
Chapter 33

THE TEMPLE THAT JOSEPHUS KNEW

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS for those who wish to know the location of the Temple of Herod (and consequently those of Solomon and Zerubbabel) is to pay attention to the eyewitness accounts of the Jewish priest/historian, Josephus. Not only was he one who observed the Temple for himself, he was a priest who had access to all areas of the Temple (save the Holy of Holies) and he had within his reach all of the historical documents that the Jews in the early first century maintained in Jerusalem. Besides that, in his accounts of the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, he dedicated his works to Titus (the Roman general and later emperor) and to Herod Agrippa the Second who were both eyewitnesses to the state of affairs in Jerusalem before and after the war. They would have known whether Josephus was telling the truth about the Temple or if he was “pulling his punches” and that he greatly exaggerated his descriptions of the Temple of Herod.

It ought to be apparent to any reasonable person that the narratives of Josephus (especially when they are consistent with one another, and they are in regard to the Temple) should be given a great deal of credence in letting us know the facts of what pre-war Jerusalem and the Temple were like. If one would simply let Josephus state the evidence that he gives (and believe him), the true site of the Temple of Herod would have been recognized long ago. The truth is, Josephus describes a Temple that was very different than what modern scholars assume to be the fact. In no way does Josephus have in mind the remains of the Haram esh-Sharif when he spoke about the Temple of Herod that once existed in Jerusalem. Josephus had an altogether different building complex in mind when he spoke of the Temple.

Before we look at the clear and illuminating description of the Temple of Herod (and his historical analysis of the building of the structure from the time of Solomon), we should be aware of one geographical feature associated with the Temple that all Jewish people would have taken for granted (and so did Josephus) that the priest/historian did not believe it was necessary to mention as being a necessary part of the Temple complex. Two foreigners, however (one from Egypt about 300 years before Josephus, and one Roman who lived in the time of Josephus), felt it was essential to mention a cardinal feature of the Temple around which the whole structure was able to maintain its holiness and represent the very House of God on earth. That was the mention of a natural spring of water that was found within the precincts of the Temple to provide the needed water supplies (both ritualistically and for ordinary cleaning purposes) that any "House of God" would have to have in order to function as a suitable residence of God on earth or in heaven. Let us notice what these two foreigners had to say about the Temple and its furniture and the necessary facility that made the building a holy and divine Sanctuary that could adequately represent the "House of God" on earth.

The first witness is that of Aristeeas who came from Egypt to Jerusalem about 300 years before the time of Josephus. He leaves us a report of what he saw with his own eyes. Notice that he makes a point of the fact that inside the Temple area "the water supply is

inexhaustible since there is an abundant natural spring that gushes out from inside the Temple area.”⁶³⁶ Tacitus, the Roman, said the same.

“The Temple resembled a fortress and had its own walls, which were more laboriously constructed than the others. Even the colonnades with which it was surrounded formed an admirable outer defense. It contained an inexhaustible spring.”⁶³⁷

Readers, the only spring in the Jerusalem area (and there is no other for at least five miles in any direction) is that known in the Holy Scriptures as the Gihon Spring. That natural spring that gave an inexhaustible supply of spring water was, according to Aristeas and Tacitus, **WITHIN THE VERY PRECINCTS OF THE TEMPLE!** And this is the truth! The fact that this well-known singular spring was **IN** the Temple shows its Gihon location. It was an indispensable requirement that for a fully equipped building that would resemble on earth God’s divine House in heaven, that building had to contain a natural spring where purified water could be obtained for certain essential rituals that demanded such things. True, we know that in the time of the Hasmoneans (the Maccabees) and also in that of Pilate, there were two aqueducts that brought water from south of Bethlehem to the Temple and the Fort Antonia area to supplement the ordinary water sources found in Jerusalem. But these two aqueducts were built because of an expanding population and they were built after the time of Aristeas.

The original supply of water for the Temple was from the “inexhaustible spring” that was found within the walls of the Temple at Jerusalem. This was the Gihon Spring (the only spring in Jerusalem). This was the original (and only) spring that was located within the Temple walls. Now note this. The Gihon Spring is situated just over 1000 feet south of the Dome of the Rock and it is even about 600 feet south of the southern wall of the Haram esh-Sharif. When, in a moment, we review Josephus’ description of the Temple and its outer walls, we must understand that we will be reading about a building that had the Gihon Spring in its confines and was

⁶³⁶ *Letter of Aristeas*, emphases mine.

⁶³⁷ Tacitus, *History*, V, 11–12.

almost a quarter of a mile south of the Dome of the Rock. The two areas will be utterly different from one another.

Josephus' Description of the Temple

The first thing that Josephus does is to show what the mountain was like on top of which Solomon built the Temple in his time. Remember that this was formerly the area of the threshing floor of Ornan who sold the area to King David so that he could construct the Sanctuary of God on its summit. Though Josephus is describing events that happened a thousand years before his time, he was still giving information about the precise spot where the Temple of Herod had been built. There was no doubt to Josephus, or the Jewish authorities at his time, that Herod's Temple was still constructed in the same general area as that of Solomon's (though enlarged very much from Solomon's Temple). So, what Josephus is stating is a description of the former hill on which Solomon began to build his Temple. What Josephus states is very instructive, and in no way can it be said that he is describing any area around the present Dome of the Rock or anywhere in the region of the Haram esh-Sharif. Note what Josephus stated.

