

The Temple Mount



Description

The temple mount is the place where the Biblical temples were built, starting from King Solomon almost 3,000 years ago. The temple was built in 3 phases (Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod) and was destroyed by the Romans. The temple was never rebuilt again by the Jews, and replaced by the Muslim shrines in the 8th C AD which stand there today over the ruins of the base of the Roman period temple.

The temple mount is located in the walled city of Jerusalem, on the eastern side of the old city. There are two tourist entrances, but the entrance is often limited to hours between the prayers.

Etymology

Haram al-Sharif - Arabic: Noble Sanctuary (refers to the entire area of the temple mount)

Har Habayit - Hebrew: Har=Mountain, Bayit=House - The mountain of The House.

Al-Aqsa (Al-Aksa) - In Arabic: the "remote" or the "farthest". The silver dome is built on the southeast side of the temple mount, and is named after the Muslim's account of the imaginative night travel of prophet Muhammad to the remote mosque. This mosque is detailed in another web page.

Kubat es-Sakhra - In Arabic: the dome of the Rock. The name dome was derived from its golden Dome, and "Rock" is named after the "foundation rock". The rock is in the center of the shrine, and according to Jewish tradition was the place where Abraham came to sacrifice his son Isaac. The rock is the center - (foundation) of the world. According to Muslim tradition, prophet Muhammad ascended to the heaven from this rock. This shrine is detailed in another web page.

Even Ha-Shtiya - Hebrew: Foundation stone.

History of the Temple

FIRST TEMPLE

The first temple was built by King Solomon at about 950 BC, and was located on the highest point above the Kidron valley - on mount Moriah. As per the Bible (2 Chronicles 3:1: "Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite".

The temple was destroyed after the intrusion of Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar II (as per Jeremiah 34: 7): "When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem". He destroyed Jerusalem in 587BC (2 Kings 24: 10,13): "At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged....And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said".

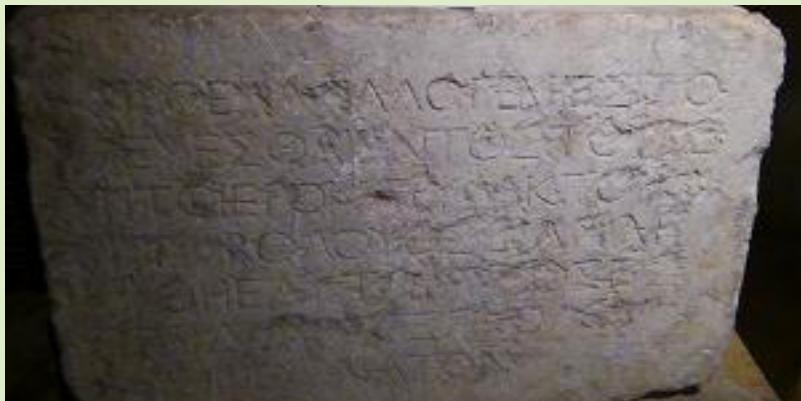
SECOND TEMPLE

The population was transferred to Babylon, but returned after 50 years. After their return, on 536, Zerubbabel built the first phase of the second temple. (Ezra 3: 8: "Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel ... to set forward the work of the house of the LORD"). Over 500 years the temple was repaired and new walls were constructed, but the major overhaul was performed by Herod - the great builder.

Herod the Great, King of Israel under the Romans (37BC - 4BC), enlarged and rebuilt the second temple, and made it a magnificent temple. A reconstruction of the temple is illustrated below, with a view from the south-east.

The trapezoid area of the temple mount was 144,000 square meters - the size of about 20 football fields. Its wall lengths were 280m (south wall), 460 (east wall), 315 (north wall) and 485 (west wall). The mount was 10 stories high - its height above the street level was 30m with additional 20m underground, using heavy hewn boulders measuring between 2-5 tons (small size) to 10 tons and more. Indeed - a colossal enterprise designed to host more than 100,000 visitors during the holidays.

