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Biblical Jerusalem

F.F. Bruce

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THE CITY OF DAVID

Jerusalem had been a city-state for over a millennium when, shortly before 1000 B.C., it was captured by King David, who had established his position as ruler of the united tribes of Israel and Judah. Its Canaanite population was partly Hittite and partly Amorite in origin; it was ruled by a dynasty of kings who were also priests of the deity El Elyon. (The best-known member of this dynasty is Melchizedek, a contemporary of Abraham). David neither extirpated the city's population nor abolished its constitution, but he and his successors continued to rule it as heirs to its ancient priest-kings, 'after the order of Melchizedek'.

The city which David captured occupied a strong position on the hill Ophel, south of the present Haram esh-Sherif. He fortified and enlarged it and made it the capital of his united kingdom, calling it by his own name, 'the city of David'. Strategically it was a sound choice, for the site was well adapted

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to withstand assault. Politically, too, it was a wise choice, for Jerusalem belonged neither to Israel nor to Judah, but lay between these two mutually suspicious and jealous parts of David's realm. Religiously the city already enjoyed high prestige as a holy place, and David set himself to strengthen this prestige. The Israelites were reminded how their ancestor Abraham had received the blessing of Melchizedek, a former priest-king of Jerusalem, and paid him tithes. More than that: the Ark of the Covenant, the palladium of the tribes of Israel and symbol of their unity, was brought to Jerusalem and solemnly installed in a tent-shrine which David had prepared for it. The success of this policy, to make Jerusalem the religious centre of Israel, may be gauged from the part which names like Jerusalem and Zion play in Christian hymnody down to the present day.

David's successor, Solomon, furthered his father's policy by building a temple to accommodate the Ark on the area now known as the Haram esh-Sherif. And although the united kingdom was disrupted after Solomon's death, Jerusalem continued to enjoy unequalled veneration as the hearth and home of Yahweh, the God of Israel. In the course of four centuries the hills to the west of the city of David and the temple area were settled and walled round, and the city, which, together with the temple, was captured and destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., occupied a much larger area than the citadel which David had taken.

THE SECOND COMMONWEALTH

The Second Commonwealth of the Jewish nation began shortly after the Persians became the leading world-power. An edict of Cyrus the Great about 538 B.C. permitted those Jews who had been deported from their homeland to return and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Some twenty-three years later the restored shrine was dedicated to the worship of Yahweh (although the Ark of the Covenant had disappeared for ever). It was not until 445 B.C., however, that the Persian court authorised the rebuilding of Jerusalem as a walled city.

From this time down to the end of the Second Commonwealth in A.D. 70, Jerusalem had almost continuously the status of a holy city. Together with the territory immediately surrounding it, it constituted a temple-state. There were

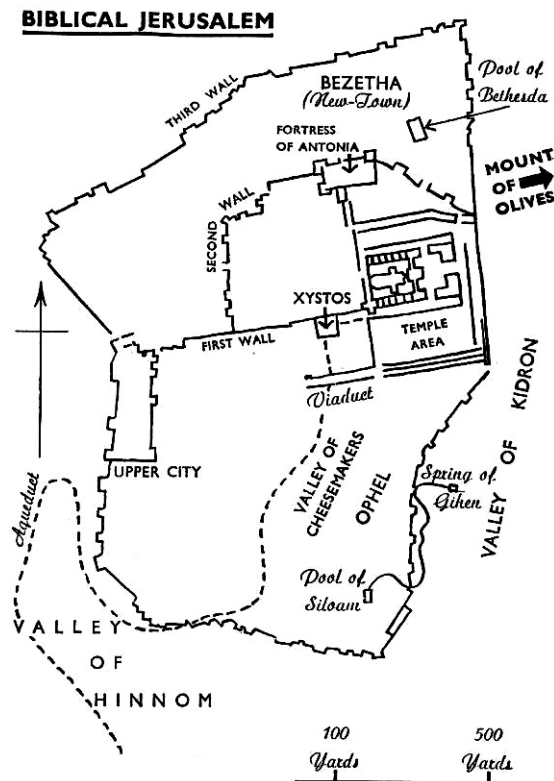
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several such temple-states in the Persian and Graeco-Roman world; one of the best known (apart from Jerusalem itself) is Hierapolis in Syria, the city attached to the temple of Atargatis, whose cult is described to us by the satirist Lucian (2nd century A.D.) in his treatise *On the Syrian Goddess*. In these states the city existed for the temple, and not *vice versa*. The constitution of the state was in essence the constitution of the temple; the state was governed by the temple priesthood. The prerogatives of the cult were protected by the imperial power.