“The Temple was seated on a strong hill, the level area on its summit originally barely sufficed for shrine [the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place] and the altar [the Altar of Burnt Offering], the ground around it being precipitous and steep.”⁶³⁸

Notice carefully that the Temple was first constructed on a “strong hill.” It was a steep hill that was pretty easy to defend because of its precipitous features. Note that the area on top was surrounded by cliffs that went downslope in a manner that was “precipitous and steep.” The area on top of this strong hill was not large. It was so constrained in its top area that “its summit barely [just barely] sufficed for shrine and the altar.” How much space was this on top of this strong and precipitous hill that had steep sides all around? Since the Holy of Holies, Holy Place and Altar of Burnt Offering that Solomon built (as Josephus stated) was about 130 cubits (195 feet) in length: The Holy of Holies was 60 cubits

⁶³⁸ *War* V.5,1.

long (90 feet); the porch in front of the shrine (the Holy Place) was 20 cubits long (30 feet); and the altar was located southwest of the Holy Place some 30 cubits away (that is, 10 cubits between the porch and the laver, the laver was 10 cubits wide, and then another 10 cubits to the western side of the Altar of Burnt Offering), and then the Altar of Burnt Offering itself was a square of 20 cubits (30 feet), makes a space of about 130 cubits in length (195 feet) from west to east. Since we find that Solomon also built his palace and judgment hall just to the south of the Temple, and on this particular hill that Josephus called a “strong hill,” the width of the summit area must also have measured about 130 cubits from north to south. This made an exact square as a platform.

How high was this strong hill on which Solomon built the original Temple, his palace and government buildings? Josephus said Solomon built an east wall (or embankment) that reached upwards from the very base of the hill (that is, from the bottom of the Kedron Valley) for 300 cubits (450 feet). This eastern embankment (or wall) ascended upward from the base (from the very floor of the Kedron Valley) until it reached an altitude at the level area on top of the mountain. This eastern precinct (between the top of the hill and this artificial embankment that Solomon built in the east and directly over the Kedron Valley) was then filled in with earth, stones and bigger rocks until this eastern embankment reached the top of the hill some 450 feet above the floor of the Kedron Valley. Josephus tells us that Solomon filled in (in the Bible the Hebrew states he made the “Millo” — a “filled in” area) with earth and stones. Thus, the steep and precipitous area between the top of the hill and the embankment that Solomon erected out of the floor of the Kedron Valley was completely “filled in.” Let us see how Josephus describes this very activity of Solomon.

“But king Solomon, the actual founder of the Temple, having walled up the eastern side, a single portico [colonnade] was reared on this made ground [on top of this artificial ‘fill in’]; on its other sides [north, west, south] the sanctuary remained exposed [no walls were built by Solomon on these three sides]. In course of ages, however, through the constant additions of the people to the embankment, the hilltop by this process of leveling up widened

[they 'filled in' more areas]. They further broke down the north wall [a later activity that was done by Herod] and thus took in an area as large as the whole Temple enclosure subsequently occupied. Then, after having enclosed the hill from its base [from the floor of the Kedron and Tyropoeon valleys] with a wall on three sides [after Solomon's time the Israelites built the north, west and south walls], and accomplished a task greater than they could ever have hoped to achieve — a task upon which long ages were spent by them as well as all their sacred treasures, though replenished by the tributes offered to God from every quarter of the world — they built around the block the upper courts and the lower Temple enclosure [the final Temple of Herod was shaped like a square block]. The latter, where its foundations were lowest, they built up from 300 cubits [450 feet high]; at some spots this figure was exceeded.”⁶³⁹

Though Josephus said that the four walls supporting the Temple in his time was shaped as a square block of stones reaching up on the east side to 450 feet (and in some places even higher) from the floor of the Kedron Valley, he showed that most of the eastern part of the Temple was built over the earth and rock “fill in” that Solomon and later Israelites placed within the eastern embankment (and finally within the embankments caused by the building of the other three walls on the north, west and south). This square block of supportive walls with an abundance of “fill in” material appeared (as we will soon see) as a 40 to 45 story tower that arose out of the floor of the Kedron Valley and with its southern and northern sides extended westward over the ridge between the Kedron and Tyropoeon Valleys. Indeed, the western wall [or side] of the Temple [this square blocked tower] also arose out of the Tyropoeon Valley (though the western side was not as high). But even besides the external visible parts of the four walls surrounding the Temple tower, there were also a great number of foundation stones that supported the Sanctuary structure that could not be seen because they were built below ground. Josephus continues:

“The whole depth of the foundations was, however, not apparent [not all of the foundation stones of the Temple could be seen]; for they [Israelites over the ages] filled up a considerable part of the

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

ravines [the Kedron and the Tyropoeon Valleys] wishing to level the narrow alleys of the town. Blocks of stone were used in the building measuring 40 cubits [60 feet long]; for lavish funds and popular enthusiasm led to incredible enterprises, and a task seemingly interminable was through perseverance and in time actually achieved.”⁶⁴⁰

This does not end the description of the Temple by Josephus. He goes into much more elaborate detail that highlights the actual appearance of the Temple and its walls. The whole complex had the appearance of a square blocked tower that was 400 hundred cubits square at the summit of its construction (a Greek *stadium* in length on each side, or 600 feet by 600 feet). At the summit (which was 300 cubits high or 450 feet) Herod built a level platform on which he constructed four colonnades with roadways on top to surround the square block. In the interior of this platform (indeed, Josephus said “in its center”) Herod built the Sanctuary itself with its outer courts on the east and its inner courts (those of the priests and the Holy of Holies) on the west. The whole structure rose up to a height of a modern skyscraper some 40 to 45 stories above the extreme depths of the Kedron Valley. This was nowhere near the Dome of the Rock.

The Prodigious Heights of the Temple Walls

Let us look further at the eyewitness accounts of Josephus that tell us about the dimensions of the Temple of Herod and where its walls were positioned in the first century. We should start with a further description of the east wall. Josephus said the foundation of that wall was built by Solomon and was still in existence in the time of Herod. Though Josephus seems to say the eastern wall was a creation of Solomon, he may only mean that its early foundational stones were those of Solomon.⁶⁴¹ There were also enlarge-

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ There is the statement in the Septuagint Version of Sirach that Simon, the son of Onias, in the early third century B.C.E., was responsible for making more foundational stones and “doubling the height” of the Temple walls. This Simon (often identified with the extraordinary powerful High Priest called Simon the Righteous) also made the Temple into a mighty fortress with battlements at intervals along the walls. See LXX, Ecclesiasticus 50:1–2, also Charles, *Apoc-*

ments to the Temple in the time of Simon the Hasmonean. We also know that Herod in his time extended the eastern wall northward from the original wall that he found in existence at his time. Whatever the case, the southeast corner of this wall was located at the extreme bottom of the Kedron Valley — right in the very floor of the valley. Josephus did not say it was located over half way up the west slope of the Kedron Valley as is the southeastern corner of the Haram. He said it was situated at the very bottom (or at the “foot”) of the Kedron Valley.

“He [Solomon] also built a wall below, beginning at the bottom [‘at the foot’ of the eastern hill, Loeb translation] which was encompassed by a deep valley [the Kedron].”⁶⁴²

It is time to pay attention to these accounts of Josephus. This position for the wall in the valley floor (at the very foot of the slope of the Kedron Valley) required that a type of manmade channel or viaduct be constructed to direct water around the eastern wall from rains or melting snow. This allowed water to flow in a conduit that avoided undermining the southeastern angle of Solomon’s (and Herod’s) Temple.

One of the reasons Solomon placed the foundation of his eastern wall at the bottom of the ravine was to give the appearance of height and impressiveness to the completed structure. The fact that Solomon placed the foundation of the east wall in the floor of the Kedron Valley is confirmed by Josephus in his account of the Roman general Pompey in his attack against the Temple in 63 B.C.E. (this was before Herod and his rebuilding activities).

“At this treatment Pompey was very angry, and took Aristobulus into custody. And when he was come to the city [Jerusalem], he looked about where he might make his attack. He saw the walls were so firm, that it would be hard to overcome them. The valley before the walls was terrible [for depth]; and that the temple, which was within that valley, was itself encompassed with a very strong wall, insomuch that if the city were taken, that temple would be a second place of refuge for the enemy to retire to.”⁶⁴³

rypha and Pseudepigraphica, vol. I, p. 507.

⁶⁴² *Antiquities* XV.11,3.

⁶⁴³ *War* 1.7,1.

There is no ambiguity in this reference. Josephus cites historical records giving eyewitness accounts of what former people saw concerning the position of the eastern wall of the Temple. Pompey observed that the foundation of the eastern wall was located within the lowest part of the precipitous ravine. It was at the very bottom.

The walls Pompey saw in this reference were not those around the Haram esh-Sharif. It is evident to anyone who presently views the walls of the Haram that its southeastern angle is not down in the very floor of the Kedron Valley. Indeed, the southeastern corner of the Haram is conspicuously located over half way up the west side of the Kedron slope. And farther north at the northeastern angle of the Haram, the walls of the Haram are situated at the very top of the ridge. Pompey, however, saw very different walls than those perched near or on top of the slope. The eastern wall of the Temple that Pompey saw (and that he referred to) had its foundations at the floor of the Kedron Valley — in the very bottom of the ravine. Even the entire northern wall of the Temple (from its northeast corner to its northwest corner) was viewed by Josephus as being of “tremendous depth.”⁶⁴⁴

But the southeastern angle of the walls surrounding the Temple was even higher in elevation. That southeastern corner of Solomon’s and Herod’s Temple wall towered high above the very floor of the Kedron Valley. Josephus said that in his time this eastern angle of the wall was on the average 300 hundred cubits in height (450 feet, as high as a 40 to 45 story building). What? Could Josephus really mean this? It appears ridiculous in the extreme to some scholars that the walls surrounding the Haram esh-Sharif could ever have been that high. Yes, indeed, this would be the case if people consider the southeast angle of the Haram as the corner wall of the Temple Josephus was referring as an eyewitness. That southeast angle of the Haram could never have been that high, nor was it located directly in the very floor of the Kedron Valley. The truth is, however, Josephus is not speaking of the eastern wall of the Haram or of its southeast angle. The wall to which Josephus referred was 450 feet in height. Note again what he said:

⁶⁴⁴ *War* I.7,3.

“The latter [the eastern wall], where its foundations were lowest, they built up from a depth of three hundred cubits; at some spots this figure was exceeded.”⁶⁴⁵

Yes, the eastern wall of the Temple was even higher than 450 feet in some places! Moreover, Josephus went on to say that this awesome height of the eastern wall of the Temple was exceeded at the southeastern angle. He indicated the southeastern corner of the wall, up to the highest point of the Temple (perhaps this means to the top of the “pinnacle” [wing] of the Temple where the New Testament states Satan took Jesus), had a height of no less than 400 cubits (it reached upward 600 feet above the very bottom of the Kedron Valley floor). Josephus said:

“He [Solomon] made that Temple which was beyond this a wonderful one indeed, and such as exceeds all description in words; nay, if I may so say, is hardly believed upon sight; for when he had filled up great valleys with earth, which, on account of their immense depth, could not be looked on when you bent down to see them without pain, and had elevated the ground four hundred cubits [600 feet], he made it to be on a level with the top of the mountain on which the Temple was built.”⁶⁴⁶

Josephus went on to say: “This wall was itself the most prodigious work that was ever heard of by man.”⁶⁴⁷

This wall of the Temple at its southeast angle was 600 feet high from the lowest of the foundation stones to the top of the colonnades located at the southeast corner (or perhaps the 600 feet included the height of the “pinnacle” which could mean the extended height of the “Royal Cloister” that was located on the southern wall and reached to the eastern wall).

Whatever the case, even the eastern wall of the Temple at its northeast angle was also extremely high, and we are told by Josephus that this corner was located directly over the Kedron Valley (not up on the ridge and away from the slope of the Kedron as is that of the Haram esh-Sharif).

⁶⁴⁵ *War* V.5,1, Loeb translation.

⁶⁴⁶ *Antiquities* VIII.3,9.

⁶⁴⁷ *Antiquities* XV.11,3.

“The Romans also burnt the whole northern portico [colonnade] right up to that on the east, where the angle [northeastern angle of the Temple wall] connecting the two was built over the ravine called the Kedron, the depth at that point being consequently terrific.”⁶⁴⁸

This description by Josephus is very different from that associated with the northeast corner of the present Haram esh-Sharif. The present northeast angle of the Haram is located on top of the ridge. Indeed, it is on a flat part of the ridge. It is actually about 100 feet west of the slope that goes down into the Kedron. The simple truth is, these two northeast corners belong to two different walls that surround two different facilities. When Josephus spoke of the eastern wall of the Temple with its southeast and northeast angles, he was not in any manner referring to those angles in the walls now surrounding the Haram esh-Sharif.

And as far as the southeastern corner of the Temple wall is concerned, modern scholars can hardly believe that one must measure 600 feet downward from the “pinnacle” to reach the lowest of the foundation stones of the Temple wall in the floor of the Kedron Valley. As a comparison in height, this eastern wall would have been 120 feet higher than the top of the great pyramid of Cheops in Egypt (the largest and highest of the pyramids). And remember, Josephus was reporting these measurements concerning the walls of the Temple as an eyewitness. He was writing his book to King Agrippa and others in the royal family (plus to Titus the Roman emperor) who were also eyewitnesses to these immense and awesome dimensions of the Temple walls.

Josephus, as a historian/priest, had been to the Temple many times and he observed the enormous height of the southeast angle directly over the Kedron, and the northeast angle also of great height (though not quite as high) located directly over the Kedron Valley as well. Notice the superlatives in language Josephus used in describing this wonderful and majestic scene of this precipitous eastern wall that supported the “pinnacle” of the Temple at its southeast angle.

⁶⁴⁸ *War* VI.3,2 Loeb ed.

“This cloister [that is, the southeast corner of the southern colonnade] deserves to be mentioned better than any other under the sun. For while the valley was very deep, and its bottom could not be seen, if you looked from above into the depth, this farther vastly high elevation of the colonnade stood upon that height, insomuch that if anyone looked down from the top of the battlements, or down both these altitudes, he would be giddy, while his sight could not reach to such a great depth.”⁶⁴⁹

So high was the southern colonnade at the southeast corner of the Temple wall that Josephus said the Temple (when looked at from the south of Jerusalem) could be seen for “a great many furlongs.”⁶⁵⁰

Josephus was describing the final architectural aspects of Herod’s Temple, but he acknowledged many of these features were associated with the original Temple of Solomon.⁶⁵¹ Of course, Solomon’s Temple was nowhere as large as Herod’s Temple finally became. Indeed, the Jewish authorities after the time of Alexander the Great enlarged the size of Solomon’s original design

⁶⁴⁹ *Antiquities* XV.11,5.

⁶⁵⁰ *Antiquities* XV.11,3.

⁶⁵¹ While Josephus said in *War* V.5,1 that the top of the eastern wall of Herod’s Temple was 300 cubits’ above the Kedron Valley (or higher in places), he said in *Antiquities* VIII.3,9 the height was 400 cubits (that is 100 cubits higher). Reading the texts carefully means that the extra 100 cubits (of the 400 cubits’ measurement) remained below ground because “the whole depth of the foundations was not evident; for they filled up a considerable part of the ravines” (*War* V.5,1). And in *Antiquities* VIII.3,9, Josephus said Solomon “filled up great valleys with earth.” This means Solomon actually filled in with earth the original Kedron Valley (to the height of 100 cubits) and then on top of this foundational “fill-in,” his east wall ascended another 300 cubits exposed to the air up to the top of the Temple wall. However, we are told that it was Simon, the son of Onias, in the early third century B.C.E. who actually doubled the height of the walls around the Temple (see *Ecclesiasticus* 50:1–2). Josephus may be including this further heightening of the Temple walls by Simon in his description. Whatever the historical truth, Josephus was certainly giving proper dimensions for the eastern wall of Herod’s Temple of which he was an eyewitness. Did Josephus include the height of the “pinnacle” in his 400 cubits height at the southeast angle? The word “pinnacle” actually means “wing” (or side building) and it may have been a scenic view area and not a “tower.” There is no ritualistic or symbolic reason shown in the Bible why a “tower” had to be at that corner. If there were a “tower” at that spot (as we have illustrated as a possibility), it was only for aesthetic and/or observational purposes.

by doubling the height of the walls,⁶⁵² and that Herod himself made the Temple larger still.

We have an eyewitness account from the man named Hecateus who visited Jerusalem near the time of Alexander the Great. He said that Solomon's platform for the Temple was only 150 feet wide.⁶⁵³ You will remember that in the time of Herod, the Temple platform on which the Temple stood was a square of 600 feet on each side. Herod doubled the size of the Temple that was in his day. Josephus said he "enlarged the surrounding area to double its former extent [that is, double the size of the Temple which was in existence in his time]."⁶⁵⁴ Josephus said such extensions were made over the ages since the time of Solomon. But even the smaller lateral dimensions of Solomon's earlier Temple were grand and awe-inspiring. Josephus said:

"He [Solomon] made that Temple which was beyond this a wonderful one indeed, and such as exceeds all description in words; nay, if I may so say, is hardly believed upon sight; for when he had filled up great valleys with earth, which, on account of their immense depth, could not be looked on when you bent down to see them without pain, and had elevated the ground four hundred cubits, he made it to be on a level with the top of the mountain on which the Temple was built."⁶⁵⁵

In giving these large dimensions of height for the Temple walls (which he considered so outstanding and full of grandeur), Josephus readily admitted that most people who had never seen the Temple would have expressed disbelief at these enormous measurements. But Josephus was dedicating this very work to King Agrippa and to the Emperor Titus who were both eyewitnesses as well to the enormity of the height of the Temple walls. There is no reason to doubt Josephus' evaluation when he said the eastern wall

⁶⁵² Ecclesiasticus 50:1.

⁶⁵³ "The Jews have only one fortified city; they call it Jerusalem. Nearly in the center of the city stands a stone wall [of the Temple], enclosing an area about 500 feet long and 150 feet broad, approached by a pair of gates" (Josephus, *Contra Apion* I.22).

⁶⁵⁴ *War* I.21,1.

⁶⁵⁵ *Antiquities* VIII.3,9.

of the Temple “exceeds all descriptions in words.” He also said: “the wall was itself the most prodigious work that was ever heard of by man.”⁶⁵⁶ In stating these facts, Josephus admitted that the “immense depths” of the dimensions of the eastern wall could be “hardly believed.”

To Josephus the whole vista was wonderful beyond compare. And without doubt, this precipitous eastern wall of the Temple was truly a glorious work of art. The Temple platform was at the top of these steep walls. The Temple (on its square platform) was viewed as perched on top of a perfectly squared TOWER that reached upward 40 to 45 stories like a modern skyscraper occupying a square block of area in New York or Chicago. This square-shaped TOWER was located 600 feet south of the southern wall of Fort Antonia and it was connected to the fort by two arched bridges positioned side-by-side that attached the northwestern corner of the square Temple platform with the southwestern corner of Antonia. It was a magnificent sight to behold.

What Is Modern Opinion of these Statements?

The majority of historians today stand back in utter disbelief in what these eyewitness accounts of Josephus attest. Most modern scholars cannot believe that there is any veracity in Josephus’ narratives of these wonderful dimensions of the Temple described in his early accounts. They simply brush aside the information and suggest that Josephus was simply up to his old tricks of exaggeration. They think the poor guy must have been out of his mind!

This has to be the case from their point of view because when one looks at the present southeast angle of the Haram esh-Sharif (which they imagine to be the southeast corner of the Temple walls), it could in no way fit any of these descriptions of Josephus that we read in the above references. Prof. George Adam Smith, one of the great authorities of early Jerusalem, said: “The dimensions which Josephus gives are not trustworthy, nor reconcilable with the Haram area.”⁶⁵⁷ That’s right, what Josephus reported will

⁶⁵⁶ *Antiquities* XV.11,3.

