

The Thought

JEW & GENTILE

IN THE GOSPEL AGE

X

TEMPLE & SYNAGOGUE IN THE TIME OF JESUS

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IN the time of the Lord Jesus, the religious life of the Jew was centred in two institutions, the Temple and the Synagogue. They were completely independent, the authorities in the one having no jurisdiction whatever in the other. At the same time they were in no sense rivals; indeed, in some ways they were complementary. The Temple provided a worship which involved a complicated sacrificial ritual, enriched by tradition and made splendid by the gifts of multitudes. The Synagogue provided a worship without sacrifice, wherein prayers and regular instruction occupied the chief places. Prayers were offered in the Temple also, and psalms were sung, but there they were secondary to the sacrifices. On the other hand, some ancient authorities always refer to the synagogues as "houses of prayer." There was a synagogue actually in the Temple precincts, and it is on record how the priests had to hurry to and fro, without rest, from Synagogue and College to Temple and Altar, during the busy day and night celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Temple which Jesus knew and frequented was that which was rebuilt by Herod the Great. He began this work in the eighteenth year of his reign (20-19 B.C.). A thousand priests, working with determination, completed the Sanctuary in eighteen months, but the remainder was still being built forty-six years after (John ii, 20), and doubtless great stones, some of them sixty feet long, could then be seen lying there waiting to be used (Mark xiii, 1). The whole was not completed until A.D. 63, less than seven years before it was completely destroyed, and "not one stone left upon another, which was not thrown down." Built in white marble, terraces rising pile on pile, surrounded by colonnades, gates overlaid with gold, "it was distinguished," wrote the Roman Tacitus, "by its wealth no less than by its magnificence." It looked like a mountain covered with snow. When the eastern front, faced with gold, caught the first beams of the morning sun over the Mount of Olives, it shone with a splendour that dazzled the eyes of the beholder.

Inside the Temple that Jesus knew

THE Temple buildings covered an area of approximately 400 yards by 330 yards, and could hold over 200,000 people at one time. The usual approach was from the west over the bridge which spanned the Tyropoeon Valley. This bridge carried a roadway 354 feet long and 50 feet wide, whilst from the parapet there was a sheer drop of over 200 feet. Probably Jesus rode across this bridge on Palm Sunday, escorted by the cheering crowd, and so entered the outermost court, the Court of the Gentiles. Opposite, inside the eastern wall, were the cloisters known as Solomon's Porch, three rows of solid marble columns some 40 feet

high, traditionally the only part of the Temple which had survived from Solomon's time. Here Jesus walked and taught at the winter Feast of Dedication (John x, 23), and here also the first Christian sermon after Pentecost was preached (Acts iii, 11 f.). There were cloisters on all four sides, but the most splendid were along the south wall, and were known as the Royal Porch. Here there were two double rows of columns, the central avenue being 45 feet wide and 100 feet high. The worshipper entered directly into this avenue from the bridge, and then inclined left across the open court. In the porticos at Feast times groups gathered round the Rabbis who taught there, such a group as that which the boy Jesus had joined when Mary and Joseph found Him after their anxious three days' search.

Meanwhile, in the court itself there surged a motley throng, men from every country under heaven, Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, merchant and money-lender, amongst them beasts and birds on sale for sacrifice, whilst continuously the Roman sentry paced the roof of the northern porches to give instant warning of any sudden disturbance, lest it should speedily grow into that rebellion which the Romans never ceased to expect. It is no wonder that once our Lord cleared this court, declaring, in the burning words of Jeremiah of old, that they had turned God's House of Prayer into a robbers' den.