So it was with Jerusalem. Its constitution as a temple-state was drawn up, on the basis of ancient precedent, by Ezra, Jewish secretary of state at the Persian court, and was imposed by imperial authority. The temple staff of priests and Levites was maintained by a ten percent. income tax, and for its regular services a small annual capitation fee was paid by all adult male Jews in the empire, whether they lived in Judaea or not. The head of the state was the high priest, who was assisted by a council of seventy elders, called the Sanhedrin. The first historical reference to the Sanhedrin belongs to the year 198 B.C. but it existed before that time. While Judaea belonged to the empire of the Persians, and later to that of Alexander and his successors, the imperial interests were served by a governor appointed by the court, but the temple-state enjoyed a large measure of autonomy under the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

Until 174 B.C. the high priesthood was a hereditary office, held by the descendants of Zadok, who had been chief priest in Solomon's time. During the following years there was considerable interference with the priesthood and temple by the Seleucid dynasty; this reached its peak during the three years 167-164 B.C., when the temple was turned over to the worship of Olympian Zeus. Later the priestly family of the Hasmoneans, who led the movement for religious and national independence, assumed the high priesthood and exercised it until 36 B.C. By that year Judaea had become part of the Roman world, and was ruled in the Roman interest by the client king Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.). Thenceforth the high priest was appointed either by members of the Herod family or by Roman governors. The office tended to go to the highest bidder, and therefore became the perquisite of a few wealthy families.

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A HOLY CITY

But even when Rome ruled Judaea, whether it did so indirectly through Herod or one of his descendants, or directly through procurators appointed by the emperor, Jerusalem's status as a holy city remained inviolate until the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 66. Herod himself, while he professed the Jewish faith, had no compunction about building pagan temples in other Palestinian cities; but he never dreamed of infringing Jerusalem's sanctity in any such way. On the contrary, his most splendid work of architecture was his rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple on a magnificent scale. This work was begun early in 19 B.C. and the finishing touches were not put to it until A.D. 63, long after Herod's death.

When, in A.D. 6, Judaea became a Roman province, under the government of a procurator who commanded the provincial army, Jerusalem's sacred status was recognised by an imperial order which forbade the military standards to be carried within its walls while the standards were surmounted by the image of the emperor. The presence of these images in the holy city would have been offensive to its inhabitants, because of the ban upon such things in the Second Commandment. When Pontius Pilate became Roman procurator in A.D. 26, he showed himself quite insensitive to scruples of this kind, and attempted to bring the imperial images into the city; a riot nearly broke out in consequence, and Pilate, with as good a grace as he could muster, had to bow to the storm. It was a clear sign that Jerusalem, by its rebellion, had forfeited all claim to such special recognition, when in A.D. 70 the victorious soldiers of Titus set up their standards, complete with the imperial image, in the temple court and paid divine honours to them. In the eyes of many pious people this was the very 'abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place', the ultimate sign of the triumph of iniquity.

Another collision between Pilate and the religious privileges of Jerusalem had to do with the temple treasury. Pilate greatly augmented Jerusalem's water-supply by the construction of a new aqueduct from the hills to the south, and as the temple benefited by this new supply more than any other institution in Jerusalem, he thought that part of the expense ought to be

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defrayed from the temple treasury. But the priests were horrified at the suggestion that sacred money should be used for such a secular purpose as an aqueduct, and they were able to make good their refusal to pay what Pilate demanded. On the other hand, one of the incidents which precipitated the revolt against Rome in A.D. 66 was the action of Florus, the last Roman procurator of Judaea, in seizing seventeen talents from the temple treasury.

LAW AND ORDER

Since it was so easy for a Roman to cause unintentional offence in Jerusalem, the procurators of Judaea preferred to have their regular headquarters at Caesarea, on the Mediterranean seaboard. Caesarea was a new city, founded by Herod, with a large Gentile population and none of the religious scruples that played such a prominent part in the life of Jerusalem. At Caesarea, too, the greater part of the provincial forces were stationed—five auxiliary cohorts. One cohort was stationed in Jerusalem; its headquarters were in the fortress of Antonia, which Herod had built immediately to the north-west of the temple. From the fortress it was possible to supervise the outer court of the temple, and if any riot broke out there which called for military intervention, troops could be on the spot at once by way of two flights of steps which connected the fortress with the outer court. It was military intervention of this timely kind that saved St Paul's life once, when a hostile crowd set upon him in the temple court because it was rumoured that he had violated the sanctity of the holy place by taking a Gentile within the forbidden area.

