4

JERUSALEM
THE CITY OF THE TEMPLE

We said earlier that the deepest impact Roman rule had on Judaism as a religion came almost incidentally, from the Roman perspective: Judaism was deeply transformed through the loss of the temple in A.D. 70. For Second Temple Judaism the temple itself, and the worship going on in the temple, belonged to the very foundation of the religion. Jewish religion centered around the cultic service of the priests and the Levites in the temple. After A.D. 70 Judaism had to be drastically redefined. The earliest believers in Jesus belonged to the Second Temple period, they began their new life as disciples of Jesus when the temple was still standing and in full business. Neither Peter, nor Jacob (or James, Jesus' brother), nor Paul lived long enough to see the temple fall. What was the significance of the temple to the earliest followers of Jesus? And when the temple fell, what did that mean? In hindsight, we observe that two varieties of pre-70 Judaism were able to survive, we should perhaps even say profit from, the fall of the sanctuary: the movement of sages that became the fathers of rabbinic Judaism, and the Jesus movement that became Christianity. In this chapter, we take a closer look at the pre-70 Jerusalem that was their common cradle.

Was Jerusalem Relevant?

There are those who contend that the early church was shaped by events occurring not in Jerusalem or Israel, but in the Hellenistic cities of the eastern empire, Syria, Asia Minor and even in Greece and the city of Rome itself. The argument continues over whether the early Jerusalem community of believers in Jesus soon lost its significance, and whether the New Testament writings reflect the beliefs of Hellenized Christians who had only minimal contact with Jerusalem and the first believers there.

In order to support this theory, the Book of Acts has to be dismissed as a mostly unhistorical record, and this was done by many New Testament scholars in the past. But in recent years the historical credibility of Acts has been re-evaluated, and for good reasons.[1] The centrality of the Jerusalem community and its position as the "mother church" of all Christianity, as reported in Acts, is also substantiated by important evidence in Paul's epistles (to which we will return below).

The Christian church had its decisive beginning in Jerusalem; its first doctrinal decisions were made there; its first organizational patterns were developed there; its basic self-definition was worked out there. Therefore it will be worthwhile to devote some time to describing Jerusalem as it was known to the earliest Christian community.

The Temple and the Pilgrimages

The key to understanding Jerusalem's enormous significance since Old Testament times is the temple. Without the temple, Jerusalem would have been just another provincial city in the Judean hills, lying far from the main commercial routes and geographically isolated. At that time, there were two main roads running from north to south, both far from Jerusalem: one along the coast and one from Damascus southward through the highlands east of the Jordan. In ancient times this latter road was called "the King's Highway." The

[1]Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth, 1961); Ian Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 2nd ed. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979); Jacob Jervell, "The Problem of Traditions in Acts," in *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), pp. 19-39; Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1979 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980]); Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 49 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989); and, most recently, the five-volume series *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993-1996) For complete listing of the volumes in the series, see the general literature bibliography in the introduction above, p. xix.

main road from east to west ran through the Jezreel plain, far to the north.[2]

Jerusalem's topographical location was backward, being surrounded by mountains on all sides, with only one natural pass to the southeast (along the Kidron). Not a single east-west pass cuts through the mountain ridge upon which Jerusalem is situated. Travelers and merchants from the Transjordan preferred the Jezreel route and did not pass by Jerusalem. Added to this were the facts that the neighborhood of Jerusalem was poor in natural resources and its water supply was always problematic. The only raw material available in large quantities was stone, the Jerusalem stone famous to this day. The only natural resource apart from stone was the olive trees, for which the soil is well suited. The name of the Mount of Olives is a reminder that there was once a thriving olive industry around Jerusalem, but even this was no large-scale export business. In fact, "a proof of how unsuitably placed Jerusalem was for trade is the fact that in the entire course of her history, we find no single trade whose product had ever made her name famous."[3]