Gates and Courts of Jewry's Shrine

TOWARDS the north of this court, west rather than central, lay the Temple, surrounded by a marble screen four and a half feet high, which no Gentile might pass on pain of death. Within this screen, south, east and north, were fourteen steps, and at the top of these, the *chel*, or fortification. This was 40 feet high, and, in the Roman Wars, was held by the defenders long after the enemy had occupied the Court of the Gentiles. It was pierced by nine gates, four on the north, four on the south, and on the east the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. This last was the usual entrance, and here, on the twelve steps which led up into the Court of the Women, Peter and John found and healed the man lame from his birth, who thereupon entered with them into the court where the worshippers stood during the Temple services. The women were allowed to come thus far—hence the name; though tradition has it that they occupied galleries round three sides of the court. There were thirteen chests in this court, called "trumpets" because of their shape. Into these the worshippers cast their gifts, either for Temple use or for charitable purposes, the rich of their abundance and the poor widow, whom Jesus noticed as He sat there, her two mites, "all that she had." There were other trumpets which some men used when they gave their charitable gifts (Matthew vi, 2).



"KEEP THE PASSOVER UNTO THE LORD THY GOD." The solemn feast of the Passover occurs in the first month of the Jewish year (Exodus xii, 2-11), that is, Nisan, anciently called Abib, and lasts for seven days. James J. Tissot's Biblical illustration depicts a Jewish family assembled

in Jerusalem to celebrate the Seder, or home service, at the beginning of the festival. The master of the house is the celebrant. Relatives are gathered round the table set with symbolical food and wine. The ceremony includes breaking of unleavened bread and drinking the Cup of Blessing.

Leading out of the Court of the Women was a semi-circular flight of fifteen steps into the Court of Israel. The gate here was known as the Gate of Nicanor. It was wrought of Corinthian bronze, and was nearly twice the size of the other gates, being 75 feet high by 60 feet wide. Some hold that the outer gate was the Gate of Nicanor, and the ancient authorities themselves vary. The probable explanation is that at one time there was no Court of the Women, and then the Gate of Nicanor would indeed be the outer gate.

The worshipper would gaze through the Gate of Nicanor, and, straight in front of him, over the low wall which separated the Court of Israel from the Court of the Priests beyond, he could see the Altar of Burnt Offering, from which rose continuously the smoke of sacrifice. Beyond the altar he could see the massive porch which fronted the Sanctuary, and, beneath the porch, the long veil of finest Babylonian texture, embroidered in purple and blue, which covered the double golden doors of the Sanctuary. Above these doors was a huge golden vine, its branches hanging down from a great height and its clusters as large as a man. It was the symbol of Israel, and the Branch was a title of Messiah. "I am the true vine," said the Lord.

The furniture of the Sanctuary was the seven-branched candlestick, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense. At the western end was the Holy of Holies, empty of everything except only the Presence of God Himself, and entered only by the High Priest on one day in the year, the Day of Atonement. It was shrouded by the second veil (Hebrews ix, 3), though Rabbinic tradition holds that there were two veils here, one behind the other, making a corridor a foot and a half wide.

The daily worship of the Temple was performed by one of the twenty-four "courses" of the priesthood, each course officiating for one week. The whole area of Palestine was thus divided, and it was the privilege and duty of the male Israelites to be present at the Temple during their week whilst the sacrifices were being offered. Their function was to represent the People Israel. In practice, however, they appointed a deputation to represent them at Jerusalem, whilst those who stayed at home were wont to gather in the local synagogue for prayer at the times of sacrifice. These were at dawn and at the ninth hour, which was three o'clock in the afternoon. The courses of priests were changed on the Sabbath, the incoming priests offering the evening sacrifices and changing the shewbread. At the three great pilgrimage feasts, however, all the priests were on duty, so great was the press of worshippers and the multitude of sacrifices. Josephus says that at the Passover of A.D. 65 there were three million worshippers, though here his pride of race may easily have outstripped his care for accuracy.

THE central feature of the worship was the sacrifices, for the priests were solely sacrificing officials. There were the regular sacrifices morning and afternoon, and various freewill offerings and redemption gifts during the day. But there were other noteworthy features. Whilst the burnt offerings were being presented, the Levitical choir sang and played. It is not known what they sang, but it may well have been Psalm c on week-days, still the regular week-day psalm, and one of the psalms xc to xcix on the Sabbath, with xxix substituted for xciv. These are still Sabbath psalms among the Jews.

