

Introduction: Devotion to and Worship in Jerusalem's Temple

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A few brief reflections will help readers comprehend the following chapters. The Temple was indeed the center of worship for Jews both within and outside the Holy Land, but it was much more than the center for worship.¹ In Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the three primary biblical languages, the verb “ascend” defines one’s approach to the Holy City and the House of God, the Temple. While the final journey sometimes was downward topographically, the journey had always been considered upward and the overriding concept was always to ascend to the hill of the Lord. In his chapter, Leen Ritmeyer helps us imagine the Temple known to Jews before 70 CE when it was burned by Roman soldiers at the end of the first great Jewish revolt against Rome (66–74). Ritmeyer has also helped many visualize the Temple in Jesus’ day in many publications in which his drawings have appeared, and in his attractively illustrated *The Quest: Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem*.²

A superb study of the Temple Hillel that Jesus knew is “The Rebuilding of the Second Temple and Its Precinct,” by the masterful Ehud Netzer, who finds that Herod the Great was not the only one who built the Temple, as Josephus says, as “the most glorious of all his” building projects (*Ant* 15.380), but a king who was a gifted architect who became involved in his works.³ Josephus (c. 37–100 CE) supplies a description of the Temple, and we know assuredly he was an eyewitness (but no eyewitness can be unbiased). Josephus was not only from a priestly family but an Aaronite (a descendant of Aaron) who officiated in the

1. See C.T.R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Source Book* (London: Routledge, 1996).

2. Leen Ritmeyer, *The Quest: Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006). One of the best guides to Jerusalem today, in light of archaeology and biblical sources, is the 1266-page work by Max Küchler, *Jerusalem: Ein Handbuch und Studienreiseführer zur Heiligen Stadt*, Orte und Landschaften der Bibel 4.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

3. Ehud Netzer, “The Rebuilding of the Second Temple and Its Precinct,” in *The Architecture of Herod the Great Builder* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2008), 137–78.

Temple. He describes the Temple in his *War* 5.184–227, *Antiquities* 15.410–20, and *Against Apion* 2.102–109.⁴

Thus, in many ways Josephus's works are the most important sources. The other three sources are the New Testament writings (which are clearly confessional), archaeology (but the Temples of Solomon and of Herod were razed to the ground by conquering armies),⁵ and Mishnah *Middot* (which may in places be based on an eyewitness's memory).⁶ Martin Goodman's "The Temple in First-Century CE Judaism" is a masterful and succinct survey of the Temple and its importance from the time of Herod the Great, through the time of the apostate Julian, who wished to rebuild the Temple in 362 CE, to Nahmanides.⁷

CENTER OF THE WORLD

Not far from Jerusalem, and especially from the Mount of Olives on the east, pilgrimages could see the dominating presence of the Temple Mount (*Har Habayit*). The presence of the Sanctuary and especially the Temple was signaled by large pillars of smoke rising from the sacrifices during the day and plumes of fire during the evening and night. The mystical sight was remembered by an eyewitness, Josephus:

Now the outward face of the Temple in its front . . . was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight. Thus, at the first rising of the sun, it reflected back a very fiery splendor, causing those who

4. See Lee I. Levine, "Josephus' Description of the Jerusalem Temple," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essay in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers, *Studia Post-Biblica* 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 233–46. Also see R. Bauckham, "Josephus' Account of the Temple in *Contra Apionem* 2.102–109," in *Studies in Josephus' Contra Apionem*, ed. L.H. Feldman and J.R. Levison (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 327–47.

5. Still valuable is N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984). For those who read modern Hebrew, Joseph Patrich's work is invaluable: *Hidushim ba-arkhe'ologyah shel Yerushalayim u-sevivoteha: Kovets mehkarim* (Jerusalem: Rashut ha'atikot, Merhav Yerushalayim, 2007).

6. Alfred Edersheim (1825–1889) wrote an erudite description of worship in the Herodian Temple. The massive 828-page volume is full of important information but much needs correcting in light of archaeological discoveries and the more conservative estimate of the reliability of oral traditions preserved in the Mishnah over one hundred years after the burning of the Temple in 70 CE. See Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as they were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1874). As the title indicates, Edersheim was born a Jew and became convinced that Jesus from Nazareth was the Messiah; many critics may imagine this conversion may have influenced some pages in his work.

7. Martin Goodman, "The Temple in First Century CE Judaism," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 459–68.

forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own (blinding) rays. But this Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow. For, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white. On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it. (*War* 5.222–23)⁸

During the centuries from the Exile in Babylon in the sixth century BCE to the first century CE, Jews lauded the Holy City and declared Jerusalem to be the center of the earth. Such claims and perceptions loom prominently in Ezekiel 38:12, *1 Enoch* 26:1, and *Jubilees* 8:19. They evolve from earlier poetic visions, notably Psalm 87:

On the holy mount stands the city he founded;
the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God. (Ps 87:1–3 NRSV)

PILGRIMAGE

The Torah, God's Word, demanded that every Jew make a pilgrimage to the Temple. Three pilgrimages were required each year to the Holy City (Deut. 16:16–17, Exod. 23:14).⁹ Faithful Jews must travel to the Holy City to worship in the Temple at Pesach (Passover), fifty days later at Shavuot (Pentecost or Feast of Weeks), and in the autumn at Sukkot (Tabernacles or the Festival of Booths). During the time of Jesus, the regulation was liberalized. Those in the Diaspora should make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime. Philo traveled, at least once, from Alexandria to Jerusalem to fulfill this law. Jews living in Galilee or far away from the Temple should make the pilgrimage once a year. In his chapter, Mordechai Aviam clarifies how and in what ways Galilean Judaism was linked socially and symbolically with the Temple. Pilgrims clearly affected the economy of Jerusalem.¹⁰

8. William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 707–08. This most popular of translations of Josephus's books was translated long ago; Whiston lived from 1667 to 1752. I have capitalized "temple" in Whiston's translation and adapted his archaic English for modern readers.

9. See Charlesworth and D.T. Olson, "Prayers for Festivals (1Q34–1Q34bis; 4Q507–509)," in the Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scroll Project Series, vol. 4A, pp. 46–105.

10. See Martin Goodman, "The Pilgrimage Economy of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York:

BANKING FUNCTIONS

The Treasury in the Temple also performed banking functions, receiving donations as well as the required taxes and tithes. The Temple Tax of a half-shekel demanded of each male every year insured that money flowed into the Temple treasury from all over the known world, from Adiabene in the east to Spain in the west. Other gifts insured outstanding wealth within the Temple, including Herod the Great's lavish edifices and spoils of many wars (*Ant* 15.402). The fee for entering the Temple increased the deposits in the bank and demanded moneychangers made so famous by the Gospels.¹¹ Other gifts include the Nicanor Gate and the Golden Menorah (Lamp) given by Queen Helena of Adiabene (probably about a decade after Jesus' death). The Sanctuary was richly endowed; for example, except for the Nicanor Gate, all gates were covered with gold and the bronzes "shone like gold" (*mMiddot* 2:3).

ARCHITECTURE

The Temple Mount, the walls of the Sanctuary, the gates, the stoas, and the monumental structures within the Sanctuary, especially the Temple, were Herod the Great's "most glorious" achievement (*Ant* 15.380). One Jew, who lived more than a century before Herod, imagined an eschatological Temple that would be, even more than Solomon's edifice, "great and spacious," indeed "a lofty building" (1 *En.* 89:50). One tradition would never change; it was established by Solomon when he dedicated the First Temple:

[W]hen a foreigner comes and prays toward this house,
 then hear in heaven your dwelling place,
 and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you,
 so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you,
 as do your people Israel,
 and so that they may know
 that your name has been invoked

Continuum, 1999), 69–76. Also see S. Safrai, *Pilgrimage at the Time of the Second Temple*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1985) [in Hebrew].

11. The abuse of the moneychangers in the Temple is supported by warnings in Rabbinics about the abuses of the high priestly families and Josephus's report that the High Priest Ananias sent his slaves to confiscate the tithes reserved for the priests; they were so successful that some of the priests starved to death (*Ant* 20.205–07). See the helpful discussion by Randall Buth and Brian Kvasnica, "Temple Authorities and Tithe Evasion," in *Jesus' Last Week*, ed. R. Steven Notley et al., Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 53–80.

on this house that I have built.
 (1 Kings 8:42-43 NRSV [my arrangement])

Beginning in the tenth century BCE and continuing until at least 70 CE, Israelites and Jews confessed that God dwells on earth in the Jerusalem Temple, “the House of the Lord.”

Herod began his expansion of the Temple by preparing one thousand wagons and ten thousand skilled artisans, and one thousand priestly garments to be worn by priests who were taught masonry, carpentry, and related crafts (*Ant* 15.390). He first removed the old foundations of the Temple Mount, as we know from Josephus (*Ant* 15.391) and from excavations to the west and south of the Temple Walls. The Temple doors extended to the roof and were adorned with embroidered veils, flowers of purple, and elegantly chiseled pillars. Herod built massive cloisters on all sides of the interior of the Sanctuary. The most elaborate is the Royal Stoa inside the southern wall. Note the description by Josephus, who spent many years in the Sanctuary:

