

THREE THINGS JESUS LIKELY SAW IN JERUSALEM

By Bryan Windle

Archaeology is a valuable tool which allows us to travel back in time, so to speak, and walk in the footsteps of the people described in the pages of Scripture. Viewing the things these individuals saw allows us to contextualize and understand the biblical text. In this article we'll focus on Jesus in Jerusalem.

The New Testament biographies of Jesus—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record that Jesus made regular trips to Jerusalem. As a first-century Jewish man, he made the required pilgrimages to celebrate the Jewish feasts (i.e., Feast of Unleavened Bread—Mt 26:17; Feast of Tabernacles—Jn 7:2,10; Feast of Dedication—Jn 10:22; Purim¹—Jn 5:1, etc.). Here are three things Jesus likely saw during his time in Jerusalem.

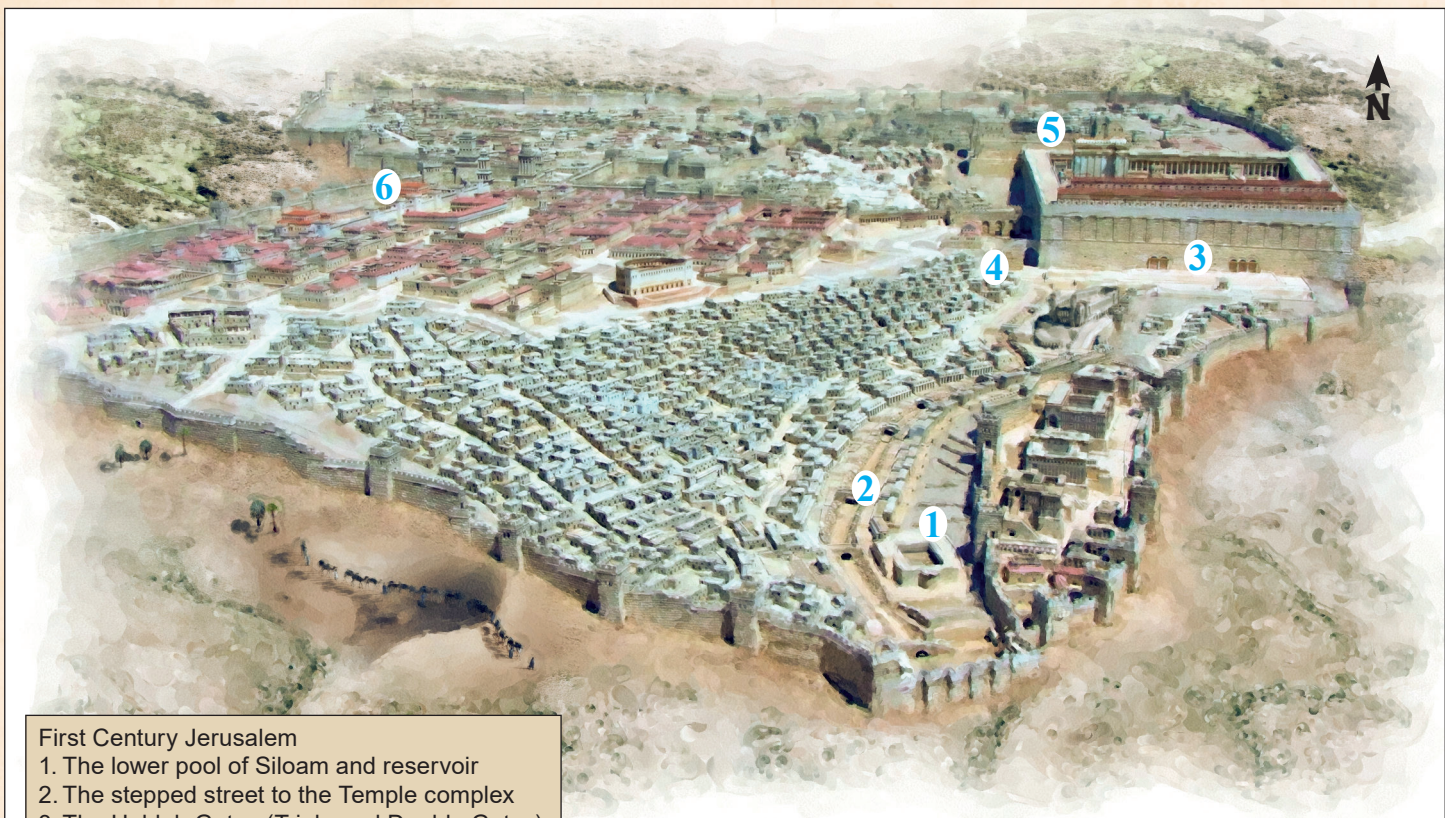
POOL OF SILOAM

In one of the gospels, we read about how Jesus healed a blind man: “He spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.’ (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing” (Jn 9:6–7, ESV). The Pool of Siloam was evidently nearby and obviously a place with which Jesus was familiar. In fact, most Jews who came to Jerusalem

were familiar with the Pool of Siloam, since during the Feast of Tabernacles a priest drew water from this pool in a golden vessel and carried it in a procession back to the Temple.²

For many years, people identified a small pool where water emerges from Hezekiah’s Tunnel as the Pool of Siloam. This is where a Byzantine church had been built by the Empress Eudocia to commemorate the miracle of the blind man.³

In 2004, workers repairing a drainage pipe located a short distance away from the Byzantine pool unearthed several large, stone steps. Archaeologists Eli Shukron and Ronny Reich were called in and unearthed a large pool that was in use during the first century, which most scholars now believe is the Pool of Siloam of Jesus’ day.⁴ This pool was dated using coins and pottery found during the excavations. Four coins of Alexander Jannaeus (ca. 103–76 BC) were found in the plaster of the original steps, dating its construction to the late Hasmonean/early Hellenistic period. Near one of the corners of the pool, in a plaza or terrace, the excavators found Second Temple pottery and coins from the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 AD).