During the sacrificing the priests blew with their trumpets, and afterwards the cymbals were struck. This was the time when the drink offering was poured out, and it was the signal for the singing of the daily psalm. This psalm was accompanied by the orchestra, and varied according to the day of the week, xxiv for the first day, and then, in order, xlviii, lxxxii, xciv, lxxxi, xciii and xcii for the Sabbath. The psalm was sung in three sections, with a pause after each section. Then the priests blew upon their trumpets, and the congregation bowed down and worshipped.

There is preserved in Psalm cl a list of musical instruments used in the Temple, though this was supplemented in Herod's time. Tradition has it that in Herod's Temple there was an instrument known as a *magrephah*. Apparently it was a primitive organ, for it had thirteen pipes and two bellows. It is said that it could produce a hundred different notes, and that it was used to summon the priests to worship and to tell the Levites when to sing. There was also an orchestra of six harps, six lutes, two pairs of cymbals, two trumpets, and not less than two nor more than twelve flutes. At one time there were women singers in the Temple, but, long before the time of our Lord, their places had been taken by boys.

On the Sabbath there were additional sacrifices at both services. Just as the regular daily psalm followed the regular daily sacrifice, so after each additional sacrifice a Sabbath canticle was sung. In the morning this was the Song of Moses from Deuteronomy (xxxii). It was divided into six parts for six successive Sabbaths, and each part was sung in three sections as in the case of the psalms. In the afternoon the canticle was the Song of Moses from Exodus (xv) in two parts, and the Song of Israel (Numbers xxi, 17 f.), making three parts in all for three successive Sabbaths.

Special Psalms for Days of Festival

BUT the most important services at the Temple were those at the Feasts, and on these occasions Jesus was present, following the customs of the normal devout country Jew, who worshipped in his local synagogue at ordinary times and came up to Jerusalem for the Feasts as the Law commanded. There were special psalms for the feasts, corresponding to the special sacrifices, for example, cxxxv for Passover, xxx for Dedication, and lxxxi for New Moons. At the three great pilgrimage feasts, psalms cxiii-cxviii were sung (known as the Hallel, meaning "praise"), with such accompaniments, responses, and movements as were proper for the particular feast.

At Passover, for instance, the people repeated the first clause of each psalm, and after every other line repeated Hallelujah (that is, "Praise ye the Lord"). In cxviii, they repeated the Hallelujah thrice, and also the three lines of verses 25 and 26. At Tabernacles, the Hallel was sung as at Passover, but with an accompaniment of flutes. On the first day and on the Sabbath there was no accompaniment, because these days were regarded as being more holy than the others. At verse 25 the priests marched in procession round the altar, just as they did at all festivals when the sacrifices had been offered. At Weeks, later known as Pentecost, the