The outer court of the temple was open to all and sundry, even to Gentiles; hence it was sometimes called the Court of the Gentiles. But none but Jews were allowed to enter the inner courts, and near the gateways leading into them from the outer court warning notices were posted up in Greek and Latin, which said in effect: "Warning to non-Jews: no admittance on pain of death". (Two of these notices are still extant.) So anxious were the emperors to conciliate Jewish susceptibilities in such matters that the procurators had orders to ratify the death-sentence passed by the Sanhedrin for this trespass even when the offender was a Roman citizen.

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There were occasions, however, when a larger Roman force than a single cohort was required in Jerusalem—particularly at the three great pilgrimage-festivals of the Jewish year, when great crowds of Jewish worshippers from the lands of the dispersion were present in the city. At such times the Roman procurator himself often found it advisable to be on the spot: this explains why Pilate was present in Jerusalem at the time of the arrest and trial of Jesus, for that was the period of the Passover festival. Riots were peculiarly liable to break out on such occasions.

For the ordinary maintenance of Jewish law, however, another police body was available, quite distinct from the Roman forces. This was the temple police, which executed the orders

of the high priest and Sanhedrin. Its commander, called the captain of the temple, was usually a member of one of the great chief-priestly families, and his authority came second only to the high priest's. The temple police, a picked body of Levites, maintained order not only in the temple but in the city too, and might even undertake duties outside the city. It was members of this police-force, for example, who arrested Jesus when Judas Iscariot guided them to His place of retreat, who guarded the tomb in which His body was placed after being taken down from the cross, and who accompanied Saul of Tarsus to Damascus to arrest Jerusalem Christians who had taken refuge there.

TAXATION AND COINAGE

Under the Roman occupation the people of Jerusalem and Judaea had a heavy burden of taxation to bear. In addition to a wide variety of temple dues they had to pay the tribute demanded by Rome (for the delivery of which the high priest and Sanhedrin were made responsible) and tolls on many kinds of produce (which were collected by *publicani*). The tribute to Rome and the exactions of the *publicani* were hotly resented by many, but the temple dues were paid with religious and patriotic devotion. Even when the chief priests and leading temple officials earned public obloquy for their oppressive conduct and their retention of the lion's share of the temple dues for themselves, the temple itself was venerated by the great majority of the people. Attacks on the chief-priestly families were sure of popular support, but anyone who attacked the temple was a

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public enemy. In the early days of the Christian Church of Jerusalem the apostles, who attended the temple services, enjoyed the people's good will, in spite of the hostility of the chief priests; but Stephen, who denounced the whole temple order, could be executed with no risk of a popular demonstration in his favour.

While their devotion to the temple was basically religious, we cannot forget that to the people of Jerusalem the temple represented a principal source of livelihood. It was the temple that drew such large crowds of pilgrims to Jerusalem at the great festivals, and their coming to the city brought a large revenue to the citizens, as the coming of tourists does nowadays. An attack on the temple, therefore, was an attack on their standard of living as well as on their religion.

The coinage used in transactions relating to the temple had to be coinage which did not infringe the prohibition of images laid down in the Second Commandment. As we know from a familiar incident in the Gospels, coins bearing Caesar's 'image and superscription' were in common use for secular purposes in Jerusalem, but they would have been inadmissible for sacred traffic. The coinage preferred by the temple authorities was one of Tyrian mintage, which had no offensive symbolism. The need for visitors to procure this acceptable coinage in place of the Roman money which they would normally use explains the presence of money-changers in the immediate vicinity of the sacred precincts.

