

Acts 3:1-10

Introduction

In Acts 2, we saw that climactic redemptive-historical event where the Spirit was poured out on *all* the disciples by the risen and exalted Messiah. At the end of chapter 2, Luke gave us a summary description of those first days of the new messianic (which is to say: eschatological; end-times; last days) community (2:42-47). We could say that chapter 2 was “big picture.” Along with chapter 1, it’s laid the foundation for our reading of the rest of Acts. Now, in chapter 3, