

Jewish Evangelism: Where It All Began
THE BIRTHPLACE OF JEWISH EVANGELISM
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Introduction

God's plan of redemption began before the foundation of the world, and there are many significant points in the history and denouement of His purposes through the centuries. Certainly, the call of Abraham and God's ensuing covenant with him was of overwhelming significance; for through this divine / human encounter, God revealed that there would be descendants born of Abraham's seed, and that His salvation would come through them. The Messiah, who would become our sin offering, would be born as—and would also die as—"King of the Jews".¹ In His encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus would say, "Salvation is of the Jews."²

To be sure, this had nothing to do with any inherent superiority on the part of the Jewish people; it was not due to their "genius" for religion or to an exalted piety, but was solely a matter of God's sovereign choice. Nevertheless, it is not a historical anomaly that the good news of salvation, which would be preached to every tribe and nation under heaven, would first be proclaimed to the Jewish people. Jewish evangelism, therefore, is not some addendum to the program of the Church, but it was, and is, primary. To speak of the birth of the Church, or of evangelism in general, is to speak of *Jewish* evangelism—it is to speak of the Day of Pentecost (i. e., Shavu'ot) and of Jerusalem. For at this time, the remnant of Israel, who had been made righteous by faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, was empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to proclaim this good news to the ends of the earth, beginning at Jerusalem.

Shavu'oth was one of the three major pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish people. At Pesach (Passover), Succoth (Tabernacles), and at Shavu'oth (Pentecost), Jews made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from all over the world. The extent of this "ingathering" is suggested in Acts 2:9–11 by the list of language groups present as the disciples began to speak in these various languages. Shavu'oth is the Hebrew word for "weeks," as it marks the completion of a "week" of weeks (i. e., forty-nine days), following the Sabbath of Passover.³ The Greek word Pentecost ("fiftieth") signifies that it fell on the fiftieth day after this Paschal Sabbath (i. e., on a Sunday). This was the time of the offering of new grain, of first fruits. It marked the beginning of the harvest season, and as such, it found its fulfillment following the death and resurrection of Jesus, as God began to gather His world-wide harvest, beginning with Jerusalem and the Remnant of Israel.

¹E. g., Matt 2:2 and 27:37. Incidentally, this proclamation was made, in both instances, by non-Jews.

²John 4:22

³Lev 23:15-22

The recent growth in the numbers of Jewish members in the Body of Christ has challenged the gentile majority to re-examine the Scriptures and to rediscover the Jewish roots of the faith. This is also a time in which a great deal of light has been shed on the stage and setting in which that early drama was played out. Knowledge of Jerusalem and of the Temple Mount had slept, entombed, beneath layers of soil and tradition from the first century until the late nineteenth century, awaiting the turn of the archaeologist's spade. Whether through archaeological or Biblical research, however, much has been learned in the twentieth century about the birth of Jewish evangelism.

Locating the City of David

One of the most basic questions of geography that had to be answered in the past was, "Where was the earliest Jerusalem (i. e., 'Mt. Zion' or the 'City of David')?" This is a tremendously important question, for its location would illuminate some details of the events of Pentecost and explain the orientation of the Temple Mount. Josephus had wrongly identified the much larger western hill as the site of the Jebusite city, later ruled by the Kings of Israel. This led, in turn, to the mis-identification of a tomb on this western hill as that of David, and of the fortress complex at Jaffa Gate as "the Citadel of David". But with the discovery of Hezekiah's Tunnel, with its inscription, not to mention later archaeological discoveries, it became clear that the much more humble eastern hill was truly Mt. Zion, the City of David.⁴ Traditions die hard, however, so the western hill is still known as "Mt. Zion," and the eastern hill (in order to avoid confusion) is known as the City of David. Here, Raymond Weill, the French archaeologist, discovered, in 1913–1914, "the tombs of the sons of David".⁵ More recent archaeology has also clarified the location of the citadel, within the City of David.

Locating the Events of Shavu'oth

Another significant question is, "Where did the events of Acts 2 take place?" Luke tells us that the disciples met in two settings close to the final events of crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension: in the upper room of a private dwelling,⁶ and in the Temple.⁷ In Acts 1:15, the one hundred and twenty disciples had been meeting in the upper room. In this upper room, Peter addressed the group, presenting the need for a replacement for Judas, and Matthias was chosen to fill the vacancy. Acts 2:1–2 says, "And when the day of Pentecost had really arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting." In addition to the sound of the wind, there was the appearance of tongues of flame above each one, and the supernatural ability

⁴Avigad, N. *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville, Tennessee: 1983), p. 26.

⁵II Chronicles 32:33 (cf. also, I Kings 2:10; I Kings 11:43; II Chronicles 21:20; and Nehemiah 3:16).

⁶Luke 22:12

⁷Luke 24:53

to speak in other languages. At this point, verse 6 says, “the multitude came together, and were bewildered.” It was to this multitude that Peter addressed his sermon.⁸

Some commentators say that the events of 2:1–4 took place in the upper room, and at some point, the disciples went to the Temple courts, in order for Peter to address the crowds. But note that verse 6 indicates that the multitude came to them, and not *vice versa*. In other words, the miracle of Shavu’oth occurred in the same place as the sermon of Peter.

To be sure, the emphasis of Luke is on *what* occurred and *when*. The location is unspecified in the text. The text says only that they were “together in one place,” and that the noise “filled the whole house where they were sitting.” Many interpreters, assume that the events all took place in the upper room, referred to in the first chapter.⁹ This interpretation, however, fails to note the shift of contexts, which is suggested by the opening words of Acts 2:1: “And when the Day of Pentecost had really arrived.” The Feast of Shavu’oth (as in Hebrew) was one of the major pilgrimage festivals, and for this occasion, the city was filled with people—people who had been waiting for the arrival of this day and the opportunity to take part in the rituals at the Temple Mount. Josephus hardly mentions Shavu’oth without emphasizing the numbers of people that filled the city, and especially the Temple precincts.¹⁰

The view that seems most natural is that the disciples had moved from the upper room to the Temple Mount between the events recorded in Acts 1 and those of Acts 2. In other words, the events of Acts 2 must have taken place at the southern end of the Temple Mount—at the so-called “Portico of Solomon.” This building, although not the Temple itself, was a part of the Temple complex. It could be referred to as a “house” (οικον, as in Acts 2:1) or a “place” (as in Acts 2:2), but it could also be referred to as “the temple” (τῷ ἱερῷ, as in Acts 2:46).¹¹ It is specifically the place of Peter’s next address (in Acts 3:12–26).¹² As a part of the Temple, it would also be an appropriate place to bring the “first fruits” of the gospel proclamation.

Furthermore, it not only afforded ample room for a large multitude,¹³ but accounts for the references to those who are addressed. Peter’s sermon is addressed to: “men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:14), “men of Israel” (v. 22), and “all the House of Israel” (v. 36). It is also clear that Peter holds some in his audience directly responsible for the death of Jesus. He says, “you nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death”

⁸Acts 2:14–40

⁹E.g., F. F. Bruce, E. F. Harrison, Richard N. Longenecker, and I. Howard Marshall.

¹⁰Cf. Josephus. *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 1, 13:3 (253) and Book 2, 3:1 (42).

¹¹See also Acts 5:20, 25, 42.

¹²Acts 3:11

¹³It is a multitude from “every nation under heaven” (v. 5), and it is comprised of at least fifteen different language groups (vv. 9–11).

(v. 23); and he refers to Jesus, “whom you crucified” (v. 36).¹⁴ Peter is addressing the entire nation, including the national leadership. It is interesting to note that, at this time, the Sanhedrin convened in the apse at the eastern end of “Solomon’s Portico”.¹⁵ Thus, Peter’s sermon would be analogous to an address today on the steps of the Capitol Building in Washington, D. C., or on Red Square in Moscow. Indeed, Peter is addressing all mankind, from the heart of Israel and the from “the center of the world”—Temple Mount. The words of the Psalmist come to mind: “Show Thyself strong, O God, who has acted on our behalf, because of Thy temple at Jerusalem” (Ps 68:28–29).

