

# The Temple in Jerusalem

Part Two of a talk by Professor Mary Smallwood on Palm Sunday 2010  
Christ Church Morningside, Registered Charity SC003009

So there was nothing to put in the Holy of Holies in the post-Exilic Temple or Herod's. It was empty. But anti-Semitic slander said that an ass's head was kept there for worship. When the Roman general Pompey had to fight his way to the Temple in 63 B.C. (he had been called in to settle a dynastic dispute and met unexpected opposition), he went into the Holy of Holies and was amazed to find it empty. Quite probably he did this just out of curiosity (was there really an ass's head there?) and not as a deliberate act of sacrilege. But to the Jews it was unforgivable, and in 115 A.D., in the cause of some serious disturbances, a Jewish mob in Alexandria destroyed the tomb containing Pompey's head, presumably as a belated act of vengeance.

The only priest who ever entered the Holy of Holies was the High Priest, and that only on the Day of Atonement in October. Then and then only he pronounced the sacred name Jahweh. Otherwise, whenever the Tetragrammaton JHWH occurred in the Scriptures or in any other writing, it was read as Adonai, My Lord (in English translation just Lord). When "God" appears in translation, it is a different Hebrew word.



A menorah

In front of the entrance to the Holy of Holies stood the sacred solid{old Temple furniture - the Menorah or 7-branched candelabrum, the Table of the Shewbread and the altar of incense. When they had been salvaged from the burning Temple in A.D. 70, they were, of course, taken to Rome, where they were displayed in Titus' triumphal procession through the city. We can see them through Roman eyes as depicted (whether accurately or not we cannot know) in the relief carvings on the Arch of Titus in the Forum. But the actual objects have almost certainly gone beyond any hope of future discovery. They were looted by the Vandals in the 5th century, recovered in the 6th, and after a short stay in the then Roman capital of Constantinople, were sent home, more or less, to a church in Jerusalem. They were still there in the 7th century, but at an unknown later date they disappeared, probably melted down by the Muslims.

Along both sides of the eastern part of the main hall were rooms, three storeys of them, all inter-connected, in Herod's building. No-one tells us their use, but my guess is that at least some were storage rooms for the many items used in the Jewish cult - oil for the Menorah, incense, implements used in sacrifices, priests' vestments, all the things needed for Temple maintenance, daily services and the elaborate ceremonies held at the major festivals. Traditionally, the High Priest's vestments were kept in the Temple, but under Herod they were transferred to the Antonia fortress, where they stayed until A.D. 37, when Tiberius allowed them to be returned to the Temple - to be destroyed, of course, in A.D. 70. Priests and Levites may have slept in some of the rooms for night duties and security, just as Eli and Samuel had done in the Tabernacle.

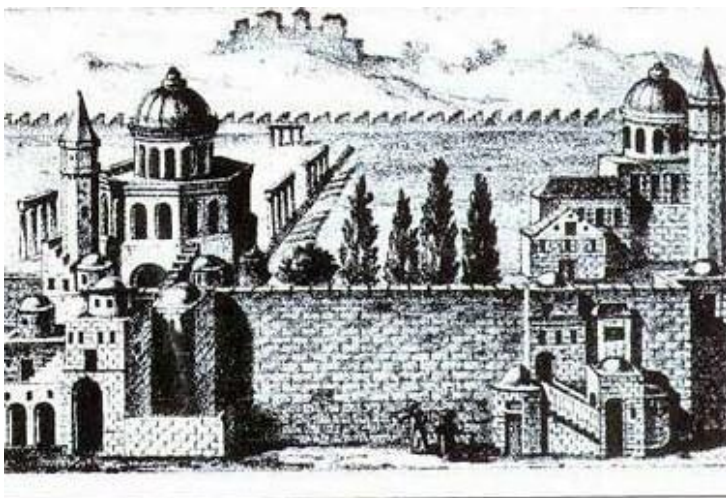
Stretching out from the Temple were three open-air courts. Right in front of the facade was the Court of the Priests, in which stood the huge Altar of Sacrifice and the Laver, an almost equally large circular tank of water, a very necessary amenity. In the Jewish cult, as in some or many pagan cults, the animals presented for sacrifice were dedicated to God and killed and then at least part of the flesh provided the priests' dinner. Only rarely was there a holocaust, a "complete burning" (such as Elijah organized on Mt. Carmel). That extravagance was kept for very special occasions.

Next came the Court of the Israelites (adult Jewish men), while furthest from the building was the Court of Women. Our sources make this the largest, which is very puzzling. But the figures for the three courts together do not add up and there may well be mistakes in them. (In my plan I have been impartial.) It is entirely unclear whether the courts formed concentric circles round three sides of the Temple or formed a series eastwards. It

does not matter much, and for my plan I have chosen the latter arrangement, partly because it was easier to draw. What is absolutely clear is that the three courts were surrounded by a balustrade with 14 entrances, at each of which was a pair of inscriptions on stone, one in Hebrew and one in rather poor Greek, warning gentiles that they risked death if they trespassed inside. One of the Greek ones survived after A.D. 70 and is now in a museum in Istanbul. Half of another is in a museum in Jerusalem.