This cloister had pillars that stood in four rows one over against the other all along, for the fourth row was interwoven into the wall, which [also was built of stone]; and the thickness of each pillar was such, that three men might, with their arms extended, fathom it round, and join their hands again, while its length was twenty-seven feet, with a double spiral at its basis; and the number of all the pillars [in that court] was an hundred and sixty-two. The capitals of the columns were sculptured after the Corinthian style,¹² and caused amazement [to the spectators], by reason of the grandeur of the whole. (*Ant* 15.413-14; W. Whitson's translation)

Inside the cloisters or porticoes, the Sanctuary constituted many areas. Strict barriers portioned off the sections of the Sanctuary so that as one moved from the Outer Courtyard in the south northwards into the Inner Courtyard (which was 500 cubits square; see Ezek. 42:20 and *mMiddot* 2:1), through the Court of Women and towards the Temple, the level of sanctity increased significantly. Finally, the Jewish worshipper could see the area in which the High Priest alone could enter and only on the Day of Atonement.

Artists, engineers, masons, carpenters, wood and metal artisans, and gifted workmen frequented the Temple, especially during its massive rebuilding and

12. My rendering of Whitson's translation: “The chapters were made with sculptures after the Corinthian order . . .”

expansion under Herod the Great and his descendants. Herod extended the Sanctuary southward and westward and perhaps northward. Most likely, most artisans were Jews from many areas of the world. The architecture of the Temple was both elegant and monumental; it was almost always a political statement: We are Jews. We are important. We were chosen by the one and only God.

The Sanctuary had many divisions. Proceeding inward, purified Jews passed through the outer court or the Court of the Gentiles to the Temple. A balustrade warned Gentiles not to proceed further; after that was a raised partition called “Soreg.” Within the Temple were more divisions: the Court of the Women, then further inside, the Court of the Men of Israel, and the Court of the Priests. In this sacred area were the altar of incense, the golden lampstand, the table for bread offering, and the place for slaughtering animals. Above this courtyard to the west was the Porch or Ulam (אולם); it separated the Court of the Priests from the Heikal (היכל), the interior of the sacred area. The Holy of Holies, or Debir (דביר), was the most sacred area. In this area, the Ark of the Covenant once stood.

Eupolemus (ca. second century BCE) wrote a description of the Temple and claimed the monumental work had been done by Solomon. It is possible that Eupolemus’s description helps us comprehend the architectural magnificence of the Sanctuary and Temple in Jesus’ day. On the one hand, Herod’s builders may have been influenced by Eupolemus’s account. On the other hand, his account may have been altered by eyewitnesses of Herod’s Temple. His description was transmitted through Alexander Polyhistor’s *On the Jews* (first century BCE), to Eusebius (c. 260–340). Note how Eupolemus’s account of the Sanctuary and Temple harmonizes with, but also adds details not found in, Josephus’s works:

He also made two bronze pillars and overlaid them with pure gold, a finger in thickness. The pillars were as tall as the sanctuary, and each pillar was ten cubits in circumference. He stood them one on the right of the House (i.e. the Temple) and one on the left. He also made ten golden lampstands, each weighing ten talents; he took as a model the lampstand placed by Moses in the tent of witnessing. He stood them on each side of the sacred enclosure, some on the right, some on the left. He also made seventy golden lamps so that seven might burn upon each lampstand. He also built the gates of the Temple and adorned them with gold and silver and covered them with coffered work of cedar and cypress. He also made a portico on the northern side of the Temple, and supported it with forty-eight bronze pillars.

He also fashioned a bronze laver, twenty cubits in length, twenty cubits in width, and five cubits in height. He also made a brim upon it, which extended outward one cubit over the base for the priests to stand upon and bathe their feet and wash their hands. He also made the twelve legs of the laver of cast metal and of the height of a man; and he stood them at the back end under the laver, at the right of the altar of sacrifice. He also made a bronze platform two cubits in height near the laver for the king to stand upon whenever he prays so that he might be visible to the Jewish people. He also built the altar of sacrifice twenty cubits by twenty cubits and twelve cubits in height. He also made two bronze rings wrought like chains and stood them upon stands, which were twenty cubits in height above the sanctuary, and they cast a shadow over the entire Temple. He hung upon each network four hundred bronze bells, a talent in weight, and he made all the networks in order to ring the bells and scare away the birds that they might not settle upon the Temple or build a nest upon the coffered works of the gates and porticoes and defile the Temple with their excrement. (*apud* Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.26.1. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2.869–70; translated by F. Fallon)

Eupolemus's account does not suit Solomon's Temple; it also does not apply to the Hasmonean, or pre-Herodian, Temple. Thus, F. Fallon rightly suggests that Eupolemus's description "may derive from the Second Temple," that is, the Herodian Temple (*OTP* 2.869 note m). Some descriptions may derive from the Hebrew Bible, but other traditions seem to be enriched by eyewitnesses of Herod's Temple. Eupolemus's information must no longer be ignored in discerning the Temple Jesus knew; of course, the accounts in the Mishnah and apocryphal works are not to be taken without careful evaluation, either. The most important rabbinic work regarding the Temple is Mishnah *Middot*. This tractate preserves the dimensions and descriptions of the Temple but is not found in the Tosephta (the "Supplement" to the Mishnah).

