

Acts 2:46-47

Introduction

This morning, we come to the end of Acts chapter two, one of the most redemptive-historically significant chapters in all of the Bible. The promised Holy Spirit has *now* been poured out by the risen and exalted Messiah once for all. What we have, then, in the pouring out of this eschatological Spirit, is the inauguration of the “last days” [*eschatos hemera*]*—*the “end times.” And with this pouring out of the promised Holy Spirit and the inauguration of these last days, we have also the creation of a new, eschatological *people*. That’s who we are. This morning we come to the end not only of chapter two, but of Luke’s summary description of this “end-times” people in the first days of its infancy.

I. Acts 2:46–47 — And daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with joy and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.

There was something special about those first days of the infant church. It could almost seem to us like everything was already perfect. Soon enough, there will be both internal and external pressures. There will be sin and judgment within the community (5:1-16), there will be grumbling about partiality in the distribution of food (6:1), there will be doctrinal controversy and debate (Acts 15), there will be strong interpersonal conflict (15:36-41), and there will be opposition and persecution from outside (4:1-31; 5:17-42; 7:54-8:3). But here at the very beginning, there was a unique season of blessing and growth.

The book of Acts is often read and studied as a detailed “blueprint” for the life of the church today. People speak of the desire to return to the primitive experience and practices of the apostolic church. But is this really Luke’s intent? When Luke was writing this history some thirty years after the events he records, was the entire church still meeting every day at the temple? Was the church throughout the Roman empire still breaking bread from house to house and constantly taking their meals together? Did the church throughout the Roman empire still have the same kind of favor with “all the people”? And was the Lord still adding to their number daily the thousands who were being saved in just a single city (cf. 2:41; 4:4). The answer to these questions is probably “no”; and Luke’s purpose in writing is not to exhort his readers to recapture those lost “golden days.” The day of Pentecost is a day that can’t be repeated in history because it’s a once-for-all, redemptive-historical event, similar to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even those first days and months of the church are—by the nature of the case—unique and in some sense unrepeatable. The entire apostolic period is in some sense unique and unrepeatable because the apostles lived only in that first century. And yet Luke does expect that this redemptive-historical account should have powerful implications for our own experience of life in this “end-times” community. If Acts is not a detailed blueprint to be duplicated exactly, it *is* a Spirit-inspired model that ought to guide, and convict, and encourage us. So Luke begins in verse 46:

II. Acts 2:46a — And daily devoting themselves [*proskartereo*]...

This is the third time Luke has used this word to describe those first disciples. In chapter one, they were continually **devoting themselves** to prayer (1:14). Here in chapter two, they were continually **devoting themselves** to the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers (2:42). And now Luke says again that they were “daily **devoting themselves...**”

The basic meaning of the Greek word here is to persevere or persist in something devotedly—with great care and effort (cf. Num. 13:21; LES). In our day, devotion has come to be associated more with a religious fanaticism than with that which characterizes all true Christians. In our day, a distinction might be made between a “devoted Christian” and those who are the more “normal” or “regular” Christians. But this is just another way of supposing that there’s such a thing as a class of “carnal Christians” and a class of “spiritual Christians” (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 6:1). It’s true that there will be differences in spiritual maturity (cf. 1 Pet. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:5-8; 3:17-18) as well as differences in calling and gifting (cf. Rom. 12:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:28-31). We have to be careful not to measure ourselves or others by the standard of the most spiritually mature or the “most” spiritually gifted. And yet every true Christian must be characterized ultimately by devotion; by a determination, in dependence upon God’s grace, to persist and persevere devotedly (with great care and effort) in love to God and love to each other and in a true *obedience* and holiness of life. Devotion implies an obedience that doesn’t rest on changing feelings or circumstances. It implies a healthy sense of “duty” which arises, here, from a wonderful sense of indebtedness.

Luke intends that the devotion of those first disciples should be a model and example to all of us—that we should all be daily “devoting ourselves” to the living out of our faith. For some, this will be a rebuke and a warning. For others, this is something that can be both freeing and empowering. To the extent that we suppose there are the “devoted Christians” and then there are the rest of us, we set ourselves up for sin and failure and constant discouragement. But when we understand that we’re all called equally to be “daily devoting ourselves,” then we may begin to experience a joy and a victory in our lives that we didn’t know before.

III. Acts 2:46b — And daily devoting themselves **with one accord** [*homothymadon*]...

Here, again, is a theme that we know Luke has strongly emphasized in the first several chapters of Acts.