A Description of Temple Mount

Since the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., and since there are conflicting descriptions of the Temple complex in ancient literature, some may question if we, today, can really know what the Temple Mount looked like. Although some questions remain (chiefly, the precise location of the Temple, itself), a fairly comprehensive picture has emerged from archaeological and historical research. As surprising as it may seem, according to leading Israeli archaeologists, some of the most significant work ever done on or about the Temple Mount, was done by Charles Warren and C. W. Wilson, British engineering officers, in the latter half of the past century.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the excavations of Benjamin Mazar¹⁷ (1968–77), have answered many questions that had remained unanswered by earlier explorations. Avigad says:

Mazar was able to do openly what Charles Warren and his colleagues had been forced to do secretly: he exposed large portions of the Western and Southern Walls of the Temple Enclosure, laying bare the area of “Robinson’s Arch” and uncovering the paved streets leading to it. He also discovered a monumental staircase leading up to the “Double Gate” in the southern wall, various other structures, and carved stones from Herod’s “Royal Portico” in the outermost court of the Temple.¹⁸

Relying on the results of these excavations, we will briefly survey the Temple Mount: first, the walls and the resulting enclosure, then the means of gaining access to the courtyards,

¹⁴It is interesting to compare these references in chapter 2 with the terms of address that are used when Peter addresses the “rulers and elders of the people” in chapter 4.

¹⁵K. and L. Ritmeyer, “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount in Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* [BAR], 15:6, p. 32.

¹⁶In the author’s opinion, the most helpful source for the results of these early excavations is the small book, *Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill*, by J. King (London, 1898). M. Avi Yonah says, “Because of past difficulties, we know little more today about the Temple Mount than Warren did a century ago” [“Jerusalem of the Second Temple Period” in *Jerusalem Revealed* (Jerusalem, 1976), p.13]. Regarding the work of Warren, N. Avigad says, “In spite of its obvious shortcomings, his work is still of utmost importance for research even today” [“The Architecture of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period” in *Jerusalem Revealed*, p.14]. Even as recently as 1985, M. Ben-Dov said of the work of these men, “Their pioneering work...is considered the cornerstone of research on the Temple Mount...” [In *the Shadow of the Temple* (New York, 1985), p. 16].

¹⁷See his, *The Mountain of the Lord* (Garden City, New York; 1975).

¹⁸Avigad, M. *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville, Tennessee: 1983), p.20.

and finally, the so called “Portico of Solomon,” or Royal Stoa, and some related features. We will not discuss the location of the Temple on the Temple Mount, though not for lack of strong opinions! Neither are we interested in the precise location of the Solomonic walls that originally framed the crest of Mt. Moriah (i. e., Temple Mount). It is sufficient to note that Herod enlarged the Temple platform by extending it on the North, West, and South. Of course, first Solomon, and later, Herod, built a wall around the hill, filling in the area between the two with a variety of elements in order to provide spacious courts around the Temple itself.

The Walls of the Temple Mount

Following its enlargement by Herod, the Temple enclosure was twice as large as the acropolis of Athens, and presently measures thirty-four acres, or almost one-sixth of the total area within the walls of the old city. The upper courses of the enclosure wall did not survive the destruction of the city in 70 A.D., yet enough of the lower courses have survived to be more than suggestive of the “latter glory of this house,”¹⁹ as it existed in the days of the Messiah. Some of the stones that comprise this retaining wall are truly colossal. One stone, for example, measures 11.5’ x 11.5’ x 47.5’!²⁰ Furthermore, these stones have been laid without mortar, and they are so finely chiseled and fitted together, that a razor blade can not be inserted between them.

The Gates of the Temple Mount

David asked the penetrating question, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?”²¹ But, for the moment, consider the very practical question of, “**How** did the people ascend into the hill of the LORD?” The Mishna says:

There were five gates to the Temple Mount: two Hulda Gates from the South that served for entrance and exit; Kiphonos Gate from the West, that served for entrance and exit; the Tadi Gate from the North, which was not used at all; the Eastern Gate, on which was portrayed the Palace of Shushan. Through this the High Priest who burned the [Red] Heifer, and all that aided him went out to the Mount of Installation [i. e., the Mt. of Olives].²²

It is important to understand that, although the Temple, itself, was oriented to the East, the structures that comprised the larger Temple complex faced the South. The original Mt. Zion, city of Melchizedek, with the tombs of David²³ and Solomon, was to the South. Therefore, the

¹⁹Haggai 2:9

²⁰This particular stone can be seen in the “Rabbinic tunnel,” in the western wall.

²¹Psalms 24:3

²²Tractate Midot, 1:3

²³One can almost see Peter as he gestures toward the City of David below him, making reference to the tomb of David (Acts 2:29), in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

Tadi Gate was the “back door,” and is not of any special significance for our purposes. As far as the Herodian location of the eastern gate, it is enough to note that it was in the same place as the current eastern gate,²⁴ and a portion of Coponius (Kiphonos) Gate can be seen at the extreme right hand side of the women’s prayer area of the Western Wall. Coponius Gate,²⁵ also known as “Barclay’s Gate,”²⁶ provided access from the lower street, which ran along the western wall, by means of a staircase within the enclosure.

