

The Temple In Christ's Day

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The temple in the days of Christ both reflects both the Jewish understanding of the Law of God in that day and provides an important historical context for the earthly life of Jesus the Messiah. The Jewish temple worship, as a reflection of the commandments of the Scripture, typifies that very Character who asked questions of the doctors of the Law at twelve. Interestingly, Jesus used even extra-Biblical Jewish traditions to illustrate spiritual truths,¹ so the study of their additions and adoptions of Divine mandates in holy writ provides not only insight into the Jewish mindset in His day and backdrop for the Lord's years in unglorified flesh, but opens up hermeneutically valuable and spiritually edifying insights into His teachings.

The Temple had a prominent location towards the northeastern side of Jerusalem.² It brought a flow of worshippers from other parts of the Promised Land and the world during the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut 16:16), when all male Israelites were commanded to ascend to the holy city to participate in the celebrations. Exception was only made for the deaf, dumb, and lame, those whom sickness, infirmity, or age rendered incapable of going on foot up the mountain of the house, and all in a state of Levitical uncleanness.³ The population of around 600,000 swelled near Passover to between two and three millions of people. Pilgrims would approach Jerusalem singing the “songs of degrees” or “ascents” (Ps 120-134) as they physically ascended to around 2,600 feet above sea level to reach her; its height, from which one could obtain views of the plains of Jericho, the windings of Jordan, the gray of the Dead Sea, and finally Pisgah and the mountains of Moab and Ammon to the east, the

¹ See, for example, pgs. 112-113 of *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, updated edition, Alfred Edersheim. If Temple guards fell asleep and were caught at the coming of their captain, they were either beaten or had their clothing set on fire, and thus did not “keep their garments” (cf. Rev 16:15).

² For useful maps of the city and Temple, see pg. 426, 670, 688, 1497, 1520-1521, *The NIV Study Bible*, general editor Kenneth L. Barker; pg. 1635, the *KJV Study Bible*, various editors; and maps on pg. #11 in the back of *A Survey of Israel's History*, Revised and Expanded, Leon J. Wood (Rev. by David O. Brian), and pg. 15 of *The Temple: Its Ministries and Services*. See also chapter 1, “A First View of Jerusalem and of the Temple,” in this last book.

³ See pgs. 153-154, *The Temple: Its Ministries and Services*. This source is utilized frequently for the information in the following pages, since Edersheim was one of the leading authorities of his time in this area and his book on the Temple as it existed in Jesus' day is definitive. I will, however, employ spare footnoting to avoid the excessive clutter of repetitive citations.

expanse of the king's gardens and the hill country of Judea to the south, localities such as Mispah, Gibeon, Ajalon, Michmash, Ramah, and Anathoth to the north, and the mountains of Bethel (Song 2:17) on the west, explains the Biblical description of men "going up" to the city. From alien territory (Ps 120:5-6) through the uncertainties of the journey (Ps 121, 125, etc.) the faithful finally journey safely to God's Temple, to sing: "Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion" (Ps 134). The Temple plateau, which had been artificially leveled, was approximately a thousand feet in length and width, with the Temple itself on the northwest. The entirety of Jerusalem was magnificent, but the Temple-mount, which could hold over 210,000 people, stood isolated in its grandeur, its terraces rising high above the city, until at the top, enclosed with marble cloisters, cedar-roofed and richly ornamented, the Temple itself stood out as a mass of snowy marble and gold. It presented a marvelous sight from whatever angle approached, but reserved a special disclosure of its beauty for worshippers arriving from the east— a turn in the road, and the city, formerly unseen, burst into view to marked advantage. This was the direction from which Jesus made His triumphal entry before His Passion⁴ (Lu 19:28-44).

The Tower of Antonia stood at the northwestern edge of the Temple, a grim reminder to the Jews of their hated Roman overlords who would in A. D. 70 destroy the city and not leave "one stone upon another [of the Temple], that [would] not be thrown down" (Mt 24:2), because Israel preferred type to antitype (Is 53:1, Heb 6:1-2) and "knew[] not the time of [her] visitation" (Lu 19:41ff., Dan 9:26). Midway between the castle of like name and the Temple, it was united with the former by a double set of cloisters, while a subterranean passage entered the Temple itself and cloisters and stairs

⁴ See pg. 6, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, and book 5, chapter 1 of *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, both by Alfred Edersheim.