- Acts 1:14–15 (cf. 15:25) — **These all with one accord** [*homothymadon*] were *continually devoting themselves* to prayer... [I]n those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a crowd of about 120 persons was **together** [*epi to auto*])...
- Acts 2:1 — And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all **together** [*homou*] **in the same** [*place; epi to auto*].
- Acts 2:44 — And all those who had believed were **together** [*epi to auto*] and had all things in common...
- Acts 2:47 — And the Lord was adding **together** [*epi to auto*] daily those who were being saved.

- Acts 4:32 — [T]he congregation of those who believed were of **one heart and soul**.
- Acts 5:12 — Now at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were happening among the people, and **they were all with one accord** [*homothymadon*] in Solomon’s Portico.

Here, Luke says that they were “*daily devoting themselves with one accord*.” The truth that emerges from all this is that we can’t be “devoted” Christians apart from the community of God’s people. One of the most basic expressions of any true devotion to Christ is devotion to the body of Christ. To be devoted to Christ is, by definition, to be devoted to the living of our lives together in community (praying together, taking the Lord’s Supper together, listening to the Apostle’s teaching together, and sharing together). On the one hand, we devote ourselves to Christ by devoting ourselves to the body of Christ. On the other hand, it’s our experience of life lived together in the body of Christ that enables us and empowers us to be truly “devoted.” This is the reality that Luke is conveying to us when he says here in verse 46:

IV. Acts 2:46c — And daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house...

Apparently, all three thousand plus of the new believers (2:41, 47) were meeting publicly every day in the temple while smaller groups of believers were meeting every day in private homes. The temple, in the time of Jesus and the apostles, was the largest religious sanctuary in the world (see graphic on p. 9). The entire temple complex covered 36 acres (29 football fields) and was surrounded on all sides by a vast covered porch or colonnade. It was the part of this colonnade that bordered the eastern side of the temple complex that was called “the Portico of Solomon” and that could easily accommodate a crowd of three thousand plus people. Luke tells us in chapter five:

- Acts 5:12 (cf. Jn. 10:23) — ...and *they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Portico*.

The believers met at the temple because this was a convenient place where they could all meet together at the same time. But that wasn’t the only reason. In chapter 3, we’ll see Peter and John going up to the temple at the ninth hour (3:00), the hour of prayer (3:1). In chapter 22, Paul will say that after his conversion, he returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple (22:17-18). In chapter 21, we’ll see four believing Jews who were under a Nazirite vow needing to purify themselves at the temple (21:17-26). Even though the temple had been “fulfilled”—or “filled up”—in Christ and even though the disciples knew that its days were now numbered (cf. Mat. 24:1-2), for a little while longer (while the temple was still standing and the believers had not yet been entirely ostracized by their countrymen [and in this unique redemptive-historical period of transition]) attendance at the temple remained a natural (we could say an “instinctive”) expression of the believing *Jews’* devotion to God. This is why Luke tells us that they were “daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple.”

Today, we’re not called to meet every day as a church, and we know it’s not possible for all the church to be regularly worshipping together (for both geographical and doctrinal reasons)—much less meeting at a temple. And yet we *are* meant to see in this example of the early church a picture of that devotion and unity that should still characterize us *as* the end-times people that we

are. If they were daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple, shouldn't we be equally fervent in devoting ourselves weekly with one accord in this "true" temple where we are all living stones being joined together into a holy sanctuary in the Lord (cf. Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5)? Even as they were breaking bread from house to house, shouldn't we always be finding spiritual refreshment and encouragement in each other's company?

But there's more at work here than just "what we *ought* to be doing." Underneath everything, and permeating everything, and over all is this deep, deep down, compelling and controlling joy. Isn't that what we've been seeing ever since verse 42, when Luke first began describing the life of this new Messianic community?

V. Acts 2:46d-47a — And daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, **they were taking their meals together with joy [*agalliasis*] and simplicity of heart, praising God...**

The word for "joy," here, is a strong word that could be translated in certain contexts: "with exultation." The pairing of this word, then, with "simplicity" is really beautiful. We could translate like this: "And daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with hearts full of a simple, unaffected—even a "childlike"—exuberance and joy (cf. Alexander; NEB). Isn't this a wonderfully fitting conclusion to all that we've seen in chapter two?

We've seen already some of Luke's unique emphases in his Gospel. Luke, more than Matthew and Mark, emphasizes the necessity of *prayer* for the coming of the *kingdom* (cf. Acts 1:14). Luke, more than Matthew and Mark, highlights the theme of *wealth* and *possessions* as these relate to life in Messiah's *kingdom*. Now we'll see how it's Luke who emphasizes (even more than Matthew and Mark) the theme of *joy* in connection with the coming of the *kingdom**—a joy that we often see expressed in praising and blessing God (as it is here).