One of the exciting findings belonging to the Herodian temple was found by Clermont and Ganneau in 1871 in a graveyard near the temple mount wall. This 1st C AD warning stone reads (in Greek): "No intruder is allowed in the courtyard and within the wall surrounding the temple. Whoever enters will invite death for himself". This warning is based on the Bible (Numbers 1:51): "And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death".



Jerusalem Temple warning stone, 1st C AD
[Istanbul Archaeological Museum]

THE GREAT REVOLT

Following the Jewish revolt against the Romans, the Roman troops headed by Titus destroyed and looted the city and the temple. This left most of Herod's second temple in rubble. Only few remnants of this remarkable structure remained, such as the western wall, Hulda Gates, and the south-western corner in the southern wall.



BYZANTINE PERIOD

The temple mount was left in ruins. The Romans rebuilt the city and laid out new roads, while the temple mount was left in ruins. A large church was built in the 6th C AD in the area of El-Aqsa mosque.

ARAB PERIOD

The Arabs conquered Jerusalem in 638AD, and Khalif Omar visited and prayed in the site in that year. The dome of the Rock shrine, with the large golden dome and an octagon structure, was built by the Umayyad Khalif Abdul-Malik ibn Marwan in 691 (72 year according to Muslim calendar), and named it after Omar. It is one of the most beautiful and enduring shrines in the World, and remained almost untouched throughout the years. The rock is, according to Muslim tradition, the spot where prophet Mohamed ascended to heaven.

Years later, either in 696 (by the same Khalif) or in 705AD (by his son), another dome was built on the far south side: the Al-Aqsa mosque (also "Al-Aksa", which means "the remote" mosque). It was named after the tradition of prophet Muhammad's imaginative travel from Mecca to a remote mosque.

Additional Umayyad palaces and administration structures were constructed south of the temple mount.

CRUSADERS

In 1099 the Crusaders called the Temple mount as "Templum Domini", turned the Dome of the rock to a church, adding a cross on the dome. They turned the Al-Aksa mosque to a prayer house and then to Baldwin's royal palace in 1104, naming it King Solomon's palace.

The Templar Knights military-religious organization was established in 1118, and named their organization after the temple. The vast halls under Al-Aksa mosque was believed to be King Solomon's stables, a name still used today in the area that was cleared under the mosque.

The Crusaders were driven out from Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187.

