
Chapter 22

WHERE WAS THE AKRA?

WHEN ONE LOOKS at the southeast ridge a third of a mile south of the present Dome of the Rock, there is no longer a major mountain called Zion with a subsidiary “hump” on the north called the *Ophel*. The reason this former elevated area is no longer in existence is because Josephus tells us that in the time of Simon the Hasmonean the region of Zion in the extreme south of the ridge was systematically cut down to the bedrock. It took the inhabitants of Jerusalem three years working night and day to accomplish the task of destruction. So complete was this engineering activity of the Jews that it became common from the time of Simon the Hasmonean onward to refer to this once elevated region of the southeast ridge (where there were once “two mountains”) as “the Lower City” (in contrast to earlier descriptions that the region was like the “utmost heights”).

We will now discover that this southern region called the original Zion was designated the *Akra* in the period of the Hasmoneans (otherwise known as the Maccabees). We are told in the historical records that this *Akra* was destroyed. It was cut down to bedrock. This is one of the main reasons that scholars have had trouble in

discovering its whereabouts, especially since they think the Temple (which was always described as being alongside the *Akra*) is reckoned by them to have been situated where the Dome of the Rock now exists. The scholars, however, have been looking in the wrong place for the *Akra*. In this chapter, we will see the plain geographical evidence that will locate the *Akra*. This discovery will make the matter of the original Temple sites to be clear. Indeed, it is really quite easy to locate the original *Akra* once we recognize where the Temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel were located. The word *Akra* means “high area” — the *top* of a mountain.

Syrians Entrench Their Troops in the Akra

Look at some of the history concerning the *Akra*. We find in the Book of First Maccabees that Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C.E. built up the *Akra* (or Citadel) in the city of Jerusalem and placed part of his Gentile army inside. These Syrian soldiers remained in the *Akra* until Simon the Hasmonean conquered them about twenty-five years later. This *Akra* that the Syrians captured is consistently described in the historical records as being next to and alongside the Temple.⁴⁴⁷ We are further told in I Maccabees that at this earlier time the “Temple mount [was located] *alongside* [Greek: *para*] the *Akra*.”⁴⁴⁸ The text could not be clearer. The *Akra* in which the Syrians were encamped was positioned precisely alongside the Temple itself and everything in the Temple enclosure could be seen from the wall of that *Akra*.

The *Akra* and the Temple were so close to one another that the Syrians housed in the *Akra* often “became an ambush against the Temple.”⁴⁴⁹ Also: “The men in the *Akra* were hemming in Israel around the Temple, continually trying to harm them.”⁴⁵⁰ There is more proof of this. “In his time [Simon] and under his guidance they [the Jews] succeeded in driving the Gentiles out of their country, especially those [Syrians] in the City of David in Jerusalem,

⁴⁴⁷ I Maccabees 1:33–34; etc.

⁴⁴⁸ I Maccabees 13:52.

⁴⁴⁹ I Maccabees 1:36.

⁴⁵⁰ I Maccabees 6:18.

who had built for themselves an *Akra* from which they used to sally forth to defile the environs of the Temple and inflict grave injury on its purity.”⁴⁵¹

In the *Letter of Aristeas* it also shows that the *Akra* (the Citadel) was a close neighbor to the Temple and that the *Akra* was originally built alongside the Temple and designed as a fortress to protect the Temple. Aristeas said: “The Citadel [the *Akra*] was the special protection of the Temple and its founder had fortified it so strongly that it might effectively protect it [the Temple].”⁴⁵² And remember, so close was the *Akra* to the Temple that Aristeas said that from the wall of the *Akra* he and his companions could observe the priests performing their ceremonial activities within the Temple precincts. This indicates how close the two summits (the *Akra* and the Temple Mount called the *Ophel*) were to one another in the pre-Simonian period.

