

The History of the Temple Mount

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PDF: <http://www.wayoflife.org/pdf/templemount.pdf> (illustrated)

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Recently I stood on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and wondered at the past, present, and future of this amazing place. The story of the nation Israel is largely the story of the Temple Mount, and it should interest every believer, because it is at the heart of Bible prophecy and our own future is tied up with it.

The Bible says that God has placed Jerusalem at the center of the nations to be a light to the world (Ezekiel 5:5). It is Israel's failure to live up to this calling that has brought such great trouble upon her and upon the city that lies at the center of her hopes and aspirations.

Jewish tradition says that Adam and Eve were created on Mt. Moriah, but the Bible does not confirm this. In fact, the biblical description of the location of the Garden of Eden places it farther north in association with the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

The biblical history of the Temple Mount begins in 1870 B.C. when Abraham was instructed to offer his son Isaac, the inheritor of God's promise, on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:2). God provided a ram in the place of Isaac to signify the coming of the Messiah to make the perfect atonement for man's sin (Gen. 22:11-14). Abraham named the place *Jehovah-jireh*, the Lord will provide, and there God reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 22:15-18), the covenant that passed to Jacob or Israel, and through his 12 sons to the tribes of Israel.

In 957 B.C. the First Temple was built by King Solomon on Mt. Moriah (2 Chron. 3:1). It was built according to the divine plans given to his father David (1 Chronicles 22:5-6; 28:11-12, 19), and the glory of God filled it (1 Kings 8:10-11).

In 586 B.C., the First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonian armies under Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:9). The reason was Israel's sin against God (2 Chron. 26:15-21). Before the destruction the glory of God had departed from the Temple according to Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 10:18; 11:23).

In 572 B.C., while living in Babylon fourteen years after the destruction of the First Temple, Ezekiel delivered a lengthy prophecy that looked beyond the Second and Third Temples and described the Millennial Temple that will be built when the Messiah rules in His kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48).

In 534 B.C., Daniel prophesied from the Babylonian captivity that a "vile person" would flatter the Jews, desecrate the temple (obviously the Second Temple that was yet to be built), cause the Jewish sacrifice to cease, and persecute the Jewish people (Dan. 11:30-35). Daniel also prophesied that some of the Jews would "be strong, and do exploits" but they would eventually fall.

The Second Temple was built by Ezra in 516 B.C. after the Jews returned from the 70-year captivity. There is no record that divine plans were given for its construction, and the glory of God never filled it.

In 168 B.C. the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, an incredibly proud man who struck a coin with his image inscribed with "Antiochus, God Manifest," having won the Jews' affections through flattery, plundered and desecrated the Temple. He sacrificed a pig on the altar and erected a statue of Zeus (Jupiter) in the Holy Place. Antiochus outlawed sabbath-keeping and circumcision, burned the Jewish Scriptures, and forced the Jews to sacrifice to Saturn and Bacchus, the god of debauchery. He killed over 80,000 Jews and sold 40,000 into slavery. He committed horrible atrocities such as forcing a mother to watch as her seven sons were roasted on a flat iron. Mothers who circumcised their sons were thrown off the walls of Jerusalem with their infants. The ensuing Maccabean revolt led by brave Jews was successful for awhile, but eventually failed and great numbers were slaughtered. These events are mere shadows of the coming Antichrist.

In 63 B.C. the Roman armies conquered Jerusalem, and the emperor Pompey rode his horse into the Temple.

Beginning in 19 B.C. the Second Temple was enlarged and glorified by Herod the Great. Herod encouraged the corruption of Jewish worship through admixture with paganism. He placed a golden eagle, the symbol of Rome's power, over the eastern entrance, ignoring the fact that God's law forbids graven images. Further, the eagle is an unclean bird according to Jewish law. It was Herod who ordered the murder of Jewish male infants under two years old in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus.

In 33 A.D. Jesus prophesied that the Temple would be surrounded by an army and destroyed. He also said that Jerusalem's people would be killed. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

In 33 A.D. Jesus drove the moneychangers from the Temple for the second time in His ministry and was soon thereafter arrested by the Jewish and Roman authorities and crucified outside the city at Golgotha. Jesus died in fulfillment of the Passover Lamb.

The day that Jesus died, the veil in the Temple dividing the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), thus signifying that the way into the very presence of God was open for sinners through faith in the atonement of Christ. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead and instructed His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).

