
Chapter 16

WHERE DID SOLOMON BUILD THE TEMPLE?

JOSEPHUS INFORMS US that Jerusalem was built on two mountains.³⁴⁸ One mountain embraced the western area, which he called the Upper City. The other mountain was a ridge east of the Tyropoeon Valley which Josephus designated the Lower City. The whole of the eastern ridge was called the “Lower City” to distinguish it from the “Upper City” which was reckoned as the elevated area west of the Tyropoeon Valley (which was the center ravine between the Lower and the Upper Cities).

Josephus, however, in his description of Jerusalem, makes a rather remarkable statement that seems to be in error (or, it appears that way to modern archaeologists and historians). He states that the western mountain comprising the southern part of the Upper City was formerly the site where David built the City of David (called the *Akra* or Citadel). This statement of Josephus is not true,

³⁴⁸ *War* V.4,1.

and it contradicts what Josephus said in *Antiquities* VII.3,1 where he correctly placed the original City of David on the southeast ridge. The former statement (since all manuscripts of Josephus fell into Christian hands) is an editor's insertion presenting Christian opinion in the fourth century that the southwest hill was "Mount Zion" to justify the belief that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the site of Herod's Temple. This alien insertion should never have been placed in the text since Josephus would *never* have made such an erroneous statement.

What Josephus did in his description of Jerusalem was to focus his attention to the eastern mountain called the Lower City. This Lower City consisted of two elevated areas which he called "hills." They were known as the "Second Hill" and the "Third Hill." The "Second Hill" was the southeast section of Jerusalem called the *Akra*. This "Second Hill" was shaped like a crescent moon. "The second hill, which bore the name of *Akra* and supported the Lower City, was shaped like the crescent moon. Opposite this was a third hill, by nature lower than *Akra*."³⁴⁹

This "Third Hill" was opposite the *Akra*. To be opposite yet also on the same eastern ridge meant it was *north* of the *Akra*. This "Third Hill" was a part of the Lower City, in contrast to the area west of the Tyropoeon Valley that was designated the "Upper City." But it was north of the "Second Hill" area that appeared crescent-like. What was the "Third Hill"? To Josephus it was the hill on which the Dome of the Rock now rests. It was situated north of the crescent-shaped Lower City. Properly locating this "Third Hill" is a most important geographical feature in understanding the topography of early Jerusalem. We will soon pay strict attention to it. What we will discover is the fact that this "Third Hill" on which the Dome of the Rock was constructed was NOT a part of the Temple Mount. The Temple itself was located in the center of the "Second Hill" in the south and much nearer to the place called the *Akra*. The Temple was situated in the area that was shaped like a crescent moon.

³⁴⁹ *War* V.4,1.

A Major Misunderstanding of Josephus

A problem arises with this description by Josephus of early Jerusalem. Most interpreters have completely misunderstood what the historian intended by his topographical indications. Note that Josephus said the *Akra* ridge (the “Second Hill”) was shaped “like the crescent moon” and that the “Third Hill” was opposite this crescent-shaped area. The “Third Hill” was not a part of the *Akra* area. This shape of the “Second Hill” as the moon in its third quarter is a very significant geographical indication, but almost all interpreters have not understood it. Most have taken Josephus’ description to mean a *vertical* configuration of the ridge, that it was “hump-like” or “moon-like” in a vertical sense. This is the exact opposite of what Josephus intended his readers to understand.

In this case scholars should be excused for taking the meaning of Josephus in the wrong way. Truthfully, it was a reasonable supposition that Josephus meant the southeast ridge was “dome-like” in shape, like a swelling of the earth in the form of a “rounded mountain” that was oriented north to south and situated on the southeast ridge. This is because Josephus showed that there were two former elevated areas comprising the *Akra* of the Lower City. The northern ridge of the *Akra* was even called in Hebrew the *Ophel* (which means “hump-like” or “swelling”). And, the southern summit, in the time of David, was higher than the *Ophel*.

This coincidence of meaning concerning the word *Ophel* (“swelling”) and the description of the Lower City as “crescent shape,” appears at first sight to be a logical vindication for rendering the word “crescent shape” as “hump-like.” But this is NOT what Josephus meant. Modern interpreters make a major mistake when they view the southern ridge as “crescent-like” in this *vertical* sense. As a result of this misunderstanding, Cornfeld translated the Greek word meaning “crescent moon” as “hump-like” — giving it a *vertical* dimension. Thackeray, in the Loeb edition, went even farther afield by rendering the word as “hog’s back” (a most tendentious translation that no Jewish geographer would ever use). Following the same *vertical* interpretation, Professor La Sor thought Josephus meant “arched,” while Williamson stated the southeast mountain ridge was “dome-shaped.”