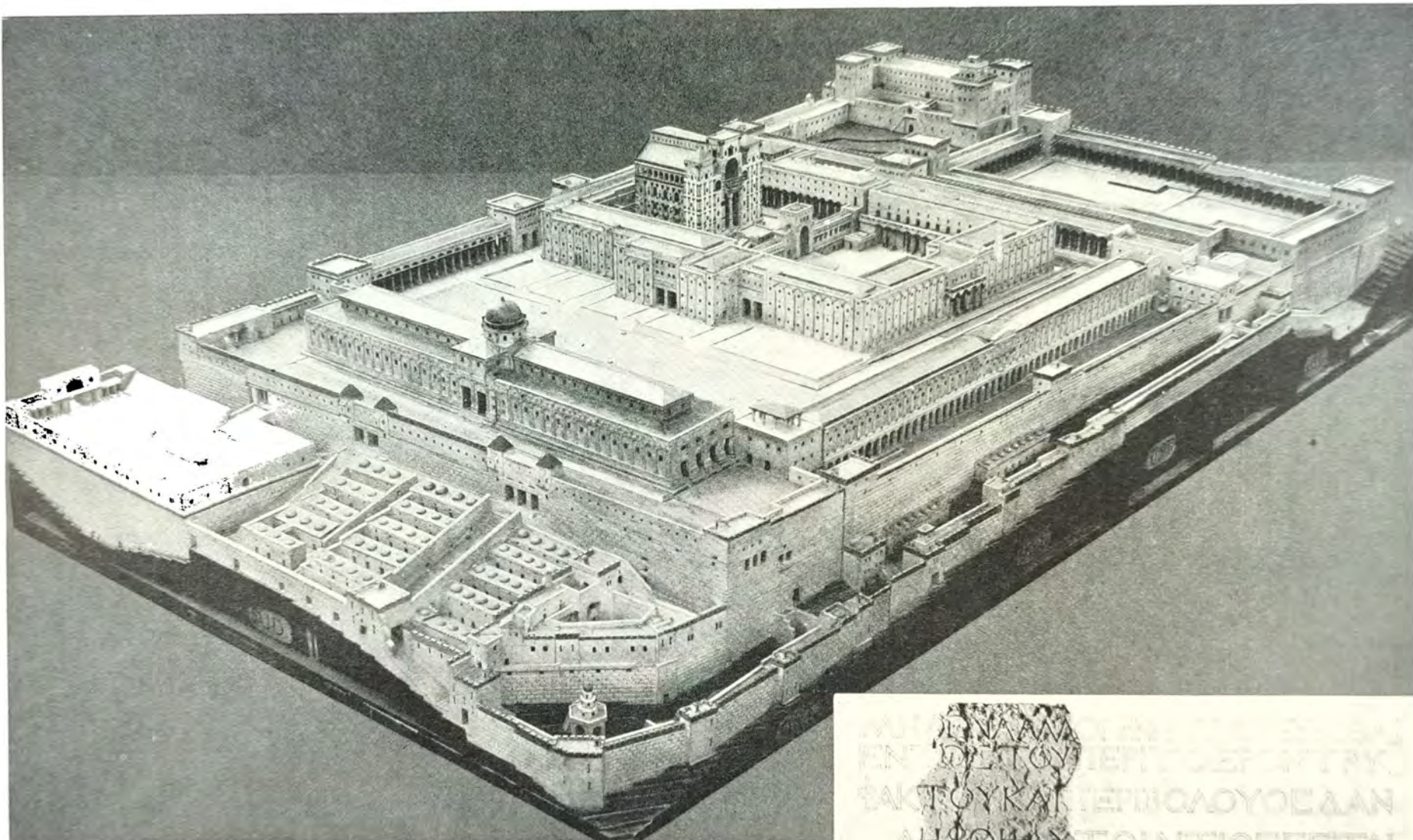
Hallel was sung as at Passover, but with the accompaniment of one flute, there being a general idea concerning this Feast that it marked the conclusion of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which followed immediately after Passover evening), just as the eighth day of Tabernacles marked the conclusion of that Feast.

Something of the Temple worship generally can be gathered from the Book of Revelation, since large parts of this book are pictures of the great Sabbath service in the Heavenly Temple at the End of Days. In addition, a description of the conclusion of the service on the Day of Atonement, as it was followed in the second century B.C., is to be found in Ecclesiasticus, there being few finer passages in the whole of literature than Ben Sirach's description of the High Priest Simon son of Onias as he came forth from the Holy of Holies himself to pour out the drink offering, with the shouts and trumpet-blasts of the priests, the singing of the temple choirs, the response of the people, and the priestly blessing at the conclusion of all.