allowed entry into the northern and western porches of the Court of the Gentiles. While in times past the castle had been David's armory, the palace of Hezekiah and Nehemiah, and the fortress of the Maccabees, in Christ's day a Roman garrison occupied it and kept a watch and a Gentile yoke over Israel and her sanctuary. The Tower overlooked and commanded the Temple, so that a detachment of soldiers could quickly rush down and quell rioting (cf. Acts 21:30-40). The Roman tower illustrated the fact that the second Temple, when contrasted to Solomon's, was "in comparison of it as nothing" (Hag 2:3). The Shekinah glory had departed from the first Temple prior to its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 10-11), and the Most Holy Place of Herod's Temple had no fire from God to burn its sacrifices, no ark of the covenant, and no mercy seat above which Jehovah⁵ dwelt between golden cherubim. The innermost room was empty, except for a large rock called the "foundation stone." On the Day of Atonement, the high priest laid his censer on this stone, threw incense upon it, and proceeded to perform his ritual as if the mercy-seat was actually there to receive the sprinkling of blood. The will of God could not be ascertained through the Urim and Thummim, and the high priest could not even be anointed with oil, for the nature of its composing elements had been lost. Yet, although the house was as nothing, Jehovah had promised that "the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this [second] house with glory... The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace" (Hag 2:7, 9). This was fulfilled when the Desire of All Nations, not only the Jews, the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6), came to guide His people into the way of peace (Lu 2:79). At eight days of age, the Anointed of the Lord, the fullness of the Godhead bodily, was carried into the second Temple by His mother and step-father, to fulfill the Law (Lu 2:21-24, 27, 39), and Simeon, who knew by the Holy Ghost that he was not to die before

⁵ This is the correct form of the Divine Name. In the preserved Hebrew text and in our accurate and consequently derivatively preserved English text, this is the form that is used. The vowel pointing of the tetragrammaton which results in this English rendering is correct, because of God's promises of preservation (Mt 5:18, Ps 12:6-7, etc.). See "The Inspiration of the Hebrew Letters and Vowel-Points," George Sayles Bishop, from the July 1991 edition of the *Plains Baptist Challenger*.

he saw the Lord's Christ (Lu 2:26), "took Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel'" (Lu 1:28-32). Truly, the glory of the second Temple did exceed that of the first. However, it led only to greater judgment upon Israel, as she chose her own way over that of her Lord and drove her King and her Husband from the Temple to the cross— an act which led to her rejection (Rom 11:19), the destruction of Jerusalem, the elimination of the ceremonial shell where she vainly sacrificed until Titus brought her now fulfilled typological system to an end, and a new and worse exile and scattering abroad to all nations— a situation which would endure until God again turned her heart to Him and, as said "the LORD... it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born" Zech 12:4, 9-10). The glory has departed from Israel, to return to her only when, after severe judgment (Zech 13:8), she turns again to her spiritual Husband (Zech 13:9), rests in the merits of the blood of His Priest-King, and is grafted back into spiritual life under the eternal redemption and greater and more perfect tabernacle of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34, Rom 11:23-33, Heb 7:1-10:39).

Herod's Temple had four principle entrances, all from the west. One descended into the Lower City, while two led to the suburb or *Parbar*. The most magnificent of the four, at the southwestern angle of the Temple, was probably the ascent into the house of the LORD that so impressed the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:5ff.). This entrance contained a colossal bridge, with arches that spanned 41.5 feet, and spring-stones that measured twenty-four feet and six feet in thickness, which spanned the Valley of the

Tyropoeon to connect the ancient City of David⁶ with the Royal Porch of the Temple. The normal Temple porches, which consisted of double rows of Corinthian pillars 37.5 feet high, ran all around the inside of its wall and bounded the outer enclosure of the Court of the Gentiles, while the Royal Porch on the south consisted of a treble colonnade of 162 pillars ranged in four rows of forty pillars each and the two extra pillars in service as a screen where the Porch opened up on the bridge. It is probable that this Porch occupied the site of the ancient palace of Solomon. From the top of this colonnade, the Kedron valley dropped off four hundred and fifty feet. Some have speculated that this was the pinnacle of the Temple from which the devil tempted the Lord (Mt 4:5-6). These porches or halls around the Court of the Gentiles were convenient places for meetings and religious discussions. Jesus was found here, when a child, in the midst of the Jewish teachers (Lu 2:46),⁷ and here He later taught the people; in Solomon's Porch, for example, which ran along the eastern wall of the second Temple, the only remnant of the first house of God built by the actual son of David, Jesus taught the people the glorious truths of the eternal security of His sheep and of His oneness with the Father (John 10:22-39). Furthermore, these porches saw the empowered preaching of the gospel by the church at Jerusalem after God authorized by fire His *ecclesia*, His new Temple for this dispensation (Acts 2, 1 Cor 3:16-17), with the associated conversion of multitudes, and the healing of the lame man who had daily "sat for alms at the Beautiful gate⁸ of the Temple," but by the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth now "entered... into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Ac 3:8, cf. 3:1-4:37).

