
Chapter 23

THE CITY OF DAVID AND THE OPHEL

BEFORE THE TIME of Simon the Hasmonean the City of David was positioned at the southern end of this crescent-shaped ridge and it was relatively *high* in elevation. As I have consistently shown in this book, the records show that the City of David was then called the *Akra* (the Citadel) and its summit was at first higher than the Temple mount which was then located on the *Ophel* knoll about five hundred feet north. The *Ophel* was naturally a lower summit of that same mountain (a single mountain ridge) that comprised the southeast ridge. Recall that Aristeeas said the original *Akra* was located close enough to the Temple Mount that it was possible to overlook activities that were going on in the Temple courts in the lower summit area to the north.

According to Josephus, the *Akra* before the time of Simon the Hasmonean was an elevated area higher than the Temple itself. His exact words are:

“He [Antiochus Epiphanes] burned the finest parts of the city, and pulling down the walls, built [that is, *built up*] the *Akra* in the lower city; *for it was high enough to overlook the Temple*, and it was for this reason that he fortified it with high walls and towers, and stationed a Macedonian garrison therein.”⁴⁶⁰

Josephus was certainly not talking about those in the City of David (the *Akra*) being able to look down into the Temple courts located a third of a mile north at the Dome of the Rock. This would have been a physical impossibility. We are told in I Maccabees that at this earlier time the “Temple mount [was located] *alongside* [Greek: *para*] the *Akra*.”⁴⁶¹ This makes it plain for all to see. The two areas were very close to one another. There are many other historical references to reinforce this conclusion.

The Compactness of the Original City of Jerusalem

There was an area between the *Akra* and the *Ophel*. It was called the “Millo” (or, “Fill In”). When Solomon enlarged the city of Jerusalem, he filled in the area between the Zion and *Ophel* summits that existed on the southeast ridge. He called the intermediate space the “Millo” (or, “Fill In”), which was a northern extension of a former “Millo” built on the north side of Zion in the Jebusite period — before the time of David.⁴⁶²

The Septuagint Version of the Bible said the original “Millo” was on the north side of the *Akra* (the Citadel sector of Zion). And so it was. But Solomon enlarged Jerusalem. He extended the original “Millo” (or, “Fill In”) northward to link the City of David with the *Ophel* summit. This made a type of artificial bridge of earth, stones and rubble that was placed on top of the old areas of Jebus located on the eastern slope of the ridge abutting to the Kedron Valley. Solomon constructed flanking walls on the eastside and on the westside of the southeastern part of the ridge known as the *Ophel*. Josephus tells us that this “Fill In” reached a height of 400

⁴⁶⁰ *Antiquities* XII.5,4 italics are my emphasis and the words in brackets are mine.

⁴⁶¹ I Maccabees 13:52.

⁴⁶² II Samuel 5:9.

cubits above the floor of the Kedron Valley (about 600 feet — this answers to a 40/45 story skyscraper in height).⁴⁶³ It was designed as a huge building that had the Temple and adjacent buildings on its level platform on the top. At least, this is how Josephus described the structure as it existed in his time.

Indeed, by the later time of Josephus, he said that Herod greatly enlarged the Temple platform and made it into a square area with dimensions of 600 feet (a *stade*) on each side. But in the period of Nehemiah, this high wall ascended from the very bottom of the Kedron Valley. It supported the Temple platform and was 150 feet broad on its east side. The southeast corner of this eastern wall was twice called in the Book of Nehemiah “the turning of the wall.”⁴⁶⁴ The northeast corner of this eastern wall (150 feet to the north) was also twice called in the Book of Nehemiah “the turning of the wall, even unto the corner.”⁴⁶⁵ This broad wall of the Temple platform was also 150 feet broad on its west side. At this early period, however, the Temple platform itself was a rectangle. The wall is described as being 500 feet in length on its south and north sides.⁴⁶⁶ This is what the eyewitness account of Hecateus of Abdera states when he saw the Temple platform near the time of Alexander the Great. Even though the platform support was smaller in the time of Nehemiah and Alexander the Great than in the period of Herod and Jesus, it was still an imposing edifice.

