

Your QUESTIONS About Prophecy ANSWERED Part 6

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WHAT ABOUT THE TEMPLE? Part 3

The last two issues of "Jacob's Ladder" looked at whether or not the Jewish people want to rebuild the Temple and the Muslim claim to the Temple Mount. The main question remaining is, **"Where was the Temple located on the Temple Mount?"**

The Temple Mount today

The present Temple Mount platform encompasses approximately thirty-four acres. The platform was built to create a large area for people to congregate. To the north, the platform paving stones are just above the bedrock of the mount with several outcroppings. The major outcropping is the peak over which the Dome of the Rock rests. Another outcropping is a flat area that is even with the platform floor about 100 yards north of the peak over which a small Islamic shrine stands called by either of two names, "Dome of the Tablets" or "Dome of the Spirits." As the mountain drops off to the south, the platform is supported by a colonnade system call "Solomon's Stables." The outer retaining wall of this southern portion includes the "Western (Wailing) Wall. This portion of the platform is several feet lower than the northern portion.

The Temple Mount platform today is park-like with groves of trees providing shade in several areas. The buildings on the platform are primarily Islamic giving evidence to the 1300 years the Temple Mount has been under Muslim control. Today there is no visible evidence of where the Temple stood on the Temple Mount.

Problems with Locating where the Temple stood

So where was the Temple located on this

platform? It would seem to be a simple task to find some kind of remains of a foundation and thus locate where the Temple stood. The problem is that the Temple Mount today is a Muslim holy site so no one is allowed to do any archeological digs. Even the impression of trying to locate where the Jewish Temple stood would send shock waves through the Muslim world. In July of 1981, two rabbis and their students conducted a secret underground excavation of the Temple Mount just north of the Western Wall at a place called Warren's Gate. They were trying to locate the exact placement of the Holy of Holies and possibly even locate the lost Ark of the Covenant. They felt they were getting very close to identifying the location of the Temple with the possibility of even finding the lost Ark of the Covenant. When this secret was revealed in a news cast, Muslim Arabs rushed the Temple Mount entrances to Solomon's Stables to prevent further work. The Israeli government was so concerned about worldwide Muslim reaction that they ordered the excavation stopped and the Warren's Gate permanently sealed.

Mere digging near the Temple Mount generates a reaction. On October 24, 2005, WorldNetDaily.com ran the following headline and lead paragraph:

"Israeli dig to spark Temple Mount violence?" JERUSALEM – A senior Al Aqsa leader whose group has been accused of associations with Hamas told WorldNetDaily yesterday recent Israeli digs near the Temple Mount and a plan to construct an underground visitor's center near the Western Wall are really Jewish designs to destroy the mosque, potentially sparking deadly riots.

Not only are the Jews forbidden to find the location of their Temple, the Muslims are doing what they can to remove any evidence that may indicate the Temple Mount at one time belonged to the Jews. Baptist Press ran the following on February 5, 2005:

"Temple Mount destruction stirred archaeologist to action"

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Gabriel Barkay's excitement over new discoveries at the Temple Mount-- the Jerusalem site that carries great significance to the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths -- is tempered by the destructive events that led to them.

Barkay, professor of archaeology at Bar Ilan University near Tel Aviv, visited New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary for a Jan. 27 lecture sponsored by the seminary's Center for Archeological Research.

"In November 1999, the Islamic authorities carried out a huge excavation of [the part of the Temple Mount known as Solomon's Stable]," Barkay said. "They built a modern entrance to the building instead of the existing entrance, and they dug a huge pit with the help of bulldozers and 300 [dump trucks] that removed the dirt from the earthen fills of this spot."

Barkay showed pictures of tractors demolishing structures dating to the Twelfth Century Crusades. The demolition went on without any

regulation or archaeological supervision, he said. Builders at the Temple Mount took many of the ancient stones from earlier Jewish buildings and cut them down to make modern stones.

"Who knows how many inscriptions we lost in this way?" Barkay said. "Who knows how many decorated stones were defaced in this manner? The earth was saturated with ancient materials, and it was dumped in the Kidron Valley to the east of the Temple Mount."

Many of the Jewish and Christian artifacts dating to the Crusades and to the first and second temples were covered up, destroyed or removed. In view of these developments, Barkay began to act.

"We formed a committee for monitoring what goes on at the Temple Mount," he said. "We take weekly aerial photos of it. Today there is much less activity. We're doing our best to protect every grain of dirt."

Just two months ago, Barkay put his archaeological know-how into action; he got a license to excavate the dumping grounds in the Kidron Valley.

"We began a project of collecting the dirt from the dumping areas. We moved the piles of dirt to a well-protected area," he recounted. "We covered them with plastic sheets. Each pile was marked with the exact place of origin and exact depth we could estimate from which it came." His team used sifting machines to separate stones from more delicate items. Then they began searching through the material by hand.

"This effort already yielded some scores of coins," he said. "We have coins from the 12th century, the 19th century, up to the first century B.C. We have some second-century B.C. Antonian coins. We have some Herodian coins."

Among the other things, the team found a Christian charm bearing the image of John the Baptist with an infant Jesus and the Jordan River in the background. They found an alabaster dish from the Persian Period and an ivory comb from the Second Temple period. Though much had already been lost, the substance of what they are finding is encouraging amid the delicate and unfortunate situation.

What occurs at the Temple Mount is not merely an Israeli affair or a Jewish issue, noted Steven Ortiz, director of the Center for Archaeological Research. Christians have a connection to the situation as well.

"Christianity is a religion based on a God who acts," Ortiz said. "Because of that [the Temple Mount] takes on a sacredness, not because of the space it occupies but because it provides tangible evidence for the historical events associated with the life of Jesus."

What we do know about the Temple location

With the physical evidence proving the location of the Temple lacking, we have to use history, tradition and what little

physical evidence that is available to identify the location of the Temple. The Scriptures tell us the first temple was built on the threshing floor of Ornan.

And when the angel stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "It is enough; now restrain your hand" And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house. "And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded. (2 Samuel 24:16-19 NKJV)

Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the LORD had appeared to his father



David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. (2 Chronicles 3:1 NKJV)

The threshing floor was a level area usually 25 to 40 feet in diameter off the peak of a hill where animals were driven over the shocks of grain to remove the grain from the straw. After the straw was forked away, the grain was tossed into the air so the wind could blow away the chaff. Then we must ask, “Where was the threshing floor located on the Temple Mount?” and “What part of the Temple was on the threshing floor?”

Rabbinic tradition gives us further insight into the location of the Temple. First, the Second Temple was built on the foundation of the First Temple. Second, the site of the Temple had to be consecrated ground which means it was not used for a cemetery or for pagan worship.

At present there are three major theories on the location of the Temple. Each has its proponents and detractors.

Three theories on the Temple's location

1. Traditional Placement

The traditional placement is that the Holy of Holies of the Temple was built over the peak of Mount Moriah, where the Dome of the Rock shrine is located today. It is believed by many that this is where Abraham was told to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. A variation of this position is that the Altar of Burnt Offering was built over the peak

placing the Holy of Holies to the West of the peak.

A strong case for this location is made through tradition, the brief excavation in 1981 and some physical evidence provided by the floor of the platform and the wall around it. Even though this position is the predominate one among scholars both Jewish and Christian, it has its detractors. The question is asked, “Where is the threshing floor?” Additionally, new research suggests the area of the Dome of the Rock may have been a Canaanite worship site with tombs below making it unfit (unconsecrated) as the site. Finally, the eastern gate of the Temple would not have been in line with the Eastern gate of the Temple Mount.

2. Northern Placement

This theory places the Temple about 100 yards north of the Dome of the Rock with the Holy of Holies over the flat outcropping of rock of the “Dome of the Tablets” or “Spirits.” This theory identifies the threshing floor and is in line with the Eastern Gate of the Temple Mount.

This, however, goes against the traditional view and the evidence confirming the traditional placement. The concern that this was a “high place” for pagan worship also disqualifies this placement.

3. Southern Placement

This theory places the Temple on the lower level of the Temple platform

between the Dome of the Rock and the El Aqsa Mosque. This view holds that the Temple platform was much smaller and lower based on the writings of Josephus Flavius and the Mishna. The higher part of the platform where the Dome of the Rock is located was the location of the Antonia Fortress. Even preliminary ground-penetrating radar and thermal-infrared scanning give support to this theory.

The major argument against this theory is that it goes against the tradition that the Temple was located close to the peak and also against what was purported to have been discovered in 1981 during that short Jewish excavation under the Temple Mount.

We started this three-part series with the question, “How do you think the Dome of the Rock will be destroyed so the Temple can be rebuilt?” We said this question assumes the Temple stood where the present Dome of the Rock stands. We now see there are several theories on the location of the Temple and, as things presently stand, there is no way to be sure of its location. We know from Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15 that some type of sacrificial system will be reinstated in order for the Abomination of Desolation to take place. This means some type of temple structure will be built in which the religious rites will be performed. It will be very interesting to see how all of this will work out.

-Larry Jaffrey