In spite of all this, Jerusalem was the unrivaled center not only of Judea, but of the entire Jewish nation, whether in Israel or in the Diaspora. And not only Jews recognized the importance of Jerusalem. Pliny the Elder, a Gentile Roman writer, says that Jerusalem was "by far the most distinguished city not of Judaea only, but of the whole Orient" (*Natural History* 5.14). There is only one explanation for this: the temple and the pilgrimages.[4] "There times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord" (Ex 23:17 NIV). This Torah commandment to visit Jerusalem on the three festivals of Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) and Succoth (Festival of Booths), and to bring the prescribed sacrifices to the temple, is the key to understanding life in Jerusalem in the Second Temple period. This commandment did not require that each man make the pilgrimage three times every year. Most Jews could not have fulfilled such a requirement, since making the pilgrimage entailed a great expenditure of time and money, especially for those living in the distant Diaspora. The commandment was taken to belong to the category of "commands which have no limit," that is, commands which encourage that certain actions be done as often as practically possible. For people living

[2]For this and the following description of Jerusalem's geographical position, cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1969 [many reprints]), pp. 51-54; John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem as Jesus Knew It: Archaeology as Evidence* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), pp. 30-43.

[3]Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time*, p. 27.

[4]Cf. esp. Shmuel Safrai, "The Temple" (see Suggestions below).