Paved with the finest variegated marble and according to Jewish tradition a square of 450 feet, the Court of the Gentiles formed the lowest or outer enclosure of the Sanctuary. Gentiles, along with Jews, could freely enter this court, provided they acted

⁶ For maps that demonstrate the changing size of Jerusalem from David's day forward, see pages #8-11 of the at the end of Wood's (rev. by D. O'Brian) *A Survey of Israel's History*.

⁷ See *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim, book 2, chapter 10.

⁸ For more on the Beautiful gate, see pg. 24, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services*, Edersheim. It is also mentioned briefly later in this paper.

with appropriate décor and reverence. Tradition ascribes Levitical eating and sleeping apartments and a synagogue to the Court. However, hope for a reverent atmosphere was dissipated by the sale of oxen, sheep, and doves for sacrifice, while money-changers used the Court to engage in large scale profiteering. The half-shekel Temple-tribute had to be paid in the exact currency of the Sanctuary, which was the ordinary Galilean shekel; with Persian, Tyrian, Syrian, Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman money in circulation, and a statutory fee called *qolbon* charged for every exchange, money-mongers could expect to take in over a tenth of what the Temple itself received as revenue. Indeed, when larger coins were tendered and the changee desired cash back, double *qolbon* was charged. Furthermore, foreign Jews, who would need to buy various items needful in their journey and consequently require further local currency, were exacted further fees. And while worshippers could bring their own animals, all who did so would need to subject them to an examination for Levitical fitness by appointed and qualified individuals,⁹ who would charge their own fees. One could avoid all this trouble through the purchase of pre-approved animals in Jerusalem. All this trade with strikingly unequal bargaining power easily became a pit of avarice; in one instance, the price of a couple of pigeons was run up to the enormous price of a gold denar, when, through the intervention of Simeon, the grandson of the great Hillel, it was brought down before night to a quarter of a silver denar.¹⁰ This corruption clearly justified the Christ's twice cleansing the Temple of its nefarious traffic, the merchants having transformed God's "house of prayer" into "a den of thieves" (Mt 21:13, cf. 21:12-19, Mr 11:15-19, Lu 19:45-48, Joh 2:13-25, Jer 7:11, Is 56:7, Ps 69:9), an action which brought Him the support of God's Israel but the wrath of the religious authorities who made a large income from the Temple business through various fees levied for the use of the consecrated ground. Traffic did not extend,

⁹ A regularly qualified examiner was called *mumcheh*. Acquisition of the necessary knowledge and authorization for this position could take many months. See *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim, book 3, chapter 5.

¹⁰ See *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book 3, chapter 5.

however, into the area within the inner wall of the Temple, which only Jews could enter. A marble screen four and a half feet high near the flight of fourteen steps and the terrace or *Chel* which bounded the inner Temple wall bore Greek and Latin inscriptions warning Gentiles not to proceed on pain of death (cf. Acts 21:27-30).

Upon entry by the principle entrance on the east, the Beautiful Gate, which was made of richly ornamented Corinthian brass with massive double doors that required the strength of twenty men to be closed, one would pass from the Court of the Gentiles into the Court of the Women. This court was not so named because it was exclusively for the use of the female sex, but because women were allowed to proceed no farther, except for sacrificial purposes. Indeed, both men and women probably used this court for worship, with women, according to tradition, occupying only a raised gallery along three of the sides.

