

FROM GALILEE TO JERUSALEM

Though largely centered in Galilee, Jesus visited Jerusalem for several festivals (Jn. 2:23; 5:1; 7:2, 8-10; 10:22-23; 12:1, 12). Of the various places in Jerusalem mentioned in connection with his ministry, the two pools in John's Gospel, Siloam and Bethesda, can be located with reasonable certainty. On one of his visits to Jerusalem, Jesus healed a man born blind, telling him to wash in the Pool of Siloam (Jn. 9:1ff.). Siloam was the ancient pool that lay not far from the end of Hezekiah's tunnel, which brought water from the Gihon Spring on the eastern side of the City of David to the western side of the hill. Bethesda, a pool where sheep were washed (Jn. 5:2ff.), is the other one of the two excavated pools, situated about 100 yards north of the Temple Mount. Together, the pools may have yielded as much as 5000 square yards of water surface, and the fragments of column bases, capitals and other evidences of porticos and remnants of the five porches have been discovered there.



The steps to the Pool of Siloam have been uncovered in Jerusalem (2004).

During his ministry in the north, Jesus repeatedly told his closest disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, where he would die (Mt. 16:21; 20:18).

This would be his final trip. Luke's Gospel spends some 10 chapters on an extended travel narrative describing Jesus' last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51—19:41). Between Galilee and Jerusalem lay Samaria, but most pilgrims avoided this shorter route on grounds of ritual purity as well as the dangers arising from racial tension. They forded the Jordan River in the north, traveled southward down the eastern side of the river, and crossed again at Jericho before reaching Jerusalem. Apparently, Jesus did the same, though on at least two occasions, he deliberately passed through Samaria, either coming or going to Jerusalem (Jn. 4:4ff; Lk. 9:52).

Going to Jerusalem

The only sites in Samaria with reasonable identity relating to Jesus' visits are the ancient well, which now lies in the eastern part of modern Nablus, and Mt. Gerizim, the former site of the Samaritan temple, which had been razed by the Jews a century and a half earlier. In his

NT ARCHAEOLOGY

conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:4ff.), only the mountain itself is mentioned as sacred, since only the foundation ruins of the Samaritan temple would have been visible.



Here are remnants of the Samaritan Temple excavation atop Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritan Pentateuch, in its version of the Ten Commandments, specifically indicates that the temple was to be built on Mt. Gerizim. This claim was voiced by the Samaritan woman to Jesus (Jn. 4:20).

A well near Sychar, called Jacob's well in John's Gospel, has early Christian identification (early 4th century), and its location is the only such one agreed upon by Jews, Samaritans, Muslims, and Christians. On property now belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church, the well is about 7.5' in diameter and about 100' deep. In addition to an underground water source, rainwater seeps in along the sides. Because the well lay at the intersection of two main roads in the time of Jesus, it was a natural stopping place for ancient travelers.

Jericho, the site of the southern ford of the Jordan, was one of the most ancient cities in the world. About six miles north of the Dead Sea, it was an oasis blessed with several springs. Here, Herod the Great built palaces, gardens and swimming pools, many of which have now



The ruins of Herod's Jericho Palace

been excavated, and the city took on a Roman character, since Herod employed Roman architects and workers to build his grandiose edifices. Here, also, Jesus met Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax

NT ARCHAEOLOGY

collector (Lk. 19:1-8),¹ and here he healed the Son of Timaeus (Mk. 10:46-52). In Jericho, the disparity between the opulent wealthy and the poverty of the common people was immediately apparent. Blind Bartimaeus probably was one of many beggars who pleaded for relief near the bastions of Roman power and affluence.

In Jerusalem



The Golden Gate as it is today is not the one through which Jesus entered the city. Rather, he entered through an earlier gate which lies beneath this one.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on his final trip was from the Mount of Olives on the eastern side of the city (Mt. 21:1). The Golden Gate, one of eight entries to the Old City, is the oldest of them all and likely the place where he rode into Jerusalem on the donkey. The modern gate has been walled in for several centuries, and in fact, a Muslim cemetery covers the slope outside the gate.² Quite by accident, an earlier gate was discovered beneath the present Golden Gate. Since this earlier gate has not been excavated, the best evidence for its date comes from the masonry of the walls near it, and it

likely goes back to the time of Christ.