VI. Joy in Luke's Gospel

Luke's birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus and the songs that accompany these birth narratives are unique to his Gospel; and it's in these opening narratives and songs that he begins right away to highlight the theme of joy.

- Luke 1:13-14 — The angel [Gabriel] said to [Zechariah], "Do not be afraid... for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will call his name John. "And you will have **joy** [*chara*] and **gladness** [exultation; *agalliasis*], and many will **rejoice** [*chairō*] at his birth.

Why this joy? Because John's birth was to be the sign of God visiting His people and accomplishing their redemption (Lk. 1:68).

* In Matthew's gospel, we encounter the theme of joy (explicitly) in four places that are unique to Matthew (2:10; 13:44; 25:21, 23; 28:8).

- Luke 1:42–44 — [When Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth, and when Elizabeth heard her greeting, Elizabeth] cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for **joy** [exultation; *agalliasis*].”

Why this joy in the baby who was still in Elizabeth’s womb? Because this was the mother of the Messiah, whose way he would prepare. Mary responded to Elizabeth’s words by singing a song of praise that begins with these words:

- Luke 1:46–47 — “**My soul magnifies the Lord**, and my spirit has **rejoiced** [exulted; *agalliao*] in God my Savior.”

Mary rejoiced because God’s mercy to her was the sign of His mercy to Israel, to Abraham and his seed forever (Lk. 1:54-55). A few verses later, we read:

- Luke 1:57–58 — Now the time was fulfilled for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had magnified His great mercy toward her, and they were **rejoicing** [*chairo*] with her [not simply because God had given her a child, but because in a “miraculous” manner, she had brought forth the child who was to prepare the way of the Lord].

Finally, when the birth of Jesus was announced to the shepherds, the angel said to them:

- Luke 2:10–11 — “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of **great joy** [*me gas chara*] which will be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

The beginning of Luke’s Gospel is like a symphony of gladness and joy. In particular, we could summarize these opening narratives as the proclamation not just of joy, but of eschatological joy—not just of gladness, but specifically of eschatological gladness.

Luke is the only Gospel writer who recounts these things in chapter ten:

- Luke 10:17–20 — Now the seventy returned with **joy** [*chara*], saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you [kingdom] authority to tread on serpents and scorpions [the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places; Eph. 6:12], and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you [cause you ultimate spiritual harm]. Nevertheless do not **rejoice** [*chairo*] [mainly] in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but **rejoice** [*chairo*] [above all] that your names are recorded in heaven.”

Immediately after Jesus calls the disciples to rejoice, Luke includes a passage that he shares with Matthew, but he introduces it in a way that’s unique only to him:

- Luke 10:21 (compare Mat. 11:25-26) — *At that very time* [Jesus] **rejoiced greatly** [exulted; *agalliao*] in the Holy Spirit, and said, “**I praise You**, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.”

When Jesus calls us to rejoice that our names are written in heaven, he’s calling us to share with Him in His own unbounded and exultant joy. This is what Luke would have us see. Luke alone tells us in chapter 13 that—

- Luke 13:17 — The entire crowd was **rejoicing** [*chairo*] over all the glorious things being done by [Jesus].

While Luke shares the next passage in common with Matthew, the three-fold emphasis on joy is found only in Luke.

- Luke 15:4–7 (compare with Mat. 18:12-14) — “What man among you, if he has one hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, **rejoicing** [*chairo*]. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘**Rejoice with me** [*synchairo*], for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I tell you that in the same way, there will be more **joy** [*chaira*] in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

Only Luke goes on, then, to recount the parables that Jesus told of the lost coin and the prodigal son.

- Luke 15:8–10 — “[W]hat woman, if she has ten drachmas and loses one drachma, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘**Rejoice with me** [*synchairo*], for I have found the drachma which I had lost!’ In the same way, I tell you, there is **joy** [*chaira*] in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
- Luke 15:32 — [The father of the prodigal son said to his older son:] “But we had to celebrate and **rejoice** [*chairo*], for this brother of yours was dead and is alive, and was lost and has been found.”

Only in Luke do we see this wonderful picture of rejoicing in heaven—of joy in the presence of the angels—over the entrance of one sinner into the kingdom. Luke alone recounts the story of Zaccheus, and how:

- Luke 19:6 — [Zaccheus] hurried and came down [from the tree] and received [Jesus] **joyfully** [*chairo*].

Luke’s account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is shared in common with Matthew and Mark, but only Luke sounds explicitly the note of rejoicing.

