add his own words to the standard text can be seen from the following **גמרא**:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף לג׳ עמ׳ ב׳–ההוא דנחית קמיה דרבי חנינא, אמר: הא–ל הגדול הגבור והנורא והאדיר והעזוז והיראוי החזק והאמיץ והודאי והנכבד. המתין לו עד דסיים, כי סיים אמר ליה: סיימתינהו לכולהו שבחי דמרך? למה לי כולי האי? אנן הני תלת דאמרינן, אי לאו דאמרינהו משה רבינו באורייתא, ואתו אנשי כנסת הגדולה ותקנינהו בתפלה, לא הוינן יכולין למימר להו, ואת אמרת כולי האי ואזלת! משל, למלך בשר ודם שהיו לו אלף אלפים דינרי זהב, והיו מקלסין אותו בשל כסף, והלא גנאי הוא לו!

Notice that **רבי חנינא** objected to the words chosen by the **שליח ציבור** and not the fact that the **שליח ציבור** added to the standard text.

In the following excerpt, the **גמרא** clearly encourages a **שליח ציבור** to add to the standard text:

ירושלמי מסכת ברכות–דף יב׳ עמ׳ א׳–ב׳–הלכה ה׳– מתני׳ בשחר מברך שתים לפניה ואחת לאחריה ובערב מברך שתים לפניה ושתים לאחריה אחת ארוכה ואחת קצרה מקום שאמרו להאריך אינו רשאי לקצר לקצר אינו רשאי להאריך לחתום אינו רשאי שלא לחתום לחתום אינו רשאי לחתום: דף יד׳ עמ׳ א׳–גמרא–אלו ברכות שמאריכין בהן: ברכות ראש השנה ויום הכיפורים וברכות תענית ציבור. מברכותיו של אדם ניכר אם תלמיד חכם הוא אם בור הוא. אלו ברכות שמקצרין בהם: המברך על המצות ועל הפירות וברכת הזימון וברכה אחרונה של ברכת המזון אחר המזון. הא כל שאר ברכות אדם מאריך? אמר חזקיה מן מה דתני, המאריך הרי זה מגונה והמקצר הרי זה משובח. הדא אמרה שאין זה כלל. תני: צריך להאריך בגואל ישראל בתענית. הא בשש שהוא מוסיף אינו מאריך? א״ר יוסה שלא תאמר הואיל ומעין י״ח לא יאריך בה, לפום כן צריך מימר צריך להאריך בגואל ישראל בתענית:

We can point to the development of **תפלת מוסף** of **ראש השנה** as proof that one of the ways that the **שליח ציבור** was allowed to add to **שמונה עשרה** was by adding **פסוקים**:

משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק ד׳ משנה ו׳–אין פוחתין מעשרה מלכיות מעשרה זכרונות מעשרה שופרות. רבי יוחנן בן נורי אומר אם אמר שלש שלש מכולן יצא. אין מזכירין זכרון מלכות ושופר של פורענות. מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא רבי יוסי אומר אם השלים בתורה יצא.

Let us not forget that the **תפילות** we are discussing were not readily available in book form until after the invention of the printing press (circa 1440 CE). For both the **שליח ציבור** and the congregation, the easiest words to recall from memory were words that followed a poetic form or were borrowed from **תנ״ך**. What has survived are a few examples of the amplification of the **תפילות** that took place in many locations over several centuries by thousands of **שלוחי ציבור**.

TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מ עמ׳ ב׳-Whoever changes the wording of the Brachot from the wording chosen by Chazal does not fulfill his obligation.

Professor Ezra Fleischer-Our analysis of the prayers leads us to conclude that separate sources led to the introduction into the Tephilot of words that follow a prose form and words that follow a poetic form. Our analysis further opens a door to uncovering the origin of some parts of the current fixed prayers and the identification of their source as following the text of the prayer as it was recited by the prayer leader when ten men were present. It is well known that in many early synagogues in Eretz Yisroel there existed side by side two forms of Shemona Esrei, both established at the same time, one that was recited by the individual congregants and one that was recited by the prayer leader. From the time of the birth of poetic liturgy (piyuttim) this is how the services were conducted: the individuals when reciting Shemona Esrei would follow the standard text with which they were familiar. The prayer leader would not repeat out loud the same text but would instead recite a different version, one that was more flowery and frilly and arranged in a poetic form.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף לג׳ עמ׳ ב׳ - A certain reader went down in the presence of Rabbi Hanina and said, O G-d, the great, mighty, terrible, majestic, powerful, awful, strong, fearless, sure and honoured. Rabbi Hanina waited until the reader had finished. When the Reader had finished Rabbi Hanina said to him: Have you concluded all the praise of your Master? Why do we want all this? Even with these three words of praise that we do say, had not Moses our Master mentioned them in the Torah and had not the Men of the Great Assembly come and inserted them in the Tefillah, we should not have been able to mention them, and you say all these and still go on! It is as if an earthly king had a million denarii of gold, and someone praised him as possessing silver ones. Would it not be an insult to him?