On his arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus visited the temple precincts, and from the Court of the Nations he drove out the money exchangers. The 2nd Temple Priests would allow only Tyrian shekels for use in the temple, and any other coinage had to be exchanged (Mt. 17:27; 21:12). This incident is one of several during Jesus' final days in Jerusalem that features coinage. On one occasion, he called attention to a widow giving two *lepta* to the temple, the smallest of Roman coins (Lk. 21:2). On another, he used a Roman denarius to respond to a question about imperial taxes (Mk. 12:15-17). Judas Iscariot likely received his payment for betraying Jesus in Tyrian shekels as well (Mt. 26:15).



Roman Denarius

¹ The Roman tax system included a sales tax, a crop tax (tax on the ground), as well as a personal tax (on furniture, slaves, money). Also, there was a poll tax on each individual, a tax on transportation of goods (for the use of roads, markets, and ports), an inheritance tax, and a business licensing fee. Tax collection was farmed out to local collectors, who like Zacchaeus, often lived in thriving commercial centers like Jericho. That there were abuses is apparent, and the total tax burden per individual may have been as high as 49%.

² The Quran connects this gate with Allah's final judgment, hence, the desire of Muslims to be buried near it.

NT ARCHAEOLOGY

Like many pilgrims, Jesus probably spent the evenings during his last week outside the city walls, and one place, Gethsemane, was on the Mt. of Olives. The word Gethsemane means oil press, and since John's Gospel calls it a *κηπος* (*kepos* = garden, cf. Jn. 18:1), the popular expression "garden of Gethsemane" was coined. As early as AD 330 the Christian historian Eusebius identified the site as being at the foot of the Mt. of Olives, based on earlier tradition, and since that time, the place has been revered as the place of Jesus' travail on the night of his arrest. A modern church built over the foundations of an ancient church mark the site. The popular idea that the olive trees on the Mt. of Olives date all the way back to Jesus' era is almost certainly mistaken. The trees can only be verified back to the 7th century, and further, Flavius Josephus

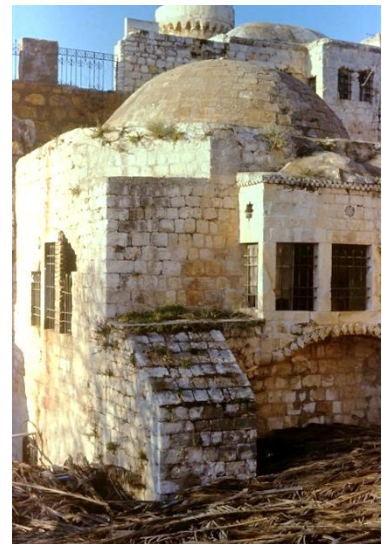
indicated that all trees in the environs of Jerusalem were cut down by the Romans during the siege in AD 70.



These 1st century steps are the likely route taken by Jesus on the night of his arrest to face Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

Other tourist sites are equally questionable. The home of Caiaphas, according to Josephus, was somewhere to the west of the old City of David, but it was burned during the 1st Jewish Revolt, and its location is uncertain. Beneath the present 1931 St. Peter of the Cockcrow Church (St. Peter in Gallicantu), a rock-hewn chamber was excavated that features rings and stone handles on the walls, a chamber that could have served to detain prisoners. Some have suggested that this was where Jesus was detained when brought before Caiaphas. However, Christian tradition, which can only be traced to about 500 years after the fact, shrouds this suggestion with ambiguity. The most that can be said is that the

excavated ancient steps leading down the slope toward the ancient City of David might have been used by Jesus and the others on the night of his arrest. The same is true of the upper room, the alleged site of the Last Supper. The site of Holy Zion Church has been believed to be the place of the Last Supper since the 4th century, and in fact, when the church was damaged in the mid-20th century, excavations were performed leading to the discovery of a Roman Period structure, possibly a Christian-Jewish synagogue, beneath the ruins of the Byzantine Church on the site. Again, however, nothing discovered so far offers reasonable certainty.



The Cenacle (from Jerome's Vulgate) is the traditional building of the Last Supper. However, the present structure on the site dates only as far back as the Crusaders, though it stands on the traditional site of what was believed to be the place of Jesus' final meal with the disciples.