- Luke 19:37–38 (compare with Mat. 21:9 & Mk. 11:9-10) — Now as soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to **praise God, rejoicing** [*chairo*] with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Only Luke tells us that when Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, “they still were not believing because of their **joy** [*chara*]” (Lk. 24:41). And finally, it’s only Luke who ends his gospel with these words:

- Luke 24:51–53 — And it happened that while [Jesus] was blessing [the disciples], He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshipping Him, returned to Jerusalem with **great joy** [*megas chara*], **and were continually in the temple blessing God.**

The good news of “**great joy** [*megas chara*]” that the angels announced to the shepherds at the beginning of Luke, and the shepherds’ “**glorifying and praising God** for all that they had heard and seen” (Lk. 2:20) reaches its “fulfillment” at the end of Luke in the “**great joy** [*megas chara*]” of the disciples as they were “continually in the temple **blessing God.**” The joy that we saw in the opening birth narratives of Luke reaches its “fulfillment” in the joy of Christ resurrected and ascended into heaven. Should it be any surprise to us, then, that in the opening chapters of Acts, Luke takes up again this theme of joy?

VII. Joy in Acts

The first reference to joy in Acts is a reference to the resurrection joy of Jesus Himself:

- Acts 2:26–28 (cf. Ps. 16:9-11; LES) — “Therefore my heart was **glad** [*euphraino*] and my tongue **exulted** [*agalliao*]; moreover my flesh also will live in hope; because You will not forsake my soul to Hades, nor give Your Holy One over to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me **full of gladness** [*pleroo euphrosyne*] with Your presence.”

Once again, Luke wants us to see our own joy as a participation in that boundless and exultant joy of Jesus Himself, resurrected from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God. It’s only when viewed within this eschatological context that we can understand Luke’s reference here at the end of chapter two to the disciples’ hearts being full of a simple, unaffected—even a “childlike”—exuberance and joy. This isn’t just joy. This is eschatological joy.[†] There’s a redemptive-historical—and therefore a qualitative—difference. This isn’t just gladness. This is eschatological gladness.

Over and over again in the prophet Isaiah, it was said that the coming age of the Messiah would be characterized uniquely and supremely by joy (cf. Isa. 9:2–3; 12:3-6; 25:9; 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:1-2, 5-6, 10; 55:12; 56:7; 61:3, 7; 65:18; 66:10, 14). In the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel, it was said that the coming age of the Messiah would be the age of the Spirit poured out upon

[†] “Their gladness was doubtless motivated by more than the provision of daily needs. They were aware that God was at work in their midst in a new way and that they were enjoying the benefits of the messianic salvation” (Peterson).

God's people (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; cf. Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 48:16; 61:1). And what do we learn in the New Testament? In Galatians 5, we learn that the fruit of the **Spirit** is **joy** (5:22). In Romans 14, Paul speaks of "righteousness and peace and **joy in the Holy Spirit**" (14:17). In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul speaks of "the **joy of the Holy Spirit**" (1:6). We've already seen in Luke 10 how Jesus Himself **rejoiced** greatly in the **Holy Spirit** (10:21). And later in Acts, in chapter 13, Luke will tell us that "the disciples were continually filled with **joy** and with the **Holy Spirit**" (13:52).

As an eschatological people filled now with the eschatological Spirit we've been given the **gift** of eschatological joy. So in Acts chapter 5, we'll see the apostles "**rejoicing** [*chairō*] that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for the Name" (5:41). In Acts 8, Luke will tell us that after Christ was preached in Samaria, there was **great joy** [*megas chara*] in that city (8:5, 7-8). Later in chapter 8, we'll see the Ethiopian eunuch go on his way **rejoicing** [*chairō*] after believing the good news about Jesus (8:35, 39). In Acts 11, Luke will tell us that Barnabas **rejoiced** [*chairō*] when he saw the grace of God in the salvation of the Gentiles (11:22-23). In Acts 13, Luke will tell us that the Gentiles "began **rejoicing** [*chairō*] and **glorifying the word of the Lord**" when they learned that the Messiah's salvation was to be sent to them (13:46-48; cf. 15:31). Later on in chapter 13 we see that "the disciples were continually **filled with joy** [*plerōō chara*]" (13:52). In Acts 15, we're told that Paul and Barnabas were bringing **great joy** [*megas chara*] to all the brothers as they were recounting in detail the conversion of the Gentiles (15:3). And finally, in Acts 16, Luke will tell us that the Philippian jailor "**rejoiced greatly** [*agalliao*] with his whole household, because he had believed in God" (16:34).