In addition to the gates mentioned in the Mishna, Josephus describes an additional three in the western wall, alone, and archaeology has substantiated Josephus’ description. These gates, not listed in the passage above from the Mishna, are the entrances above Wilson’s and Robinson’s Arches and Warren’s Gate. How is this apparent discrepancy, between the Mishna on the one hand, and Josephus and archaeology on the other hand, to be reconciled? Ben-Dov argues, “The two gates leading off the overpasses were used to gain entry to the area of the public institutions within the Temple Mount compound but not to the area of the Temple itself.”²⁷ Aside from his failure to deal with Warren’s Gate, it seems much more likely (and justifiable) that the Mishna is speaking of gates that actually penetrated the structure of the temple enclosure, itself (as opposed to gates that were located on the same level as the courts), and of gates that were used by the common people (unlike those that were used exclusively by the priests, such as Warren’s Gate and, as will be proposed, the Triple Gate).

Our primary interest, however, is in the gates and entrances on the southern end; for, given the orientation of the Temple Mount, these were the “front doors.” As such, the Apostles, and the early, Jewish Christians would have primarily used these gates to gain access to the courts of the Temple. In addition to the gates in the southern wall, there were also staircases near both the southwestern and southeastern corners. Entrances from these staircases into the Temple Mount enclosure were from the East and from the West.

The staircase near the southeastern corner did not lead directly to the courtyards or to the “Portico of Solomon,” but to the vaulted area below. There may have been access from “Solomon’s Stables” (as this area is known today) to the courts through the tunnel inside the triple gate, but this has not been demonstrated conclusively. Ben-Dov claims that this gate may have been used as “the starting point of a ramp on which the scapegoat was sent from the Temple Mount out into the desert.”²⁸ Justification for such a hypothesis is difficult to find, and it seems much more plausible that the scapegoat exited through the eastern gate, just as the “red heifer”.

²⁴Fleming, J, “The Undiscovered Gate Beneath Jerusalem’s Golden Gate” in **BAR**, 9:1, pp. 24-37.

²⁵Probably named for the Roman procurator, Coponius (6-9 A.D.), who may have underwritten the expense of its construction and embellishment [see, B. Mazar’s *The Mountain of the Lord* (Garden City, New York: 1975), p. 133].

²⁶Named after its discoverer, J. T. Barclay, an American architect who lived in Jerusalem, 1855-1857. His niece was Miss Lottie Moon, the famous missionary to China.

²⁷Ben-Dov, M. *In the Shadow of the Temple* (New York: 1985, p. 135).

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 145.

The entrance at the southeast corner more probably afforded access to an area that was used by the priests for storage of such items as olive oil, grain, salt, flour, etc.

The staircase near the southwestern corner was much more significant, however. Although neither of these staircases are mentioned in the Mishna, Josephus does, at least, describe the one in the Southwest. While we have considered these gates from the perspective of one entering the Temple, Josephus considers them from the perspective of one leaving the Temple. In writing of the gates in the western wall, he speaks of them leading to the various parts of the city and says, “and the last [i. e., the southernmost] led to the other city [i. e., the lower city as opposed to the upper city], where the road descended down into the valley by a great number of steps.”²⁹ The excavations of Mazar have revealed the remains of this staircase and of its gate, which provided access to “Solomon’s Portico”. On the basis of these remains, the width of the gate has been calculated to have been more than sixteen feet.³⁰

Far below the level of the Temple Mount platform, outside the southern wall, were the main entrances to (and exits from) the Temple. To the East, there was the Triple Gate, and to the West, the Double Gate. The “Triple Gate” was probably used only by the priests,³¹ and was, therefore, not included in the list of Temple gates in the Mishna. King gives the following description:

It consists of three entrances, now built up, that gave access to [two] vaulted passages running at right angles to the south wall. Each entrance is thirteen feet wide, surmounted by a semicircular arch, about five feet thick. Inside are elliptical arches of wider span and eight feet thick. The piers are each six feet wide, and on the lowest stone of the western pier [i. e., support column], which stone forms one of a great course, there exists a kind of architrave moulding, as well as some Hebrew characters on the face of the stone. . . . Probably there was in former ages a large vestibule inside the Triple Gate, of the same character as that inside the Double Gate.³²

The two gates that comprise the Double Gate are probably those referred to in the Mishna as the Hulda Gates. Whether the “Hulda” for whom the gates are named is the same as the prophetess by that name is not known. If so, one can only speculate as to the reason for her name being applied to these Herodian gates. Nahman Avigad describes them as follows:

The “Double Gate” . . . is about 12.80 m. [42’] wide, with a thick pier in the centre, dividing it into two openings. Within is a square hall with a column at the centre,

²⁹Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book XV, 11:5 (403).