⁵ Thus, this large pool was likely used from the late Hasmonean/early Hellenistic period through to the destruction of Jerusalem in the latter half of the first century. It is almost certain that this is the Pool of Siloam with which Jesus was familiar and in which the blind man was healed.



First Century Jerusalem

1. The lower pool of Siloam and reservoir
2. The stepped street to the Temple complex
3. The Huldah Gates (Triple and Double Gates)
4. Robinson’s Arch
5. The Temple
6. Herod’s Palace



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Left: Excavations between 2004–2007 revealed steps leading into a large (approximately three-quarters of an acre) rock cut pool.

Right: The small (upper) pool previously believed to be the one referenced in the New Testament. Roman Emperor Hadrian conducted far reaching military and political campaigns during his reign, 117–138 AD. After the costly second Jewish revolt of 132 AD, he renamed Jerusalem with aspirations to turn it into a Roman colony. Along with killing or enslaving citizens then burning and destroying the city and outposts, Rome installed pagan temples intentionally over important Jewish sites. If such a monument was built at the upper pool it is no surprise that in the 4th century Queen Helena would identify it. In her fervent quest to identify and venerate Christian sites, she may have walked right by the lower pool. Lush vegetation had grown over it and the entire complex remained buried and filled with debris until 2004.



Steve Rudd



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Above Left: First century stepped street under the modern city. It was originally a wide, massive stone path leading 600 meters from the pool to the Temple. Beneath the paving stones a drainage channel was discovered that may have been used as a hiding place for Jewish rebels against the Romans in 70 AD. A series of aqueducts were found leading to and from the Gihon spring and the Pool of Siloam.

Above Right: Adjacent to the pool was a paved plaza which may have either been a columned portico or an enclosed promenade for visitors to the pool.

THE TEMPLE

Early, eyewitness testimony records that Jesus frequently went to the Temple while he was in Jerusalem (Mt 21:12, 24:1; Mk 11:27, 12:35; Jn 5:14, 7:14, 8:2, 8:20, 10:23). The main gates, used by most pilgrims coming to the Temple, were the Double and Triple Gates (the Huldah Gates), located on the southern side of the Temple Mount.⁶ Early rabbinic sources testify that the two Huldah Gates in the south were used for entering and exiting the Temple (Mishnah Middot 1:3; 2:2).⁷ The fact that many ritual baths, called *mikvaot* (*mikveh* in the singular), have been discovered in this area, testify to the importance of these gates.⁸

The Double and Triple Gates, as well as the southern steps leading up to them, are still visible today. The southern Temple Mount area was unearthed in excavations led by Benjamin Mazar from 1968–78, and under Ronny Reich in the 1990s. A number of discoveries, including the southern steps, a first-century road, numerous ritual baths, and the famous Trumpeting inscription, all add to our understanding of the function of the Temple in the time of Jesus.⁹ In front of the Double Gate, Mazar unearthed a massive staircase, 215 ft (65.5 m) wide with 30 steps constructed of trimmed paving blocks, which have since been restored.⁹ Undoubtedly, Jesus used these steps many times to enter and exit the temple precincts.

Once inside, the temple complex itself was divided into several courtyards. The Court of the Gentiles was the closest area that Gentiles and ritually impure people could get to the Temple itself. Between this courtyard and the inner courts of the temple precinct, there was a wall on which were warning signs in both Greek and Latin that forbade foreigners from going beyond that point. Josephus describes these warning signs in two passages:

When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone, all round; whose height was three cubits, its construction was

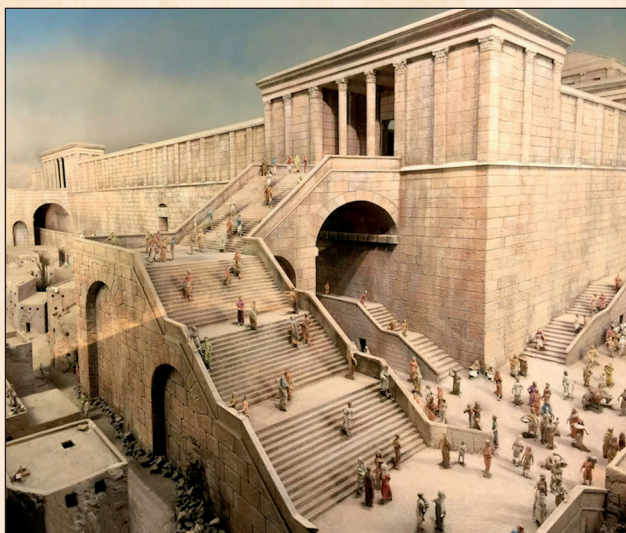
very elegant. Upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another; declaring the law of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters; that no foreigner should go within that sanctuary (*War* 5.5.2).¹⁰

Thus was the first enclosure. In the midst of which, and not far from it, was the second: to be gone up to by a few steps. This was encompassed by a stone wall, for a partition: with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death (*Ant* 15.11.5).¹¹

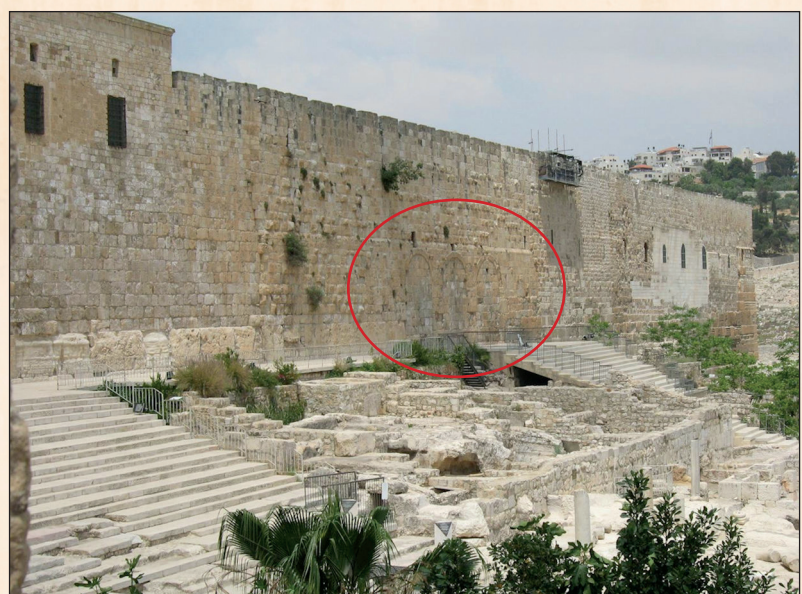
In 1871, one of these warning signs was discovered in Jerusalem. The limestone slab had a seven-line inscription which reads: “Foreigners must not enter inside the balustrade or into the forecourt around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”¹² In 1935 a second fragmentary temple warning inscription was discovered outside of the Old City of Jerusalem near the Lion’s Gate. Jesus and his disciples would have seen these warning inscriptions many times as they entered the temple precincts.

HEROD’S PALACE

Two buildings dominated the landscape of first-century Jerusalem: the Temple and Herod’s palace. Jesus would no doubt have seen the three great towers of Herod the Great’s palace, which he named in honor of his friends and relatives: Hippicus, Phasael and Miriamne. The base of one of these ancient towers still stands today near the Jaffa Gate, and is popularly, if erroneously, known as the “Tower of David.” Many identify this tower as Phasael, although Hillel Geva has argued that it is the remains of Hippicus.¹³ While Jesus was likely familiar with Herod’s palace from the outside, is there any evidence that he was ever inside this famous building? I believe there is.



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Left: A model reconstruction of Robinson’s Arch on the western side of the Temple.

Right: The remains of the triple southern gates and steps unearthed between 1968–78 and further excavated in the 1990s.



Tower of David Museum



Andrey Zeigarnik/Wikimedia Commons

Excavations underneath an Ottoman era prison known as the Kishle, built in 1834 and used up until the 1960s. The foundation of what is thought to be Herod's palace was discovered in 1999 beneath an abandoned building on the Tower of David Museum grounds (right). Other excavations since the 1960s have uncovered parts of what is believed to be the substructure. According to Josephus, Herod's palace was enormous with gold and silver throughout and running water. The palace ruins interestingly revealed a complex sewage system.

Upper right: The Trumpeting Inscription is thought to have been a directional sign for priests during the Second Temple period. It was a large basalt corner parapet stone discovered in 1968. After digging through the destruction layers of the Umayyad caliphate, Byzantine and Roman, it was found laying upon paving stones of an Herodian era street 5' from the southwest corner of the Temple. The Hebrew script translates, "to the place of trumpeting" or "blowing" with an incomplete word that may mean "declare". Jewish historian Josephus wrote in *The Jewish War* of a place at the Temple "the point where it was custom for one of the priests to stand and to give notice, by sound of trumpet, in the afternoon of the approach, and on the following evening of the close, of every seventh day".



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Viewing the places in Jerusalem that Jesus would have seen is a helpful way to enter the biblical text and develop a greater understanding of the geographical, historical, and cultural background of the world in which Jesus lived. Many places in the Jerusalem of Jesus' day have been excavated, and the findings affirm the accurate descriptions of these places found in the gospels.

When Pontius Pilate interrogated Jesus, he was taken to the "palace of the Roman governor" (Jn 18:28), which was one and the same as the Praetorium (Mk 15:16).

When Herod's son Archelaus was deposed by the Romans in 6 AD, they confiscated his possessions. Herod's magnificent palace then became the residence for the Roman governor whenever he visited Jerusalem. Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, described Herod's palace as "the residence of the prefects;" Josephus also identified the residence of Roman governors with Herod's palace.¹⁴

Archaeologist Shimon Gibson states, "Today, a consensus of opinion exists among scholars that Herod's palace on the west side of the city was the same as the Praetorium and that in its immediate vicinity Jesus was tried and condemned to death."¹⁵

Part of Herod's palace can be seen today near the Tower of David Museum, beneath the "Kishle," an Ottoman-era prison. The massive Herodian walls are visible at the lowest level, with various other layers of construction through the ages built on top of them.

Endnotes for this article can be found at www.BibleArchaeology.org. Type "Endnotes" in the search box; next, click the "Bible and Spade Bibliographies and Endnotes" link; then page down to the article.



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