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## *Chapter 17*

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# THE CENTRALITY OF THE EARLY TEMPLES

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**T**HE EARLIER TEMPLE that Aristeeas observed was located north and *alongside* the Citadel (the *Akra*) and positioned within the crescent-shaped city of Jerusalem. This placed the Temple about a third of a mile south of the region of the Dome of the Rock in the Haram. This southern region is the precise spot that another historian by the name of Hecateus Sof Abdera said the Temple was located. Hecateus witnessed this fact during his visit to Jerusalem long before Simon the Hasmonean (I will later show why Simon's period is important) — somewhere near the time of Alexander the Great. Hecateus wrote extensively about the Jews in Judaea according to Josephus and also about the city of Jerusalem. Josephus quoted him on several occasions and gave him high marks for the accuracy of his accounts. Let us note carefully what Hecateus reports as an eyewitness. He said the Temple was located *near the CENTER of Jerusalem* as it existed in his time.

“The Jews have only one fortified city; they call it Jerusalem. *Nearly in the center of the city* stands a stone wall [of the Temple], enclosing an area about 500 feet long and 150 feet broad, approached by a pair of gates. Within this enclosure is a square altar, built of heaped up stones, unhewn and unwrought; each side is 30 feet long and the height is 15 feet. Beside it stands a great edifice, containing an altar and a lampstand, made of gold, and weighing two talents; upon these is a light which is never extinguished by night or day.”<sup>357</sup>

In no way is Hecateus describing the Temple as being in the region of the Dome of the Rock. That area in Hecateus’ time was located outside the walls of Jerusalem in *the extreme north* of the metropolitan area and *FAR AWAY* from its *center*. However, the actual Temple was positioned near the *very center* of Jerusalem, as one would naturally expect it to be.

### **The Old Testament Confirms Hecateus’ Location**

If we had nothing more to go on but the narrative by Hecateus, it provides us with grounds to question the opinion of modern scholars that position the original Temple of Solomon and that of Zerubbabel on the “Third Hill” of the city, in the extreme north around the Dome of the Rock. The Temple was actually situated on the “Second Hill” of Jerusalem in the *center* of that southeast ridge. Indeed, there are far more significant evidences to support Hecateus’ statements. These are the accounts of eyewitnesses who were writers of the Bible. There is an abundance of information within the Holy Scriptures to show this. The Scriptures reveal that Hecateus was giving an accurate description of Jerusalem and the Temple before the time of Simon the Hasmonean. What Hecateus said about the geography of Jerusalem would have been a very similar description through past times back to the period of Solomon. Let us now look at the scriptural evidence.

One of the Psalmists had some words to say about the location of the Temple in Jerusalem. He placed the Temple directly in the *center* of the city of Jerusalem. Note Psalm 116:18 & 19.

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<sup>357</sup> *Contra Apion*, I.22.

“I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord’s house [within His Temple], *in the midst of thee*, O Jerusalem” (italics mine).

This biblical writer states that the courts of the Lord’s house were in the middle of Jerusalem. This reference is a clear geographical indication. His description is not metaphorical nor is it a figure of speech. The Scripture is telling us that before the time of Simon the Hasmonean, the original Temple of God was located in the very *center* of Jerusalem, not in the extreme *north* on the peripheral edge of the city where the Dome of the Rock area is located.

Some may say, however, that this statement of centrality mentioned in the Bible must be a general description and cannot be accepted as a precise geographical indication. This belief will not hold water. This exact Hebrew expression was used by the prophet Ezekiel when he located his future prophetic Temple precisely in the middle (he meant in the absolute *center*) of the restored land of Israel. Ezekiel wrote that: “the Sanctuary of the Lord shall be *in the midst* thereof.”<sup>358</sup> The prophet repeated this specific geographical identification. He said: “The city shall be *in the midst* thereof.”<sup>359</sup> Similarly, Ezekiel said: “The Sanctuary of the House shall be *in the midst* thereof.”<sup>360</sup> What does the phrase “*in the midst*” actually mean? Scholars realize what it signifies. The Catholic translation called “The New American Version” renders the above three verses as: “the Sanctuary of the Lord shall be *in its center*”; “the City shall be *at their center*”; and “the sacred tract and the Sanctuary shall be *in the middle*.” Other modern translators and commentators follow the same rendering of the Hebrew, which clearly has this meaning of centrality.