The recent astounding archaeological discoveries are outside the Sanctuary and part of the Temple Mount.¹³ The massive stones that Roman soldiers pushed from the top of the Sanctuary to their present location during the destruction of 70 CE can be seen today where they fell.¹⁴ These relics demonstrate the fact that nothing of Herod's Temple itself remains. Evident

13. See plate 20 in Ehud Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod the Great Builder* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2008).

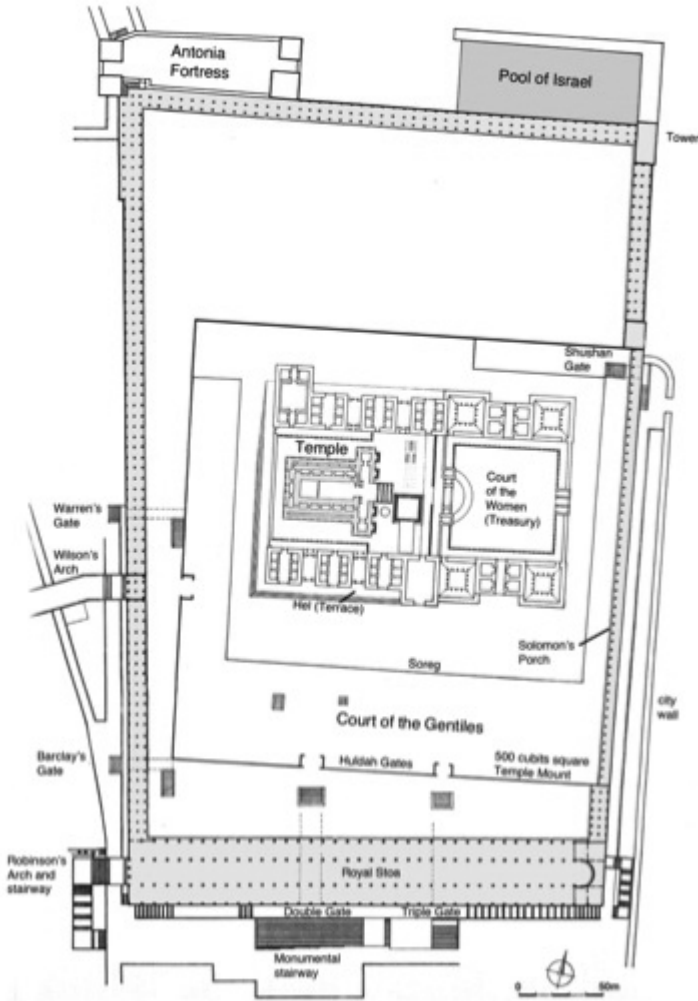


Fig. 0.1. Leen Ritmeyer's drawing of the Sanctuary and where he imagines the Shushan Gate was located. Reprinted with the courtesy of Leen Ritmeyer.

are many *miqva'ot* (ritual immersion baths) near the entrances and beneath the houses to the Western Wall, including the massive *miqva'ot* in Bethzatha to the north and the Pool of Siloam much farther to the south of the Sanctuary.

14. The author of *Pseudo-Philo (LAB)* describes the stones, the altar, and the offerings. It is precarious to use his descriptions for the Temple Jesus knew because he is imagining Kenaz and Solomon; see D. J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo 26" in *OTP* 2.336-41.

Still visible are the outlines of gates on the walls of the Temple Mount, but only in the south and west.¹⁵ They can be seen, or imagined, as one walks clockwise from the eastern section of the southern wall. They are the triple gate, the eastern edge of the double gate (that some think is “the Beautiful Gate”),¹⁶ Robinson’s Gate that can be only imagined above Robinson’s Arch, Barclay’s Gate, a gate above Wilson’s Arch that is no longer visible (priests would walk into the Sanctuary on this bridge from the Upper City), Warren’s Gate, the Tadi Gate and the Sheep Gate on the north (exact locations are debated), and the Shushan Gate (mentioned in the Mishnah but there is now no evidence of it).¹⁷ Most of these gates do not bear the original names; they bear the name of the nineteenth-century Europeans who discovered them.