In 70 A.D. the Second Temple was destroyed by the Roman Tenth Legion under General Titus, after a siege of five months during which the city was surrounded. The Jewish historian Josephus said that over a million Jews were killed, including thousands of children. Nearly 100,000 Jews were taken prisoner, and thousands of these died by crucifixion, by being burned alive, and by being forced to fight wild animals and gladiators in the arenas. The Second Temple was pulled down on the same day that the First Temple was destroyed 656 years earlier, and it was destroyed for the same reason.

In 71 A.D. the first in a series of Vespasian coins was struck in silver, bronze, and gold. (Some might have been made from gold taken from the Temple.) The Emperor Vespasian's head appears on one side. (He led the Roman armies against Israel until his son Titus took over when he was crowned emperor at Caesarea Maritima in 69 A.D.) The words *Ivdaea Capta* ("Judea has been conquered") or *Ivdaea Devicta* ("Judea has been defeated") were engraved around the rim. Israel was usually depicted as a weeping woman sitting by a palm tree with her hands tied behind her back or in front, though in some she is standing. On some coins she is guarded by the Roman emperor clothed in his military gear and standing in a victory pose with one foot on an enemy soldier's helmet. In publishing these coins, the Roman authorities were unwittingly depicting the ancient prophecy of Isaiah that because of her sin Israel would fall and "she being desolate shall sit upon the ground" (Isaiah 3:26). The coins continued to be issued by two other emperors (Vespasian's sons) until 96 A.D. Another coin depicted the execution of the Jewish revolt leader Simon son of Giora. He was taken to Rome, publicly displayed, then executed. The coin features Vespasian's head on one side and a triumphal Roman procession on the other, with Vespasian standing in a four-horse chariot and Simon being led to his death.

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews have observed Tisha B'Av (meaning ninth of Av) as the day of mourning over their loss. The practice began after the destruction of the First Temple and was reestablished in 71 A.D. The observance falls in July or August of the Gregorian calendar. On Tisha B'Av, the Torah is draped in black. There is fasting and mourning, with the reading of the book of Lamentations and Jewish poetry called kinnot. Orthodox Jews believe that Tisha B'Av will be kept until the Messiah comes, at which time it will become a celebration.

In 82 A.D. the Arch of Titus was dedicated in Rome to celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem. It was built by the Emperor Domitian in honor of his older brother Titus, who led the Roman Tenth Legion against Jerusalem and afterwards became emperor. The Arch addresses Titus as “divine.” Inside the Arch are depictions of the articles taken from the Temple, including the menorah and the silver trumpets.

From 132-135 A.D. Shimon ben Kosiba led the Second Jewish Revolt to reestablish control of Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. When he liberated Jerusalem, he was called the Messiah by Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph and renamed *Bar Kokhba* (“Son of the Star”) based on the Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17. The Jews struck the coin of Bar Kokhba depicting the Temple with the Ark of the Covenant inside and the Messianic star on the roof. The other side was inscribed with “To the Freedom of Jerusalem.” The revolt was put down by the Romans with terrible brutality and the death and enslavement of more than half a million Jews. Judea was reduced to rubble, with 50 fortified towns and nearly 1000 villages razed. Jewish children were wrapped in Torah scrolls and burned alive, but it must also be said that the Jews had extended their own brutality to the Christians that refused to curse Jesus and accept Kosiba’s claim to Messiahship.

In 135 A.D. the Roman Emperor Hadrian built a pagan temple on the Mount. It was dedicated to the trio of pagan gods and goddesses Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Hadrian was a great worshiper of Jupiter, having erected the famous Olympian Jupiter temple in Athens. But he also worshipped himself and required worship from his subjects. On the Temple Mount he honored himself as a god with an equestrian statue. At the same time, a temple of Aphrodite was built over the tomb which Christians venerated as the tomb of Jesus. Hadrian outlawed the study and teaching of the Torah and made it a capital offense to practice Judaism.

In 325 A.D. the “Christian” Emperor Constantine tore down the Temple of Jupiter and built an octagon church on the site by the name of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

In 614 Jerusalem was conquered by the Persians and Christians and Jews were exiled to Persia.

In 629 the Byzantine Emperor Herodius recaptured Jerusalem from the Persians and reestablished the churches.

In 638 Jerusalem was re-conquered by the Muslims and in 691 the Dome of the Rock mosque was built on the site of Constantine’s church.

In 715 the al-Aqsa Mosque was built on the southern end of the Temple Mount, based on the myth that Mohammed flew to heaven from here to receive the blessings of the prophets. The Temple Mount became known as the Haram el-Sharif (“Noble Enclosure”) by the Moslems.