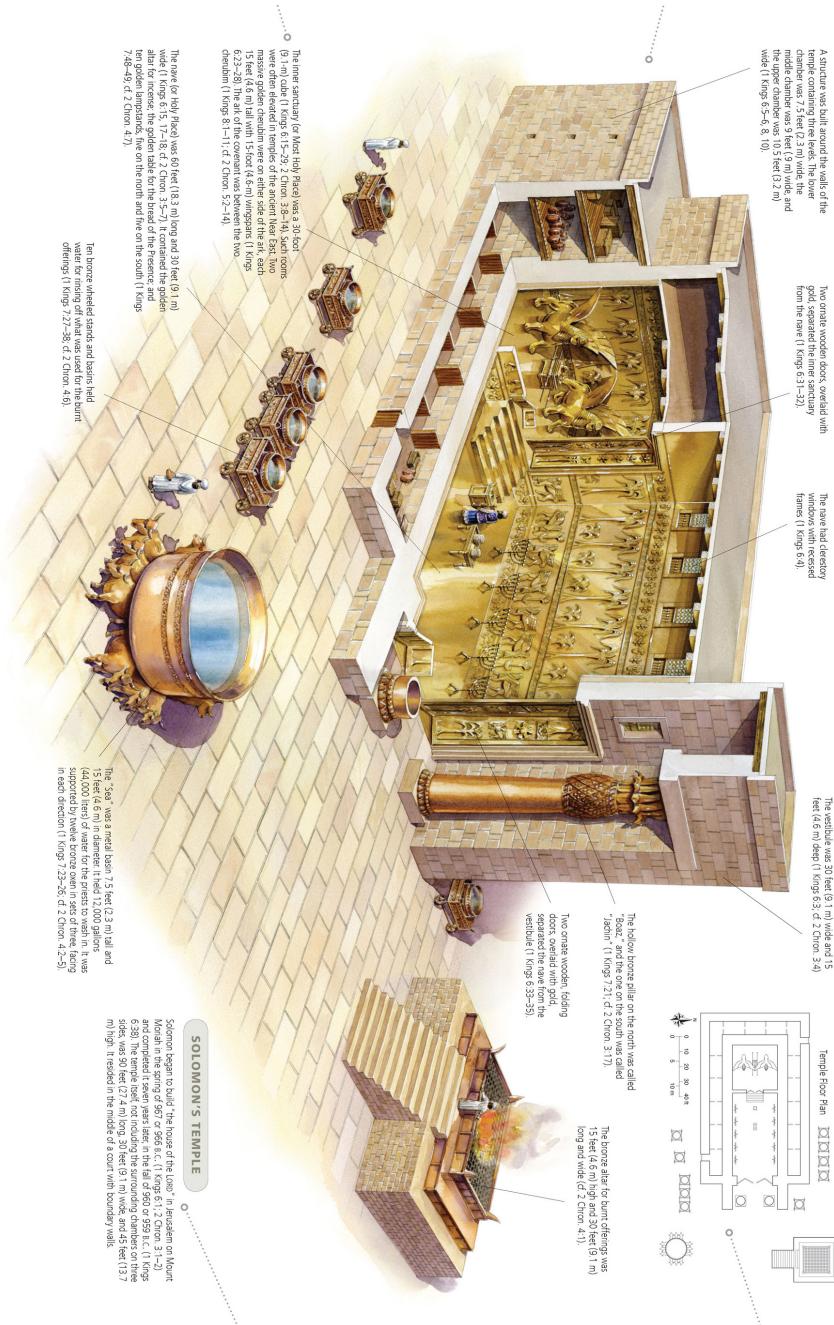
MAMLUKS/OTTOMAN

During the 14th-20th C the temple mount became a major Muslim prayer site; new walls and gates were constructed around the temple mount and the city; dozens of shrines, prayer domes and fountains added in the temple mount.

MODERN YEARS

In 1967 Israel reunited Jerusalem, but left the control of the temple mount to the Muslim Wakf. From time to time there are religious and political frictions ignited at the site, for example the riots in year 2000 that sparked the 5-years Palestinian uprising, called the "Al-Aksa Intefada". The situation seems explosive almost periodically, and the Israeli police staffs thousands of policemen in some Fridays, limiting the age and residence of the allowed persons to enter the temple mount in order to reduce the friction. There are some extreme Jewish groups who want to rebuild the "third temple", but this is a small group which is limited by the authorities. In addition, there are political debates over the fate of the city, which spells out more trouble in this hot spot.

Solomon's Temple Diagram



SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE Solomon began to build 'the house of the Lord' in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah in the spring of 957 or 956 B.C. (1 Kings 6:3, 5; 1 Chron. 3:1-8) and completed it seven years later in the fall of 950 or 959 B.C. (1 Kings 6:38). The temple itself (not including the surrounding chambers or the outer court) was 90 feet (27.4 m) long, 30 feet (9 m) wide, and 45 feet (13.7 m) high. It rested on the middle of a court with boundary walls 10 feet (3 m) high.

The Sea was a metal basin 7.5 feet (2.3 m) tall and 15 feet (4.6 m) in diameter. It held 12,000 gallons (44,000 liters) of water for the priests to wash in. It was supported by twelve bronze oven in sets of three, facing in each direction (1 Kings 7:23-26; cf. 2 Chron. 4:2-5).