⁶⁵⁷ *Jerusalem*, vol.I, p.231.

not fit the Haram esh-Sharif in any way, shape or form. As one point of fact, the southeast corner of the Haram has its foundations over half way to the top of the western slope of the Kedron, not down in the floor of the valley as Josephus states the actual Temple walls were located.

Indeed, if one were to transfer the dimensions of the Temple and its walls mentioned by Josephus to the area of the Haram, then the platform on which the Temple was built would have been 300 cubits (450 feet) above the base of the southeast corner. Note how this is an impossible figure. Recall that on top of the platform of the Haram, one would also have to place the “pinnacle” of the Temple. If these measurements of Josephus were true (and if one applied them to the present Haram and its walls), the Temple platform on which the Temple was built would be almost 200 feet higher than the summit of the Mount of Olives! Ouch! Such a prospect must be acknowledged as a complete absurdity.

Even the lateral dimensions of the Temple walls as given by Josephus (a square of 600 feet) will not fit harmoniously with the Haram walls. Indeed, the square of the actual Temple could be placed over the area of the Dome of the Rock, there would still be plenty of room on all sides of the Haram platform. Besides that, if scholars place the Temple as described by Josephus onto the platform of the Haram, it would be like seeing a 40 to 45 story building on that platform. This is a ridiculous assessment. Besides, Josephus tells us in the clearest of language that the southeastern corner of Herod’s Temple wall went directly down into the floor of the Kedron Valley and that the northeastern wall also did the same thing (though not quite as high above the Kedron).

The fact remains that the Haram esh-Sharif and its four rectangular walls surrounding it, are not the walls of the Temple nor is the Haram the region where the Temple was located. The Haram clearly fits the spot of Fort Antonia, and Josephus tells us that the southern wall of Antonia was precisely one *stade* (600 feet) north of the northern wall of the Temple.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ *War* VI.2,6.

Josephus said the fortress was so high and large that Antonia obscured from sight the whole Temple by those approaching Jerusalem directly from the north. Since these geographical indications represent the conclusions of an eyewitness, these affirmations would be nonsensical if one placed the Temple measurements mentioned by Josephus within the Haram.

The truth is, the scholars have simply selected the wrong site for the Temple. The Haram is the site of Fort Antonia. But, if one viewed the southeastern corner of the wall of the actual Temple as having its foundation at the very floor of the Kedron Valley and just south of the Gihon Spring, then Josephus' descriptions make perfectly good sense.

The Temple's Southeastern Angle in the Valley Floor

Solomon (and later Herod) had to place the southeastern corner of the Temple walls at the very bottom of the Kedron Valley. There was an essential reason for this. The Temple had to have a particular fixture within its boundaries for Sanctuary rituals to function properly, and also for the Temple to represent the physical example of God's Palace on earth. What was this feature? It was the biblical requirement that the Temple have a natural spring positioned within its borders. There are numerous scriptural evidences that prove this point.

There was only one spring in Jerusalem and that natural spring is called the Gihon located slightly upslope from the extreme floor of the Kedron Valley on its western side. In order for the Temple to have this spring within its precincts, Solomon had to place it inside his east wall. To do this, the king began an awesome and enormous building enterprise. It was in the nature of Solomon (and later, Herod the Great) to overcome what experts of their times considered impossible obstacles.

Undeterred by topographical problems he had to encounter, Solomon (according to Josephus) started to construct the foundation for the eastern wall of the Temple just east and south of the Gihon Spring in the very floor of the Kedron Valley. The wall was then elevated upward. At first Solomon may have built up the wall

about half way to the top of the ridge, and later (in the time of Simon, son of Onias) the wall was built higher to be double its former vertical dimension.⁶⁵⁹ Solomon, or later people, also extended the wall northward along the western slope of the Valley. As it continued its northward course, the foundation part of the wall started to ascend alongside the west slope of the Kedron Valley where the valley began to turn slightly eastward. The eastern wall finally reached its northeast angle. From that angle, the wall turned westward to reach to the top of the ridge separating the Kedron and Tyropoeon Valleys. At a later time, this northern wall was extended farther westward toward the Tyropoeon Valley. Even later (in the time of Herod), this north wall was even torn down and another replaced it farther north.⁶⁶⁰

The top of the crest of this ridge between the Kedron and Tyropoeon Valleys on which the north wall was built was about 2300 feet above sea level, according to Charles Wilson's survey (which is the standard I use in this book).⁶⁶¹ This crest of the ridge would be about 450 feet above the floor of the Kedron Valley (assuming this to be its pristine or pre-alluvium state). It would mean the top of this northern wall would have been 120 feet higher than the bed-rock of the crest.⁶⁶² This height would reach the top of the colon-

⁶⁵⁹ See Ecclesiasticus 50:1 where it is recorded about "doubling the height" of the former Temple walls.

⁶⁶⁰ *War* V.5,1.

⁶⁶¹ This Ordinance Survey was made under the command of Captain Charles Wilson for the Ordinance Survey Office in the United Kingdom for 1864/5.

⁶⁶² What was the elevation above sea level of the absolute floor of the Kedron Valley in the time of Solomon? Of course, no one knows. The present level opposite the Gihon Spring is about 2100 feet above sea level. But there has been a considerable amount of alluvial fill-in from the various destructions of Jerusalem since the time of Solomon. It appears that Josephus tells us that there were 100 cubits (150 feet) of foundational walls on the Temple's east side that were below surface in his day. I have taken the 300 cubits (450 feet) that Josephus said was exposed to the air for the southeast angle to begin at about 1970 feet above sea level. This would mean the top of the Temple walls would be just about 2420 feet above sea level. This level for the top of the colonnades makes it even with the platform of the Haram esh-Sharif (which is the esplanade area of the former Fort Antonia). This would allow the top of the two colonnade roadways from Fort Antonia to the Temple to be level at about 2420 feet above sea level. The measurements given in this book are based on this assumption. Until

nades surrounding the foursquare Temple. This height of the north wall of the Temple was why Herod provided two level roadways from the top of the Temple colonnades directly northward to Fort Antonia.⁶⁶³ The southern wall of the Temple would have been about 160 feet above the crest of the north/south ridge over which the Temple was situated.

Depending on the area, the four walls surrounding the Temple were either 450 feet high to around 160 feet high where the north wall crossed the crest of the ridge between the Kedron Valley and the Tyropocon Valley. Josephus describes how these walls were built and placed into operation over the ages.

“When King Solomon, who was the person that built the Temple, had built a wall to it on its east side, there was then added one cloister [a colonnade on top] founded on a bank cast up for it, and on the other parts the holy house stood naked [its other three walls around it had not been built by Solomon]; but in future ages the people added new banks [they built the other three walls and filled in the vacant space to make a large raised platform on top], and the hill became a larger plain. Then they broke down the wall on the north side [in the time of Herod], and took in as much as sufficed afterward for the compass of the entire Temple. When they had built walls on three sides of the Temple round about from the bot-

archaeological investigation is done to solve the problem of the ancient heights of ridges or the depths of valleys in and around Jerusalem within their various time periods, this value will probably work as good as any.

⁶⁶³ The top of the northern wall of the outer Temple (at the juncture with these two colonnades from Fort Antonia) was at about 160 feet in height above the rocky ground of the crest of the ridge. If there were no colonnade bridges spanning this area between the north Temple wall and the south wall of Fort Antonia, then the troops from Fort Antonia would have had to descend to the ground level of the rocky ridge and then, when they reached the north wall of the Temple, climb steps upward for at least 120 feet in order to reach the platform on which the Temple was built. Such a thing would provide little or no military advantage to any troops coming from Antonia. But Herod had the two bridges built from the southwest corner of Antonia practically on a level to the northwest corner to the outer Temple colonnades (and none but military forces could use such bridges). And another point. If it were necessary (though it was not) to position the Holy of Holies over the exposed surface of an outcropping of natural rock (like the “Rock” under the Dome of the Rock), that “Rock” would have been 120 feet below the floor of the Holy of Holies. One would have to invent stairs to reach it. There was, of course, no such requirement.

tom of the hill [from the floor of the Kedron Valley] and had performed a work that was greater than could be hoped for.”⁶⁶⁴

The reason such a prodigious building was constructed with walls of immense heights (as a TOWER) was so the Temple could be built on a platform positioned over the Gihon Spring at the bottom of the valley. The Gihon Spring had to be within the Temple for the Sanctuary to function properly. (I have thoroughly explained why the Spring had to be a part of the Temple in a further chapter.)

Of course, the Temple itself could not use all the water that erupted periodically from the Gihon Spring. To account for this overflow, Solomon constructed a conduit that exited from the bottom of the Temple wall. The viaduct led southward along the western slope of the Kedron Valley, sometimes in an open trench and at other times within an enclosed pipe. Much of the water flowed out through an aperture in the wall acting as a spout to exit the Temple area. The water then descended into the conduit alongside the Kedron Valley to flow southward into a pool.

Several Psalms in the Holy Scriptures speak of this water that came forth from the Temple which the people could use for their benefit. But in the time of Hezekiah (when the Assyrians were encamped in front of Jerusalem), Hezekiah closed the aperture at the bottom of the Temple wall. Before doing this, he had his engineers design and construct a tunnel underneath Mount Zion that brought the water into the southwestern part of the city.

“This same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon [the waters exited through the southern wall of the Temple] and directed them down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.”⁶⁶⁵

This “upper outlet” which Hezekiah closed up was that spout that ejected water through the southern wall of the Temple that Solomon had built. Hezekiah closed up that aperture in the Temple wall and directed the water via his new tunnel to the western part of the city during the siege.

⁶⁶⁴ *War* V.5,1.

⁶⁶⁵ II Chronicles 32:30, Revised Standard Version.

As I said, it was necessary to have a natural spring within the Temple precincts. Though spring waters could be transported to the site by aqueduct, Solomon had the Gihon Spring nearby and he used those waters exclusively. The region of the Haram had no natural spring in that northern area. True, there were cisterns aplenty, but there was no natural spring, and this was a requisite feature demanded in the Scriptures. The foundational walls of the Haram were also built near the top of the ridge on the west side of the Kedron Valley. But Josephus and the other historical sources inform us that Solomon began to build his Temple wall at the floor of the Kedron Valley. This is a most significant point that needs emphasizing.