As an eschatological people filled now with the eschatological Spirit we've been given the gift of eschatological joy—a joy which depends not on changing circumstances, but on the abiding presence of the Spirit of Christ in us. It's this simple, childlike joy in the Holy Spirit, then, which is to be the overriding, controlling principle of our lives. It's this joy in the Holy Spirit which is to characterize especially our experience of life together as Messiah's people. And it's this childlike joy in the Holy Spirit which enables us to persevere even in the midst of the sorrows that we still experience in this fallen world. Even as the Spirit is Himself the pledge of the fullness of our inheritance which is yet to come (Eph. 1:14), so also the joy that we have now in the Holy Spirit is already the guarantee of that day when all sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isa. 35:10). In the end, it's the expression of our *joy* in true devotion and unity that witnesses powerfully to the world around us. Luke concludes:

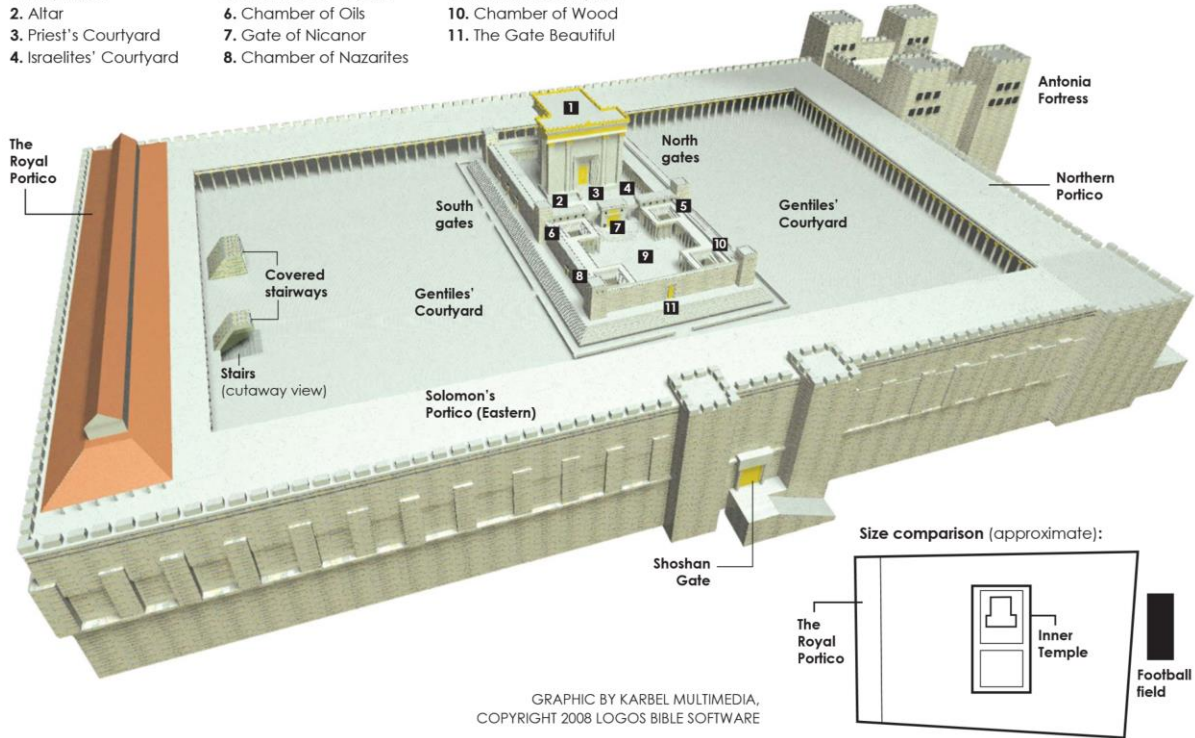
VIII. Acts 2:47b — And daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with joy and sincerity of heart, praising God **and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.**

By God's grace, may we be a church always characterized by a simple and childlike joy. May it be this joy that finds expression in our daily devoting ourselves to Christ our King and to one another. And may it be this joy that always adorns our witness and testimony to the world.

Herod's "Second" Temple on the Temple Mount

King Herod the Great began renovations on the Second Temple approximately 20-19 BC. The entire temple expansion, including the massive Temple Mount, was not completed until approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

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| 1. Holy Place | 5. Chamber of Lepers | 9. Women's Courtyard |
| 2. Altar | 6. Chamber of Oils | 10. Chamber of Wood |
| 3. Priest's Courtyard | 7. Gate of Nicanor | 11. The Gate Beautiful |
| 4. Israelites' Courtyard | 8. Chamber of Nazarites | |



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