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The bronze altar for burnt offerings was 15 feet (4.6 m) high and 30 feet (9.1 m) long and wide (cf. 2 Chron. 4:1).

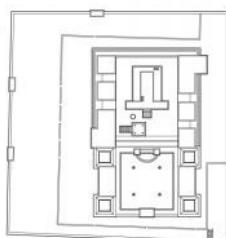
Two ornate wooden, folding doors, overlaid with gold separated the nave from the vestibule (1 Kings 6:33-35).
"Begin" (1 Kings 7:21, cf 2 Chron 3:17).

862, and the one on the south was called "Jachin" (1 Kings 7:21; cf. 2 Chron. 3:17).

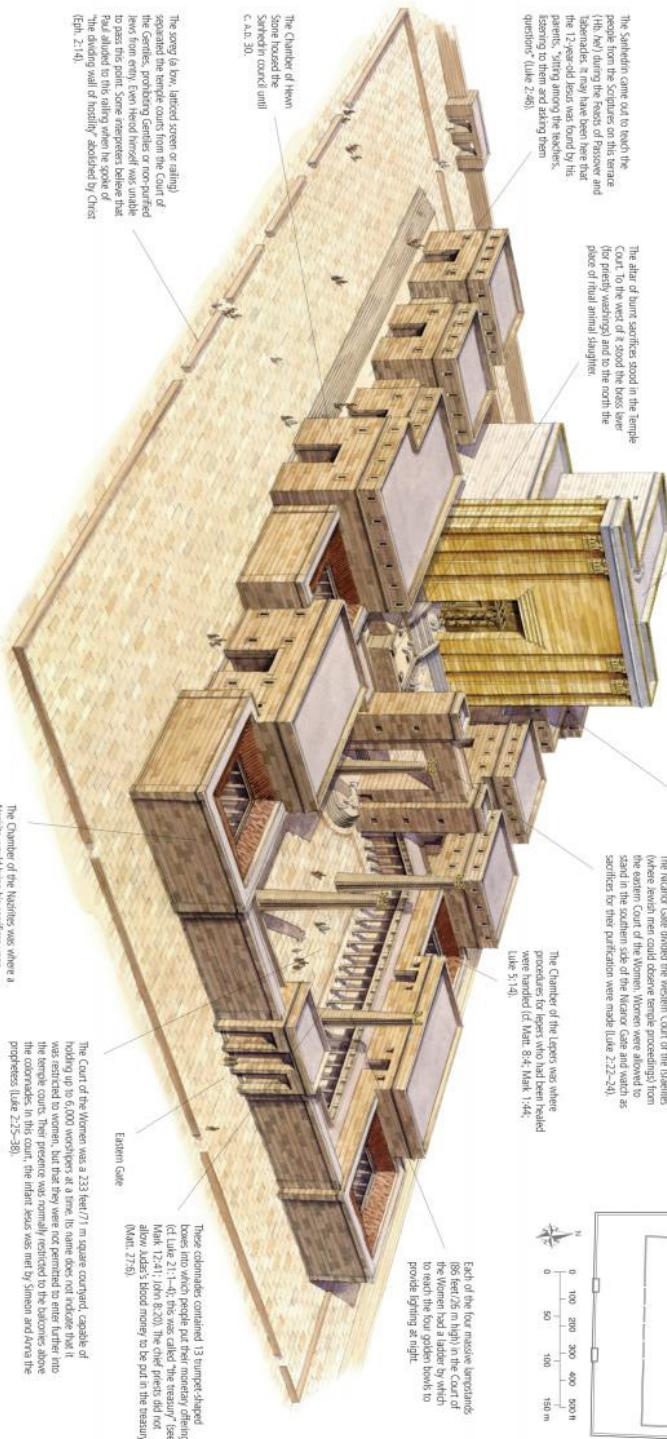
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HEROD'S TEMPLE COMPLEX IN THE TIME OF JESUS

Temple Complex Architectural Plan



Herod's Temple Diagram



When the Gospels and the book of Acts refer to entering the temple or "going into the temple," it often not a reference to the temple itself, but rather to this temple complex, including a number of courts and chambers that surrounded the temple. These latter structures were the great and wonderful buildings referred to by the disciples in Matt. 24:1; Mark 13:2.

