

## THE TEMPLE OF HEROD

For our knowledge of the last and greatest of the Jewish temples, we are indebted almost entirely to the works of Josephus and the Talmudic tractate *Middoth* (meaning "Measurements").

The temple itself was surrounded by a series of courts. Inside of each larger court were successively smaller courts. The courts were named as follows:

- (1) Court of Gentiles. This was the largest court and was the largest court and was open to everyone.
- (2) Court of the Women. This lay in front of (to the east of) the temple proper, and was open to Jewish women.
- (3) Court of Israel. Only Jewish men might enter this court.
- (4) Court of the priests. Only priests could enter this section.

While Josephus says that the outer court was externally 400 cubits each way, there is no reason to assume that this court in New Testament times was much different in size from the present Haram-es-sheerif, the walled enclosure containing the Dome of the Rock, and eight-sided Mohammedan shrine probably built on the same spot as Solomon's and Herod's temple. This court now is 929 feet on the south side, 1041 feet on the north, 1556 on the east, and 1596 on the west, and its total area is some thirty-five acres. (See Jack Finegan, *Archaeology of the New Testament*, Princeton, 1969, p. 118).

The large court around the temple area had magnificent porches (also called porticoes, cloisters, or stoas) on the inside of the walls. The cloisters in the west, north, and

east sides were composed of double rows of Corinthian columns, 25 cubits or 37 feet 6 inches in height, with flat roofs, and resting against the outer wall of the Temple. These, however, were immeasurably surpassed in magnificence by the royal porch or *Stoa Basilicā* (or Royal Porch), which overhung the southern wall. It consisted of a nave (or central open area) and two aisles, that toward the Temple being open, that toward the country closed by the wall. The breadth of the centre nave was 45 feet; of the side aisles 30 from centre to centre of the pillars; their height 50 feet, and that of the centre aisle 100 feet. Its total length was one stadium or 600 Greek feet. This magnificent structure was supported by 162 Corinthian columns. The porch on the inside of the east wall was called Solomon's porch (Acts 3:11).

The wall of the outer court had one gate on the north, four on the west, two on the south, and one on the east.

The eastern gate (which Josephus does not mention, but which is mentioned in the Talmud) appears to have been the Gate Beautiful mentioned in Acts 3:10. The location of the Gate Beautiful is uncertain; some say it was the Nicanor Gate leading from the court of the Women into the Court of Israel. The eastern gate of the Court of the Gentiles is presently called the Golden Gate, and is walled up. According to the Talmud this gate (through which Christ entered at his triumphal entry) was decorated with drawings of the Palace of Shushan, where Queen Esther lived. This was to make the people "ever mindful when they came." Some have therefore called this the Shushan Gate. The fact that it opens through Solomon's Porch adds strength to the view that it is the Gate Beautiful of Acts chapter three. (Acts 3:2, 8, 11).

The two southern gates into the temple area are also now walled up. From west to east they are respectively called the Double Gate and the Triple Gate, because they

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had two and three openings. They seem to be the Huldah gates referred to in the *Middoth*.

At the extreme southwest corner of the temple an entrance opened into the Royal Porch (Stoa Basilica). This entrance was approached by a bridge across the Tyropeon Valley. A small part of one arch of this bridge still remains in the wall; it is known as Robinson's Arch.

There were four gates into the temple area on the west, commonly known by the names of the modern explorers who discovered or wrote about them. From south to north they are Barclay's Gate, Wilson's arch, Warren's Gate, and the West Gate. Wilson's Arch is now deeply underground. (See *Biblical Archaeologist*, Jan. 1966, p. 27ff., and Jan. 1967, p. 27ff.)

The temple enclosure within the Court of the Gentiles was several steps higher than the large court surrounding it. The temple area—referring to the Court of Israel and the temple within it—was approximately 180 by 240 cubits. The elevated area comprising the Temple enclosure and the court of the women was entered by ten gates. Signs at each of these gates warned any Gentiles that they entered only at the risk of the death penalty.