WALLS AND WATER

When Jerusalem was rebuilt as a walled city under the governorship of Nehemiah (445 B.C.), the walls followed roughly the lines of the walls which the Babylonians had demolished in 587 B.C., that is to say, they enclosed not only the original settlement on Ophel but the higher

hill to the west (separated from Ophel by the 'Valley of the Cheesemakers') which formed the 'Upper City' or 'Second Quarter'. Between Nehemiah's time and Herod's the walls were destroyed and rebuilt more than once. In the time of Jesus there were two north walls: the earlier ran due west from a point about halfway along the western side of the temple area, and the second, farther to the north, ran west from the north-west corner of the Fortress of

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Antonia. The temple area itself was separately fortified, and on certain occasions held out after its besiegers were in occupation of the city. A third north wall, begun by Agrippa I (king of the Jews from A.D. 41 to 44), enclosed a large residential area north of the previous walls—the area known as Bezetha or New-Town. South-west and south of the city lay the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, containing the municipal refuse-dump, where fires burned night and day (whence the name of the valley—Ge-Hinnom or Gehenna—was applied to the place of punishment for the wicked dead); east of the city lay the watercourse of Kidron, which runs down to the Dead Sea, and on the east side of the watercourse rose the Mount of Olives. The Valley of the Cheesemakers, which divided the eastern half of the city from the western, was bridged by viaducts supported on arches. The best known of these viaducts led west from the south-west corner of the temple area, where the Sanhedrin's council chamber stood; at its western end lay a large open-air gathering place called the Xystos (i.e., the polished place, presumably from its marble floor). There were several fine buildings in Jerusalem apart from those associated with the temple; Herod had a palace adjoining the western wall, other members of his family had their town-houses, and so had the old patrician families of Judaea, especially those from which the high priests were drawn.

Unlike most of the great cities of antiquity, Jerusalem stood on no river. But its water-supply was well organised even in its pre-Israelite days, and in times of siege it was not lack of water that troubled the citizens most. There were several springs and cisterns within the walls, and from the spring of Gihon (now the Virgin's Fountain) outside the east wall a tunnel carried water into the Pool of Siloam, a rock-basin in the south-east corner of the city. The Pool of Bethesda, also mentioned in the New Testament, lay in the district of Bezetha, north of the temple area. The towers on the walls included large cisterns for water-storage. And long before Pilate constructed his aqueduct, an aqueduct of more modest dimensions carried water to the temple from the neighbourhood of Bethlehem.

AFTER THE DESTRUCTION

After the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus in A.D. 70, the site lay derelict for over sixty years. The Emperor

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Hadrian then refounded the city as a Roman colony, with the name Aelia Capitolina—Aelia after his own family name Aelius, and Capitolina because the new foundation was dedicated to Iuppiter Capitolinus, in whose honour a shrine was erected on the temple area. The proposal to desecrate the holy ground of Jerusalem in this way led to a further Jewish revolt, which was not put down until after three and a half years of bitter guerrilla warfare (A.D. 132-135). The area of Aelia Capitolina was more or less the same as that of the Old City of Jerusalem to-day, although the present walls were erected as late as the sixteenth century. For nearly two hundred years Aelia Capitolina stood as a pagan city, until the Emperor

Constantine gained control of the Eastern Empire (A.D. 324) and purified the city of all its pagan installations. It was by his order that the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was begun. But the vicissitudes of the city between A.D. 70 and Constantine's time make the identification of New Testament sites a hazardous task.

TABLE OF DATES

c. 1000 B.C.	David captures Jerusalem from Canaanites.
587 B.C.	City of Jerusalem and Temple of Solomon destroyed by the Babylonians.
538 B.C.	Cyrus of Persia, having overthrown the Babylonian Empire, permits Jewish exiles to go home. 515 B.C. Second Temple dedicated.
445 B.C.	Nehemiah governor: Jerusalem rebuilt as a walled city.
332 B.C.	Judea passes from Persian to Graeco-Macedonian overlordship.
198 B.C.	First mention of the Sanhedrin.
174 B.C.	End of Zadokite high priesthood.
67-164 B.C.	Antiochus Epiphanes turns the Temple over to pagan worship.
164 B.C.	Ascendancy of the Hasmonean family begins.
63 B.C.	Roman occupation of Judaea begins.
37-4 B.C.	Reign of Herod the Great.
19 B.C.	Herod begins to rebuild the Temple.
A.D. 6	Judaea governed by Roman procurators. A.D. 26-36 Pontius Pilate procurator.
A.D. 41-44	Herod Agrippa I reigns as 'king of the Jews'. A.D. 66 Jewish revolt against Rome.
A.D. 70	City and Temple of Jerusalem destroyed by Romans under Titus.
A.D. 132.-135	Second Jewish war against Rome.
A.D. 324	Constantine becomes Emperor of the East; Jerusalem becomes a Christian city.

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