The Chamber of the Hulites was the building which housed priests who served when they did not on duty (cf. Zechariah 1:16).

The Chamber of the Women was the building where Jewish men could observe temple proceedings from the eastern side of the Women. Women were allowed to stand in the southern side of the Nicanor Gate and watch as sacrifices for their purification were made (Luke 2:22-23).

The Sanhedrin came out to touch the people from the Sanhedrin on this terrace (1st level) during the Passover and Tabernacles. It may have been here that the 12-year-old Jesus was found by His parents, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46).

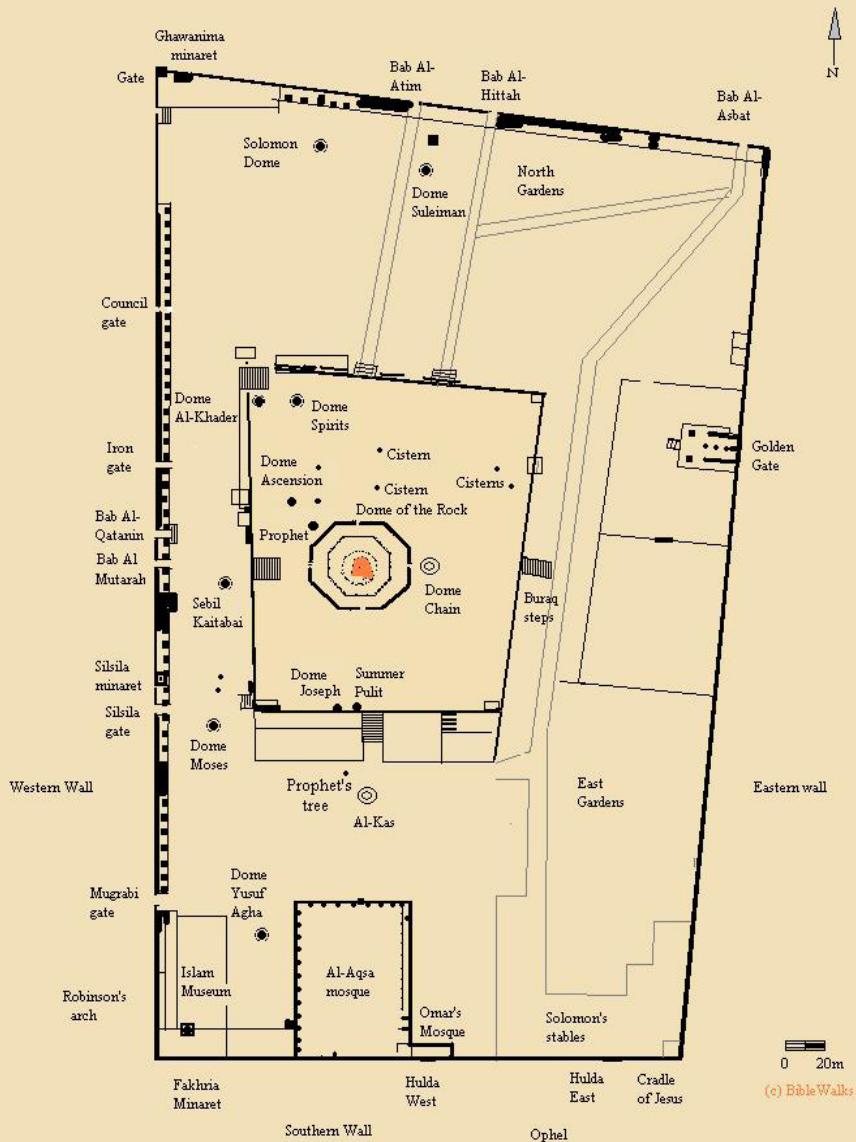
The altar of burnt sacrifices stood in the Temple Court, to the west of a stood the oxen over (for private washing) and the corn (place of ritual animal slaughter).