Of these ten gates, nine were overlaid with gold and silver. But one was of Corinthian bronze, and far exceeded in costliness the ones that were plated with silver and set in gold. (See Josephus, *Wars*, V, 5, 2-3.) Whether this was the Nicanor gate leading from the Court of Women into the Court of Israel, or whether it was the gate leading from the Court of Gentiles into the Court of Women, is not completely certain; the latter position seems more probable.

Immediately within the entrance to the court of priests stood the great altar of burnt offerings. Both the Altar and the temple were enclosed by a low parapet one cubit

in height, placed so as to keep the people separate from the priests while the latter were performing their functions.

The temple itself had the same dimensions as Solomon's temple, 60 cubits long, and 20 cubits wide; however it was 60 cubits high. It was divided into the Holy Place (20 by 40 cubits) and the Holy of Holies (20 cubits by 20 cubits). In the Holy Place were kept the seven-branched golden lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table for the showbread. A representation of the lampstand may be seen on the arch of Titus in Rome, where it is pictured as part of the booty taken from Jerusalem when the Romans captured the city in A.D. 70. There was no furniture at all in the Holy of Holies of Herod's temple.

Separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy place was a heavy veil corresponding to the one in the tabernacle of Moses. According to Rabbinical traditions, the veil in Herod's temple was 40 cubits long, 20 wide, had the thickness of the palm of the hand, and was made in 72 squares. This was the heavy veil that was ripped apart from top to bottom at the time of the death of Christ Jesus (Matt. 27:51).

This temple made an overwhelming appearance in the eyes of men (Luke 21:5). It was approximately 80 years in construction. Five years later it was utterly destroyed, and not one stone of the temple was left upon another (Luke 21:6).

### 11. *Other buildings of Herod in Jerusalem.*

About 9 B.C.—eight years from its commencement—the court and cloisters of the Temple were finished, and the bridge between the south cloister and the upper city (demolished by Pompey) was doubtless now rebuilt with that massive masonry of which some remains still survive. At this time equally magnificent works were being carried on in another part of the city, namely, in the old wall at

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the north-west corner, contiguous to the palace, where three towers of great size and magnificence were erected on the wall, and one as an outwork at a small distance to the north. The latter was called Psephinus, the three former were Hippicus, after one of his friends—Phasaelus, after his brother—and Mariamne, after his queen. Phasaelus appears to have been erected first of the three,<sup>12</sup> though it can not have been begun at the time of Phasael's death, as that took place some years before Jerusalem came into Herod's hands. The Temple continued afterward to receive fresh additions, besides the repairs of injuries done in frequent tumults, so that, when it was visited by our Lord at the beginning of his ministry (A.D. 27), it was said that the building had occupied the intervening forty years. Nor did it cease then; for Josephus places its completion by Herod Agrippa II. about A.D. 65, only five years before its final destruction; an act in which its finisher, and the great-grandson of its founder, was the ally of the Romans, A.D. 70. The great Agrippa, though a heathen, is connected with the Temple in another way. When on a visit to Herod, he propitiated the Jews by offering 100 oxen (a hecatomb), and feasted all the people, Herod having joined in his heathen sacrifices at Cæsarea. During this period, in fact, Herod was drawing closer to his patron. In the beginning of 14 B.C. he joined Agrippa in the Black Sea with a powerful fleet, and his services were rewarded by the addition of the territory to the east of the lake of Gennesareth, where Herod hunted the robbers of Trachonitis out of their mountain caves with wonderful vigor and relentless cruelty. Part of this region was formed into a tetrarchy for his brother Pheroras. He also procured from Agrippa the restoration of privileges and immunities to the Jews of the "Dispersion." On his return, in the autumn of the same year, he

12. Josephus, *Ant.*, XVII, 10, 2.

addressed the people assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles, and remitted them a fourth of the annual tax.

## 12. *Family troubles of Herod. Execution of his sons Aristobulus and Alexander.*

The eye turned from all this splendor to Herod's domestic life meets one of the most appalling spectacles in the pages of history. The source of all his cruelties is to be found in his usurpation. His jealousy was excited by the Asmonæan blood which flowed in the veins of his own sons by his marriage with Mariamne; and his conscience, ever reproaching him with her murder, prompted him to suspect her avengers in her children. Those who had urged him on to the condemnation of Mariamne had better reason for the like fears on their own account. So when Herod brought back Aristobulus and Alexander from their three years' residence at Rome, their destruction was already half prepared. Their fate was sealed by the enthusiasm of the people, who hailed in their graceful persons and popular manners the true scions of the Asmonæan house. Herod, who never displayed that morose depravity which loves wickedness for its own sake, treated the youths at first like a father. He married Alexander to Glaphyra, the daughter of Archelaus, king of Cappadocia, and Aristobulus to his cousin Berenice, the daughter of Salome. Even this union did not appease Salome's jealous ambition. With the aid of Herod's brother, Pheroras, she so far wrought on his fears as to induce him to send for ANTIPATER, his eldest son by Doris, whom he had divorced to marry Mariamne. Antipater proved a deadly and unscrupulous enemy to his brothers, who were at length carried by Herod before the tribunal of Augustus at Aquileia (13 B.C.). Herod was accompanied by NICOLAUS DAMASCENUS, the intimate friend both of Augustus and himself, whose eloquence was so often of service to the Herodian family. This distin-

guished rhetorician, a native of Damascus, and the son of Antipater and Stratonice, was the companion of Herod's studies, and his mediator with Augustus whenever some especially flagrant act of the Jewish king stirred the emperor's indignation. Nicolaus wrote lives of Augustus and of himself, and a Universal History. The emperor effected a reconciliation; but still Antipater was placed before the sons of Mariamne in the succession to the throne; and, being sent to Rome in the train of Agrippa, he tried in all his letters to renew Herod's suspicions against them. Herod's return from a visit to Rome, in 11 B.C., was again followed by an address to the people assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles, in which the announcement of Antipater as his successor—a prince not of the Amonæan blood—was recommended by new exemptions. The whole atmosphere of the court was poisoned with distrust. False accusers shared the fate of the accused; slaves were tortured to extract evidence; and at last Alexander was tempted to a most improbable confession. A fresh trial took place at Berytus before the Roman governors of Syria, Saturninus and Volumnus, with a court of 150 assessors, by a majority of whom the youths were condemned unheard, and Herod's claim to the power of life and death over them was confirmed. After some hesitation he caused them to be strangled at Sebaste.

### 13. *Herod's golden eagle torn down.*

In or about the year 7 occurred the affair of the Golden Eagle, a parallel to that of the theatre, and, like that, important, as showing how strongly the Maccabæan spirit of resistance to innovation on the Jewish law still existed, and how vain were any concessions in other directions in the presence of such innovations. Herod had fixed a large golden eagle, the symbol of the Roman empire, of which Judæa was now a province, over the entrance to the Sanc-

tuary, probably at the same time that he inscribed the name of Agrippa on the gate.<sup>18</sup> As a breach of the second commandment—more than as a badge of dependence—this had excited the indignation of the Jews, and especially of two of the chief rabbis, who instigated their disciples to tear it down. A false report of the king's death was made the occasion of doing this in open day, and in the presence of a large number of people. Being taken before Herod, the rabbis defended their conduct and were burned alive. The high-priest Matthias was deposed, and Joazar took his place.

#### 14. *Conspiracy of Herod's son Antipater and death of his brother Pheroras.*

To complete the series of his domestic tragedies, Herod's favored son, Antipater, conspired against his life with his favorite brother, Pheroras. The wife of Pheroras was connected with the Pharisees, 7000 of whom had refused to take the oath of allegiance, and she was accused of disseminating disloyal prophesies. Pheroras fell into disgrace; but in his last illness, which soon followed, Herod treated him with a kindness which moved him to abandon his designs. Upon his death, not without suspicion of poison, Herod instituted an inquiry; the whole plot was revealed, and proved by the confession of his wife. Antipater, who had gone to Rome to avoid suspicion, was returning to reape, as he supposed, the fruit of his parricide, when he was seized at Sebaste, brought to trial before Herod and Varus, the Roman governor of Syria, and condemned on the clearest evidence.

#### 15. *Herod's last sickness; visit of the wisemen; Massacre of Bethlehem babes.*

While Antipater's doom awaited the confirmation of Augustus, Herod was seized with a most painful and loath-

18. Josephus, *Wars*, I, 21, 8.



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some disease. The increasing torments of his ulcerated body, which derived no benefit from the warm baths of Callirhoe, drove him to new acts of frenzied cruelty; but we may well doubt whether the fancy of what he *might* have felt does not prevail over sober fact in the statement that he ordered the representatives of the chief families of Judæa to be shut up in the hippodrome at Jericho and to be put to death as soon as he expired, that his funeral might not want mourners.

His rage and terror were brought to a climax by a new and strange danger, threatening the crown which had cost him so much. A caravan headed by persons of great distinction arrived at Jerusalem, making the omnious inquiry, "Where is he that is born KING OF THE JEWS?" and declaring that the star of his Nativity had guided them from the distant East. Herod well knew the significance of that title. His agitation was shared by all the people of Jerusalem, though doubtless from widely different feelings. Assembling the teachers of the law, he obtained their opinion, on the authority of the prophet Micah, that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. Secretly calling for the strangers, and having learned from them the precise time of the star's appearance, he sent them to Bethlehem, and bade them return to inform him when they had found the babe that he too might go and worship Him. Having in vain awaited their return, he resolved to rid himself of the dreaded rival by the massacre of all the babes in Bethlehem and its district from the age of two years old and under. The consummation of this sentence, and the escape of Jesus, belong to the next book of our history. We here regard the transaction from the point of view of Herod's life. Vast as we know the issues at stake to have been, we can hardly be surprised that, amid all the horrors of Herod's last days, the murder of some ten or

twelve children in a small country town<sup>14</sup> escaped the notice of the Jews at the time, and of their historian afterward.

16. *Execution of Herod's son Antipater.*  
*Herod's death.*

They soon had horrors enough in their very midst. The embassy returned from Rome, with the consent of Augustus to Herod's dealing as he pleased with his guilty son, though the milder alternative of banishment was suggested. About the same time, Herod attempted suicide in a paroxysm of agony. The rumor of his death spread through the palace. Antipater tried to bribe his jailer who reported the offer to Herod, and the tyrant's dying breath gave the order for his son's execution. It appears to have been in connection with the fate of Antipater, perhaps as the expression of his own disgust in yielding to the king's importunity, that Augustus uttered the celebrated sarcasm, "It is better to be Herod's hog than his son."—for his religion forbade his slaughtering the former. After using his last remnant of strength to give final directions about his will, he expired five days after the death of Antipater, shortly before the Passover, 4 B.C. He had just entered on the thirty-seventh year of his reign, dating from the edict which gave him the kingdom, and the thirty-fourth of his actual possession of the throne, dating from the death of Antigonus.<sup>15</sup>

14. Such is the result of a sober calculation, founded on our knowledge of Bethlehem. The accurate simplicity of St. Matthew (ii. 16-18) may be contrasted with the vague statements of the fathers that Herod slew "all the children in Bethlehem" (Justin and Origen), and with the exaggerated impressions made on us by the painters.

15. There is now no doubt that the common era of the birth of our Saviour is wrong by four years. Christ was born shortly before the death of Herod, and we know that the latter died four years before the Christian era.

17. *Character of Herod.*

Enough has appeared of Herod's abilities and vices in this summary of his reign. It is, perhaps, difficult to see in his character any of the true elements of greatness. Some have even supposed that the title—the *great*—is a mistranslation for the *elder*; and yet on the other hand he seems to have possessed the good qualities of Henry VIII with his vices. He maintained peace at home during a long reign by the vigor and timely generosity of his administration. Abroad he conciliated the good-will of the Romans under circumstances of unusual difficulty. His ostentatious display, and even his arbitrary tyranny, was calculated to inspire Orientals with awe. Bold and yet prudent, oppressive and yet profuse, he had many of the characteristics which make a popular hero; and the title which may have been first given in admiration of successful despotism now serves to bring out in clearer contrast the terrible price at which the success was purchased.

18. *Herod's relation to sacred history.*

It remains to say a word upon his relation to the whole course of Divine Providence in the history of the Jews. As a usurper of an alien race, and that the hated race of Edom, and the destroyer of the Asmonæan house and kingdom, he cleared the ground of all who might have lawfully competed with Christ for the throne of David; while his power united the Holy Land in preparation for the advent of its predicted King. Nor was even his personal character without its bearing on the coming of the Christ. No government, except perhaps one that maintains its power over an enslaved but noble people by brute force, is much worse in its moral character than the people who submit to it; and Herod is in some sense the representative of the deep moral degradation of the Jews. The

religious puritanism, which the bitter lesson of the Captivity had impressed on the Jewish Church, was still maintained, though only in outward form, by the Pharisees; and a remnant of its living spirit was preserved amid the fanaticism of the Essenes; but the more than half-heathen pomp of Herod too truly represented the worldly spirit which looked for an earthly kingdom as its highest hope. Nor are the family feuds which stained the house of Herod with perpetual blood without their deep significance. The palace gave the worst example, but still only an example; of that dissolution of the bonds of nature which the prophet Malachi had marked as a sign of His coming who alone could restore peace. The time was evidently at hand, when "Elijah the prophet (John the baptizer) should be sent before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: to *turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers*, lest He could come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6).

### 19. *Jewish history in two streams after the time of Herod.*

Before Herod's reign had closed, both that Prophet (John the baptizer) and the Christ himself had been born. Their entrance into the world forms the subject now before us; but we shall be the better prepared to enter on the history of Christ and the Apostles by first taking a summary view of the princes of Herod's house who ruled in different parts of Palestine with different degrees of power, and of the Roman dominion in the country till the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact the history divides itself at Herod's death into two portions which intersect almost without mingling; that of Christ and his Church, and that of the Jews as a nation. The latter belongs rather to the history of the Old Covenant than of the New. It is the story of the last expiring effort of a noble but corrupted

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and mistaken people, to defend their supposed rights against the earthly masters to whose yoke they had already bowed, and against the spiritual Lord whom they resisted because they knew him not. Perhaps the devout student of the spiritual conflict is too often at a disadvantage for want to a comprehensive view of the external relations of the Jewish nation. This distinction is thus insisted on by the eloquent historian of the Jews:—"The history of the Jews after the death of Herod (not rightly named the Great) and the birth of Jesus separates itself into two streams: one narrow at first, and hardly to be traced in its secret windings into the world, but with the light of heaven upon it, and gradually widening till it embraces a large part of Asia, part of Africa, the whole of Europe, and becomes a mighty irresistible river—a river with many branches—gladdening the fertilizing mankind, and bearing civilization, as well as holiness and happiness, in its course;— the other at first as expansive, but gradually shrinking into obscurity, lost in deep, almost impenetrable, ravines; sullen apparently and lonely, yet not without its peculiar majesty in its continuous, inexhaustible, irrepressible flow, and not without its own peculiar influence as an undercurrent on the general life and progress of mankind; . . . Too often attempted to be cruelly dried up by violent means, or turned into blood, yet still emerging when seeming almost lost, and flowing on, as it still flows, and seems destined to flow. Though the Jewish and Christian history have much in common, they may be kept almost entirely distinct." This remark applies especially to what remains to be told of the house of Herod.

### 20. *The Herodian party.*

In the account which is given by St. Matthew (xxii. 15 ff.) and St. Mark (xii. 13 ff.) of the last efforts made by different sections of the Jews to obtain from our Lord him-

self the materials for his accusation, a party under the name of *Herodians* is represented as acting in concert with the Pharisees (Matt. xxii. 16; Mark xii. 13). St. Mark mentions the combination of the two parties for a similar object at an earlier period (Mark iii. 6), and in another place (viii. 15; cf. Luke xii. 1) he preserves a saying of our Lord, in which "the leaven of Herod" is placed in close connection with "the leaven of the Pharisees." In the Gospel of St. Luke, on the other hand, the Herodians are not brought forward at all by name.

These scanty references to the Herodian party tell us little about its adherents. But in the nature of the case two distinct classes might thus unite in supporting what was a domestic tyranny, as contrasted with absolute dependence on Rome: (1) those who saw in the Herods a protection against direct heathen rule which was the one object of their fear; and (2) those who were inclined to look with satisfaction upon such a compromise between the ancient faith and heathen civilization, as Herod the Great and his successors had endeavored to realize, as the true and highest consummation of Jewish hopes. On the one side the Herodians—partisans of Herod in the widest sense of the term—were thus brought into union with the Pharisees, on the other, with the Sadducees. Yet there is no reason to suppose that they endeavored to form any very systematic harmony of the conflicting doctrines of the two sects, but rather the conflicting doctrines themselves were thrown into the background by what appeared to be a paramount political necessity.

The Herodians gradually ceased to be a political group after Herod's death, as the Romans more and more took over direct rule of Judea and the surrounding Kingdoms.

21. *Roman Emperors' of New Testament Times.*

1. *Octavian (Augustus) Caesar* (27 B.C.-A.D. 14)

Augustus was ruling at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:1). He first fully established the power of the empire. He boasted that he found Rome brick and left it marble. He promoted peace and prosperity.

2. *Tiberius Caesar* (A.D. 14-37)

Tiberius was emperor during Christ's ministry and death (Luke 3:1). He was the adopted son of Augustus. He was suspicious, haughty, cruel, and never popular with the people.

3. *Caligula* (A.D. 37-41)

Caligula was mentally unstable and tyrannical. He tried to erect a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple. He was assassinated by one of the imperial guards.

4. *Claudius* (A.D. 41-54)

Claudius was an able ruler, but he had an idiotic physical appearance. In his time Rome became a bureaucracy. He expelled the Jews from Rome after a disturbance there over the "Chrestus" (Acts 18:2). He took Agrippina as his fourth wife; she was the mother of Nero.

5. *Nero* (A.D. 54-64)

Nero ruled well for five years. He murdered his mother in A.D. 59. He became careless, extravagant, and cruel. Rome burned in A.D. 64, and the Christians were blamed for this. He instigated the first Roman persecution against Christians. His troops revolted against him, and he ordered one of his guards to kill him.

1. For further information about these Roman emperors, see Merrill C. Tenny, *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1961, p. 1 ff.

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6. *Galba* (A.D. 68)

He was appointed by the army, and slain by the army.

7. *Otho* (A.D. 69)

He was killed in the battle with Vitellius, the Roman legate of Germany.

8. *Vitellius* (A.D. 69)

Vitellius was slain by troops of the Roman general Vespasian.

9. *Vespasian* (A.D. 69-79)

Vespasian was a plain, stern, honest, vigorous, old soldier, burly and bald-headed. He built the Colosseum. Jerusalem was destroyed during his reign.

10. *Titus* (A.D. 79-81)

Titus actually was the one who destroyed Jerusalem, while his father Vespasian was ruling. He was handsome, popular, and generous. Pompeii was destroyed by the volcano Vesuvius during his reign.

11. *Domitian* (A.D. 81-96)

Domitian was the second son of Vespasian. He was autocratic and demanded worship for himself. He instigated the second Roman persecution against Christians. He was suspicious and harsh. He was assassinated. He was probably emperor when the book of Revelation was written.

12. *Nerva* (A.D. 96-98)

Nerva was an older man, mild in nature.

13. *Trajan* (A.D. 98-117)

Trajan was an energetic, professional soldier. He put down numerous rebellions, and annexed new territories to the Roman empire.