How glorious was he when the people gathered round him
At his coming forth out of the sanctuary!
As the morning star in the midst of a cloud,
As the moon at the full:
As the sun shining forth upon the temple of the Most High,
And as the rainbow giving light in clouds of glory:
As the flower of roses in the days of new fruits,
As lilies at the waterspring,
As the shoot of the frankincense tree in the time of summer:
As fire and incense in the censer,
As a vessel all of beaten gold
Adorned with all manner of precious stones:
As an olive tree budding forth fruits,
And as a cypress growing high among the clouds.
When he took up the robe of glory,
And put on the perfection of exaltation.
In the ascent of the holy altar,
He made glorious the precinct of the sanctuary.
And when he received the portions out of the priests' hands
Himself also standing by the hearth of the altar,
His brethren as a garland round about him,
He was as a young cedar in Libanus;
And as stems of palm trees compassed they him round about,
And all the sons of Aaron in their glory,
And the Lord's offering in their hands, before all the
congregation of Israel.
And finishing the service at the altars,
That he might adorn the offering of the Most High, the
Almighty,
He stretched out his hand to the cup,
And poured of the blood of the grape.
He poured out at the foot of the altar
A sweet-smelling savour unto the Most High, the King of all.
Then shouted the sons of Aaron,
They sounded the trumpets of beaten work,
They made a great noise to be heard,
For a remembrance before the Most High.
Then all the people together hastened,
And fell down upon the earth on their faces
To worship their Lord, the Almighty, God Most High.
The singers also praised him with their voices:
In the whole house was there made sweet melody.
And the people besought the Lord Most High,
In prayer before him that is merciful,
Till the worship of the Lord should be ended;
And so they accomplished his service.
Then he went down, and lifted up his hands
Over the whole congregation of the children of Israel,
To give blessing unto the Lord with his lips,
And to glory in his name.
And he bowed himself down in worship the second time,
To declare the blessing from the Most High.

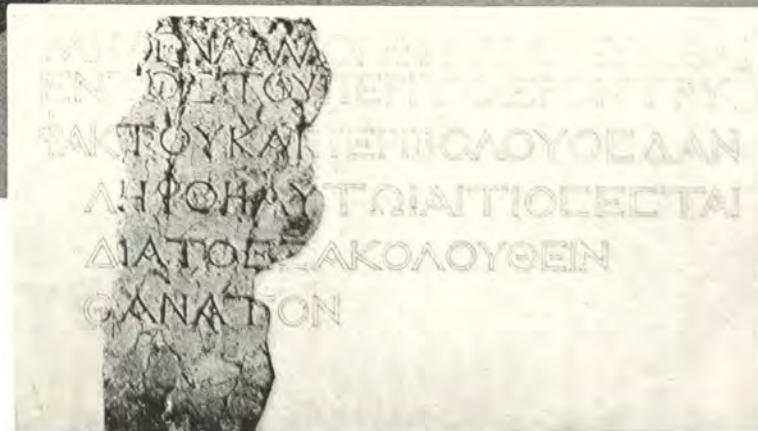
(Ecclesiasticus I, 5-21, R.V.; Oxford University Press.)

The most spectacular and popular of all the Feasts in every generation was the Feast of Tabernacles. It came at the end of the year, when all the produce of fold



"FORTY AND SIX YEARS WAS THIS TEMPLE IN BUILDING." The model by Sir Conrad Schick is a reconstruction of Herod's Temple on Mount Moriah, the Temple which Jesus knew. On the north side of the precincts (right upper corner in the picture) stood the fortress of Antonia; on the south-west corner (extreme left) was the Roman Hippodrome; the arcade on the eastern side (running from centre to the right) was given over to the money-changers. Thus militarism, entertainment, and commerce encroached on the Sanctuary. The fragment of lapidary inscription (Palestine Archaeological Museum) from Herod's Temple is part of one of several such notices in Greek forbidding non-Jewish persons to pass beyond the forecourt or Court of the Gentiles. The inscription may be translated: "No foreigner may enter within the screen and enclosure round the holy place. Whosoever is caught so trespassing will himself be the cause of death overtaking him."