The compilers of the Mishnah in *Middot* 1:3 name five Temple gates: the two Hulda Gates in the south, the Qiponos Gate on the west, the Tadi Gate on the north, and the Eastern Gate (Shushan Gate, through which the High Priest leads the red heifer to the Mount of Olives). The Mishnah was codified after 200 CE and should not be taken literally, even though there is intermittently reliable oral tradition preserved, since it conflicts both with the descriptions of Josephus, who knew the Temple intimately, and archaeological discoveries. Most likely, the Mishnah preserves descriptions of the pre-Herodian Temple, and this hypothesis makes sense since Mishnah *Middot* often parallels, and even quotes, the descriptions of the Temple in the Pentateuch, Kings, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Chronicles.¹⁸

Especially impressive today are the massive retaining walls, including the Western Wall (also called the “Wailing Wall”), with its beautifully chiseled and embossed Herodian ashlar (polished stones with an elegant border). These

15. See the definitive publication by Eilat Mazar, *The Walls of the Temple Mount* (Jerusalem: Shoham Academic Research and Publication, 2011). As Netzer warned, the gates into the Temple Mount are “clear with regard to the southern and western sides but somewhat hazy with regard to the northern and eastern ones.” See Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod the Great Builder*, 171. I am deeply indebted to Ehud for years of discussing our shared passion of understanding Herod and the massive buildings and cities he created.

16. See the claims and more especially the elaborate drawings and photographs of the Double Gate in figs. 36, 39, 40, and 41 in Roger Liebi, *The Messiah in the Temple*, trans. Timothy Capes (Düsseldorf: Christlicher Medien Vertrieb, 2012). This volume will be unattractive to some specialists because of its faith-based discussions.

17. For images of Robinson’s Arch, Wilson’s Arch, Warren’s Gate, and Barclay’s Gate, see Liebi, *The Messiah in the Temple*, 54–59. For the Shushan Gate, see Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod the Great Builder*, 175.

18. See the professional drawing of the Pre-Herodian Square Temple Mount by Leen Ritmeyer in *The Quest: Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 185.

archaeological discoveries often prove that Josephus's descriptions of Jerusalem and the Temple before 70 CE are not mere hyperbole; sometimes they are astoundingly accurate. One stone in the western retaining wall weighs approximately 570 tons and is 13.7 meters long, 3.5 meters high, and about 4.5 meters wide.¹⁹

TEMPLE POLICE

The thousands of priests and the treasures demanded a Temple police. They also controlled the crowds that could become mobs during the festivals, especially Pesach (Passover), when Jerusalem frequently tripled in size. As we know from the history of Jesus, charismatics were attracted to the Temple cult; and these free-thinking, powerful individuals clashed with any institutional group, such as priests. The Temple police not only guarded the High Priest but they guided many who needed to know where to go within the Sanctuary. Most likely, they also monitored those who entered the Sanctuary, not permitting Gentiles to cross the balustrade or “latticed railing” (m*Middot* 2:3), and prohibited Jews from continuing further into the Sanctuary if they were a *mamzer* (someone who could not prove full and authentic Jewish lineage), or not healthy, or had not entered a *miqveh* (a ritual immersion bath for purifications of Jews), or had been in too close contact with Gentiles, treated the priests without honor, or wore inappropriate garb. These guards protected the purity of the Sanctuary from the danger of pollution from any who were not well, including especially the blind, the lame, the leper, and the *mamzer*. These guards arrested first Jesus, according to John, and then later Paul, according to Acts. Finally, among their other duties, the Temple guards sought to keep Roman soldiers at a distance.

WORSHIP CENTER

The most important dimension of the Temple was worship. From all parts of the known world, Jews affirmed that Jerusalem's Temple was the only place to worship and was the abode of the LORD God. As Martin Goodman states, the unparalleled importance of the Temple to most Jews around the world is placarded by the willingness of Alexandrians, Galileans, and Judeans to sacrifice themselves, and their children, for its sanctity between 38 and 40 CE.²⁰ Moreover, King Agrippa I risked losing prestige, power, and even his own

19. For a color image of this massive stone, see www.IJCO.org “Image Gallery” [double click on it] and Liebi, *The Messiah in the Temple*, 60.