What often confuses readers of the Holy Scriptures is their interpretation of the archaic phrase “*in the midst*” (which in normal English presents a nebulous geographical focus) rather than the specific usage “*in the center*” (which provides a more precise and concrete meaning). The simple fact is, Ezekiel intended the “con-

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<sup>358</sup> Ezekiel 48:10.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 15.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 21.

crete meaning,” rather than the nebulous. He dogmatically indicated that the Temple of the Lord was to be in the *center* of the land, and he meant the real “center” (his description in chapter 48 places the Sanctuary in that *center* of a north/south axis). Look at what the prophet said in Ezekiel 37:26 & 28 using the same Hebrew expression as given above (and by changing the word “midst” to “center”). God said: “I will set my Sanctuary *in the center* of them forevermore” and again “my Sanctuary shall be *in the center* of them forevermore.”

There is much more biblical evidence to show the *central* position of the Temple in the early City of Jerusalem. Ezekiel described the Shekinah (the Glory of God) as leaving the Temple in his day. It abandoned the Temple and positioned itself over the Mount of Olives. We should recall that the Shekinah (the Glory) was always associated with the Holy of Holies inside the Temple at Jerusalem. In regard to this Glory, Ezekiel said (again using the word “center” instead of “midst”): “And the glory of the Lord went up from *the center of the city* [of Jerusalem], and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city [the Mount of Olives].”<sup>361</sup> In the Bible, the Mount of Olives was reckoned to be an elongated mountain which included its northern spur called Scopus and the “Offense” spur located on the south. The Mount of Olives also had two central summits. The whole of Olivet is about a mile long north to south. So, the Shekinah left the Temple in the *center* of Jerusalem and went to a part of this elongated shaped Mount of Olives — just where the Shekinah went on the Mount of Olives is not stated, but the exact geographical spot will become pertinent later on in this book.

All of the above gives us some very useful geographical information. The City of Jerusalem itself, in the time of Ezekiel, was then located on the southeast ridge and the Temple (God’s dwelling) was situated in the *center* of the city. This fact is also given in the prophecies of Zechariah some seventy years later.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Ezekiel 11:23.

<sup>362</sup> Zechariah 8:3,8.

“Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and *will dwell in the center of Jerusalem* and Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts [Zion] the holy mountain [God’s Temple].... And I will bring them, and *they shall dwell in the center of Jerusalem* [with Him]: and they [Israel] shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness” (italics mine).

This teaching of Zechariah is not allegorical nor were his geographical indications mere figures of speech meaning that God would nebulously dwell “among them” or “around them.” Indeed, when Zechariah made these statements, the Temple was located in the *very center* of the city of Jerusalem just as the eyewitness account of Hecateus said it was. This location is re-enforced further by Zechariah in another section of his writings. He gave a prophecy that God would continue to dwell “*in the center*” of Zion. Note Zechariah 2:10–13.

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and *I will dwell in the center of thee*.... And thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me [Zechariah] unto thee. And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation [His Temple]” (italics mine).

Zechariah continues his theme by stating that God’s glory would be in the *center* of Jerusalem: “I will be the glory *in the center* of her.”<sup>363</sup> This position of centrality among the Israelites at their capital city of Jerusalem would have been the same location for the Sanctuary that Moses ordained for the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The Tabernacle was indeed pitched directly in the *center* of the encampment of the tribes of Israel. In order to duplicate this design, Solomon’s Temple was also placed in the *center* of Jerusalem, in the *center* of the crescent shaped ridge. Even the place of the Temple in the “Temple Scroll” of the Dead Sea sectarians was also described as being in the *center* of Jerusalem. All these historical references show that it was common understanding among biblical writers that the position of the Temple in relation to the City of Jerusalem was that of centrality.

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<sup>363</sup> Zechariah 2:4–5.

So, when one substitutes the modern English word “center” for the archaic English word “midst,” as I have done in the biblical verses above, we are provided with a clear description of geographical significance. This makes the meaning of the biblical texts to accord with the historical facts. They all place the Tabernacle and the early Temples in the *center* of the various encampments in the wilderness and at the capital city of Jerusalem. They also agree identically with the statement of Hecateus who revealed (as an eyewitness) that the Temple was indeed located in the *center* of Jerusalem in his day. This does not end the matter. There is much more evidence that conclusively proves these facts.

What is interesting is the fact that modern archaeologists who have excavated in the region of the southeast ridge, totally ignore these eyewitness accounts about the geography that comprised the “Lower City” of Jerusalem in the period before the time of Simon the Hasmonean. The truth is, however, there was once a major mountain with two summits (the *Akra* and the *Ophel*) on the southeast ridge and that mountain no longer exists in that area. What modern archaeologists need to do is to re-evaluate these eyewitness accounts. Once these historical events are understood and appreciated, then proper conclusions can be reached on what the archaeological remains present to us for examination.