ירושלמי מסכת ברכות–דף יב׳ עמ׳ א׳–ב׳–הלכה ה׳-Mishna: In the morning, we recite two Brachot before Kriyat Shema and one after Kriyat Shema. In the night, we recite two Brachot before Kriyat Shema and two after Kriyat Shema, one long and one short. If it was customary to recite a long Bracha, it was not appropriate to shorten it; if it was customary to recite a short Bracha, it was not appropriate to lengthen it. If it was customary to end with a Bracha, it was not appropriate to end without a Bracha; if it was customary to end without a Bracha, it was not appropriate to end with a Bracha. Gemara-these are the Brachot that we lengthen: the Brachot in Shemona Esrei of Rosh Hashona and on Yom Kippur and on a public fast day. We can tell from the wording chosen by the prayer leader to include within his Brachot whether he is a wise man or an

ignorant man. These are the Brachot that we may shorten: the ones recited for performing Mitzvot; before eating fruit, the Zimun Bracha and the last Bracha of Bircat HaMazone after eating. May one lengthen other Brachot? Chizkia said: We can learn the same rule from another Baraita in which we learned: one who lengthens his Bracha has acted inappropriately and one who shortens his Bracha has acted in a praiseworthy manner. Since this Baraita is teaching us that it is inappropriate to lengthen a Bracha, we can conclude that the other Baraita was not teaching us a general rule. It was taught in a different Baraita: the prayer leader must lengthen the Bracha of Go'Ail Yisroel on a public fast day. Does this mean that he should not lengthen the six additional Brachot that are added to Shemona Esrei on a public fast day? Rav Yossi said: You may think that since the Bracha of Go'Ail Yisroel is one of the eighteen Brachot in Shemona Esrei that the prayer leader may not add to it. For that reason the Baraita taught that he may add to the Bracha of Go'Ail Yisroel and to the other Brachot of Shemona Esrei on a public fast day.

משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק ד' משנה ו'-We may not recite less than ten verses whose theme is the kingdom of G-d; less than ten verses whose theme is G-d remembering and less than ten verses whose theme is blowing the Shofar. Rabbi Yochonon Ben Nuri said: it is sufficient if one recites three verses from each theme. We may not choose a verse whose theme is the Kingdom of G-d or the Shofar blowing of punishment. One should begin with verses from the Torah and end with verses from the prophets. Rav Yossi said that if one concludes with a verse from the Torah, he still fulfills his obligation.

SUPPLEMENT

The Archaeology of Judaism

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Editor's Note: *The study of the development of Tefila needs to include the history of* **תפלה**, **בציבור**. *The study of* **תפלה בציבור** *in turn involves the history of the synagogue as an institution. Professor Rachel Hachlili, a Professor of Archaeology, has written extensively on the history of the synagogue. The following is part of a chapter she wrote for the book: Archaeology and World Religion edited by Timothy Insoll. This excerpt was downloaded from www.questia.com.*

Introduction

The archaeology of Judaism is the term meaning art, archaeology and material culture created specifically for the Jewish community. Its form and content were determined by the desires of all classes. It was executed in accordance with the spiritual and secular requirements of local congregations and was employed to satisfy both functional and recreational needs. The archaeology of Judaism, from the Second Temple period to the end of Late Antiquity (late second century BCE—seventh century CE), the period under consideration here, reflects a culture which came into being not in consequence of a nation's isolation but as the result of a necessity to absorb and assimilate, and to compete with, the culture of others. Simultaneously with absorbing and assimilating elements from its Hellenistic, Roman pagan, and later Christian, surroundings, Jewish art and archaeology retained and clung to its fundamentally spiritual basis, and to its essential beliefs and customs.

The worship of objects, whether natural or created by a person, was of significance in ancient times. With the proliferation of polytheistic beliefs the necessity for organised symbols was realised. In the case of Judaism, however, visual art was not an indispensable attribute of worship. On the contrary, a constant battle raged between the Jewish religion, which was expressed in abstract values, and pagan worship, where symbols and tangible objects were used. Although Judaism in principle rejected pagan symbols, they nevertheless penetrated Jewish art and archaeology as decorative motifs, devoid of their original meaning. Jewish art and archaeology found expression in various aspects of Jewish life; secular, sacred, and funerary. It adorned public and private buildings, tombs, sarcophagi, and ossuaries, some of which, such as the synagogue interiors and exteriors and the tomb facades in Jerusalem, were vigorously and splendidly decorated.