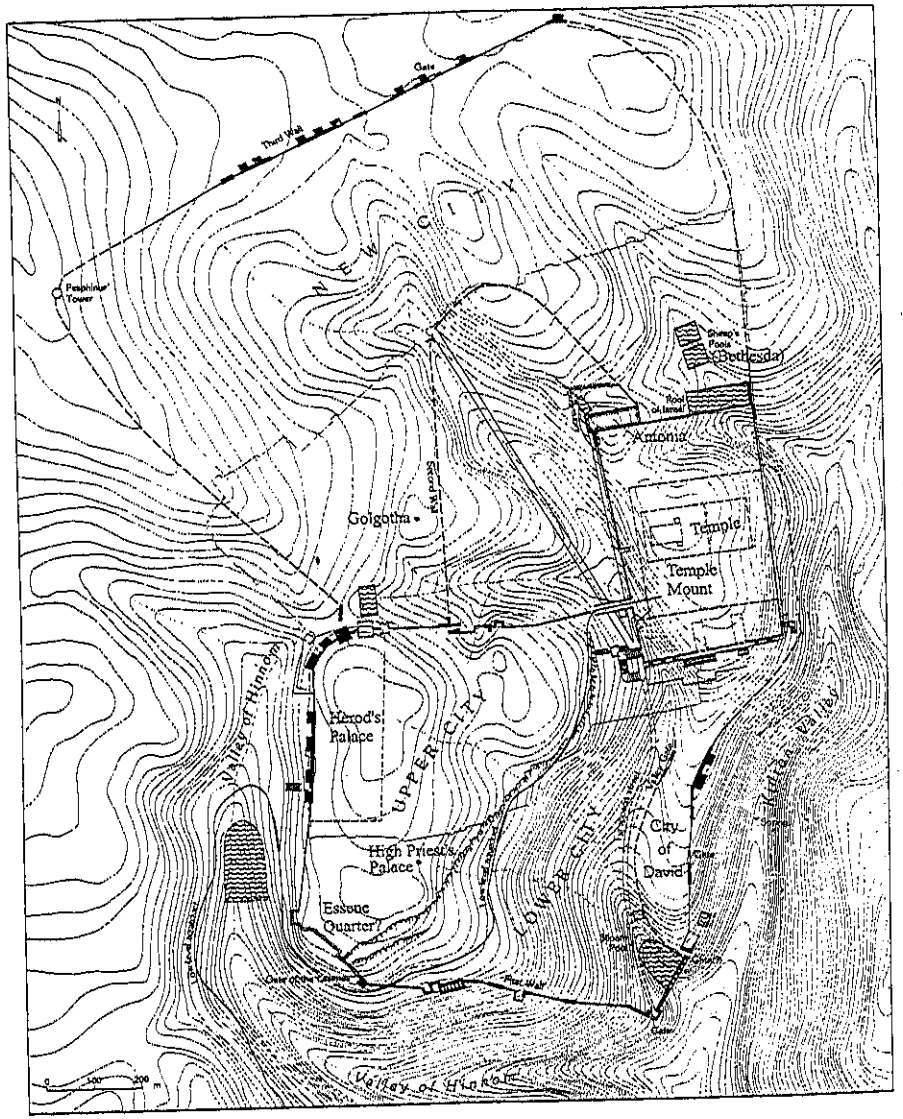


Figure 4.1. Jerusalem

in or near Jerusalem, participation in all the festivals would be possible, but it would be costly for those living in other parts of Israel; the normal practice of observant Jews would be to go once a year—as did the parents of Jesus (Lk 2:41)—or less. Among Diaspora Jews the frequency was no doubt much lower: perhaps only once in a lifetime, depending on religious commitment, traveling distance and personal means.

One—possibly very generous—scholarly estimate of the population inside and outside the land of Israel in the first century numbers the Jewish population in the land at 2.5 million (plus approximately one million non-Jews); and in the dispersion at approximately 5 million Jews.[5] The ratio here is more significant than the absolute figures: the majority of Jews were living outside the land, as they do today. The estimated number of permanent citizens in Jerusalem (within the walls) varies from ca. 50,000 to ca. 100,000. During festivals the population almost doubled, which would mean that approximately 1 percent of the Jewish community outside Jerusalem would attend each festival of pilgrimage. The ancient sources, in one of the few cases in which they give realistic and reliable figures, say that the pilgrims numbered "tens of thousands."

Thus the pilgrimages were at the very foundation of the city's economy and prosperity.

The Temple: The Financial Significance

Let us take a closer look at the pilgrims. What did they bring with them? First and foremost they brought money to spend in Jerusalem. Before they left on their journey, they collected the temple tax from all their kinsmen. Every Jew was obliged to pay this tax, the so-called half-shekel tax (equivalent to two Roman dinars; cf. Mt 17:24-27), once a year. This half-shekel was delivered to the temple treasury in Jerusalem, and it contributed, for example, to the expenses of the offerings made for the whole Israelite community each morning and evening, the "continual burnt offering." The tax more than covered these expenses, resulting in the accumulation of a huge amount of capital in the temple treasury. Pious people often deposited their private funds in this treasury, adding to the capital. The temple thus functioned as a kind of deposit bank, and its treasure chambers were considered the safest place you could keep your fortune.

But the financial significance of the temple was not confined to this. The

[5] M. Avi-Yonah, "Historical Geography" (in *Compendia 1:1*: 78-116), pp. 108-10.

pilgrims also brought money to buy the required sacrifices of animals, food and wine. The sacrificial service of the temple generated extensive financial activity in and around the city: the raising of animals and corn products in the countryside; the business of bakers, butchers and wine sellers in the city; and the changing of money that was necessary since the pilgrims could not buy their temple offerings or pay the temple tax in the currency they brought with them from abroad, but only with the stable currency minted in Tyre, also called the "shekel of the Sanctuary" *(shekel haqodesh)*.[6] (The Romans did not grant the Jewish authorities the right to mint their own coins.)

There were also other activities necessary to keep the temple running: some 18,000 priests and Levites had to be supported each year (700 per week), sacred vestments for the priests and the curtains of the temple had to be sewn or repaired, sacred Bible scrolls had to be written, the sacred vessels had to be repaired or replaced by new ones and so on. Thus the temple engaged entire guilds of physicians, scribes, smiths, building maintenance workers, weavers, etc. And of course the daily needs of thousands of pilgrims had to be met—so there were hostels and a huge catering industry. The pilgrims also wanted to bring souvenirs home with them. The ancient sources specifically mention two such mementos: a women's diadem called a "golden city" (*ir shel zahav*) and intricately engraved signet rings.[7]

The different categories of artisans and entrepreneurs were concentrated in their own streets or markets. Ancient sources mention the clothes market; the poultry market, the wool market, the flour market, the coppersmiths' market, and the weavers', cheesemakers' and bakers' streets, to name a few. The "markets" were mostly vaulted bazaar streets, with small workshops on each side, open towards the street. The houses were mostly small one- or two-story buildings.