³⁰Ben-Dov, M. *In the Shadow of the Temple* (New York: 1985), p. 144.

³¹Cf. Ritmeyer, K. and L. “Reconstructing the Triple Gate” in *BAR*, 15:6, p. 51. Cf. also, King, J. *Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill* (London: 1898), p. 71.

³²King, J. *Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill* (London: 1898), p.73.

supporting arches upon which four low domes rest, with pendentives in the corners; one of the domes still bears stucco ornamentation, in an Eastern Hellenistic style.³³

These domes are over 16' in diameter, and are "among the earliest surviving domes known to us from classical architecture."³⁴ They are decorated with a variety of floral and geometric designs, and were tinted or painted with appropriate colors. Ascending northward from this square hall, is a tunnel that has been basically preserved in its original Herodian state, almost throughout its length.³⁵ Prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., this tunnel opened onto the Temple courts, north of "Solomon's Portico."

On the basis of the size of the "monumental staircase" at the foot of the Double Gate, this must have been the main entrance to the Temple Mount for the general population. This staircase is two hundred and fifteen feet wide, and the base for these thirty steps was cut into the bedrock. The steps are so constructed that one is encouraged to pause following each two steps. Perhaps this was to allow pilgrims to read (or recite) the fifteen "Psalms of Ascent" (Pss 120–34) as they prepared themselves to enter the Temple courts. This monumental staircase was one of the most exciting finds of the modern Temple Mount excavations. As Hershel Shanks says, "On these steps tens of thousands of pilgrims climbed to the Temple platform. One of them was doubtless Jesus of Nazareth."³⁶

The "Portico of Solomon"

Above the tunnels that ascended from the Double and Triple Gates, and extending across the full width of the Temple Mount was Herod's magnificent royal stoa, known as "Solomon's Portico." The size of this structure and its height above the city below were of tremendous fascination for ancient historians. A much more modern description is equally impressive, for James King writes, "the Royal Cloisters were at least six hundred feet in length; that is, longer than any cathedral in England; and it is a noteworthy fact that this vast porch was more spacious than York Minster or Westminster Abbey."³⁷ He continues:

Some think that the temples of Greece and Rome rivaled in extent the proud edifice of Herod, but this is a mistaken idea. The exact dimensions of the classical temples are well known: the Parthenon, on the Athenian Acropolis, was one of the grandest temples of

³³Avigad, N. "The Architecture of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period" in *Jerusalem Revealed* (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 16.

³⁴Shanks, H. "Excavating in the Shadow of the Temple Mount" in *BAR*, 12:6, p.31.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p.30.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p.28. In this connection, it is interesting that the Double Gate is known in Muslim tradition as "The Prophet's Gate" [Ben-Dov, M. *In the Shadow of the Temple* (New York, 1985), p. 286]. Others who frequented these steps were probably "Rabban Gamaliel and the elders" [Tosefta, Sanhedrin 2:2 (I am indebted to the Ritmeyers for this reference; *BAR*, 15:6, p.36)].

³⁷King, J. *Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill* (London: 1898), p. 124.

Greece, while the Capitol, on the top of Mons Capitolina, was the largest temple of Rome. The Parthenon and Capitol, however, were small compared with the Herodian Sanctuary at Jerusalem, and it seems wonderful to discover that both these classical temples could have stood under the roof of the Stoa Basilica.

The columns, that formed the nave and two side aisles, were more than fifteen feet in circumference, and the height has been calculated to have been about thirty-six feet.³⁸

This huge structure possibly housed the tables of the money changers, mentioned in Matthew 21:12 and the Sanhedrin (see above). One thing is clear, the early Jewish believers assembled here, for Acts 3:11 and 5:12 mention the so-called “portico” or “stoa of Solomon.” Although the other citations in Acts may not be so specific, the reference to the early believers meeting in the “temple,” in 2:46–47, and the events on Shavu’oth should all be seen in this setting.