This study examines the available data, both in Israel and where relevant in the Diaspora, and aims for comprehensive aspects of interpretation by determining the meaning and significance of the material culture presented. It draws attention to what seems truly

distinctive in the archaeology of Judaism. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the archaeology of Judaism in respect of these main aspects; the synagogue, Jewish burial customs, Jewish symbols and iconography, inscriptions, dietary remains, and the domestic and community environment.

The synagogue

Two important institutions distinguish Judaism: the Jerusalem Temple and the synagogue. Throughout Jewish history both have been dominant in Jewish religious, social, and cultural life. The Jerusalem Temple was the focal point for the Jewish nation, the centre for worship and the place where political, economic and spiritual affairs of world Jewry could be discussed and determined. The Temple of the Second Temple period was conformed with the temple of biblical Israel in its main religious and architectural features.

During the first century BCE—first century CE, the Temple in Jerusalem was still the centre of worship and ritual of the entire Jewish community in Judea and the Diaspora. Here Jews could participate in ceremonies and in the teaching of the Law conducted in the Temple courtyards, and could settle administrative questions in the Temple courts (Safrai 1987). The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was a turning point in the creation of the synagogue, both in architectural terms and in the customs and rituals practised. The response to the catastrophe of 70 CE was the use of Torah reading, study and prayer to supplement the sacrificial cult, so that public worship by study and prayer was now the cult of the synagogue. This new, important, and unique Jewish institution was invented during the Second Temple period (Schürer *et al.* 1979, II: 427-8; Cohen 1984:151-74; Safrai 1987:31-51).

The synagogue institution was a revolutionary concept in terms of worship and faith. First, it was a place of new ways of worship, not only for the privileged few, namely the priests, but for a large, participating community fulfilling the need for individual self-expression. Its aim was to supplement or replace the Temple and its sacrificial cult. The main elements of temple worship, offerings and sacrifices, were not transferred to the synagogue, not even symbolically. Second, it provided a structure to house the Torah shrine, the central place of worship built on to the wall oriented to Jerusalem. Finally, it was also used as an assembly house for communal as well as for religious occasions.

The relationship between Temple and synagogue was further strengthened by the use of related iconography and symbols of the Temple in the architecture and decoration of synagogues (Hachlili 1988: Chapters VII-IX, 1998: Chapters II, VII). The Jewish communities in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora were anxious to preserve and remember the sanctity of the Temple, its sacred vessels, its cult, and its ceremonies, so they used them in the synagogue decoration as well as in the religious services.

Synagogue, *Beth Ha-Knesseth* in Hebrew and *synagoge* in Greek, both mean 'House of Assembly'. The origin of the synagogue is still disputed, and various theories have been

promoted concerning these origins, their date, form, function, and location (Levine 1996, Hachlili 1997, 1998:15-22). As early as the mid-third century BCE, inscriptions mention Egyptian synagogues; Jews in the first century CE believed the synagogue to be a very ancient institution dating back to the time of Moses; Talmudic tradition mentions that there were synagogues during the Babylonian exile. Some scholars assume that the synagogue was established by Diaspora Jews, and maintain that it is likely that the synagogue first developed in Ptolemaic Egypt. Gutmann (1981:3-4) maintains that the emergence of the synagogue was the result of the Hasmonaean revolution in second-century BCE Judaea, when the synagogue, an institution unique to the Pharisees, became a meeting place where prayers and ceremonies were practised by individual Jews. Safrai (1976:912-13, 918) sees the synagogue as developing from the public Torah-reading assemblies at the time of Ezra (fifth century BCE).

The archaeological sources for synagogue origins are to be found in the assembly halls of the Second Temple period (Hachlili 1997a). Following the destruction of the Temple they were adapted to function also as places of local worship in addition to their previous function of community centre, becoming symbols of the uniqueness of the Jewish community. Jewish aspirations in the Diaspora for a separate identity and community life resulted in the construction of assembly structures in Egypt and Babylon during the Second Temple period; for example, concurrently at Delos a dwelling house was used for assembly purposes. These local centres probably existed as community assembly halls where services would be conducted on Sabbaths and feast days (Hachlili 1988:138-40). The Zealot assembly structures at the fortresses of Masada, Herodium and Gamla probably served as local assembly halls during the years of the revolt against Rome, a time when it was extremely difficult for the congregation to travel to Jerusalem to participate in Temple worship.

Two recently uncovered structures at Jericho (Netzer *et al.* 1999) and Kiryat Sefer (Magen *et al.* 1999:27-30) are also deemed to be synagogues of this period. During the time these structures served as small community centres, worship may have been conducted in them, even though no convincing evidence has yet been found. Such structures may have had a focal point in the centre of the hall, which would explain the function of the benches lining the walls: the congregation would have faced inwards. The excavated structures are assumed by scholars to be synagogues because of the circumstantial evidence of similarity in architectural plan, hence in function, even though no actual proof has been uncovered. Common architectural features are (a) their construction as oblong halls; (b) the division of the hall by rows of columns into a central nave and surrounding aisles; (c) stepped benches erected along all four walls of the hall facing the centre. The structures also share a similar period for their construction, namely the first century CE (although those in Gamla and Jericho may have been erected by the end of the first century BCE). The pre-70 CE structures conceivably had didactic functions as well as being centres for assembly and for the community, but they were not places of cult or worship. As long as the Temple existed in Jerusalem, the Jews were careful to avoid any competition with it. Epigraphic and literary

sources are also informative, such as the Theodotus inscription from Mount Ophel which records a synagogue in Jerusalem (Frey 1952: no. 1404). Josephus and the New Testament (*Against Apion* 2, 175; *Acts* 15:21), also attest to the existence of synagogues in the first century CE which were centres of Scripture reading and studies.

After the destruction of the Temple, the sages established the 'act' of compulsory prayer, a new institution in Jewish life, invented for social and educational reasons (Cohen 1984:165, Fleisher 1991:28 and n. 9; on the sanctity of the synagogue see Fine 1997:61-79). This imposition of prayer on the Jewish community as a law was one of the most important in the history of the nation. It not only mitigated the theological calamity, it also consolidated the dispersed survivors as a unique national and religious unit (Fleisher 1991:34-5). The synagogue building began functioning now as an assembly hall for the local congregation as well as a spiritual, religious, and social centre; it was not a substitute for, nor did it replace the Temple, but it served only local needs.

Synagogues of Late Antiquity operated as a combination of congregational assembly hall and, more importantly, a place for reading the Torah, for obligatory prayer, and for instituting and teaching religious law, the *halacha.* The congregation inside the hall prayed facing the Torah shrine, that is, facing Jerusalem and the Temple. Thus the distinctive feature of the later synagogue emerges, the Torah shrine built on the Jerusalem oriented wall, which determined the synagogue orientation and which symbolised the sanctity of the place, being a reminder of the Temple.

The focus of synagogal activities, according to literary sources, consisted of reading the Torah, the Scriptures. This was the primary purpose of the synagogue for its congregation, who participated both by reading and by paying attention to other readers. Regular prayer services were held on the Sabbaths and the feast days. Daily prayers involving a large number of worshippers were established only after the destruction of the Second Temple (Safrai 1976:922-7, 942-3, Fleisher 1991:28-30). The synagogue generally belonged to a local community and was governed by three representatives: the *archisynagogus,* the president; the receiver of alms, who was a civic official, and the minister *(hazzan).* The *archisynagogus* managed religious and financial affairs (Rajak and Noy 1993) and the *hazzan* was the executive officer in charge of the practical details of running the synagogue. He was the master of ceremonies, and a paid employee (Safrai 1976:933 ff., Schürer *et al.* 1979 II: 427-39). Construction of a synagogue would be decided upon by the heads of the community and financed by private and public donations. Numerous dedicatory Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek inscriptions found in synagogue excavations indicate that the finance for the erection of the structure and its decoration as well as for repairs, remodelling, or rebuilding came from private and public donors, usually Jewish.

The synagogue building in Late Antiquity functioned as an assembly hall for the local Jewish congregation as well as a spiritual, religious, and social centre. It served the community for fund-raising, charitable collections, congregational affairs, and as a type of court of public interests. Institutions adjoining the synagogue included schools and, in

annexes, hostels, guest houses, and residences for synagogue officials. Sometimes ritual baths *(miqvaoth)* were also built on to it or close by. Its use as a community assembly centre determined its architectural plan which took the form of a large hall divided only by supporting columns, and with benches around it. The many different architectural styles uncovered verify that they were not built according to a stereotype, nor were they designed according to an authoritative law; no universal or uniform synagogue plan existed. Opinions vary considerably as to the evolution of synagogue architecture. Several attempts have been made to categorise and explain the different types and the divergence in style of the synagogues scattered throughout many regions (Hachlili 1988:141-233, 1998:14-95).

