

## Illegal Israelite Temples

### Commentary for March 1, 2014 — Breaking God's Law Given to Moses

The article this month is about "The Book of Haggai" by Dr. Ernest L. Martin. Read first the "[March 2014 Newsletter](#)." The messages from God through the prophet Haggai are about the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple after the people of Israel returned from Babylon. I am sure you will enjoy Dr. Martin's analysis. In this Commentary, I want to remind you that other Jewish temples were built which were not legitimate.

The Israelite sanctuaries can be legally placed only at locations God chooses for them. Anywhere else is illegal according to Mosaic Law:

**"But unto the place which YHWH your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall you seek, and thither you shalt come: And thither you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks."**

• **Deuteronomy 12:5-6**

Such offerings, sacrifices, and tithes could only be done where and when God designated.

**"Then there shall be a place which YHWH your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall you bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow unto YHWH."**

• **Deuteronomy 12:11**

Later in Deuteronomy chapter 12, God tells where the offerings must not be given.

**"Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burnt offerings in every place that you see."**

• **Deuteronomy 12:13**

This statement was made because the people of Israel knew that Abraham had the right to perform sacrifices anywhere he saw fit to do so. This changed under Moses.<sup>1</sup> During and after the time of Moses, the rituals and sacrifices could only be performed where God told them to do so. That was wherever the Tabernacle stopped, indicated when and where the pillar of cloud and fire stopped. Israel remained at that location so long as the pillar stopped. During Moses' time, the people had a supernatural event happening in their midst at all times!

After Israel entered the Promised Land, the location designated by God was at Shiloh. In the time of King David, God chose a particular location in the city of Jebus. This city became known later as Jerusalem, the City of David. The location God chose was above and west of

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<sup>1</sup> See my article "[A Name for the Temple of God](#)" where the importance of "the house" of God's name is explained. Dr. Ernest Martin's "[Chapter 3, Progressive Revelation](#)" from his book [The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#) makes clear how God's laws changed through history.

the Gihon Springs (at **"the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite,"** 2 Samuel 24:18).<sup>2</sup> Read 2 Samuel 24:16–25 for that story. The Gihon location provided sufficient water for the sacrificial system of the Temple (built by David's son Solomon) as well as providing enough water for the city of Jerusalem.

### **Illegitimate Israelite Temples**

Many people have forgotten that there were other temples built by Israelites, and these are well known. These sites were illegitimate and illegal according to the Law of Moses because they were at a location which God did not allow.

After the 40-year reign of King Solomon, God split off the ten northern tribes of Israel into a separate kingdom under King Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:23–40):

**"And Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of YHWH at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.'**

**Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' And he set the one in Bethel,<sup>3</sup> and the other put he in Dan.**

**And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an HOUSE of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi."**

**• 1 Kings 12:26–31**

God threatened to punish Bethel for its idolatry (Amos 4:13). Later the narrative of Amos mentions Bethel again, when Amos the prophet is threatened by an idolatrous priest:

**"Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O you seer, go, flee you away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel [*miqdash*, sanctuary], and it is the king's court [house]."**

**• Amos 7:12–13**

These places of worship, called "houses" were temples to YHWH. Initially they were not temples to Baal. The worship of Baal came later during the time of King Ahaz of Samaria (the

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<sup>2</sup> For proof of the location of the Temple in Jerusalem, see Dr. Martin's book [The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot](#).

<sup>3</sup> The name "Beth-El" means "house of El" or "house of God." About 12 miles north of Jerusalem, it was the traditional site where Abraham intended to sacrifice Isaac. It was also where Jacob had his dream of the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:11–22). Jacob named the place Bethel as the result of his experience and dream. Later God told Jacob to build an altar there (Genesis 35:1). Bethel became a royal city of the Canaanites, later allotted to the Israelite tribe of Benjamin. The altar at Dan was less popular than the one at Bethel. The site of Bethel was eventually destroyed by King Josiah of Judah (2 Kings 23:15–17).

other name for the northern kingdom of Israel).<sup>4</sup> Supposedly, Jeroboam wanted people to worship YHWH, but **NOT** at the site chosen by God. The sites of Bethel and Dan declined, and then later had resurgence before the northern kingdom of Israel was wiped out by Assyria.