The archaeological excavations have revealed a couple of other features that are worthy of mention in connection with “Solomon’s Portico” and the early congregation of Jesus-believing Jews in Jerusalem. Benjamin Mazar describes the first:

East of the monumental stairs, between them and the “Triple Gate” and south of the street, we found the remains of a large structure, the plan of which is unclear; what is outstanding in this building is the number of pools and cisterns hewn into the rock and plastered. It may well have been an extensive ritual bath for those coming to the Temple, prior to their entering the holy precincts.³⁹

In addition to this facility, Mazar’s excavations revealed another large, Herodian building, located approximately 160’ south of the Double Gate, which also contained a series of “huge cisterns and a plastered pool.”⁴⁰ With these discoveries, the question of where the three thousand who responded to the message of Peter and were baptized, on “the birthday of the Church,” may have been answered. Also, Acts 21:26 speaks of Paul taking four men who were under a vow, “purifying himself along with them, [and going] into the temple.” The purification may well have been in this facility near the entrance to the Hulda Gates.

Also discovered in the excavations at the foot of the southern wall of the Temple Mount was a large stone bearing a Hebrew inscription: ...לבייתהתקיעעזחלחכ [To (or, For) the house (or, station) of trumpeting to (or, for)...]. Unfortunately, the inscription is incomplete, the stone

³⁸Ben-Dov, M. *In the Shadow of the Temple* (New York: 1985), pp. 92f.

³⁹Mazar, B. “The Archaeological Excavations near the Temple Mount” in *Jerusalem Revealed* (edited by Y. Yadin; Jerusalem: 1976), p. 30.

⁴⁰Mazar, B. “Excavations Near Temple Mount Reveal Splendors of Herodian Jerusalem” in *BAR*, 6:4, p. 49.

having been broken.⁴¹ Most agree that this inscription came from atop the southwest⁴² corner of “Solomon’s Portico.” Disagreement over the best way to supply the missing word or words, and over the purpose of the inscription, should not detract from the essential consensus that this stone marked the place from which the beginning and ending of the Sabbath was announced with the sound of a trumpet. Josephus mentions this practice in connection with an “outermost” tower. Ben-Dov says, “The southwestern corner was the most suitable one for this purpose, since it rose above the Lower Market, Jerusalem’s main commercial center.”⁴³

This tower with its inscription calls to mind at least two events. Firstly, the marking of the beginning and ending of the Sabbath would have especially been of significance in reference to the burial and resurrection of the Lord. Only fifty days before Shavuoth, within hours of the death of Jesus, the onset of the Sabbath⁴⁴ would have been trumpeted from this corner tower. Secondly, this tower may well be the “parapet” to which Hegesippus refers in his account of the death of James the Just.⁴⁵ Stephen had met death by stoning (Acts 7:57–60), James, the son of Zebedee had been put to death with a sword (Acts 12:2), but the martyrdom of James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus, is not recorded in the Book of Acts, probably because it occurred after the composition of the book. James the Just had written his epistle between 45 and 48 A.D.; the Jerusalem Council, in which he had participated (Acts 15), had probably taken place in 49 A.D.; the Book of Acts had been written between 60 and 62 A.D.; and James the Just was martyred sometime later, in 62 A.D. This James the Just, was the leader of the Congregation of believers that met at “Solomon’s Portico”, according to Clement.⁴⁶ Bagatti summarizes the accounts nicely, “Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History gives three quotations from different authors, Clement of Alexandria, Hegesippus and Josephus Flavius, who speak of James’ death. These quotations substantially agree in this, that James was thrown down from the Temple and was killed with a dyer’s stick.”⁴⁷

The account of Hegesippus (a Jewish believer) is particularly graphic and detailed.⁴⁸ There was apparently an attempt to entice James with acceptance and respect from the Sanhedrin, if he would, “restrain the people, for they have gone astray after Jesus in the belief that he is the Christ.” Their proposal was that James would take a position on “the Temple

⁴¹Perhaps by Charles Warren? See K. and L. Ritmeyer “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount in Jerusalem” in *BAR*, 15:6, p. 34.

⁴²Ben-Dov’s reference to “the southeast” corner, on p. 94 of his book, is clearly an error.

⁴³Ben-Dov, M. “Herod’s Mighty Temple Mount” in *BAR*, 12:6, p. 48.