Until I got on to the Courts I was talking only about the Temple building. The Greek word for a temple, a building, is NAOS. But the Jewish Temple stood in a very large open paved area, and the Greek term for the whole complex is TO HIERON, an adjective in the neuter, meaning "the holy" thing, or here "place" understood. N.T. writers are punctilious in distinguishing between the two terms. Unfortunately, both have to be translated "Temple" in English, because there is no simple alternative. We shall be distinguishing between them later, but meanwhile I have a bit to say about the sacred area.

The Temple in its sacred area was somewhat like a cathedral in a close, except that in Jerusalem the boundaries of the sacred area were clearly demarcated by a massive wall. The Muslim holy area, Haram esh-Sharif is exactly the Temple enclosure of Herod's Temple. But that was c.25% larger than that of its predecessor. For to enhance the magnificence of his new Temple's setting, Herod had the enclosure extended southwards. But there was a problem. At the S.E. the land sloped downwards towards the Kidron valley. Undaunted, Herod simply had it levelled up on pillars. Under the S.E. section of the present enclosure a forest of pillars supports the pavement above, starting a couple of feet high and getting taller and taller towards the south. At some unknown date this extraordinary crypt-like structure acquired the ridiculous name "Solomon's Stables"! The extended enclosure is nearly 500 yards north to south and as big as several football fields. The whole of it except the three courts was open to anyone; hence its popular name, the Court of the Gentiles. Its correct name was the Outer Court.



Chotel Maarbi, or West Wall.

Kotel engraving 1850

Herod's wall masonry was magnificent; you all know pictures of the Wailing Wall. That is towards the south end of the west wall, i.e. it is Herodian. Many of the stones are enormous, weighing tons. Josephus says that "stones 60 feet long" were used, but this is a clear example of corruption in transmission. The longest surviving visible stone is barely half that length (still impressive enough). You remember the disciples on perhaps their first visit to the city reacting exactly like any modern tourist - Gosh! Just look at those stones. If you walk along the outside of the east wall, you can see clearly the join between the Herodian masonry and the much smaller stones of the earlier wall running northwards.

There were several gates in the west wall of the enclosure facing the city, none along the east wall above the Kidron valley, and a monumental one in the south wall, approached by a splendid stairway, now excavated. Through it one entered the Royal Portico. To add splendour to his enlarged enclosure, which must have been very stark, Herod had pillared porticoes built all round the walls, Greek in style. That on the south was double, with especially elaborate decoration.

Herod's ambitious project was started in 23 or 22, and the Temple itself Josephus says, took only 18 months to complete, with a further 8 years for the rest. Then why, when Jesus spoke metaphorically of his future death

and resurrection, did his incredulous hearers say 'You can't rebuild the Temple, NAOS, in three days! It took 46 years to build'. The explanation of this extraordinary discrepancy probably is that the basic structure of the NAOS was complete enough in 18 months for the building to be taken into use, but that work on the decoration (or possibly repairs) went on until the 20s A.D.

Now (at last) for some N.T. episodes involving the Temple. Jesus' first visit there was at the age of 40 days when he was taken to be presented to God. You may have seen paintings in which Mary is handing her baby to Simeon inside an impressive building. Well, I think you realize now that that was impossible. Joseph and Mary could not enter the Temple, NAOS. Nor, incidentally, could Anna, who must have spent her 60 or so years of widowhood in TO HIERON, i.e. in the Court of the Women or, in inclement weather, under the porticoes. And Luke correctly says that Jesus was taken to HIERON. So where exactly did the Presentation take place? We do not know. It may have been in the Court of the Women, though I have a nasty suspicion that High Priests and fathers would have felt it *infra dig.* to be seen there, even if the Court was not actually barred to men. Alternatively, and I think more probably, Presentation rites could have been held, in any weather, under the porticoes.