The Over-All View of the Early Temple and Jerusalem

In this region of the “Fill In” between the City of David and the Temple on the *Ophel* summit, Solomon erected several majestic buildings — some were private and others were government edifices. One of those was Solomon’s own palace. Scholars have long recognized that there are many biblical references to show the nearness of Solomon’s palace to the Temple Mount. And there can be no doubt that Solomon built his palace *adjacent* to the Temple

⁴⁶³ *Antiquities* VIII.3.9.

⁴⁶⁴ Nehemiah 3:19–20.

⁴⁶⁵ Nehemiah 3:24–25.

⁴⁶⁶ Josephus, *Contra Apion* I.22.

(just south of the Temple) in the “Millo” area between the *Akra* and the Temple.⁴⁶⁷

Indeed, Solomon’s palace abutted directly to the south side of the Temple.⁴⁶⁸ In the eastern part of this palace was an area where political prisoners could be confined. This accounts for the east gate leading into this area as the “Prison Gate.” This is where Jeremiah the prophet was imprisoned. “And Jeremiah was shut up in the Court of the Prison, which was in the king of Judah’s house.”⁴⁶⁹ This Prison Gate in the east wall led directly into the courts of the royal residence (called the “king’s high house” in Nehemiah 3:25).

Just to the north of the Prison Gate was the Water Gate (Nehemiah 3:26) which was opposite the Gihon Spring (hence the reason for its name). The Water Gate had the *Ophel* summit (the Temple Mount) directly to its west.⁴⁷⁰ Just north of the Water Gate was “the Wall of Ophel.”⁴⁷¹ This “Wall of Ophel” was the rampart that defended the eastern aspect of the *Ophel* summit. So, the Prison Gate was just east of Solomon’s former palace, while the Water Gate (above the Gihon Spring) was just east of the *Ophel* (or the Temple itself). The southern Prison Gate and the northern Water Gate were dual or adjacent gates. The description in the Book of Nehemiah is clear on this matter. There were also “caves” and “tunnels” in the subterranean area of the *Ophel*. These were constructed to lead to the spring water at the Gihon Spring.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁷ See *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, New Edition, article “Jerusalem.”

⁴⁶⁸ I Kings 10:5; II Chronicles 9:4; I Chronicles 26:16.

⁴⁶⁹ Jeremiah 32:2.

⁴⁷⁰ Nehemiah 3:26.

⁴⁷¹ Nehemiah 3:27.

⁴⁷² The terms “Mount Zion” and the “Temple Mount” are synonymous. They refer to the same place – to the spur of the *southeast* ridge where the original “Mount Zion” and its northerly extension called the “Ophel” were located. For accuracy’s sake, all the Temples were located on the “Ophel” prominence situated over and around the Gihon Spring. The Temple was built on the “Ophel” (the “humped mount”) that was over the Gihon Spring. Note that in Isaiah 32:14 (where “Ophel” is translated “forts” in the KJV), Isaiah said some of the main geographical features of the Ophel were its “caves” (KJV: “dens”) that were located underneath and within the mountain ridge. In later times, Maimonides

All of these topographical indications show the relative nearness of the City of David to Solomon's palace that was alongside the southern wall of the Temple. The geographical layout gave the appearance that Jerusalem had been "compacted" — a matter of being "brought together" into a being a unified city on a single mountain ridge. In a Psalm of the Bible, we read: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact [joined or coupled] together."⁴⁷³ The last word of the Psalm (rendered "together") has more meaning to it in Hebrew than the King James translation provides. It actually states: "that is joined *to itself*."

This "joining" of the two summits on the southeast ridge (Zion with the *Ophel*) by the "Millo" allowed the two summits to become united and more or less leveled out with one another. This made Jerusalem to be a single city surrounded by its own walls. It was not connected by bridges or moats by any manmade or natural abutments to any other urban area. Jerusalem was then located solely on the southeast crescent-shaped ridge.