⁴⁴Luke 23:54.

⁴⁵Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Bk. 2, Sec. 23 [pp. 99-102].

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Bk. 2, Sec. 1 [p.72].

⁴⁷Bagatti, B. *The Church from the Circumcision* (Jerusalem: 1984), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁸The following quotes come from Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Bk. 2, Sec. 23 [pp. 99-102].

parapet” on Passover Day, from whence he would be easily seen and heard by the multitudes of pilgrims and worshippers. The description of the “parapet” in Eusebius corresponds nicely with the “house of trumpeting,” above the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount. Once he was in place, they shouted to him, “Righteous one, whose word we are all obliged to accept, the people are going astray after Jesus who was crucified; so tell us what is meant by ‘the door of Jesus’.”

He replied as loudly as he could: “Why do you question me about the Son of Man? I tell you, He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and He will come on the clouds of heaven.” Many were convinced, and gloried in James’s testimony, crying: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Then again the Scribes and Pharisees said to each other: “We made a bad mistake in affording such testimony to Jesus. We had better go up and throw him down, so that they will be frightened and not believe him.” “Ho, ho!” they called out, “even the Righteous one has gone astray!”—fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: “Let us remove the Righteous one, for he is unprofitable to us. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their works.” [Is. 3:10]

Since the fall did not kill him, they began to stone him. A member of a priestly family tried to stop them, but a fuller brought down his club on James’ skull, and ended his life near the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount. Thus ended the apostolic age in Jerusalem.

Epilogue

The birth of Jewish evangelism was also the birth of Church history. The congregation of Jewish believers that gathered at “Solomon’s Portico” probably continued meeting here until just prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Following the flight to Pella, the meeting place may have moved to the synagogue on “Mt. Zion” (the “Church of the Apostles”).⁴⁹ It is also possible that the move to “Mt. Zion” was necessitated a few years earlier by the martyrdom of James the Just in 62 A.D.

Eusebius claims that the first fifteen “bishops” of the church in Jerusalem were “Hebrews.”⁵⁰ Simeon, son of Cleopas, followed James,⁵¹ and was martyred by crucifixion⁵² in either 106/107 A.D., at 120 years of age. Following Simeon were Justus (the first of two who bore this name), Zacchaeus, Tobias, Benjamin, John, Matthias, Philip, Seneca, Justus (the second), Levi, Ephres, Joseph, and Judas. “All are said to be Hebrews in origin For at that time their whole church consisted of Hebrew believers who had continued from apostolic times down to the later siege in which the Jews . . . were overwhelmed in a full-scale war.”⁵³ Thus, in

⁴⁹Pixner, B. “Church of the Apostles Found on Mt. Zion” in *BAR*, 16:3, pp. 16-35, 60. Cf. also, B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision* (Jerusalem: 1984), p. 7ff, 116ff; and R. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Jerusalem: 1988).

⁵⁰Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Bk. 4, Sec. 5 [p. 156].

⁵¹*Ibid.*, Bk. 3, Sec. 11 [p.123].

⁵²*Ibid.*, Bk. 3, Sec. 32 [p.142].

⁵³*Ibid.*, Bk. 4, Sec. 5 [p. 156].

the twenty-eight years between the martyrdom of Simeon (106 /107 A.D.) and the edict of Hadrian, which banned any Jewish person from entering Jerusalem (135 A.D.), we must fit the short tenures of the remaining thirteen Messianic Jewish pastors.

In the centuries that followed, places of New Testament and apostolic significance were frequently “graced” with church buildings or shrines. That “Solomon’s Portico” was so viewed can be seen from the answer to a question Tertulian raised. He asked, “What therefore is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem, between the Academy and the church? Our doctrine was born under the Porch of Solomon.”⁵⁴