The Vertical Interpretation is Wrong

All these modern translations focus on a *vertical* aspect. But this is not what Josephus wanted his readers to understand by his use of the word “crescent-shaped.” Josephus was actually speaking in the *horizontal* sense. As a matter of fact, if one stood on the southern extension of the Mount of Olives (called the Mount of Offense) and looked westward over the city of Jerusalem in the time of Josephus (and especially in the earlier period before Simon the Hasmonean), one would have observed the walls surrounding this southeastern ridge prominently displayed with a crescent-shaped configuration (like the moon in its third quarter). One would have observed the northern and southern “horns” of this crescent. The “horns” were evident by the shape of the walls coming to a sharp convergence in the extreme north, with a similar sharp convergence in the extreme south of this curved ridge. These two “horns” of the crescent-shape would have extended eastward toward the Kedron Valley, while the outward circular bulge of the ridge, which connected the two northern and southern “horns,” would have bulged westward toward the Tyropoeon Valley.

The western side of this southeast ridge abutting to the Tyropoeon Valley had a wall separating the eastern part of Jerusalem on the southeast ridge from the area west of the Tyropoeon Valley that later became the Upper City.³⁵⁰ The accompanying diagram page indicates the “crescent-shape” of early Jerusalem that would have been observed. All the city of Jerusalem, including the Temple, was then located within that “crescent-shaped” area. Interestingly, this shape of the original city of Jerusalem is also described in a similar way in “The Letter of Aristeas.” Aristeas wrote more than three hundred years before Josephus. This early author said that the Jerusalem of his time was shaped like a theatre (in this case, he meant, a Greek theatre — a semi-circle).

³⁵⁰ See Luria, B.Z. “The Hasmonean Wall of Jerusalem.” *Beth Mikra* (1983), #93, 180–84. Also see Josephus, *Antiquities* XIII.5,11 for a description of such a wall.



The above plate is found in Professor George Adam Smith's monumental work of two volumes titled: *Jerusalem* published in 1912. In this diagram, Prof. Smith uses a modern (1865) map of the Jerusalem area. In his text he attributes the crescent shaped southeastern ridge (which he outlines in bold lines) to show the original "Mount Zion" with its Ophel extension slightly to the north of the center of the crescent. He ascknowledged that there was NO MORE area to Jerusalem at that time than what was in the crescent shape. This geograaphical feature existed until Simon the Hasmonean.

Notice what Aristeas stated about the overall shape of Jerusalem at this earlier period. He agreed with Josephus that the southeast ridge was shaped like the moon in its third quarter, but with a *horizontal* dimension. It appeared like a semi-circle.

“The size of the city [of Jerusalem] is of moderate dimensions. It is about forty furlongs in circumference, as far as one could conjecture. *It has its towers arranged in the shape of a theatre.*”³⁵¹

This geographical layout of early Jerusalem (and confined to the southeast ridge) shows that the city was shaped like a Greek *theatre*. Even the Jewish authorities in the Talmud recognized that the form of a theatre was that like the moon in its crescent phase.³⁵² The design of an early theatre was that of a half-circle, and Aristeas was stating that Jerusalem with its walls had that half-circle shape. But he went on with more detailed information which reinforces the “crescent-shape” of early Jerusalem. He said: “Indeed, the place *bends back*, since the city is built on a mountain [on a single mountain].”³⁵³

When one looked at early Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, it gave the distinct appearance of “a bent-back mountain” — a *single* mountain curved backward. There was no “Upper City” on the western hill at the time Aristeas saw Jerusalem. We will show in this book that the “Upper City” was planned by Simon the Hasmonean in the last part of the second century B.C.E. and was continually built until the time of the apostles. In the time of Aristeas, only the southeastern ridge was considered to be the City of Jerusalem. It was then “crescent-shaped.” Professor Charles said that the Greek word denoting this early geographical appearance of Jerusalem is *anaklosin* that literally means, “a bending back.” Liddell and Scott also show that the word means “to curve backwards” or to reveal features like a rounded stern of a ship. Another description is like that of a long board plank suspended over a bench

³⁵¹ R.H. Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. II, p.105, lines 105–6, italics are my emphasis and words in brackets are mine.

³⁵² See Talmud *Sanhedrin* 37a where the theatre-like seating of the Sanhedrin in the Temple at Jerusalem was shaped “like the moon.”

³⁵³ R.H. Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. II, p.105, see note on line 106.

fulcrum with weights at each end that causes the plank to “bend” — like a seesaw or a teeter-totter that bends at both ends. Professor Charles further defined the word *anaklosin* as being like the “crescent horns” of the Mount of Olives (starting with Mount Scopus in the north and including the Mount of Offense in the south) “which bend round slightly [in a westward direction] towards the city.”³⁵⁴ This is true. The Mount of Olives as seen from the air (or on a map) also appears “crescent-shape” though its “horns” point westward towards the modern city of Jerusalem. The original Jerusalem also had its “crescent-shape,” however, its “horns” pointed in an opposite direction toward the east (toward the Kedron Valley).

Now note this important point. This “crescent-shape” of the southeastern ridge as described by Josephus and Aristeas means that both its western and eastern walls encompassing the southeast ridge would have been circular shaped (between the two projecting “horns” which were in the north and south). In truth, both the inner and the outer walls of the crescent-shaped ramparts of Jerusalem in this early period would have appeared “circular.” The walls at intervals had square-like protrudent turrets and some slight oblique angles within them, but Aristeas said the overall shape of the ramparts then circling the City of Jerusalem was like a “circle of walls.”³⁵⁵ Remember, there was yet no “Upper City” on the western hill in this early period.

These descriptions of Aristeas are accurate and easy to understand. There were actually two walls enclosing the southeast ridge, each of them was in the form of a half-circle — the shorter inner circled wall was on the eastern or Kedron Valley side, and the longer outer circled wall was on the western or the Tyropoeon Valley side. This gave the definite appearance of a *horizontal* “crescent” when observed from an elevated area, and, it made Jerusalem look like the half-circled shape of a “Greek theatre.”

This “crescent-shaped” configuration is a most important geographical feature of early Jerusalem because the historical and biblical records show that the City of David and the early Temples

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.105.

³⁵⁵ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. II., p.104.

were built within and upon that single mountain which was shaped like a Greek “theatre.” That “crescent-shaped” appearance represents the original topography that describes the city of Jerusalem from the time of David down to the time of Simon the Hasmonean. And though archaeology has shown that there was some building activity on the southwest hill (later called the “Upper City”) in the two hundred years before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city in the sixth century before the common era, but it did not become a permanent feature of the area of Jerusalem until the time of Simon the Hasmonean. I will show Simon’s role later in this book.

The Original Jerusalem Located on ONE Mountain

There is more to it than the fact that Jerusalem was “crescent-shaped.” Aristeas also revealed that the entire city of Jerusalem in his time was located on *ONE mountain ridge*. Notice what he said:

“When we arrived in the land of the Jews we saw the city [Jerusalem] situated in the middle of the whole of Judaea *on the top of a mountain* [a single mountain] of considerable altitude. On the summit the Temple had been built in all its splendor. It [the Temple] was surrounded by three walls [a wall on the south, one on the west, and one on the north — the eastern rampart of the Temple was the east wall of the City].... The Temple faces the east and its back is toward the west.”³⁵⁶

The Temple that Aristeas observed was located on that single mountain, as well as the whole of the city of Jerusalem. This mountain actually had two summits like the three summits on the Mount of Olives. The northern summit was where the Temple was located. It was called the *Ophel* area. The southern (and slightly higher) summit was the site of the Citadel (which was actually the *Akra* or the City of David). This *Akra* (City of David) on the southern edge of the city was still located *alongside* the Temple because Aristeas said his group of companions ascended “the neighboring Citadel and looked around us” to look down into the Temple to view all that went on within its outer courts. This shows

³⁵⁶ Charles, *ibid.*, p.105, lines 83–4, italics are my emphasis and the words in brackets are mine.

that the Citadel and the Temple were built on the elevated region of this single mountain.

The text of Aristeas states that from the lofty position on the wall of the Citadel, people could “gain complete information” of what was going on inside the outer courts of the Temple (line 100). This observation from an eyewitness that the Citadel was *alongside* the Temple and close to it, is of prime importance. It shows the closeness of the Citadel (the *Akra*) to the Temple. Furthermore, Aristeas said the Citadel was built as the special fortress for “guarding the Temple precincts” (line 101). Or, in plain words: “The Citadel was the special protection of the Temple and its founder had fortified it so strongly that it might efficiently protect it [the Temple]” (line 104, words in brackets mine).

From these eyewitness accounts of Aristeas, it can easily be determined that the Temple was located to the north but still *alongside* the City of David. The Temple was not situated at that time near the area of the Dome of the Rock that modern historians and theologians (whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim) insist is the proper site. These authorities are wrong. Indeed, since professional archaeologists have also guessed that the Dome of the Rock is the region for the early Temples, they have also misjudged the majority of the eyewitness accounts concerning the City of David and the Temple being on the southeast ridge. A complete re-evaluation of the archaeological evidence needs to be made. That is why I am doing in this historical research. When one investigates what the documentary evidence actually shows, a whole different picture emerges on the scene. It provides us with a history that presents a very different Jerusalem than most people have imagined.