The Chamber of the Hulites divided the western Court of the Israelites (where Jewish men could observe temple proceedings) from the eastern Court of the Women. Women were allowed to stand in the southern side of the Nicanor Gate and watch as sacrifices for their purification were made (Luke 2:22-23).

The Chamber of the Levites was where Levites who had been healed were handed their duties (Matt. 8:4; Mark 1:44).



Modern Temple Mount Diagram



Temple Mount- Points of Interest



The Dome of the Rock

The dome of the Rock shrine, with a large golden dome and an octagon structure, was built in 691AD, and named after Khalif Omar. The rock is, according to Muslim tradition, the spot where prophet Mohamed ascended to heaven. According to Jewish tradition, the rock was the center of Holy of Holiest, the center point of God's dwelling and the creation of the world. It is one of the most beautiful and enduring shrines in the World, and remained almost untouched throughout the years.

The Arabs conquered Jerusalem in 638AD, and Khalif Omar visited and prayed in the site in that year. The dome of the Rock shrine, with the large

golden dome and an octagon structure, was built by the Umayyad Khalif Abdul-Malik ibn Marwan. The construction started in 689 and completed in 691 (72 years according to Muslim calendar), as indicated on an interior mosaic inscription. There are, however, other suggestions for a later completion date.

The name dome was derived from its golden Dome, and "Rock" is named after the "foundation rock". The rock is in the center of the mosque, and according to Jewish tradition was the place where Abraham came to sacrifice his son Isaac. The rock, according to the faith, is the center of the world. According to Muslim tradition, prophet Muhammad ascended back to Mecca from this rock after his night journey.

Al Aqsa Mosque

Al-Aqsa ("the farthest") Mosque is located on the southern side of the temple mount, and is the 3rd most holiest site in Islam. Initially built in 705 AD, the present silver-dome structure dates to 1035AD. It is named after the Muslim's account of the night travel of prophet Muhammad, who according to their tradition was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem.



Temple Mount- Points of Interest



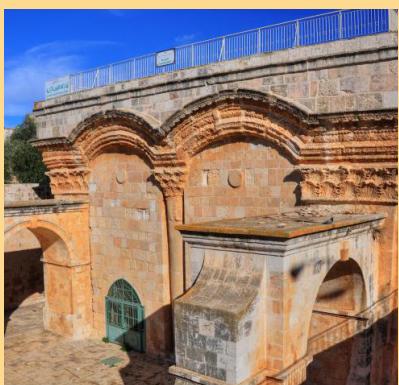
The Western/Wailing Wall

The Western wall is a remnant of Herod's grand temple, and is the most holiest site for Jews. It attracts thousands of Jewish worshippers daily, who come to pray and lay out their problems and seek for heavenly guidance. They feel the presence of God's spirit, who according to their belief resides for thousands of years in the holy temple.

The worship at the site of the western wall started after the destruction, and was referred in early texts in the 3rd-5th C. For 2,000 years the Jews came to the site and prayed for the rebuilt of Jerusalem and the Jewish Nation, since the fate of both coincided at the same time. For many times during the history the Jews were forbidden to approach the site, or were harassed while doing so, or had to bribe to get into the site.

According to Jewish Law, one is obligated to grieve and rend one's garment upon visiting the Western Wall and seeing the desolate site of the Temple. A person who has not seen the Wall within the last 30 days should recite:

“Our Holy Temple, which was our glory, in which our forefathers praised You, was burned and all of our delights were destroyed”.