### ***Jewish Temples in Egypt***

There were two illegal Jewish temples in Egypt. The earliest Jewish temple in Egypt was at Elephantine on the Nile River in southern Egypt (Ezekiel 29:10, Syene is Elephantine, today known as Aswan).<sup>5</sup> In 1893, documents were discovered which told about an early Jewish temple in Egypt. Some of these documents are online in English. For example:

**“Now our ancestors built this temple in the fortress of Yeb [Elephantine Island in the Nile River] in the days of the kingdom of Egypt; and when Cambyses came to Egypt [525 BC] he found it (already) constructed. They (the Persians) knocked down all the temples of the Egyptian gods; but no one damaged this temple.”**

• ***Petition to Authorize Elephantine Temple Reconstruction***

In 405 BC, this Jewish temple was attacked and burned, stone pillars smashed, gateways demolished, cedar roof burned, and all gold and silver taken. This Jewish temple survived the Persian invasion of 525 BC while Egyptian temples were put down. This Aramaic (a cognate language of Hebrew) letter also mentions a historical figure named Sanballat: **“We have also set forth the whole matter in a letter in our name to Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria.”**<sup>6</sup> This temple was rebuilt, but soon destroyed thereafter.

The Jewish historian Josephus tells us about the second Jewish temple in Egypt.

**“... the son of Onias, the high priest, who was of the same name with his father, and who fled to King Ptolemy, ... When this Onias saw that Judea was oppressed by the Macedonians and their kings, ... resolved to send to King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra, to ask permission from them that he might build a temple in Egypt like to that at Jerusalem, and might ordain Levites and priests out of their own family.**

**The chief reason why he was desirous so to do, was, that he relied upon the prophet Isaiah, who lived above six hundred years before, and foretold that there certainly was to be a temple built to Almighty God in Egypt by a man that was a Jew.”**

• ***Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 13:62–64***

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<sup>4</sup> There was a distinction between worship of the calves and worship of Baal. In Hosea 4:15, 5:1, and 10:5 (Bethaven is close to Bethel and they are identified as the same), the worship of the calves is called “idolatrous” (Hosea 8:1–6). This might not seem to be much difference, but the worship of calves by Israelites was idolatrous worship of YHWH. See 2 Kings 17:27–28. When Samaritans were placed in Bethel, their idolatrous worship was not commanded by YHWH. The worship of Baal (in the form of a bull) was NOT made to YHWH. Baal was different from YHWH. God Himself made the distinction between Baal and the calves (2 Kings 10:18–29) when Jehu destroyed idols, sanctuary, and priests of Baal, but wrongly left the sanctuary at Bethel untouched.

<sup>5</sup> Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, 4:611) says **“Its river Nile is navigable as far as the city called Elephantine, ... cataracts hindering ships from going any farther [south].”**

<sup>6</sup> A Sanballat tried to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem’s walls. See Nehemiah 2:10, 19, 4:1, 7, 6:1-2, 5, 12, 14, and 13:28.

Onias, although a high priest, was exiled from the Temple in Jerusalem. The Isaiah passage he referred to was a misapplication of Isaiah 19:18–21.

**“I desire, therefore, that you will grant me permission to purge this holy place, which belongs to no master, and is fallen down, and to build there a temple to Almighty God, after the pattern of that in Jerusalem, and of the same dimensions, that may be for the benefit of yourself, and your wife and children, that those Jews who dwell in Egypt may have a place where they may come and meet together in mutual harmony one with another, and he subservient to your advantages; for the prophet Isaiah foretold that ‘there should be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God’; and many other such things did he prophesy relating to that place.”**

• *Josephus, Antiquities 13:67–68*

Onias received a positive reply from King Ptolemy and his sister/wife Cleopatra (a different Cleopatra than the one in the time of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony).

**“So Onias took the place, and built a temple, and an altar to God, like indeed to that in Jerusalem, but smaller and poorer. ... However, Onias found other Jews like himself, together with priests and Levites, that there performed divine service.”**

• *Josephus, Antiquities 13:72–73*

The temple was built about 170 BC and lasted for some 243 years.

## **Samaritan Temples**

There were also Samaritan temples. The Samaritans were brought to the land by the Assyrians to inhabit the land of the former northern kingdom of Israel. They partly adopted the Jewish religion. Jews had little contact with Samaritans (John 4:9), considered by Jews to be somewhat heretical, to be avoided, and almost “half-Jews.” The apostles preached to the Samaritans (Acts 1:8, 8:1, 5, 9, 14, 9:31, and 15:3), and many became early converts.

**“And then Sanballat [him again!] ... told him further, that he would build for him a temple like that at Jerusalem, upon Mount Gerizim, which is the highest of all the mountains that are in Samaria;**

• *Antiquities of the Jews 11:310<sup>7</sup>*

The Samaritan temple was built on Mount Gerizim, destroyed in 130 BC, and another was built in Shechem (now called Nablus). When the Samaritan woman spoke with Jesus at Jacob’s Well, and He replied:

**“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain [Shechem]; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.’ Jesus said unto her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.”**

• *John 4:20–22*

Enjoy Dr. Martin’s article “The Book of Haggai” about the legitimate Temple.

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<sup>7</sup> Josephus’ dating is wrong here, saying Sanballat lived until the time of Alexander the Great.