In the period from approximately 20 B.C. to A.D. 6, the economic significance of the temple was increased by the enormous and costly reconstruction and enlargement project begun by Herod. When the work began, 10,000 lay workers and 1,000 specially trained priests were employed, and when the work was completed some eighty years later, 18,000 construction workers were suddenly faced with unemployment. The result of their work

[6]Cf. *Tosefta, Ketubim* 13:3 [Zuckermandel ed.] (= 12:6, Neusner trans.); *M Bekhorot* 8:7. Concerning coins and currencies in the eastern Mediterranean area generally, and in Jerusalem and the temple especially, see *New Schürer* 2:62-66.

[7]For details and sources to this and the foregoing, see Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p. 9; and discussion in E. P. Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 77-102.

can still be seen in the lower parts of the walls surrounding the Temple Mount (including the Western Wall).[8]

The Herodian Temple was considered one of the most impressive shrines of the ancient world. Looking at the enormous and perfectly cut stones of its surrounding walls, one can easily understand the outburst of Jesus' disciples: "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (Mk 13:1 NIV). The rabbis said, "He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never in his life seen a beautiful structure" (*TB Bava Batra* 4a).

Having painted the above picture of first-century A.D. Jerusalem, one is struck by the remarkable similarity to the Old City of Jerusalem today. Then as now, Jerusalem was a city living on religious tourism; then as now, the pilgrims probably found the city crowded and noisy, and the local population, only interested in making business out of the holy.

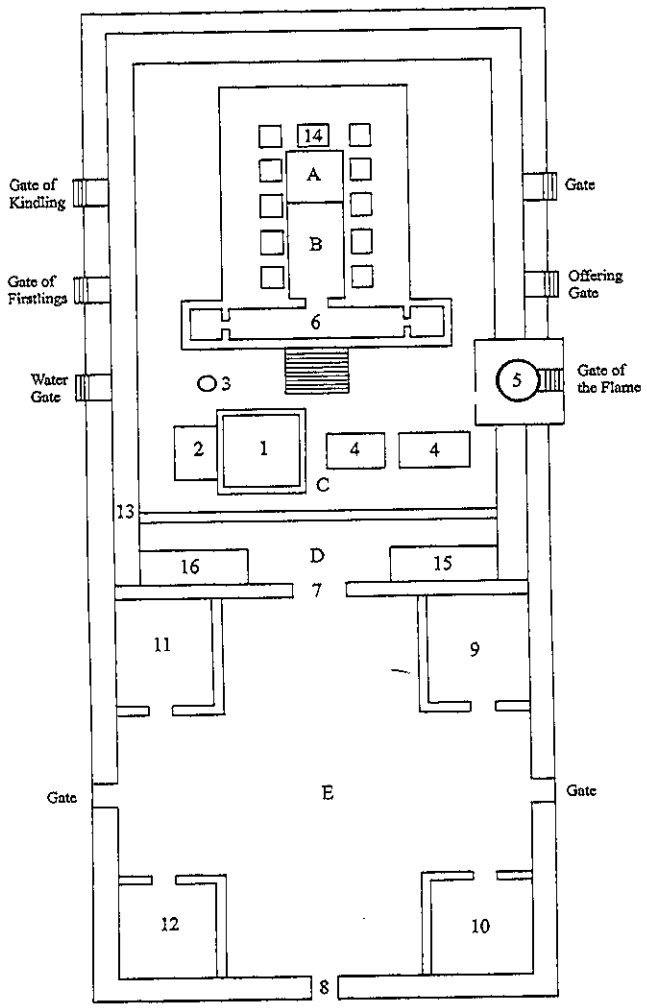
The Temple: The Religious Significance

So far we have seen how the temple and the pilgrimages provided the basis for Jerusalem's significance and prosperity. It is time to enlarge our perspective and look at the significance of the temple as a religious institution. Two concepts must be emphasized. The first is the idea of the temple as God's dwelling on earth. The God of Israel was considered invisibly present in the Holy of Holies, and this gave the whole temple an aura of unparalleled sanctity, and its servants a large measure of authority.