“He [Solomon] also built a wall below, beginning at the bottom [of the Kedron ravine] which was encompassed by a deep valley. At the south side he laid stones together, and bound them one to another with lead, and included some of the inner parts till it proceeded to a great height, and till both the largeness of the square edifice and its altitude were immense. The vastness of the stones in the front were plainly visible on the outside yet so that the inward parts were fastened together with iron, and preserved the joints immovable for future times. When this work was done in this manner, and joined together as part of the hill itself to the very top of it, he wrought it all into one outward surface. He filled up the hollow places that were about the wall, and made it a level on the external upper surface, and a smooth level also. [Later], this hill was walled all round, and in compass four *stades* [a *stade* was 600 feet], each angle [of the square] containing in length a *stade* [it was a square of 600 feet on each side]. But within this wall and on the very top of all, there ran another wall of stone also having on the east quarter a double cloister [colonnade] of the same length with the wall; in the midst of which was the Temple itself.”⁶⁶⁶

It is important to note that this colonnade built on the eastside of the Temple courts was itself considered a wall. In the time of Herod, this meant the colonnade surrounding the Temple courts had a wall associated with it. That wall had to be located on the inner side of the colonnade roadway (on the Temple side). We are informed that this wall had gates at various intervals that led into

⁶⁶⁶ *Antiquities* XV.11.3.

the Temple courts. One of those gates in the New Testament is called the “Gate Beautiful.”⁶⁶⁷

Recall that the colonnade roadway embracing the Temple courts was 30 cubits (45 feet) broad, as wide as a major three or four lane highway today. There was a flat roof on top of the colonnade that was the roadway used by Roman troops.⁶⁶⁸ Located at the base of the columns was the sheltered roadway that the ordinary worshippers used for entering the Temple. On the exterior side of the colonnade facing away from the Temple courts, there must have been a balustrade to protect people who were walking on the lower roadway from the immense depths that reached downward to the floor of the Kedron Valley. The same balustrade that was a part of the colonnade also protected people from the lesser depths on the other sides of the skyscraper type TOWER that represented the Temple Square.

Tacitus, the Roman historian who lived within a generation of the war with the Jews, said:

“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.”⁶⁶⁹

Notice that Tacitus said the colonnades were “outwork” — they could be seen from outside the Temple area. There was no outer wall to hide the columns. The wall was actually on the inside of the four colonnades that surrounding the Temple Square.

The view from such colonnade roadways around the Temple must have been spectacular and inspiring. This is precisely what

⁶⁶⁷ Acts 3:2, 10.

⁶⁶⁸ It should be remembered that the roofs of the colonnades, both of the square Temple enclosure and the two colonnade roadways that reached from the Temple to Fort Antonia, were intended to be areas where Roman troops could guard the entrances and exits to the Temple as well as Temple Square itself. Josephus refers to this precise usage of the roofs of the colonnades. He said: “The usual crowd had assembled at Jerusalem for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Roman cohort had taken up its position on the roof of the portico [colonnade] of the Temple; for a body of men in arms invariably mounts guard at the feasts, to prevent disorders arising from such a concourse of people” (*War* II.12,1 italics mine, Loeb translation).

⁶⁶⁹ Tacitus, *History*, Book V.10.

Herod wanted to present to the people who would walk within those colonnade areas. But that was only half of the beautiful prospect that these colonnades presented. When people looked at the Temple structure from a distance of half a mile away (let us say), they would have seen with admiration those prodigious and precipitous walls that were graced at the very top with a splendid colonnade surrounding the main Temple located in the center of the platform. It would have been a magnificent sight to behold. This grand spectacle is no doubt what Herod wanted to provide for the people of Jerusalem. He knew it would equally impress all Jews and Gentiles who came to Jerusalem from other parts of the world. We read in the Talmud: "He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never in his life seen a beautiful building."⁶⁷⁰

Scholars and religious authorities today are not aware of these architectural features of the Temple and its walls because they refuse to believe what Josephus said, even though he was an eyewitness. Their problem is because they have selected the wrong spot for the site of the Temple. What Josephus recorded will not fit any of the dimensions of the Haram.

Because scholars wish to focus on the Haram as their Temple site, they normally believe that the colonnades surrounding the Temple Square in Herod's time must have been open on the interior side to the Temple courts (without any wall separating the Temple courts from the colonnade areas). In truth, however, the exact opposite is the case. It was the interior side of the colonnade walkway that was closed to the pedestrians because it had a wall preventing access to the Temple courts, except at various gates that were placed in the wall. Remember, the colonnades we are told by Josephus were 45 feet wide (30 cubits) and about 38 feet high (25 cubits). In the sheltered lower area among the columns supporting the roof, the normal worshippers going to the Temple (or leaving the Temple) would walk with protection from the rain, etc. On the top of the those colonnades there was the 45 feet roadway surrounding the Temple courts used by Roman troops to govern the crowds that attended the services at the Temple. This had to be the

⁶⁷⁰ *Baba Bathra* 4a.

case if the walls were as high as Josephus said they were, and if they enclosed the Gihon Spring within them.