Some features encountered in most of the excavated and surveyed synagogues in the Land of Israel direct attention to an originality and individuality in their plans (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). These features include the Torah shrine, the triple portal, the gallery, as well as various methods of ornamentation of the facade, interior, and floors. The highly ornamented facade exterior, characteristic of the Galilean and Golan synagogues (Figure 4.3), is an additional original feature. Differences in plans among contemporary synagogues are usually due to regional and local traditions and local priorities as well as fashion. Changes in synagogue designs probably came about as a result of changes in theological concepts. Whereas Galilean synagogues indicate a preference for entrances and Torah shrines both on the same Jerusalem-oriented wall, in other localities the Torah shrine is on the Jerusalem-oriented wall and the entrance is on another.

From its inception, the Torah shrine became a permanent fixture in the synagogue building. Built on the Jerusalem-oriented wall, the Torah shrine was the receptacle for the Ark of the Scrolls and took the form or structure of aedicula, niche, or apse. It was the physical symbol of the direction of the reading of the Torah and prayer. Chronologically, the aedicula is the earliest type of Torah shrine, already in existence by the second century CE, and the most popular type in Galilean and Golan synagogues. Though constructed for use as a permanent structure, it was an appendage built on to the original internal wall only after the synagogue building had been constructed. In the case of synagogues which possessed two flanking aediculae, these seem to have had separate functions. One aedicula served to house the Ark of the Scrolls, and the other may have held the menorah. An important stage in the evolution of the Torah shrine form is the later development of the apse, during the later fifth and sixth centuries. The apse is a dominant architectural feature in the synagogue, functioning as the container for the Ark and possibly the menoroth. Typological differences in the Torah shrines should be attributed to local preferences, the popular vogue, or historical development.

Scholarly opinion differs concerning the origin of the synagogue building plan and its sources of inspiration, such as the Hellenistic basilica, the pagan triclinium, or other public structures. It appears most likely that synagogue structures were a synthesis and accumulation of a variety of plans and architectural features which were themselves influenced by traditional customs as well as by contemporary fashion, together with the

Jewish congregation's social and religious needs. The rich ornamentation of the facade, walls, floors, and other areas of the synagogue was influenced by contemporary architectural styles in secular and religious buildings in the Land of Israel and Syria. A combination of all these elements resulted in a house of worship functionally planned and lavishly decorated by the Jewish congregation for itself. Utilising previously constituted tenets within their own tradition, the Jews also adapted various elements of architecture and art from their neighbours. In this way, they succeeded in creating aesthetic and monumental structures which harmonised with the spirit of Judaism in the Land of Israel.

The discovery of Diaspora synagogue buildings which have been surveyed or excavated in Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, North Africa, Bulgaria, and Spain indicates that they do not have much in common architecturally; in fact, they rarely have similar features among themselves or to synagogues in the Land of Israel. Most of the Diaspora synagogues had several stages of use, but most of them were either built in the third and fourth centuries or flourished at that time (Rutgers 1998:97-135, Hachlili 1998:14-95). The Delos (Greece) and Ostia (Italy) synagogues were probably the earliest Diaspora synagogues, whilst the Dura Europos synagogue is dated to the middle of the third century. The dating of the end of some synagogues is determined by their subsequent conversion into churches, probably in the fifth century.

The plans seem to be local and not part of established types. However, there were two factors that determined the architectural plan of each of the Diaspora synagogues. The first was the local artistic and architectural traditions and fashions. But second, several circumstances peculiar to the Diaspora synagogues seem to have exerted some influences that ultimately determined their plans. For example, the Dura Europos synagogue was a dwelling that was subsequently converted into an assembly hall. Some synagogues were built as part of a public complex in a prominent site in the city, for instance, the Sardis synagogue, which was part of the monumental Roman bath and gymnasium complex. An important fact in the fragmentary architectural survival of some Diaspora synagogues was the intentional converting of the synagogue into a church. An instance of this is provided by the Apamea (Syria) synagogue at the end of the fourth century. Characteristic features of the Diaspora synagogue include a forecourt, a main hall, which was not divided by columns; it was usually a hall with a Torah shrine, elders' seat, and sometimes benches. The main feature and focal point of the Diaspora synagogues was also the Torah shrine which consisted of the same three forms, aedicula, niche, and apse, built on the wall oriented towards Jerusalem.

In summary, it appears that the construction of most of the synagogues in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora took local topography into consideration; their orientation, however, was determined by the Jerusalem-oriented Torah shrine structure. Consequently, the differences in synagogue orientation depend on local traditions or fashions regarding the location of the Torah shrine. The synagogue was not only a centre of worship and religious life but also a community centre, holding educational, social, and financial activities.