From time immemorial, the priests and the Levites had been the authorized teachers of the law, and even the later rabbis recognized that the Temple Mount had been the supreme seat of authoritative Torah teaching. The authoritative Scripture scrolls, from which other scrolls were copied, were kept in the temple,[9] and the rabbis later told that the highest doctrinal and judicial authority, the Sanhedrin, had gathered there. This remains significant even if the rabbis' concepts about the Sanhedrin should prove to be partly fictional

[8]Josephus's description of Herod's rebuilding of the temple is found in *Antiquities* 15.11. On the archaeology of the Herodian Temple Mount, cf. Benjamin Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975); idem, "Excavations Near Temple Mount Reveal Splendors of Herodian Jerusalem," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 6, no. 4 (1980): 44-59; idem, "The Temple Mount," *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, April 1984* (Jerusalem, 1985): 463-68; K. and L. Ritmeyer, "Reconstructing Herod's Temple Mount in Jerusalem," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 15, no. 6 (1989): 23-42; Meir Ben Dov, *Jerusalem* (see Suggestions below), pp. 38-90; Dan Bahat, "The Western Wall Tunnels," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. Hillel Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), pp. 177-90.

[9]On the significance of this for the concept and the history of canon, see chapter fourteen.



A Holy of Holies
B Sanctuary
C Court of Priests
D Court of Israel
E Court of Women

1 Altar
2 Ramp
3 Laver
4 Slaughter Area
5 Chamber of the Hearth
6 Porch
7 Nicanor Gate
8 Beautiful Gate

9 Chamber of Lepers
10 Chamber of Wood
11 Chamber of Oil
12 Chamber of Nazirites
13 Chamber of Hewn Stone
14 Chambers
15 Chamber of Vestments
16 Chamber of Baked Cakes

Plan of Herod's Temple

Figure 4.2. The Temple

(as many scholars now think). Johanan ben Zakkai, the famous rabbi who reestablished rabbinic Judaism after the fall of the temple, used to "sit and teach in the shadow of the sanctuary" (*TB Pesahim* 26a). From the New Testament we know that Jesus taught in the eastern colonnade of the temple forecourts (Jn 10:23), and so did Peter and John (Acts 3:11; 5:12).

The other main concept that explains the religious significance of the temple is that of atonement through the sacrifices brought in the temple. Simon the Just, high priest ca. 200 B.C., said, "On three things does the world stand: on the Torah, on the temple service, and on deeds of loving kindness" (*Avot* 1:2). It is clear that this learned man considered the atoning sacrifices offered in the temple to be indispensable to Israel's relationship with God. When the temple fell in A.D. 70, both rabbinic and Christian sources testify that the most irksome question asked was *How could the people now obtain remission for their sins?*

In the Torah itself, two ideas dominate with regard to the service in the tabernacle: sacrifices and ritual purity. In the Torah there are laws about many different types of sacrifices, not all of them focused on atonement for sin. It seems, however, that in the centuries following the Babylonian exile, atonement for sin became the dominant focus for the entire sacrificial service. Atonement was regarded as the very raison d'être for the temple service, as we observe in a rabbinic story about a friend of Johanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Joshua. On seeing the temple in ruins shortly after A.D. 70, Rabbi Joshua cried, "Woe unto us! that this, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!" (*Avot of Rabbi Nathan* 4).

The other important idea associated with the temple was ritual purity.[10] This is a concept difficult to define and difficult for us moderns to understand, but it is a way of making the concept of the holy very concrete, in a sense "physical." In order to enter the sphere where the holy God dwells, one has to be in a state of purity, or else the encounter with God will be destructive. Cultic impurity is treated in very much the same way that we moderns think about infections: impurity is contagious; it infects mainly by touch or through liquids, which means, for example, that the cleansing of vessels becomes very important. Very much like one is "sterilized" before being allowed to enter a strictly disinfected area in a hospital, the Israelite had to be cleansed from impurity before entering the sanctuary, or "the camp," as

[10]Here and in what follows I am heavily indebted to Shaye J. D. Cohen's masterful synthesis of recent studies (e.g., Neusner's) in *Maccabees to Mishnah*, chaps. 4 and 5.