Let us now look at the dangerous situation in which the Jews were placed for some twenty-five years after Antiochus Epiphanes garrisoned his soldiers in the *Akra*. Those Syrian armed forces were encamped in the heart of the capital city of the Jews. This proved to be an embarrassment to the Jewish authorities, but more than that, this foreign garrison was precarious to their security. Since the *Akra* was positioned alongside the Temple, this made the Temple vulnerable to attacks by these Syrian forces. All these geographical factors are important in locating the precise position of the Temple in the time of Simon the Hasmonean. If one can discover the location of the *Akra*, the Temple has to be positioned right alongside that *Akra*. The key to the whole matter of where the early Temple was located is to find the location of the *Akra*.

The Akra is Easily Identified

The Septuagint Version (in the unversified section between our First Kings 2:35 and 36 and translated long before the time of Josephus and the enlargement of the Temple by Herod) states that the *Akra* was located on the north part of Zion or David’s City that

⁴⁵¹ 1 Maccabees 14:36, words in brackets mine.

⁴⁵² Line 104, words in brackets mine.

was situated on the south part of the southeast ridge. Simply put, the *Akra* and David's City (Zion) located south of the Temple were identical.

As clear as these facts can be, these historical references have not satisfied the beliefs of the Rabbis or even modern scholars. The Rabbis and modern scholars are dogmatic in their constant and unwavering faith that the Temple was position near the Dome of the Rock within the area of the Haram. Because the *Akra* is always shown in the historical records as *alongside* the Temple, scholars and religious leaders have consistently (and erroneously) felt compelled to place the Temple of Solomon, that of Zerubbabel and Herod near or at the Dome of the Rock. No other consideration for the location of the Temple has been remotely suggested. Utter dogmatism reigns supreme and without the slightest flinching of belief. It is automatically and systematically believed that somewhere within the enclosure of the Haram was where the Temples were located. This verdict is final and without controversy as far as the scholars and Rabbis are concerned. This current scholarly and religious opinion is universal. It is a belief "engraved in stone."

Now to the point. Just where was the *Akra* located? The scholars (who accept the Dome of the Rock as the early Temple area) have invented as many theories as to the *Akra's* whereabouts as there are writers who tackle the geographical problem. Since the *Akra* was situated alongside the Temple, modern scholars have been forced to place that fortress in various areas around the Dome of the Rock because that is the only area for the Temple they will consider. This makes them resort to inventing an "Akra" out of their own imagination in order to place it in the vicinity of the Haram. It is this manufactured *Akra* of the scholars that Simon the Hasmonean is supposed to have had the citizens of Jerusalem level to the ground, taking three years to accomplish the task.

The fact is, as I am showing in this book, the Jewish Rabbis and the secular scholars (along with the Muslim Imams) have picked the wrong Temple site. What they have done is something like looking for the Golden Gate Bridge in Seattle, Washington which is in the north part of the United States, rather than where it actually is located in the south, in the San Francisco Bay area. Though

almost 800 miles separate Seattle from San Francisco (and only a third of a mile from the Dome of the Rock to the original Temple site), the analogy is still the same. Modern scholars are looking in “Seattle” for their “Golden Gate Bridge” instead of “San Francisco.” This is why they will never find their “Akra” around the Dome of the Rock.

As a result of this erroneous dogmatism of the scholars and Rabbis, some have placed their *Akra* (that Antiochus Epiphanes captured and refortified) on the northwest side of their Temple site at a place called the Baris which Herod later renamed the Antonia. Others have placed it west of the Tyropoeon Valley near where the Hasmoneans built their palace. Others have positioned it on the southern side of the Dome of the Rock and near the southern wall not far from the Al Aqsa Mosque. Others have reckoned it to be a score of yards farther south of the southern wall. Selecting these various spots shows the confusion and disarray that is rampant among the scholarly authorities. The mystery in locating the *Akra* has become a common factor in misunderstanding the geography of early Jerusalem. The difficulty is because the modern scholars and Rabbis *have picked the WRONG Temple Mount!*

The secular scholars and the religious authorities need to get their geography straight. If they would pay attention to the records in First Maccabees about the actual site of the *Akra* as described by eyewitnesses, there would never have been any doubt about the proper location of the original Temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel, and the area where Herod enlarged it. The accounts clearly identify where the *Akra* was located. One should read (and BELIEVE) them. Look at First Maccabees 1:31–33.

“He [Antiochus Epiphanes] plundered the city [of Jerusalem] and set fire to it, demolished its houses and its surrounding walls, took captive the women and children, and seized the cattle. Then *they built up the City of David* with its high, massive wall and strong towers, and *it became their Citadel [their Akra].*”

Note that the troops of Antiochus Epiphanes conquered the *Akra* and then they positioned themselves within the interior of the fortress. The text also states that the *Akra* was identical with the City of David. Indeed, this *Akra* was the City of David itself as the

Septuagint Version shows. And where was the City of David according to all historical evidence — and a site that is not disputed even by modern scholars? It was *not* in the *north* near the Dome of the Rock in the area of the Haram. It was situated on the southeast hill about a third of a mile south of the Dome of the Rock. This is precisely where the actual *Akra* was located. There is so much historical evidence to support this fact that it is truly amazing that the identification has remained so difficult for some to accept. Note what the great geographer of Jerusalem, George Adam Smith, had to say about the identification of the *Akra* WITH the City of David on the southeast ridge.

“By the author of First Maccabees *the Akra is identified with ‘the City of David,’* that is the earlier Jebusite stronghold of Sion. *If we accept this identification the question is at once solved,* for, as we have seen, the stronghold of Sion lay on the East Hill, south of and below the Temple, or immediately above Gihon.”⁴⁵³

Professor Smith was absolutely correct. Without the slightest doubt, we find First Maccabees stating that the *Akra* that was torn down by Simon the Hasmonean (which took the citizens of Jerusalem three years of night and day work to demolish) was the City of David located near the Gihon Spring. The early Temples were located a short distance north of the City of David, on a secondary northern summit called the *Ophel* directly over the Gihon Spring. Between the City of David and the *Ophel* was the region called the “Millo” (the “Fill In”) which the Septuagint Version says was the site of the *Akra* (again, this shows nearness to the Temple on its south side abutting to the City of David). This location of the *Akra* in the Septuagint (written before the time of Simon the Hasmonean) tallies with the statement of Josephus that the southeast ridge itself was called the *Akra Hill*.

Speaking of the southeast ridge, Josephus said: “The second hill [east of the Tyropoeon Valley], which bore the name *Akra* and supported the Lower City [the southeast ridge], was shaped like the crescent moon.”⁴⁵⁴ Furthermore, in *Antiquities* Josephus referred to

⁴⁵³ “Jerusalem,” vol. I., p.445, italics mine.

⁴⁵⁴ *War* V.4,1.

“the *Akra* in the Lower City [the southeast ridge].”⁴⁵⁵ This plainly shows that Josephus placed the *Akra* (which means “High Place or Tower”) into an area of Jerusalem that was in his time so cut down to the ground that he had to re-designate the region as “the Lower City.” This is the reason archaeologists will never find the original Mount Zion of David. How can modern scholars locate an ancient mountain that was cut down and no longer exists? The original Mount Zion disappeared. It was chopped down to the bedrock.

Josephus Mentions These Points

Let us look at Josephus once again. Josephus said that there were in his time three hills that made up Jerusalem (plus a fourth hill in the north part of the city that he called Bezetha or New City). The first hill was the Upper City located in the west. He then described the other two hills as they once existed. Josephus said the second hill of Jerusalem was what he called the *Akra* (or Citadel and it then represented the Lower City). His third hill he said was “opposite” the *Akra* and lower in elevation.⁴⁵⁶ No doubt this was the mountain north of the Temple where the Dome of the Rock now exists.

Josephus said that in his day (though there was no longer a second mountain in this region because it was “cut down” and had now become “the Lower City”), the region just to the north of the former Mount Zion was still however called *Ophalas*⁴⁵⁷ which is a variant of “Ophel.” It was on the *Ophel*, as we will see, that the Temples were built. At the base of the *Ophel* was the Gihon Spring that was located within the interiors of all the Temples.

Josephus also showed that this third hill (which was the area of the Dome of the Rock) had been opposite the *Akra* (and formerly lower in elevation than the *Akra*). Then Josephus takes us to the time of the Hasmoneans, where he stated that the summit of the *Akra* was then cut off. Note what Josephus said:

⁴⁵⁵ *Antiquities* XII.5,4.

⁴⁵⁶ *War* V.4,1.

⁴⁵⁷ *War* II.17,9.

“The Hasmoneans in the period of their reign, both filled up the flat-like ravine [the ravine between the *Akra* and the third hill], with the object of uniting the city [the City of David, the *Akra*] with the Temple [located on the *OpheI*], and also [they] reduced the elevation of *Akra* by leveling its summit [only its summit was at first cut down], in order that it might not block the view of the Temple [which was before the time of Simon the Hasmonean situated just to the north].”⁴⁵⁸

What Simon the Hasmonean did was to destroy completely the original Mount Zion (the City of David). He made a high mountain (*Akra*) district into the lowest part of Jerusalem and then called it the “Lower City.” Josephus tells what Simon did.

“He [Simon] thought it would be an excellent thing and to his advantage to level also the hill on which the citadel [of David] stood, in order that the Temple might be higher than this. Accordingly, he called the people to an assembly and sought to persuade them to have this done, reminding them how they had suffered at the hands of the [Syrian] garrison and the Jewish renegades, and also warning them of what they would suffer if a foreign ruler should again occupy their realm, and a garrison should be placed therein. With these words he persuaded the people since he was recommending what was to their advantage. And so they all set to and began to level the hill, and without stopping work night or day, after three whole years brought it [the City of David, the original Mount Zion] down to the ground and the surface of the plain. And thereafter the Temple stood high above everything else, once the citadel and the hill on which it stood had been demolished. Such was the nature of things accomplished in the time of Simon [the Hasmonean].”⁴⁵⁹

Previously, before the summit of the *Akra* was lowered, travelers coming to Jerusalem from the east (that is, from the Jericho region) would normally have approached the city by the Kedron Valley route. They would proceed west and then when approaching the southern part of the Jerusalem area at the foot of Mount Zion (the Citadel of David), they would turn northerly to follow the lower riverbed road of the Kedron Valley to the Temple and the east gate. While travelling northward up the Kedron Valley, the

⁴⁵⁸ *War* V.4,1, words in brackets mine.

⁴⁵⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities* XIII.6,7 ¶¶ 215–18, Loeb translation.

Akra (then located on the southern summit of the crescent-shaped city) would have blocked the view of the Temple Mount that was just to the north of the *Akra* on the *Ophel*. But in the time of Simon the Hasmonean (142 to 134 B.C.E.), he cut down the *Akra*. This made the Temple on the *Ophel* summit to be a higher area in Jerusalem.

As for Mount Zion, it was finally cut down to bedrock. Where there was once at the southern part of the eastern ridge a high mountain (*Akra*) called “Zion,” the area had been lowered to such an extent that it was (after the time of Simon the Hasmonean) the lowest part of Jerusalem and then called “the Lower City.” It was anachronous, however, that the former name *Akra* (high point) now described the *lowest* part of the city. In a word, the original “Mount Zion” was completely destroyed and leveled to the low bedrock. I will show in a later chapter that this “cutting down” was prophesied in Isaiah 29:9ff to one day happen. The prophecy was fulfilled in the time of Simon the Hasmonean.

On the third hill to the north of the Temple was located the Baris (which was enlarged by Simon and his son John Hyrcanus and built even stronger by King Herod and renamed Fort Antonia in honor of Marc Anthony). It is now time for us to examine in detail how this destruction of the elevated areas on the southeast ridge was accomplished, and how the new fortress of the Baris (that is, Fort Antonia) became the fortress and citadel for both the Temple and the City of Jerusalem. The next chapter will explain.