In 1099 the Roman Catholic Crusaders took control of Jerusalem by massacring both Jews and Muslims. They converted the Dome of the Rock into a church called the *Templum Domini* (“Temple of the Lord”), putting a cross on the top, and Al-Aqsa mosque became the headquarters of the Knights Templar.

In 1187, the Muslim leader Saladin defeated the Crusaders and restored Jerusalem to Islamic control. He banned all non-Muslim access to the Temple Mount.

In 1229 Jerusalem was re-conquered by Catholic Crusaders. The mosques on the Temple Mount were again used as churches.

In 1250 the Muslims recaptured the city and held on to it until modern times.

1517 was the beginning of the Ottoman Empire period of Turkish rule over Jerusalem that lasted 400 years.

In 1541 Sultan Suleiman I closed the Eastern Gate (also called the Golden Gate) to prevent the Jewish Messiah from entering there. An Islamic graveyard was built in front of the gate, which exists to this day. This is supposed to prevent the Messiah from entering this way because, as a Jew, he will not walk through a graveyard.

In 1700 a group of 500 ascetic Jews led by Rabbi Judah he-Hasid arrived in Jerusalem from Europe to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. he-Hasid died a few days later, though, and the movement fizzled out within 20 years.

Between 1808 and 1812, another group of Messianic ascetic Jews, known as Perushim, immigrated to the Holy Land from Lithuania to rebuild the waste places and ultimately establish the Third Temple. One of their leaders, Rabbi Avraham Solomon Zalman Zoref, even sent one of his sons overseas to locate and return the “ten lost tribes” of Israel, but the rabbi was eventually assassinated by the Arabs. (I don’t know what happened to the son.) These early attempts to restore Israel failed completely because it was not God’s time.)

In 1866 Jews became a majority in Jerusalem for the first time in 1200 years, and the southern end of the Western Wall was modified to facilitate Jewish prayer, but they were still restricted to a narrow alley that ran along the wall. The Amoraim, who were rabbinical teachers that lived between 200 and 500 A.D., taught that the Shekinah glory never left the Temple Mount and that it remained at the Western Wall (Price, *The Battle for the Last Days Temple*, p. 68). This is the basis of the prayers at the Wailing Wall to this day.

During the British Mandate, when England controlled Jerusalem from 1917-1948, Jews were not allowed on the Temple Mount. They were restricted to praying silently in the alley along the Western Wall. They were forbidden to make any noise, even audible prayers, or to blow the shofar.

In 1931, the British gave the Waqf or Islamic Trust the Temple Mount as its exclusive property.

On May 14, 1948, the new state of Israel was announced. The official declaration of statehood announced: “We hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called *Medinath Yisrael* (The State of Israel). ... The State of Israel will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion ... Our call goes out to the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side in the task of immigration and development and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations for the redemption of Israel.” U.S. President Harry Truman, a Baptist, immediately announced his recognition of Israel in spite of fierce opposition from his own State Department. Jews celebrated throughout the world. In Rome they paraded under the Arch of Titus. Prior to 1948, Jews had refused to walk through the arch.

On May 25, 1948, the Temple Mount and the old city of Jerusalem (east Jerusalem) were captured by Jordan. Jews continued to be restricted from the Mount. Under Jordanian control over the next nineteen years, 58 Jewish synagogues were destroyed, Jewish sites were desecrated, and the Western Wall was turned into a garbage dump.

On June 7, 1967, Israel recaptured the old city and the Temple Mount, regaining control for the first time in 1,897 years. Colonel Motta Gur, a paratrooper, announced in Hebrew, “The Temple Mount is in our hands! I repeat, the Temple Mount is in our hands!” Lt. Col. Uzi Eilam blew the shofar and soldiers sang “Jerusalem of Gold” and recited the *Shehechianu Blessing*: “Blessed art Thou Lord God King of the Universe who has sustained us and kept us and has brought us to this day!” The Star of David flew briefly over the Dome of the Rock. General Shlomo Goren, chaplain of the Israel Defense Forces and later to become chief rabbi of Israel, announced, “We have taken the city of God. We are entering the Messianic era for the Jewish people.” Carrying a Torah and blowing the shofar, Goren led the soldiers in recitation of prayer at the Wailing Wall. A few days after the war the first significant Jewish gathering was held on the Mount since 69 A.D., when 200,000 Jews massed there to celebrate--a celebration that proved to be short-lived.