True enough, in the two hundred years before the Babylonian Captivity, there is archaeological evidence that there were some buildings constructed on the western slope that later became known as the "Upper City." These buildings, however, were thoroughly destroyed in the period of Nebuchadnezzar. Nothing was rebuilt in this western sector until the time of Simon the Hasmonean. Without doubt, the region on the *southeast* ridge was the original Jerusalem. This fact is reinforced by geographical references given in the Book of Nehemiah, some 300 years before Simon the Hasmonean. The Holy Scriptures provide a detailed description in the Book of Nehemiah. It shows the Temple was built above the Gihon Spring.

(born in 1134 C.E.) mentioned that there were indeed these "caves" and "tunnels" underneath the Temple. The great Jewish master said:

"There was a stone in the Holy of Holies at its western wall upon which the Ark rested. In front of it stood the jar of manna and the staff of Aaron. When Solomon built the Temple, knowing that it was destined to be destroyed, he built *underneath, in deep and winding tunnels* [that is, *caves*], a place in which to hide the Ark." Peters, *Jerusalem*, p.227.

⁴⁷³ Psalm 122:3.

Dedication of the Wall by Nehemiah

The wall of Jerusalem was re-dedicated in the time of Nehemiah. At the dedication, the Jewish officials appeared at the west gate of Jerusalem. They separated themselves into two groups. One contingent walked on top of the northern wall (this was half the group going north), while the other walked along the top of the wall toward the south. Both groups traversed Jerusalem in a semi-circle fashion until they converged in front of the Temple on the eastside of Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time were crescent-shaped as defined by Aristeeas and confirmed by Josephus.

During the time of Nehemiah, the extent of Jerusalem was confined to the southeast ridge. The situation of the City of David on the southern flank with Solomon's palace and the Temple being a short distance to the north on the lower summit of the *Ophel*. This fact makes good sense when one surveys the account about the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem⁴⁷⁴ and the journey of Nehemiah when he circumnavigated the city.⁴⁷⁵ Particularly notice that at the time of Nehemiah the sepulchres of David (and many other early kings of Judah) were located at the base of the stairs that went down into the Kedron Valley from the City of David.⁴⁷⁶ They were positioned alongside a pool that was fed by the waters of a conduit from the Gihon Spring.

These sepulchres were also located near the "House of the Mighty" This building was David's former palace that Solomon had rededicated in the "Millo" area as a museum to house artifacts and trophies associated with the wars and victories of David when he was king of Israel. These sepulchres in Nehemiah's time were positioned not far south of the Gihon Spring over which the Temple then stood. In the earlier period from David to Nehemiah it was common to place the tombs of distinguished persons (especially kings) *outside* the Temple, but not far away. They were certainly not buried far to the north near the Dome of the Rock. In fact, the

⁴⁷⁴ Nehemiah 3.

⁴⁷⁵ Nehemiah 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Nehemiah 3:15-16.

earliest tombs associated with the City of David that archaeologists have found are located directly east of the Kedron Valley on the slope of the Mount of Offense. These tombs at the time of their construction were located opposite the Temple area. This is just another indication that all of Jerusalem was then located on the southeastern ridge. It had not expanded to the western hill. We will soon see that it was Simon the Hasmonean who had these tombs of King David and other kings moved up to the western hill that was called the Upper City in the time of Herod and Jesus. There is historical evidence to support this move from the southeastern hill to the southwestern hill. I will give this proof in the next chapter.

Nehemiah's Walls Were Crescent Shaped

Let us look further at the dedication of the wall in the time of Nehemiah. Note that one group went south from the Valley Gate located near the mid-position of the Western Wall (on the side of the Tyropoeon Valley). This first group continued going south a thousand cubits to the Valley of Hinnom — to the southern “horn” of the crescent shaped walls. They then turned north and walked by the City of David finally stopping a little farther on at the Water Gate opposite the Gihon Spring.⁴⁷⁷ This spot was directly in front of the *Ophel*⁴⁷⁸ and, consequently, it was in front of the House of the Lord (the Temple).⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, the broad area mentioned by Nehemiah in 8:1 which was in front of the Water Gate where Ezra read the Law to the gathered assembly is believed by many scholars to be an outer court of the Temple. This is certainly true.

The second group at the dedication of the wall left the same Valley Gate on the west side of the city but they went northward toward the Gate of Ephraim and then almost directly east where the wall crossed the crest of the ridge — to the northern “horn” of the crescent shaped walls at the Kedron Valley. They then continued southward to stop at the Prison Gate.⁴⁸⁰ They encompassed the

⁴⁷⁷ Nehemiah 12:27–37.

⁴⁷⁸ Nehemiah 3:26.

⁴⁷⁹ Nehemiah 12:40.

⁴⁸⁰ Nehemiah 12:38–39.

Mishneh region or “Second District” of Jerusalem (the area north of the *Ophel* or Temple).⁴⁸¹

Recall, the Prison Gate was just east of Solomon’s former palace (the “king’s high house”), while the Water Gate (which led to the Gihon Spring) was just east of the courts of the Temple (or, the *Ophel*).⁴⁸² The southern group led by Ezra (the priestly leader) walked in a semi-circle from the west side of Jerusalem to a point in the eastern wall that was slightly north of the 180 degree mark of the semi-circle. They stopped at the Water Gate in front of the courts of the Temple and just north of the Prison Gate.

The northern group led by Nehemiah (who was the secular ruler) also walked in a semi-circle fashion from the west side of Jerusalem to a point in the eastern wall that was slightly south of the 180 degree mark of the semi-circle. They stopped at the Prison Gate just to the south of the Water Gate. These two gates (the Prison and Water Gates) were next to each other as double gates separated no doubt by a single column of support. This pair of side-by-side gates was directly in front of the east entrance to the Temple. Indeed, we have an eyewitness account of these very gates. Hecateus in the time of Alexander the Great viewed the site and said the Temple was “approached by a pair of gates.”⁴⁸³

This means that the two groups (the priestly group led by Ezra and the secular group led by Nehemiah — both representing the “church and state” governments of the Jewish society) assembled at these two eastern gates alongside one another. This placed both groups directly in front of the Temple that was on the *Ophel* summit.⁴⁸⁴ With Ezra and his group standing in front of the Water Gate, and Nehemiah and his group standing in front of the Prison Gate, the two groups could then walk westward side-by-side in a processional fashion directly into the Temple courts. This positioning allowed Ezra’s group (the priestly representatives) to be on the right hand side which was a position of superiority in religious

⁴⁸¹ See II Kings 22:14; Nehemiah 11:9; Zephaniah 1:10.

⁴⁸² Nehemiah 3:26.

⁴⁸³ *Contra Apion* I.22.

⁴⁸⁴ Nehemiah 3:26.

matters. This right side indicated priestly rank.

These geographical indications locate the whole of the Temple complex on the *Ophel* summit above the Gihon Spring in front of a pair of gates (the Water and Prison Gates). This region for the Temple was near the *center* of the crescent-shaped area of the southeast ridge and precisely in conformity with the observation of Hecateus of Abdera.⁴⁸⁵ This means that all of Jerusalem in this pre-Simonian period was confined to the southeast ridge. The region of the Dome of the Rock was not even within the walls of Jerusalem at the time. Neither were there any walls surrounding the western hill that later (after the time of Simon) became known as the “Upper City.”

So, before the time of Simon the Hasmonean (142–134 B.C.E) the Temple was reckoned to be 150 feet wide (north to south) and 500 feet long (east to west). There was no longer the higher mountain just to the north of the Temple that was formerly called “Mount Zion.” To guard the Temple, Simon started to build a *new* citadel around the “Rock” that is now under the Dome of the Rock. He called this *new* fortress the Baris. This was the fortress that Herod later enlarged and changed its name to Antonia after Mark Anthony. These were major changes in the geography of Jerusalem. Let us see what happened.

⁴⁸⁵ *Contra Apion* 1.22.