sometimes said in the Torah. Sources of infectious impurity were corpses, sexual discharges from men and women, unclean animals, prohibited food, everything connected with idol worship (which implied that Gentiles in general were in a permanent state of impurity, although the relevant sources seem to reveal some uncertainty or disagreement as to the *degree* of this impurity).[11]

The most simple and straightforward understanding of this system of commandments in the Torah would be to think that the priests serving in the temple had to be in a permanent state of purity, whereas the ordinary lay Israelites had to cleanse themselves every time they would enter the sanctuary. This seems to have been the understanding of the majority in the late Second Temple period, probably also of the priests themselves. But was this sufficient, or did the Torah really intend all Israel to permanently constitute "the camp," wherever they lodged? Should laypeople also follow the regulations for priests? This, it seems, was to become the program of the Pharisees. We shall have more to say about that in the next chapter.

Here it is relevant to point out, as Shaye Cohen has done, that all three leading religious "parties" in the late Second Temple period—Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes—defined themselves in one way or other through their relation to the temple, the temple service and the temple as the area of purity. Their attitudes differed greatly, but the temple was essential to their self-understanding, positively or negatively. That is why the "parties" belonging to the late Second Temple period ceased to exist when the temple disappeared.

We have focused on the significance of the temple for "the locals," those who lived more or less within reach of the temple: the Judeans in general and the Jerusalemites in particular. But let us return to the Diaspora Jews. It seems very reasonable to assume that for them, in their daily dealings with Gentile neighbors, anything like the permanent ritual purity required within "the camp" of Israel was utterly beyond reach. Maybe this was part of their motivation to undertake pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the temple: to experience, for once, the nearness to the holy God himself and the holy purity surrounding him; to bring the atoning sacrifices and be cleansed from sin.

Pilgrims from the land of Israel would normally return home when the festival was over (see Lk 2:43). But pilgrims from the distant Diaspora would

[11]See on this Gedalyahu Alon, "The Levitical Uncleanness of Gentiles," in Alon, *Studies*, pp. 146-89; and Sanders, *Judaism*, pp. 72-76.

naturally try to profit as much as possible from their costly and troublesome journey, and we can safely assume that they often prolonged their stay to several weeks, or even several months, to cover more than one festival. Whether they had planned it or not, some pilgrims settled in for a permanent stay, among them some who made the pilgrimage in their old age and settled in Jerusalem in order to die and be buried there. The rabbinic literature mentions synagogues of Jews from Alexandria and Tarsus, and in Acts 6:9 we read about the "synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia." Some remains of a synagogue built for—and possibly by—such pious Jews from the Diaspora were found in 1913, during an excavation led by R. Weill on the Ophel ridge south of the Temple Mount. Weill found a Greek inscription which reads as follows:

> Theodotus the son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagogos, son of the archisynagogos, grandson of the archisynagogos, restored this synagogue for the reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments, and the hostel and the rooms and the [ritual] baths, for needy travellers from foreign lands. The foundations of the synagogue were laid by his fathers and the elders and Simonides.

A synagogue could hardly be restored in Jerusalem after the Bar Kokhba war (A.D. 132-135), which means that the restoration had to take place before A.D. 135, and since the synagogue was founded by his grandfather or even earlier, it certainly must have been in existence in the first century A.D., possibly in the late first century B.C.

Vettenus is a Latin name, and possibly Theodotus's family were Jews who immigrated to Jerusalem from Rome. Some scholars have suggested that they were former slaves who settled in Jerusalem after gaining their freedom. If this is the case, this synagogue may be the "Synagogue of the Freedmen" mentioned in Acts. However, the lack of physical evidence makes this no more than an attractive hypothesis.[12]

This inscription, and the synagogue and people it tells about, opens a window into the piety and the mentality of Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem. The synagogue was built and maintained by a family of Diaspora Jews of priestly descent who immigrated to Jerusalem, and it was built to cater to the needs of pilgrims. And we observe why the pilgrims came: for "the

[12]For instructive comments on the Theodotus inscription, see Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 17-18; and John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, eds., *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 144-45.

reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments"; and not to forget, to be purified and able to enter the sanctuary (hence "the ritual baths" of the synagogue). Literally built "in the shadow of the Sanctuary," at the foot of the steps to the Huldah gates, this location probably had symbolic significance as well.

Having emphasized the centrality of the temple to all kinds of groups within pre-70 Judaism, it is time to take a closer look at the group of people whose role and significance directly depended upon that of the temple: the priests and the Levites.

The Chief Priests, the Priests and the Levites

First we must emphasize that we are dealing with three distinct groups that can be envisioned as three concentric circles. In the innermost circle we find the high priest, former high priests and other leading functionaries of the temple. Of these, Joachim Jeremias made the following list from rabbinical sources:

- ☐ The captain *(sagan* or *nagid)* of the temple.[13] He was next in rank to the high priest and could step in to fulfill his duties if necessary.
- ☐ The director of the weekly division of (ordinary) priests *(rosh ha-mishmar).*
- ☐ The director of the daily shift *(rosh beit av).*
- ☐ The seven temple overseers *(ammarkalim).*
- ☐ The three or more temple treasurers *(gizbarim).*

These are "the chief priests" in plural, a rather narrow group of some fifteen to twenty persons.

The office of high priest was hereditary, and had been so since the days of Zadok, David's priest who anointed Solomon (1 Kings 1:38-40). Whether literally true or not, it was generally believed in the Hellenistic period that the successive high priests had been an unbroken line of Zadok's descendants. Nobody else could legitimately be made high priest. But in the turbulent years of the Hellenistic "reform" in Jerusalem, different branches of the Zadokite clan were utterly neutralized by being labeled as radical "Hellenizers," and the Hasmoneans, who were not Zadokites, grasped the opportunity and had Judah Maccabee's brother Jonathan installed as high priest in 152 B.C. After him, his brother Simon and his descendants served as high priests, and in this capacity they functioned as the supreme leaders of the autonomous Jewish state until the Roman conquest in 63 B.C. Somewhat later, Herod the

[13]Greek *strategos;* cf. Acts 4:1; 5:24, 26.

Great began the practice of installing and deposing high priests as he wanted (Zadokite or not), and this was continued by the Romans after Herod's death and right up to the first Jewish war of A.D. 66-70, which brought the final end of the high priest's office.

We moderns, hearing about this sad line of illegitimate and "politically appointed" high priests, may think that the office was hopelessly compromised and had lost all religious authority and significance during the last hundred years of its functioning. There is no doubt that many pious Jews at that time had great qualms about the state of affairs, but we should probably not conclude that the high priest's office and service were accorded no respect or reverence. After all, he was still the only man to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, there to make atonement for his own sins and for the people's. The significance of the high priest depended more on his office and service than on his personal qualities or lack thereof. We see this in more than one place in the New Testament. The author of John's Gospel was certainly not a fan of the high priest Caiaphas (he had every reason not to be!), but in John 11:49-50 he credits Caiaphas with a true prophecy—not because he was Caiaphas, but because he was high priest that year. The prophetic gift followed the office, not the man. Acts 23:1-5 tells about Paul before the Sanhedrin, speaking some harsh words to Ananias without being aware that he was speaking to the high priest. When informed of the fact, Paul hastily apologized for having insulted "a leader of [God's] people."

Even when the high priest was ever so unworthy as a person and by the way he had been appointed, once installed, he was nevertheless the high priest, and to him the Torah accorded a unique position as mediator between God and his people. Catholics may appreciate this easier than other modern Christians: the Pope is the Pope.

The second circle is the large group of ordinary priests. If the high priest was one and the "high priests" few, the priests were many. Their office was, hereditary, as were the high priest's and the Levites'. One became priest by right of birth, not by "personal call" nor by "ordination." The ordinary priests lived all over the country and only came to officiate in the temple every twenty-fourth week, when the turn of their "division" came (cf. 1 Chron 24:1-19). The number of such priests was considerable. Joachim Jeremias has calculated that 56 priests officiated in the temple each day, with 28 more being necessary on sabbaths. Each priest was on duty for only one day during his division's week, so each of the 24 divisions would number

about 300 priests, which makes a grand total of 7,200.[14]

Except for two weeks each year, these priests lived in their towns and villages as ordinary Jews. Their priestly descent and tasks would naturally tend to make them more law-observant than their fellow citizens, and some of them, though possibly not all, were educated men. Here we have to recall that the other main task of a priest—apart from sacrificing in the temple—was to teach and apply the Torah. Some scholars now think that the "scribes" we hear so much about in the New Testament and in other texts from this period were, for the most part, priests. During their long terms "off duty" from the temple, they would make a living by applying their expertise in Torah as local jurists. (We shall have more to say about this in the next chapter.)

In the temple, the priests' primary duty was to receive the sacrifices brought by laypeople: inspect the animals (they should have no blemish), slaughter them, flay them, cut them apart, sprinkle the blood, throw the parts to be burnt up upon the altar, maintain the fire on the altar, clean the area around the altar, etc. Most of this was done outside the sanctuary, in the forecourt of the priests, where the great altar for burnt sacrifices stood. In the main hall of the temple they probably had less to do, but it was there they burnt incense to accompany the daily, fixed prayers.

It is often overlooked that we have an excellent and well informed report on a priest and his service in the New Testament:

> In the days of King Herod [the Great] of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to the commandments and regulations of the Lord. . . . Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. . . .
>
> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time [week] of service was ended, he went to his home (Lk 1:5-10, 21-23).

[14]The number of Levites was probably comparable to or slightly higher than the number of priests. Josephus gives the total number of priests and Levites as 20,000 (*Against Apion* 2.108), which roughly agrees with Jeremias's calculation, *Jerusalem*, pp. 199-200. Cf., however, the critical remarks on Jeremias's calculation in Sanders, *Judaism*, 78-79.

Temple Square

In this chapter we have been talking about things that were soon to disappear: in A.D. 70 the Jews lost the temple, and with the temple the service of the high priest and the priests and the Levites disappeared, never to be resumed. In A.D. 135 the Jewish people lost Jerusalem itself. And yet, none of these things really disappeared.

"Jerusalem was not, like Corinth for example, a large city with lots of little temples dotted here and there. It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city around it" (Wright, *The New Testament*, p. 225). In this temple, holiness and purity were secured through the atoning sacrifices for all Israel. To all this belong concepts like atonement, purification by blood, sacrificial lambs, a holy people, a sanctified people, a people cleansed from their sins, a purified people, a royal priesthood, a New Jerusalem.

When reading the New Testament writings, one recognizes everywhere this temple terminology. In the very center of Paul's exposition of justification by faith in Christ (Rom 1—5), we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of the Holy of Holies in the temple, fixing our eyes on the cover of the ark, the *kapporet* upon which the high priest sprinkled the atoning blood on the Day of Atonement: "there is no distinction [between Jew and Gentile], since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, *whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement* [Hebrew, *kapporet*] *by his blood*, effective through faith" (Rom 3:22-25).

The third circle contains Levites who were the assistants and servants of the priests: they brought the wood for the altar and other accessories into the temple; they maintained order in the temple area (some of them were organized as a local police squad, the "temple guards"); they opened and closed the gates and inspected visitors. They also had liturgical functions: they were the singers of the temple. They rotated their period of service according to an order similar to that of the priests. This means, of course, that the Levites lived scattered around exactly like the priests. In the New Testament we meet at least one Levite: Barnabas, who was to join Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3), was "a Levite from Cyprus" (Acts 4:36).

We have used this much space to describe the temple, the service in the temple and the priesthood doing service there, because all this was still the religious center and heart of the common Jewish religion in the first seventy years of the Christian era. Many handbooks and historical surveys of the Judaism of this period have a lot to say about Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots; and the impression is often created that these were the only people that mattered, religiously, and that discussions about doctrine and law among these groups was all Judaism was about at the time of Jesus and Paul. But this distorts the proportions of the full picture. According to Josephus there were a few Sadducees, some 4,000 Essenes, and well over 6,000 Pharisees, but 20,000 priests and Levites![15] Numbers do not always translate into