Against the wall were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests for charitable contributions (Lu 21:2), which were sometimes named, because of their shape, *Shopharoth* or “trumpets.” This was probably the location of the “treasury” where Jesus “taught in the Temple” (John 8:20). Each chest was designated for specific contributions. One and two were for the half-shekel Temple-tribute of that and the prior year. Three was for women from whom the Law required a sacrifice of turtledoves for a sin or a burnt offering; they dropped the equivalent amount of money into the “trumpet,” which was daily removed and the appropriate number of birds sacrificed. Mary would have done this at the end of her days of purification (Luke 2:22-24). The fourth trumpet received the value of offerings of young pigeons. Trumpet five took contributions for the wood used in the Temple, six for incense, and seven gifts for golden vessels. If a man had set aside for a sin offering, and some money was left over after its purchase, he put the remainder in trumpet eight, while trumpets nine through thirteen were for leftover coin from trespass offerings, offerings of birds, the offering of the Nazarite, the cleansed leper, and voluntary offerings. It is possible that the sounding of a trumpet before the giving of

alms referred to in Matthew 6:2 has to do with these temple “trumpets.” An additional location, known as the “chamber of the silent,” also existed in which devout individuals sometimes secretly placed money that was then secretly used to educate children of the pious poor.

The four corners of the Court of Women contained unroofed chambers sixty feet long. On the northeast side, priests unfit for other than menial services because of blemishes separated worm-eaten wood from that which was destined for the altar. On the northwest, purified lepers washed before presenting themselves at the gate of Nicanor, which connected the Court of the Women on the western side to the Court of Israel. On the southeast, Nazarites polled their hair and cooked their peace offerings, while on the southwest oil and wine were stored for drink offerings. The musical instruments of the Levites were deposited in two rooms under the Court of the Israelites that were entered from the Court of Women. Fifteen steps led through Nicanor into the Court of Israel, on which the Levites sang the Psalms of degrees or ascent (Ps 120-134) on the feast of Tabernacles. All that was done “before the LORD” occurred at the Nicanor gate; there the cleansed leper and the women coming for purification presented themselves to the priests, and there the “water of jealousy” test was administered (Num 5:11-31).

The Court of Israel and the Court of the Priests were divided only by a balustrade a foot and a half high. Together they measured 280.5 feet in length by 202.5 in breadth. Of this, only a narrow strip 16.5 feet long formed the Court of Israel. Two steps connected it to the Court of the Priests, where one ascended three further low semicircular steps to a platform on which, as on the steps through the Nicanor gate, the Levites sang and played during the ordinary service. The priests, on the other hand, pronounced the blessing from steps at the other end that led to the Temple porch. To the right and left of the Nicanor were ninety-six chambers; each of the twenty-four priestly courses received four rooms for the storage of their four different types of garments, the

linen breeches, coat, girdle, and bonnet.¹¹ Next came the chamber of the high-priest's meal offering (Lev 6:20), where every morning the priests on duty gathered from the "house of stoves," the "Beth-ha-Moked." This facility was built on arches and contained a large dining-hall connected to four other chambers, one of which was a large apartment with fires continually burning for the use of priests ministering barefoot. Here as well the heads of the courses on duty slept, and in a special receptacle under the pavement the keys of the Temple were hung at night. Another of the four chambers in the house of stoves was used for divers receipts given as warrants to those that had paid for drink offerings. The third was for the preparation of the shewbread, while the last held at least six lambs ready for use in the evening sacrifice and the well-lit path to the underground bath of the priests. Other rooms on the north and south of the Court held salt for the altar and for salting the skins of sacrifices, for washing animals inwards, for storing ceremonially clean wood, and for the machinery which supplied the laver with water, while the Sanhedrin often met in the "Gazith" chamber, or Hall of Hewn Stones. Above these rooms were other apartments, such as that in which the high-priest spent the week before the Day of Atonement in study and meditation.

The most prominent object in the Court of the Priests, the altar of unhewn stones, was a fifteen foot high square of at least forty-eight feet.¹² Since it was surrounded by a circuit nine feet from the ground and a foot and a half high, and the horns of the altar provided a foot and a half of the fifteen foot height, the priests only needed to reach three feet for the top of the altar, and four and a half for the tip of the horns. An inclined plane on the south end, forty-eight feet long and twenty-four feet wide, led up to the circuit. Nearby was a great heap of salt, since every sacrifice must be salted with salt (Mr 9:49, Lev 2:13). Three fires burned on top of the thirty-six feet wide altar; one eastward for

¹¹ Extensive discussion of the priesthood, including its vestments, is beyond the scope of this paper. See *The Temple: Its Ministries and Services*, chapter four, "The Officiating Priesthood," for details of this sort.

