

Preface: Herod the Great, Hillel, Jesus, and Their Temple

The following chapters are the proceedings of a symposium in Boca Raton, Florida, in December 2011. The symposium's purpose was to introduce and discuss before a large audience the new archaeological and historical discoveries focused on the Jerusalem Temple, especially since 1968, and also to examine the often heard assertions that Jesus and his disciples considered the Temple forsaken by God and needing to be replaced. Do such claims represent an accurate assessment of the historical Jesus and of his Jewish disciples? Other related questions follow. How soon after Jesus' death did the Palestinian Jesus Movement become a predominantly Gentile movement? If this happened before the revolt in 66 CE, Gentiles in the movement could not have entered the Holy Temple, since a balustrade had been erected, long before Jesus, to warn non-Jews not to proceed further for fear of being killed by the Jewish Temple guards. Thus, if the Palestinian Jesus Movement became a Gentile movement shortly after 30 CE, the time of Jesus' crucifixion, then many of Jesus' followers would not have been able to enter the Temple to worship there.

Numerous publications open up new vistas in which it is possible to see pre-70 CE religious life in Jerusalem more clearly and reflect on popular contemporary readings of the biblical and apocryphal documents. Among such major publications on the Temple are the following (see also the selected bibliography):

In 1975, Benjamin Mazar, then dean of archaeologists in Israel and the former president of Hebrew University, published a book that resolved many enigmas about first-century Jerusalem. He exposed, with stunning images, the world in which Jews went up to God's House to worship. As many specialists have observed, his *The Mountain of the Lord: Excavating in Jerusalem* revised what we had imagined was the "atlas" of Herod's Jerusalem and Temple.

In 1983, Nahman Avigad published *Discovery Jerusalem*, after more than ten years of archaeological painstaking labor in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem. The book allowed readers to feel his excitement as he and his fellow archaeologists and workmen discovered ancient Jerusalem, sometimes after five thousand years of darkness. A house in Upper Jerusalem—the “Burnt House”—was excavated, and Avigad described the intense reaction of workers who discovered in its basement the remains of a woman who had apparently died in the Roman assault on the city in September of 70 CE. A household weight, from the home of a high priestly family, was discovered nearby, where it had fallen during the city’s destruction. Avigad’s *Discovery Jerusalem* was rightly hailed by Frank Cross of Harvard as a “masterpiece.”

In 1985, Meir Ben-Dov, field director of the excavations in Jerusalem, published a popular book that reported the sensational discoveries surrounding the Temple Mount. (The site of the Temple Mount is today the Haram esh-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, revered by Muslims as the site from which Muhammed ascended to heaven on a horse.) In his *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, Ben-Dov described the monumental enterprise of King Herod, including the remains around the Temple Mount, such as first-century walls, shops, sewers, gates, and “the first overpass in history” (the elevated corridor from the Upper City into the Temple).

In 2007, John Day, Professor of Old Testament Studies at Oxford, edited the proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*. The book contains reflections by twenty-three experts who improve our understanding of the Temple and worship in Israel from the tenth century BCE (the time of David and Solomon) to 150 CE (the close of the canonical New Testament).

In 2011, Eilat Mazar, distinguished archaeologist, head of the Shalem Center’s Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University, and granddaughter of Benjamin Mazar, published the definitive study of research upon and recent discoveries of the Temple walls. Her two volumes of *The Walls of the Temple Mount* are a treasure

trove of discovery and reflection from the time of Edward Robinson (1794–1863) to the present. It is the most comprehensive and precise documentation of the Temple’s walls; the charts and images are invaluable. Mazar shares a valid reflection on the Temple and the massive retaining walls: “The desire to inspire awe and demonstrate power must have been a chief concern of Herod, who sought to make it ‘the most notable of all the things achieved by him’ (*Ant.* I, 380; XV, 11)” (p. 13). Josephus was writing from Rome. Now we know that the Temple in Jerusalem surpassed any temple in Rome.

Studying these books, which include an *inclusio* from Benjamin Mazar to his granddaughter, Eilat, we may come closer to Jesus and his disciples, one of whom marveled at the Temple grandeur: “Teacher, look, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” (Mark 13:1). Perhaps, they were looking at the arch that now bears the name of Robinson.

Why is so much research now being devoted to the Jerusalem Temple and its symbolism? First, scholars are now finally recognizing just how Jewish were Jesus and his earliest followers. Second, after 1967, Jews again had unrestricted access to the eastern portions of Old Jerusalem in which the Temple was located, more than in the preceding two thousand years. Excavations from 1968 to the present have revealed, quite surprisingly, that Josephus’ description of the Temple was not simple hyperbole. Third, scholars have returned to familiar and to recently published documents, contemplating how they should revise previous estimates of Jesus’ relation to the Temple and those of his followers who lived before 70 CE. Further discoveries continue to occur frequently in and around Jerusalem; the full story evolves in new collections and reflections. The distinguished scholars who participated in the Boca Raton symposium and whose papers appear in this volume intend to add to our comprehension of the best reconstruction.

Thus, not only have archaeological discoveries focused on the walls of the Temple Mount and the area surrounding it opened our eyes to some misunderstandings, but we also have much more evidence to explore than is provided in Josephus and the New Testament, and are beginning to regard some of it with new appreciation. For example, an ancient Greek text is significant; it is a lost gospel of Synoptic type (see ch. 7). Most scholars disregard the possibility that it preserves any historical data because it is apocryphal, late, and contains anti-Jewish rhetoric. The document is *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 840, a fourth or fifth-century papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus (= Behnesa), Egypt,

in 1905. The work preserves one leaf of a miniature book (only 8.5 x 7 cm) from an ancient gospel that is now otherwise lost. Of singular importance is the reference to Jesus and the Temple; the account is not found in our canonical New Testament.

In this work, Jesus, “along with the disciples,” enters the holy court of the Temple. They walk “about the Temple.” The text describes the Temple as the “place of purification,” which contains “holy vessels.” To enter this “pure place,” one must wash himself and change his clothes. We hear that to enter the Temple one must first enter a certain pool, which is obviously a *mikveh*, one of the first-century Jewish ritual baths that have now been discovered south, west, and north of the Temple Mount. Only recently, archaeologists have learned that the first-century *mikvaot*, for example at Qumran, Jericho, and Jerusalem, have divisions so that one who goes down into the *mikveh* on the right ascends on the left, and is thus protected from another who begins to enter the *mikveh* impure. The one who has immersed himself continues on steps on the other side of a raised area in the plaster. Such architecture helps us understand the concern over becoming polluted by someone who has not been ritually cleansed; the one who has immersed and become purified may now enter the Temple area (or, in Galilee, a synagogue or another sacred place of study to read God’s Word).

It is somewhat startling that this highly edited and anti-Jewish text offers us one of the best literary sources for this practice. A certain Pharisee, named Levi, reports to Jesus in the Temple that he had washed himself in a certain *mikveh*: “having descended by one set of steps I ascended by another. And I put on white and clean clothes, and then I came and looked upon these holy vessels.” Jesus mentions that the water in the *mikveh* is “running water,” which translates back into Hebrew as “living water.” Only running water, living water, not transported by human means, makes a *mikveh* a ritual bath for purification (cf. Mishnah *Mikvaot* 5:1–4). The text is an ancient witness not only to the practices we now know were operative in the Temple area, but it signifies that Jesus and his disciples also followed such regulations so as to enter “the holy court.”

The following chapters are composed by leading experts on the archaeology of Jerusalem, the Psalms that were chanted in the Temple, and the evolution of the Palestinian Jesus Movement that became eventually the “Christian church.” After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, many Christians replaced the significance of the Temple with the concept of the Church; Jews replaced sacrifice with halakot (rules for living lives faithful to the Covenant) and the study of Torah and Mishnah.

Two main questions help focus the following explorations: Was the Temple as monumental as Josephus claims or was he exaggerating its grandeur

to defend his religion against those who burned the Temple? Before 70 CE, when the Temple service defined life in Jerusalem, did Jesus and his disciples revere the Temple and worship there, or were they offended by what they regarded as the desecration of what had been God's holy house? I am most grateful to Dr. John Hoffmann for organizing the Boca Symposium and helping me edit some of these chapters. Blake Jurgens and Ebb Hagan assisted me as I polished them for publication. I am deeply grateful to each of those who have helped to make the proceedings of the Boca Symposium a gift to world culture, as we explore how we (especially Jews and Christians) are defined by traditions and texts.

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