On June 17, 1967, in an attempt to appease the Muslims and foster inter-religious harmony, Israel’s Defense minister Moshe Dayan, a “secular Jew” and a profane man with no love for God’s Word, returned control of the Temple Mount to the Palestinian Waqf. The Israeli Knesset approved this decision. Dayan said in his autobiography that Jews should “view the Temple Mount as a historic site relating to past memory.” The Waqf is the same organization that has managed the Temple Mount since the Muslims overthrew the Crusaders in 1187. Not surprisingly, they have refused to allow Jews to worship on their own Mount. In fact, they have proclaimed the entire area a mosque.

In August 1967, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel warned Jews “from entering any part of the Temple Mount.” The following sign is still posted at the entrance to the Mount by the authority of the chief rabbis: “NOTICE AND WARNING: Entrance to the area of the Temple Mount is forbidden to everyone by Jewish Law owing to the sacredness of the place.” This is based on their superstitious fear that someone might tread on the place where the Holy of Holies once stood. They also say that currently there is no possibility of proper cleansing since the purification water made from the ashes of a red heifer does not exist. There is no consensus on this, though. Other rabbis have encouraged Jews to visit certain parts of the mount, after bathing in a mikva (a pool for ceremonial immersion).

In the late 1960s the Temple Mount Faithful was established to rebuild the Temple. Its leader, Gershon Salomon, is a descendant of the aforementioned Rabbi Avraham Zoref, who in the early 1800s was one of the pioneers of the modern movement to prepare for the rebuilding of the Temple. Salomon is a military officer who has fought in most of Israel’s wars, beginning with the War of Independence. During a battle in 1958 on the Golan Heights, a battle in which his company of 120 Israeli soldiers was ambushed by thousands of Syrians, Salomon was run over by a tank and seriously injured (he claims he actually died). When the Syrians were about to shoot him to make sure he was dead, they suddenly ran away, leaving the battlefield in the hands of the little company of Israelis. The Syrians later reported to UN officers that they had seen thousands of angels around Salomon. He says that during that experience he saw the light of God and he knew he still had work to do, which was the rebuilding of the Temple and the preparation of the “coming of Messiah ben David.” Salomon was also one of the soldiers that liberated the Temple Mount in 1967.

In 1986, the Temple Institute was founded with the objective of seeing “Israel rebuild the Holy Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.” They are building “the temple in waiting” by preparing architectural designs and constructing the actual articles to be used in the new Temple. At much expense (\$20 million has been donated so far) and based on extensive research they have fashioned the high priest’s garments, including the golden crown and breastplate with its 12 precious stones inscribed with the names of the tribes of Israel; a copper laver; an incense altar; silver trumpets; gold- and silver-plated shofars; harps; and many other things. Levi priests are even being trained. Of special interest is the large menorah that has been fashioned from 95 pounds of pure gold, valued at \$2 million. In December 2007 the menorah was moved to an outside location on the Western Wall Plaza across from the Temple Mount. Prior to that it had stood farther away in the old Roman Cardo (the main thoroughfare through Jerusalem). The plan is to move the menorah ever closer to the Temple Mount itself and ultimately to place it in a rebuilt Temple. The Temple Institute compared the dedication of the menorah in its new location with the dedication of the Arch of Titus in Rome 1,900 years ago. The difference is dramatic. Then, the menorah was moving away from the Temple, whereas today it is moving back toward the Temple.

In 1996, the Islamic Waqf began building massive mosques inside the Temple Mount and in the process removing evidence of the ancient Jewish temples. Tens of thousands of square feet of archaeologically rich soil has been removed. Any stones with decorations or Hebrew inscriptions were cut up to obliterate the markings and the stones were fashioned into new building material.

In January 2005 the Jewish Sanhedrin met for the first time in 1,600 years. In June of that year it was reported that the newly formed Sanhedrin was calling upon all groups involved in Temple Mount research to prepare detailed architectural plans for the reconstruction of the Jewish Holy Temple (“New Sanhedrin Plans Rebuilding of Temple,” *WorldNetDaily*, June 8, 2005).

In coming days the Third Temple will be built under the false peace program of the Antichrist and will be desecrated by him (Daniel 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 11:1-2).

After Christ’s return, the glorious Millennial Temple will be built. It is mentioned in the following prophecies: Isaiah 2:2-3; 56:6-7; 60:7, 13; Jeremiah 33:17-18; Ezekiel 37:26-28; 40-48; Haggai 2:7-9; Zechariah 6:12-15; 14:20; Malachi 3:1-5. Some of the Psalms also speak prophetically of the Millennial Temple (Psa. 68:29; 100:4; 132:13-17). In fact, the Psalms will be sung in that glorious Temple.