¹² A picture of the altar of unhewn stones, otherwise known as the altar of burnt offerings, is on page 30 of *The Temple: Its Ministries and Services*, Edersheim, updated ed., in chapter 2.

offerings, a second southward for incense, and the third northward to kindle the other two. A red line around the middle of the altar marked the place above which the blood of sacrifices intended for eating, and below which sacrifices wholly consumed was sprinkled. An excellent drainage system flushed blood and refuse from the altar down into Kedron and towards the royal gardens. Twice a year the altar was “whitened.” On its north side were six rows, with four rings each, of various mechanisms for fastening sacrifices, as well as eight marble tables for the flesh, fat, and cleaned inwards, eight low columns, each with three hooks for hanging up the pieces, a marble table for those pieces, and a silver table for the gold and silver vessels of the service.

Between the altar and porch of the Temple, towards the south, stood the brass laver, supported by twelve lions and drained and filled mechanically every morning, in which twelve priests could wash at the same time. The aqueduct that supplied the temple, which was over forty miles long, received waters from the hills around Hebron, from Etham, and from the three pools of Solomon. A further water supply came from an aqueduct from Solomon’s Pools near Bethlehem, which filled a series of rock cisterns until any overflow was carried off by a channel into the Kedron. One of these cisterns, known as the Great Sea, could hold two million gallons, and the total amount of water that could be stored probably exceeded ten million gallons. Both the city of Jerusalem and the Temple had an excellent water supply that provided plenteously for all needs.

The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were inside a porch built on huge foundations of white marble covered with gold that measured 67.5 by 9 feet, to which one ascended by a flight of twelve steps. On either side of this Sanctuary were three story buildings with five rooms, while behind it rose a building of like height with eight rooms. However, superstructures built over the porch made it higher than its three story companions, while a gabled cedar roof with golden spikes, surrounded by an elegant balustrade, surmounted the whole. Within the veil, to the right and to the left, were depositories for the sacrificial knives, and a number of gifts dedicated to God, such as a

golden candelabra from the proselyte queen of Adiabene, and two golden crowns presented by the Maccabees. There were also two tables, one of marble for the new shewbread, and the other of gold on which they laid the old when it was removed from the Holy Place. Two-leaved gold-plated doors, covered with a rich Babylonian curtain of fine linen, blue, scarlet, and purple, the four colors of the Temple, formed the entrance to the Holy Place. Above it hung a gigantic vine, the symbol of Israel, of pure gold (Ps 80:8, Jer 2:21, Ezek 19:10, Joel 1:7; cf. John 15:1-17), each cluster the height of a man. Within the Holy Place on the south was the golden candlestick, on the north the table of shewbread, and near the entrance to the Most Holy the altar of incense. This room, separated from the Holy Place by a wooden partition over which hung the veil that was rent upon Christ's death (Mt 27:51), was empty except for the foundation stone, which was supposed to be a substitute for the missing ark and its mercy seat.

Herod's Temple, which was forty-six years in the making, was certainly the place the faithful Israelite in the days before the establishment of the dispensation of grace should have gone to worship His God. Jesus preached in it, and the church at Jerusalem following the resurrection proclaimed the fact that Christ had fulfilled all that was typically portrayed therein. However, it was not an end in itself, but only had value as it pointed beyond itself to the Savior. It was an expansion and renovation of the temple erected by the faithful in Israel at the command of God's prophets after their return from exile; God had shown Himself mighty on behalf of His people and defended His rebuilt sanctuary in the day of the Maccabees; but the presence of God did not dwell within it until the Lord of glory, Jesus of Nazareth, entered within its confines—and when He did, the leaders of Israel and the directors of the Temple drove Him from His rightful seat of worship and from Jerusalem to be numbered with the transgressors. The eternally important sacrifice did not occur within the confines of the Temple, but outside the holy city—it did not provide the appearance of access to God successively confined to Jews, male Jews, priests, and the high priest, but freely provided direct access for all through

the antitypical mercy-seat, Christ, and His propitiation (Rom 3:25)— and it gained entrance for those who have received the fact of Substitution, not the shadow of it, into an eternal Temple (Rev 21:22) incomparably more magnificent than that of Solomon or of Herod; the antitypical Temple of eternal glory where Jehovah tabernacles in truth with His people (Rev 21:3).

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