20. Goodman, “The Temple in First Century CE Judaism,” 459.



Fig. 02. A large mikveh near the Temple. Reprinted by courtesy of Alexander Schick.

life, when he sought to persuade Gaius Caligula (Emperor from 37–41 CE) to rescind an order in the winter of 39 and 40 to send an army to Jerusalem to erect his effigy in the Temple so he might be declared a god.²¹ The resulting calamities were averted by the assassination of the mad emperor on 24 January 41 CE,²² and the Temple continued its supreme importance. The worldwide solidarity among most Jews was summarized by E. P. Sanders, who signaled the “payment of the temple tax by Diaspora Jews, pilgrimage to the temple from abroad, world-wide alarm at the threat of Gaius to have his statue erected in the temple . . . and many other points.”²³

The Torah demanded that the Jerusalem Temple was the only legitimate place to worship and sacrifice; other rival temples such as that at Leontopolis were insignificant in contrast.²⁴ The Samaritans, strictly speaking, never had

21. See Philo (*Legatio* 33 [248]) and Josephus (*War* 2.188–92 and *Ant* 18.262).

22. See the scholarly summary of these events in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. –A.D. 135)*, ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar et al., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), 388–96.

23. E.P. Sanders, “Common Judaism and the Temple,” in *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 47.

a “temple”; they sacrificed lambs in a sacred area that was cut out of the ground. Greek and Roman authors often cast aspersions on the idiosyncratic Jewish customs, but they understood and even admired the Jewish fondness for and dedication to the Temple (viz., Tacitus, *Histories* 5.8.1). Martin Goodman rightly points out that thanks to Josephus, who knew “the cult from the inside,” and the trustworthy reports or comments in the New Testament, Mishnah, and Tosephta, the Temple and its cult—asceticism, music, dance, sacrifice, incense, offerings, and elegance—is “much better known than any other temple system in the ancient world precisely because these later Jews and Christians preserved so much evidence about the way that the Temple operated.”²⁵ The Temple was destroyed in Jerusalem, but no one could destroy its memory or its ability to shape eternal traditions.

The Temple also needed animals for slaughter, including bulls, lambs, and pigeons. The offering of “the first fruits” demanded that produce be brought to the Temple, and that required transportation, roads, and storage facilities. Wood was a necessary commodity for sacrificial fires, and the Temple had rooms reserved for storing the logs. Incense was demanded for reverence and the required offerings. Consecutive stages of holiness demanded upkeep, cleaning, and all requirements of maintenance. (Philo of Alexandria, who made at least one pilgrimage to the Temple, remarked about the impressive cleanliness in the Sanctuary [*Spec. Laws* 1].) The cult created and stimulated special language and an elaborate symbolism.

IMAGINING JESUS ENTERING THE TEMPLE TO TEACH AND WORSHIP

Many interested readers of the following chapters would benefit from an informed, imaginative journey up and into the Temple by devout Jews, like Hillel and Jesus. Thus, in light of archaeological discoveries and texts, especially the ancient reflections in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Josephus’s *Antiquities*, and Mishnah *Middot*, and profiting from conversations with great archaeologists, such as those contributing to this symposium, I boldly share my own imagination of what it was like to climb the sheer steps into the Sanctuary and move toward the interior where the Temple rose majestically.

Almost always, pilgrims approached the Sanctuary from the west or the south. As Ehud Netzer suggested,²⁶ the main entrance façade of the Temple complex was in the south, with the Hulda Gates (both the triple and double

24. The Leontopolis temple was closed by the Roman about 72 CE. (Josephus, *War* 7.420–32).

25. Goodman, “The Temple in First Century CE Judaism,” 459.

26. Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod*, 171.

gates were named after this Old Testament prophetess [2 Kgs. 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22]). Perhaps this desired approach to the Temple was ancient, reflecting the traditions that associated David and Solomon with the Ophel. It was certainly more attractive because of the numerous *mikva'ot in situ* and the large plazas near the southern wall that accommodated the masses as they prepared to ascend into the hill of the Lord.

To better appreciate the chapters that follow, originally presented as public lectures, let us imagine what transpires when Jesus—or Hille!—walks from the southern section of Jerusalem and up into the Sanctuary. According to John 9, Jesus heals a blind man and tells him to go to the Pool of Siloam. Perhaps Jesus also went to that Pool to immerse himself so he could enter the Sanctuary. He most likely puts on more appropriate clothes, conceivably white linen similar to that worn by Essenes and the high priests (*mMiddot* 5:4). He then turns around and heads northward to ascend the monumental stairway (the width of which remains uncertain, since a large portion is today hidden beneath houses). Moving through the open plaza, he ascends into the Triple Gate. Then he climbs the interior steep steps, most likely looking up to admire the richly decorated ceilings. Once he passes under the Royal Portico, he enters again into the blinding sunlight.

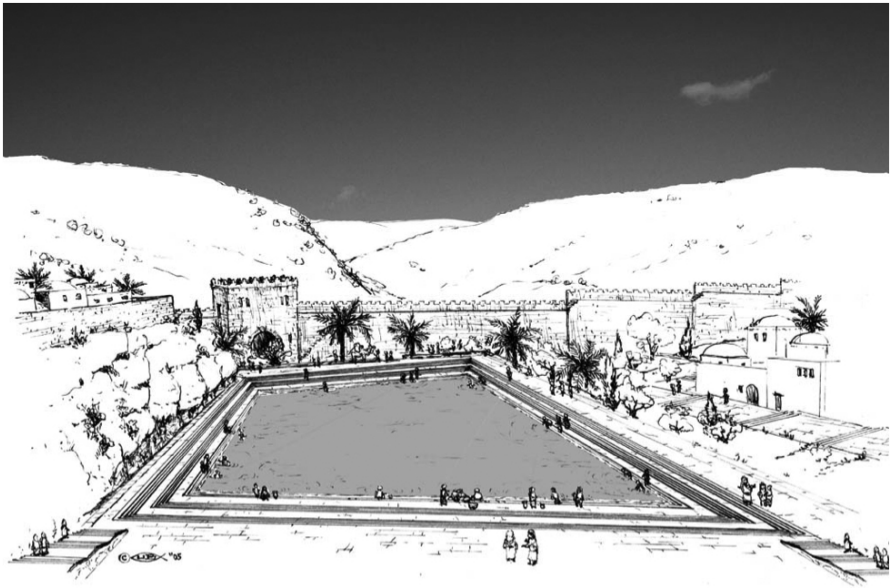


Fig. 0.3. An artist's rendering of the Pool of Siloam, looking south. Courtesy of Alexander Schick.

He moves northward through the Outer Courtyard (or Court of the Gentiles) and enters the sacred square of the older Sanctuary. He now leaves behind the southern extension of the Temple Mount, designed by Herod, even though the northern portions of it may have been constructed by the Hasmoneans. He passes through the two-foot-ten-inch balustrade²⁷ that, in Greek (and Latin),²⁸ warned Gentiles they were “liable to the death penalty” if they proceeded further.²⁹ Most likely, this warning allowed the Temple priests to deliver the desired punishment.³⁰ According to a speech by Titus, recorded by Josephus, the Roman governors allowed Jews to put to death anyone who transgressed the balustrade, even a Roman (*War* 6.124–26).

Apparently, there were additional *mikva’ot* within the Outer Courtyard in which Jews could immerse themselves, if they had become inadvertently impure.³¹ For the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, a *miqveh* was constructed on the roof of the Salt-Parva Chamber that was north of the altar (*mMiddot* 5:3). Any priest who had a nocturnal emission would proceed through a passage below the buildings to “the immersion room” (*mMiddot* 1:9).

In the Inner Courtyard, Jesus heads towards his favorite area, Solomon’s Portico, which extended along the eastern edge of the Sanctuary. Perhaps he pauses in this elegant portico for some hours, delivering one of the speeches that are located there by John (John 5:2; 10:23; cf. Acts 3:11 and 5:12). Eventually, he heads westward and through the Eastern Gate of the Temple complex and into the Court of the Women, which denoted that women could not proceed further into the Temple. Jesus moves consecutively past the Chamber of Wood on the right and the Chamber of Nazirites on the left (*mMiddot* 2:5).

In the center of the Court of the Women is the treasury. Jesus halts and remembers how he had sat nearby and heard a widow drop two small

27. The Hebrew name is “Soreg”; see *mMiddot* 2:3.

28. Josephus, *War* 5.193–94; 6.124; *Ant* 15.417.

29. See the image of the Greek inscription and discussion of the balustrade in Ritmeyer, *The Quest*, 346–47.

30. On the question of administering the death penalty by Jewish authorities in Jesus’ time, including crucifixion that was practiced by Alexander Jannaeus, described in the *Nahum Pesher*, and mirrored in the *Temple Scroll*, see Geza Vermes, “Was Crucifixion a Jewish Penalty?” *Standpoint* (April 2013): 66–69. Vermes affirms that the *Temple Scroll* allowed the Chief Priest the power to crucify someone for serious crimes (cf. *Targum to Ruth*). Many scholars conclude, perhaps under the influence of John 8:31, that the Romans did not allow the Judean leaders to execute Jews. See, for example, Ritmeyer, *The Quest*, 347.

31. See R. Reich, “Two Possible Mikvaot on the Temple Mount,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 39 (1989): 63–65. Most likely these *mikvaot* antedated Herod’s extension to the south of the Temple Mount and would have been used earlier before one entered the Sanctuary.

coins into the treasury (Mark 12:42). Then, he continues past the northern and southern gates, pausing again, this time to talk with Mary Magdalene and his mother, but only briefly because women and men “should not mingle” (m*Middot* 2:5). Before he passes the Chamber of Lepers (right) and the Chamber of Oil (left), he pauses to admire the many Levites who had gathered on the fifteen semi-circular steps that fronted the Nicanor Gate and led to the Court of the Israelites (m*Middot* 2:5). He appreciates hearing the trumpets, tambourines, and the chanting, accompanied by drums, lyres, cymbals, harps, and other musical instruments (m*Middot* 2:6). Within the Court of the Women, twenty-four young girls dance with joy and swirl, holding aloft brightly colored silk. They are ecstatically entranced by the chanting of the final psalm in the Davidic Psalter by the Levites:³²

Praise the LORD!
 Praise God *in his sanctuary*;
 praise him in his mighty firmament!
 Praise him for his mighty deeds;
 praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
 Praise him with *trumpet sound*;
 praise him with *lute and harp*!
 Praise him with *tambourine and dance*;
 praise him with *strings and pipe*!
 Praise him with *clanging cymbals*;
 praise him with *loud clashing cymbals*!
 Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
 Praise the LORD! (Ps 150 NRSV; my italics)

Hearing and seeing such elevating drama and music, Jesus feels at home in the House of the Lord, and hears an inner voice say: “This is my Father’s House.”

After this celebration, Jesus continues moving west and ahead, past the Nicanor Gate and into the Court of the Israelites. He leaves behind the pressing crowds that had misinterpreted his teachings and wished to place titles on him. He sees some lurking Sadducees whom he knew were trying to entrap him and claim that he had been born in fornication (John 8:41). He probably knew that

32. There are only 150 Davidic Psalms in the Hebrew Bible; thanks to the Qumran Scrolls, the Septuagint, and the Syriac Bible, we now have the texts of Psalms 151 to 155. See Charlesworth and James A. Sanders, “More Psalms of David,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2.609–24.

soon these teachers who denied the resurrection would brand him a *mamzer* and prohibit him from entering the Temple (cf. *Some Works of the Torah*).



Fig. 0.4. Leen Ritmeyer's depiction of the Nicanor Gate and the Court of the Women, with Levites on the fifteen steps of the Semi-Circular Steps. Reprinted by courtesy of Leen Ritmeyer.

Jesus pauses before the Duchan Gate that led from the Court of the Israelites to the Court of the Priests; he looks at the altar, which is thirty-two cubits square at the base (*mMiddot* 3:1). Not too much farther to the west is the porch, the Hêkhal, and finally the Debir (the Holy of Holies). Over the entrance to the inner Temple is a golden vine from which many philanthropists hung gold leaves and clusters (*mMiddot* 3:8). Only the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies, and only on the Day of Atonement. At other times, when repairs were needed, workmen would be lowered into the Debir in boxes from an upper room (*mMiddot* 4:5). But the boxes were closed on three sides so that the craftsmen “should not feast their eyes on the house of the Holy of Holies” (*mMiddot* 4:5).³³

As a devout Jew faithful to Torah, Jesus recites a prayer from a scroll he had memorized:

O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell,
And the place where your glory abides. (Psalm 26:8 NRSV)

33. Translated by J. Neusner, *The Mishnah* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 881.

CONCLUSION

A prominent lawyer in Los Angeles heard about the preparation of this book and wrote me the following: "I always thought that Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew, and was in Jerusalem to go to the Temple and observe Passover; and that Seder turned out to be 'The Last Supper.' There was matzo on the table of the famous painting [by Leonardo da Vinci]. Are there some scholars that believe otherwise?"³⁴

Those who have devoted themselves to produce the erudite chapters that follow share the hope that the unfortunate increase in anti-Semitism will cease, and that more and more people will comprehend that Jesus lived as an observant Jew. It was as an observant Jew that he ascended the Mountain of the Lord at his last Passover, to obey Torah and worship in the Temple. At that time, Jesus ate his last supper with his disciples. Far too often, the institution of the Last Supper is divorced from its setting and grounding in the Torah and the Temple. As Christians observe the Eucharist, they commemorate Jesus' injunction, according to Paul and Luke, to do so "in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:25; Luke 22:19).³⁵ We who write these chapters hope the symbolic importance of the Temple will also be remembered.

34. This lawyer is a very dear friend; he also loves to chase coyotes (not the animal).

35. Despite the influences from Paul and Luke on the transmission of the Last Supper in Matthew and Mark (conflationism), no scribe (as far as I can detect) added "in remembrance of me" to the first two Gospels. The Fourth Evangelist redacts the tradition so that the Last Supper is not a last supper but a speech following the feeding of the five thousand in the synagogue in Capernaum; Jesus claims he is "the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51). Justin Martyr preserves "in remembrance of me" (*Apol* 1.66.3) but it is not found in the Eucharist traditions in the *Didache* or in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* (*apud* Epiphanius, *Panarion haer.* 30.22.4-5).