Photo, American Colony in Jerusalem



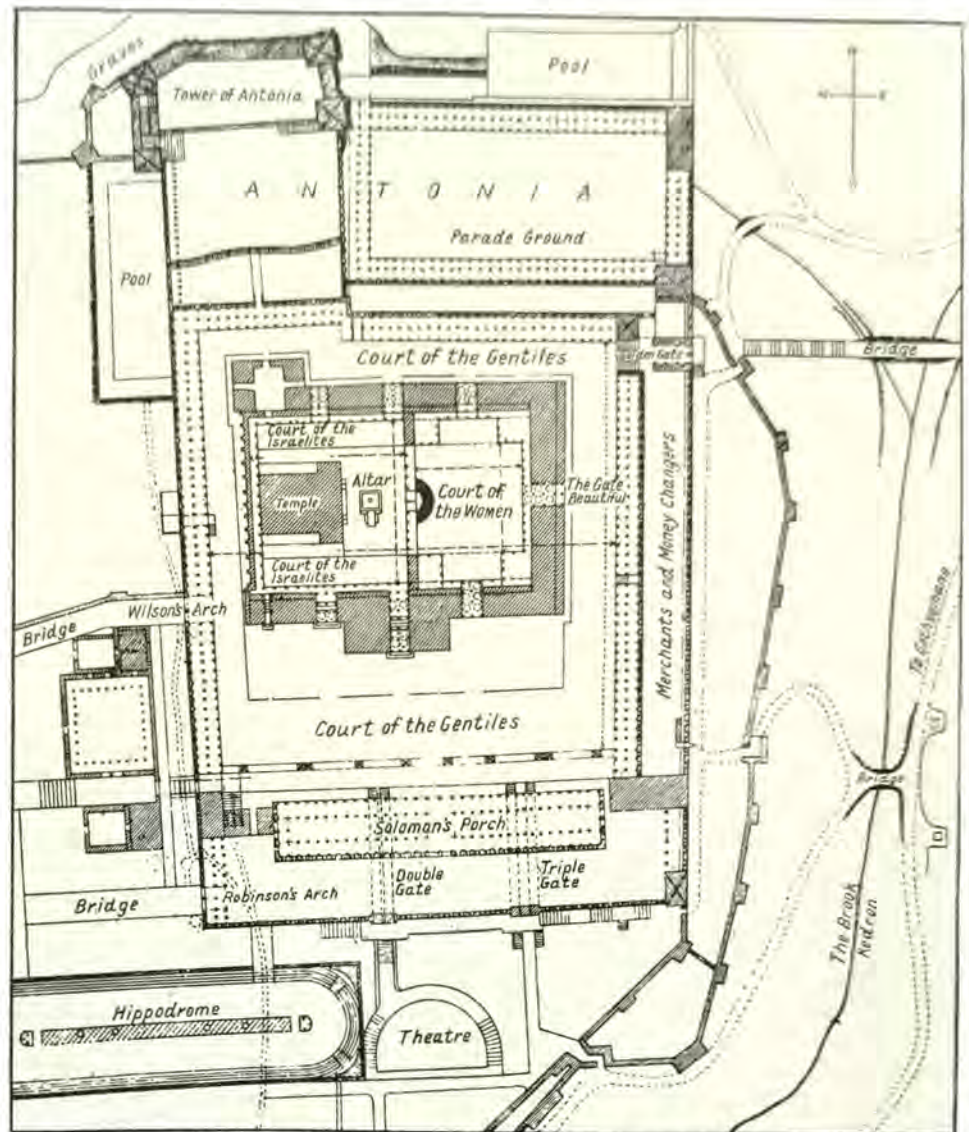
and field had been gathered in. It was the vintage feast, when Israel rejoiced in all the good gifts which God had given, and then followed their rollicking joy with earnest prayers for rain and consequent prosperity in the coming year.

At the end of the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles the Court of the Women was lit up by four great candelabras. These were replenished with oil continuously the whole night through. So great was the brightness from the "house of water-pouring," as this festival of the night of the harvest full moon was called, that there was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit up by the light of it, and it is said that a woman could pick wheat by it.

Jesus very probably had this festival in mind, and may even have been present, when He proclaimed, "I am the Light of the World: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii, 12; see vii, 37). For the celebrations of this festival the people occupied specially-constructed galleries, whilst in the court below the Pious and the

Wise danced with flaming torches in their hands, tossing them high in the air, and catching them as they fell.

Meanwhile they sang psalms and songs in the court below, whilst the Levites stood on the fifteen steps which led up to the Gate of Nicanor, singing the fifteen Songs of Degrees (Psalms cxx-cxxiv) to the accompaniment of every kind of musical instrument without number. The climax of a night of maddening, whirling revelry came with the dawn, when two priests advanced from their station in the Gate of Nicanor, and gave a threefold blast on their trumpets. Slowly they descended the fifteen steps, giving another blast as they reached the tenth step, and yet another as they came to the level of the court. So advancing, they crossed the court till they came to the Beautiful Gate. There they turned right about so that they faced the Holy of Holies to the west, and chanted, "Our fathers who were in this place turned their backs to the Temple and their faces to the east, and prostrated themselves to the rising sun; but we lift our eyes to God." According to Rabbi Jehudah, they used to repeat: "We belong to God, and lift our eyes to God."



GROUND-PLAN OF HEROD'S TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

After Sir Conrad Schick; courtesy of Mrs. Einsler

ANOTHER ceremony peculiar to the Feast of Tabernacles was the water-drawing. Ordinarily water for the drink offering was brought into the Temple overnight, but not during this Feast, because prayers for rain and pouring of water are related in ancient rites, and this was one of the chief features of Tabernacles. Each morning, whilst the sacrifice was being made ready, a priest headed a procession down the long flight of steps to the Pool of Siloam, where he filled a golden pitcher with water. Back they came, with music and joy, and the priest so regulated his pace that he passed through the Water Gate just as the sacrifice was being placed on the altar. He proceeded to the left of the inclined plane which led up to the altar, and poured the water into one of the two silver funnels which were there. At the same time he poured wine into the other funnel, and the widths of the funnels were so arranged that they emptied simultaneously. On the last, the great day of the Feast (John vii, 37), this ceremony was attended with special importance, and it was on that day that our Lord stood and cried: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." The explanation of the following statement.

"out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii, 38), is to be found in the fact that, in ancient Jewish tradition, the ceremony was connected with the hope of blessings in the New Age, and was associated not only with the miraculous river of Ezekiel xlvi, but also with the opening of a fountain for the House of David, for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah xiii, 1).

The Services of the Synagogue

THE life and ministry of Jesus is, however, to be connected even more closely with the synagogue. Jewish tradition is firm in tracing the origin of the synagogue at least as far back as Ezra. Some modern scholars are of the opinion that there were no synagogues in Palestine until after the time of the Maccabees, but we are strongly of the opinion that Jewish tradition is sound here. In any case, the synagogue was a long-established institution in the time of our Lord. Originally there were services on the Sabbath, and on market-days—Mondays and Thursdays. Later the services were daily, and the times for prayer were three—the third hour (9 a.m.), the sixth, and the ninth. The buildings seem to have been used for popular assemblies as well as for religious purposes. Among the Dispersion they would naturally be the centre of the life of the community in almost every respect. In any case, the healing of the man with the withered hand shows that there was considerable freedom, and that the services then were much less formal than they are now.

Each synagogue had a "head" who was chosen by agreement from among the "elders." He had the general oversight, and he it was who would invite strangers to speak. There was also a "minister" who had charge of the building and furniture. Sometimes he lived on the premises. He received back the scroll after the Reading (Luke iv, 20) and deposited it in the chest. His duties could be manifold. Rabbi Judah the Prince once had to provide a minister for a synagogue who could serve as preacher, sexton, judge, schoolmaster, teacher of the Law, and whatever else might be necessary. Such a paragon he found in Levi ben Sisi. The furniture of the synagogue naturally varied according to the wealth of the community. Some, then as now, could be very splendid, but the essential furniture was a chest to contain the scrolls, a platform with a reading desk, a lamp and candelabra, and trumpets.

The chief elements in the early synagogal services were the recitation of the Shema (Deuteronomy vi, 4-9; xi, 13-21; Numbers xv, 37-41; so called because each passage begins with *shema*, "hear ye"), prayers, the Reading of the Law, the Reading of the Prophets, the blessing of the priest if any were present, together with the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Aramaic vernacular, and an edifying discourse according to need and opportunity. The Shema has been the rallying point of Jewry for more than two thousand years. The pious Jew still hopes to repeat the opening words with his dying breath: "Hear ye, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One." It is the confession of the Unity of God, and many a Jew has died for it. He fixes a copy of the Shema in the Mezuzah on his door-posts, now as then, and he repeats it twice a day. When a scribe asked

Jesus what was the greatest commandment, He replied with the opening words of the Shema, doubtless the first words from the Law which the baby lips of both had learned to frame, and had continued to repeat because of the loyal devotion of both to the service of the synagogue.

It is difficult to say with confidence what exactly belonged to the synagogue service in the time of our Lord, but we know that during the first century in Palestine the Pentateuch (Law) was arranged so that it could be read Sabbath by Sabbath during a period of three years. The modern Jewish custom involves an annual reading, but this was originally the custom of the Babylonian Jews. There were also readings from the Prophets, since the Lord Himself read from the Roll of the Prophet Isaiah one Sabbath in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke iv, 16 f.). It cannot be said whether these readings were fixed at that time. Certainly Isaiah lxvi, 1, was fixed very early, and it was as short as the first lessons were. If it was the fixed reading, then we know the Sabbath: it was the last Sabbath of Cheswan, that is, during the first half of November. There is some evidence of a custom of chanting one psalm a Sabbath during a three-year period.

The custom whereby the ruler of the synagogue asked any competent visitor to speak any word of edification he might have to say, was welcomed by our Lord in the synagogues of Galilee, and by the first Apostles wherever they went among the Dispersion. Jesus regularly spoke in the synagogues until the growing hostility of the scribes of the Pharisees drove Him into the open spaces. St. Paul invariably began his ministry in a new city by speaking in the synagogue. The custom was to sit to speak.

The Prayers which were spoken in those far-off days are included in the modern Jewish Prayers, now known as the Tefillah, or the Amidah (because they are recited standing), or Shemoneh Esreh, the Eighteen Benedictions. There are now nineteen, and have been for many a long century, but the eighteen date back to the second century A.D. Some of them are earlier, and Jesus undoubtedly Himself heard and knew such prayers as Yotzer, Ahabah ("with everlasting love"), and Geullah ("true and constant, firm and enduring") in their earliest forms.

Translating the Law into Common Speech

THE translation of the Law into the Aramaic vernacular required considerable skill. In the time of our Lord the interpreter was not supposed to have anything written from which to read, though there was no rule against him preparing himself beforehand. He translated three verses at a time, and the rule was that he must not translate word for word, but give the sense. In the second century standard Aramaic translations, known as Targums, were established, and the troubles of the interpreters presumably came to an end.

The early Christian services were modelled on the synagogue services, and innumerable traces of this early association are to be found in the Roman rite and in the Book of Common Prayer. The traditional order of the services in the Free Churches owes its origin equally to the synagogue services, though these are similar to the earlier rather than to the later customs, and show less influence of the Temple rites.



MOST MODERN OF JERUSALEM'S SYNAGOGUES. In King George V Avenue outside the Walled City is the new and spacious Geshurun Synagogue. The congregation is chiefly drawn from the younger generation of Jews who have settled in Jerusalem and the western suburb of Rehavia.

The picture of the interior shows the gallery reserved for women—even in such a modern place of Jewish worship the sexes are segregated. The custom of building a gallery for the sole use of women is said to have been derived from the galleries round the Court of the Women in the Temple.

Photos, G. E. Matson, American Colony in Jerusalem