The Golden Gate

The "Golden Gate", or: "Gate of the Mercy", is regarded as a Holy site for all faiths - Jewish (arrival of the Messiah) and Christian (entrance of Jesus on Palm Sunday) and Muslim (site of future resurrection).

The gate was built in the 6th/7th century AD over the ruins of the second temple gate, and sealed since the 16th century.

Temple Mount- Points of Interest



Southern Wall Excavations

These excavations, begun by Benjamin Mazar in 1968, were the largest earth-moving archaeological projects in Israel. Work continued until 1978 but has since resumed in the 1990s. Archaeologists believe these excavations are the most important for understanding the Temple Mount because of the impossibility of excavating on the mount itself.

By the mid-1990s, the street was fully uncovered and dates to the decades before the city's destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D.

The street was over 30 feet wide and was paved with large slabs up to a foot thick. The street was covered with massive stones pushed down by the Romans; only part of the street has been cleared by the excavators.

One interesting point is **the top stone of the southwest corner** of the Temple Mount that bears an inscription which reads in part, “to the place of trumpeting.” The priests would signal the start of Shabbat and festival days by blowing the shofar, apparently from this point. The inscription was apparently only a notice to the construction workers as to the final destination of this specially-cut stone.



Temple Mount- Points of Interest

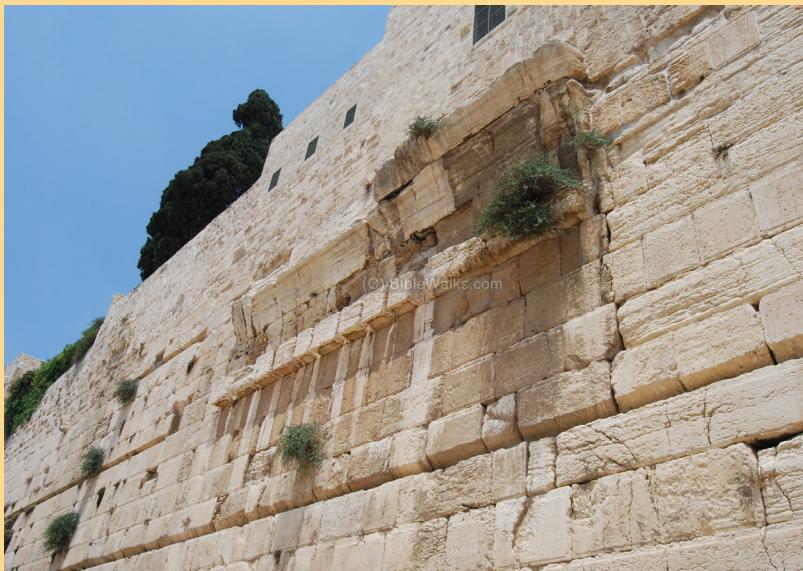
The western flight of stairs leading to the main entrances of the Temple Mount was 200 feet wide. Some suggest that the fifteen long steps may have been one of the locations where worshipers sang the fifteen Psalms of Ascent (120-34) as they went up to worship.



The Double Gates and Triple Gates provided access to the Temple Mount through subterranean passageways. Half of the lintel stone and relieving arch of the Herodian gateway is visible above the later protruding arch. Above and to the right is a stone with an inscription mentioning Hadrian's son (138 A.D.). Its position, upside down, clearly indicates that it is in secondary use.

A series of public ritual bathing installations were found on the south side of the Temple Mount. Because of the laws regarding purity before entering holy places, demand for mikvot was high and many have been discovered, dating from first century Jerusalem. Larger mikvots have separate entrances and exits; some would facilitate only one person at a time.

The stones are tapered so that the wall doesn't have the appearance that it is falling.



Scripture

I Kings 8:17-20

And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou dist well that it was in thine heart. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of my loins, he shall build the house unto my name. And the Lord hath performed his word that he spake, and I m risen in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and have built an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel