
Chapter 19

THE PRIME POSITION OF THE TEMPLE

THE TOPOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTIONS given above by the early authorities mentioned in the previous three chapters agree remarkably with other (and more extensive) geographical details provided in the eyewitness account of Aristeas (the Gentile from Egypt who visited Jerusalem well over a hundred years before the time of Simon the Hasmonean). We can now continue with a more detailed description of the Temple and Jerusalem as provided by Aristeas. It is very instructive.

We of modern times possess the actual written words of Aristeas. Prof. Gifford of England translated an English version of this early writer, which gives Eusebius' rendition. Let us recall that Aristeas was speaking about the Jerusalem of his day (early third century before Jesus). In his description of Jerusalem and the Temple, he tells us that in the interior of the Temple there was an important geographical feature that will serve as a topographical benchmark for determining where the Temple was located. He said

there was within the Temple a *natural spring* gushing up that gave an abundance of water to the Sanctuary. He could not be clearer.

“There is an inexhaustible reservoir of water, as would be expected from *an abundant spring gushing up naturally from within [the Temple]*; there being moreover wonderful and indescribable cisterns underground, of five furlongs [3000 feet away], according to their showing, all around the foundation of the Temple, and countless pipes from them, so that the streams on every side met together [at the Temple site]. And all these have been fastened with lead at the bottom and the side-walls, and over these has been spread a great quantity of plaster, all having been carefully wrought.”³⁷²

This is a remarkable statement by Aristeas that shows what the pre-Simonian Jerusalem was like. Aristeas states that *a single spring* gushed forth an abundance of water “*from within the Temple area.*” This same distinctive feature was mentioned by the Roman historian Tacitus in his description of the Temple as it existed just before its destruction in 70 C.E. Note what Tacitus stated.

“The temple resembled a citadel, and had its own walls, which were more laboriously constructed than the others. Even the colonnades with which it was surrounded formed an admirable outwork. *It contained an inexhaustible spring*; there were subterranean excavations in the hill, and tanks and cisterns for holding rainwater. The founders of the state had foreseen that frequent wars would result from the singularity of its customs, and so had made every provision against the most protracted siege.”³⁷³

That spring was a significant feature of the Temple. This spring in the Temple precincts is a most important geographical feature in helping to identify the area in the Jerusalem region where the Temple was situated. This is because there was only one spring in the Jerusalem area (and none other for five miles in any direction — as we will see in the next chapter). That spring was clearly and plainly the Gihon Spring located on the east side of the Holy Mountain as shown by Enoch in his description of Jerusalem.

³⁷² Eusebius' recording of Aristeas, *ibid.*, ch.38.

³⁷³ Tacitus, *History*, Bk. 5, para.12.

There were no springs of any kind in the region of the Haram esh-Sharif where the Dome of the Rock is located at the present. As stated before, the Gihon Spring was situated about a third of a mile south of the Dome of the Rock and it was in this southern region that the secular observers mentioned above place the Temple in Jerusalem.

It must be pointed out, however, that the Gihon Spring and the few cisterns on the Temple Mount mentioned by Tacitus were not the only water sources in Jerusalem to supply water to the Sanctuary. There were also other cisterns, which provided water to the Temple. Tacitus said some cisterns were located on the Temple Mount (which is understandable), but Aristeas said the principal ones were found 3000 feet away and upslope from the Temple. Conduits came from those cisterns to converge in the Temple. Obviously, these cisterns had to be upslope from the Temple in order for water to flow in pipes in a downslope manner.

Aristeas was even taken to view these cisterns in an area *outside* the city walls where pipes from the cisterns came together to form a major conduit for waters entering the Temple precincts. At a spot about 2500 feet away from the Temple and OUTSIDE the walls of the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish authorities took Aristeas to view (and hear) the water from these cisterns running in pipes towards the Temple. Aristeas said:

“They led me four furlongs outside the city [note, he was OUTSIDE the city of Jerusalem] and bade me peer down toward a certain spot and listen to the noise that was made by the meeting of the waters, so that the great size of the reservoirs [cisterns] became manifest to me, as has already been pointed out.”³⁷⁴

This area near the Dome of the Rock has a concentration of 36 or 37 cisterns.³⁷⁵ This unusual concentration of natural and artificial cisterns is surely the area to which Aristeas was taken. One of those cisterns was even constructed to catch water in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.³⁷⁶ And recall, those cisterns in the area of the

³⁷⁴ Charles' translation, p.103, line 91.

³⁷⁵ Smith, George Adam, *Jerusalem*, Vol.I., p.19.

³⁷⁶ *Erubin*, 104a, 104b.

Dome of the Rock were then, according to Aristeas, outside the walls of Jerusalem. There was another area that water came from (about 500 feet farther on) which Aristeas said was five furlongs away (3000 feet). This could answer very well to what the New Testament calls the "Pool of Bethesda" (or, the *Birket Israil*). A channel could have also left that northern area to the Temple.

Though these outside cisterns supplied water to the Temple, there was within the precincts of the Sanctuary "an abundant spring gushing up naturally." That natural spring had to be the Gihon. This is a major geographical fact that must be emphasized. The Temple in Aristeas' time was positioned *directly above (and associated with) the Gihon Spring*.

Now note what has happened with our modern scholars regarding Aristeas' account (and also that of Tacitus who also mentions the spring in the interior of the Temple). Since they universally believe that the site of Aristeas' Temple must have been at the Dome of the Rock (which has no springs whatever in its area), they are forced to accuse Aristeas of shoddy and erroneous reporting. They cannot believe that the historian is reporting the truth. Indeed, they go so far as to call him a liar, though they are accustomed to do so with academic language that tends to soften the charge of outright falsehood (which they believe Aristeas and Tacitus are engaged in). After all, geographical and geological experts who have extensively surveyed the area around the Dome of the Rock (which they mistakenly think is the Temple Mount) over the past hundred and fifty years admit there has never been a natural spring within the region. This is enough to convince them that Aristeas and Tacitus are wrong in their reporting.

Modern scholars are so certain that Aristeas and Tacitus were in error in their assessment about the natural spring being inside the Temple enclosure that the most recent translation of Aristeas has the translator changing the text to say "just *as if* there were a plentiful spring rising naturally from within [the Temple]." ³⁷⁷ This highly interpretative translation of the text (by adding words that

³⁷⁷ Shutt's translation in Charlesworth's *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. II, p.18.

Aristeas did not write) is in contrast to the accurate translations of R.H. Charles, Thackery and Gifford. At least the earlier scholars properly translated Aristeas as saying, like Prof. Charles: “*there is an inexhaustible supply of water, because an abundant natural spring gushes up within the Temple.*”

Though Professor Charles was faithful by correctly translating Aristeas, even he had to candidly admit that he thought Aristeas and Tacitus were wrong because there is not any geological evidence that there ever was a natural spring in the vicinity of the Dome of the Rock. It is because of this lack of proof for such a spring that prompts modern scholars to charge Aristeas and Tacitus with falsehood.

The simple fact is, however, Aristeas and Tacitus were telling the truth. The Temple of Solomon, that of Zerubbabel and the one of Herod were all situated directly over the site of the Gihon Spring which was located on the north side of the original Zion. The Temple was actually located on the *Ophel* hump at the base of which was the Gihon Spring. This is so abundantly clear that the normal historian has to wonder why archaeologists and religious leaders find it difficult to locate the original Temple site in the proper area. It is plain that in no way were Aristeas and Tacitus speaking about a natural spring gushing up naturally in some “Temple” that was supposed in the region near the Dome of the Rock.

The next chapter will show conclusively that there was only one spring in the Jerusalem area, and that spring was the Gihon. Without the slightest doubt, Aristeas saw that Gihon Spring (and Tacitus referred to it in his account of the war in 70 C.E.) and that it supplied water to the Temple from within its precincts. This means that we have eyewitness and other historical accounts that the original Temple was built just above (and within the area of) the Gihon Spring.