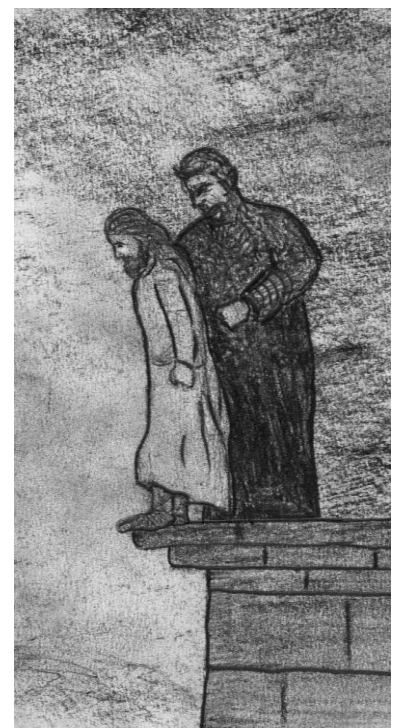


Jesus discusses with the Rabbis by Gustave Doré, 1865

The next occasion was when Jesus, aged 12, was taken to Jerusalem for the Passover and went missing. Mary and Joseph eventually found him "in the Temple" - but where exactly? Certainly not in the Temple building, NAOS, to which even rabbis had no access. Luke correctly puts the episode in TO HIERON. Possibly Jesus and the rabbis were in the Court of the Israelites. But I think it more likely that the rabbis held their informal schools under the porticoes, where anyone, gentiles included, could come to ask questions or receive instruction. It must also have been a place where Mary as well as Joseph could get right close to Jesus, for her to administer to the 12-year-old what from 'a human standpoint was a well deserved ticking-off. As an incidental parallel: - the Stoics took their name from the Stoa, a portico in Athens where their founder taught. (As an irrelevant aside - I often wonder where Jesus spent the nights in Jerusalem. Did a nice rabbi put him up?)

Next, the Temptation. In one temptation the devil invites Jesus to jump off "the pinnacle of the Temple". I used to think, and perhaps you do, that Jesus visualized the devil depositing him miraculously on the highest point of the Temple roof (NAOS). No. Think of the anti-bird spikes. But seriously, the "pinnacle of the Temple" (TO HIERON is again the term used) was the name for the S.E. corner of the enclosure, with the greatest drop to the deepest part of the Kidron valley and the wall rising 130 feet above bedrock. It is an impressive spot. I have been there. There are stairs up to the wall-top in places, needed, e.g., by priests when they had to watch there for the new moon and when they saw it blow their rams' horn trumpets to announce the start of a new month. In the temptation Jesus surely visualized himself being taken to a dangerous spot which he could have reached in real life under his own steam.

Temptation by David Clarke





On a number of occasions Jesus teaches or talks with people "in the Temple". I know at least one painting in which the episode of the tribute money takes place in a building, NAOS. This would have been quite impossible, as you now know. It is in TO HIERON that this and all the other episodes are correctly located. And I would suggest that they took place, not in the Court of the Israelites but in the Outer Court where gentiles could be present - under the porticoes when the weather so dictated. And the Outer Court was, of course, the scene of the Cleansing of the Temple. This also has been mis- represented in Art, e.g. by El Greco, with Jesus expelling traders from a building clearly meant to be the Temple, NAOS. To digress for a moment: - A market for the sale

of sacrificial animals was needed close to the place where they would be offered. Pilgrims making a journey of several days or much longer would not have wanted to include a pair of flapping pigeons in their luggage. And as the Temple-tax, paid by all adult male Jews, had to be paid in Jewish coins, not in the Roman ones then in current use, money changers were needed. In the Synoptics it is not against the market as such that Jesus reacts with uncharacteristic violence but against the blatant profiteering and swindling. In St. John it is the market that arouses his fury.

And now briefly to Acts. I am sure that I need not now tell you that when Peter and John met and healed a lame man at one of the gates of the Temple, Luke is talking about TO HIERON (ch. 3). Two interesting, and to this talk irrelevant, points come out of this episode. There was a regular period of public prayer every afternoon somewhere in TO HIERON, a practice not mentioned in the Gospels. And one of the gates in the W. wall was called, probably only in popular usage, "the Beautiful Gate", a name not otherwise recorded.

There is only one other episode involving the Temple in Acts, in ch. 21. The story of Paul's arrest by Roman troops, his trials, and his transfer to Rome begins with a riot. Some Jewish pilgrims from Asia Minor saw Paul in the Temple and stirred up trouble by alleging that he had taken a Greek from Ephesus into TO HIERON, 'thus defiling the holy place' (a different word for "holy") This makes no sense. Gentiles had always been admitted to the Outer Court and Paul had every right to take his friend in there. What the rioters thought and said was that Paul had taken him through the balustrade surrounding the three courts, past the inscriptions threatening gentile trespassers with death. That would have been nonsense, Paul would have done no such thing. He had more sense.

So much for episodes involving TO HIERON. What about NAOS, which has barely had a look-in so far? Well, NAOS is used, correctly, a number of times in the New Testament. I got a list from a Concordance, but a few will do at this late hour. I have already given you the one about the impossibility of rebuilding the NAOS in three days. At his trial Jesus was accused of having threatened to destroy the NAOS. At his death the "veil of the NAOS" was rent in two. (I did not include the "veil" in my description of the NAOS because I have no idea what it was.) In Paul's epistles the human body is metaphorically the NAOS of the Holy Spirit, and the Christian community is the NAOS of God. There is no confusion in New Testament writers between NAOS and TO HIERON. It is just muddling to us that a deficiency in the English language means that both have to be translated "Temple".

With thanks to Professor Mary Smallwood, who is Marion Richardson's cousin