To the author’s knowledge, there are no historical associations which provide a rationale for the location of the Al Aqsa Mosque. However, it is known that (on more than one occasion) mosques are sometimes erected over a site which had previously commemorated a significant event for Judaism or Christianity. This, almost certainly, is the explanation for the location of the Al Aqsa Mosque. There is some historical testimony for a church building, possibly commemorating the meeting place of the early church, on Temple Mount. King says, “In 529 A.D. Justinian built a splendid church on the Temple Hill, in honour of the Virgin Mary, and in the writings of Procopius [of Caesarea, c. 540 A.D.] there is a full and detailed account of the edifice.”⁵⁵ Breviarium de Hierosolyma (c. 590 A.D), refers to a cruciform church in the same vicinity. Warren flatly declares, “The Aksa Mosque . . . has been rebuilt at various periods, and stands on the site of the church built by Justinian.”⁵⁶ Kay Prag contends that the oldest portions of the Aksa Mosque, in the southern end of the present structure, represent the first mosque of Jerusalem, the Mosque of Umar, which was built in 638 A.D.⁵⁷ The significant question, then, is, “Why was the church of Justinian (or an even earlier one which may have stood at this site) located where it was”? In the author’s opinion, it can only be because these buildings enshrined the memory of the meeting place of the first congregation of Jesus-believing Jews in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Several characteristics of this early band of brothers and sisters are clarified by a better understanding of the setting of their public meetings in the “Portico of Solomon”. Obviously, they were a thoroughly, and distinctively, Jewish witness to the very heart of Israel. As such, they were fulfilling God’s command to, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem.”⁵⁸

Several other observations should be made regarding this first congregation of Jesus-believing Jews in Jerusalem. First, they were visible. Everyone knew who they were and where they met. Second, they were vocal. They were unabashedly evangelistic. Finally, they were

⁵⁴As quoted by Bagatti, B., *The Church From the Gentiles in Palestine* (Jerusalem: 1984), p. 22.

⁵⁵King, J. *Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill* (London: 1898), p.69.

⁵⁶Warren, C. *Underground Jerusalem* (London: 1876), p. 347.

⁵⁷Prag, K. *Jerusalem: Blue Guide* (London: 1989), p. 130.

⁵⁸Isaiah 40:2 [Hebrew]

vulnerable. They were meeting in the midst of those who opposed them. However, they had a greater concern for being found faithful, than in being “secure.”⁵⁹ May God grant that we, both Jewish and gentile believers, follow in their steps, as we proclaim the gospel of salvation to the heart of Israel and to the ends of the earth.

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⁵⁹I am indebted to Tuvia Zaretsky not only for this fine alliteration, but for many related insights which are, unfortunately, outside the scope of this article.

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Personal Notes for Guiding the Outdoor Seminar

Note #1

“Solomon’s Stables,” probably named for the Muslim leader, Shuleiman, who, following the example of the Crusaders, used this area to stable the horses of his soldiers. Four levels raised the ground level from 695 m. above sea level to about the present level of the platform at 738 m. We are on the third level from the bottom, and only the lower parts of the walls are Herodian. The rest has been reconstructed during Crusader times.

Eighty-eight pillars divide the area into thirteen N-S galleries. At the southern end of the 6th gallery is the inner side of the blocked “single gate,” which was constructed by the Crusaders. There is a tunnel under this gate which leads into the lower level of arches.

At the west side of the “stables,” an opening in the wall leads to another smaller galleried area with two rows of piers; to the South is the inner side of the blocked Herodian Triple Gate. The interior of these gates is Umayyad.

[Note: Priestly storerooms where wine, olive oil, flour, salt, and other items needed in connection with the Temple service were kept. They had access from a stairway to the east and the gate to the south (triple gate)]

Note #2

Al Aqsa Al Qadima

In the 8th century, the West side was blocked (at the upper end) with a heavy mass of masonry, which forms a foundation for the mosque above, and the E. ramp was extended to its present length when the length of the mosque above was extended.

Note #3

Tomb of David

I Kings 2:10

Then David slept with his fathers and was buried **in the City of David**.

I Kings 11:43

And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried **in the city of his father David**, and his son Rehoboam reigned in his place.

II Chronicles 32:33

So Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him on the ascent of the tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death. And his son Manasseh became king in his place.

Note: “*Tombs of the sons of David*” in II Chron. 32:33; and “*Tombs of the Kings*” in II Chron. 21:20.

Nehemiah 3:13–16 (Note the Order)

¹³ The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. They also repaired five hundred yards of the wall as far as the Dung Gate [i.e., “Crowfoot Gate” opposite the Water Gate?].

¹⁴ The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place.

¹⁵ The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Col-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King’s Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David.

¹⁶ Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of a half-district of Beth Zur, made repairs up to a point **opposite the tombs of David**, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Heroes.

Imagine the Sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Shavuot), w/ ref. to David’s tomb:

Acts 2:29

“Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.”

Acts 2:46–47

And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 3:11

And while he (the lame beggar, now healed) was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.

Acts 5:12

And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico.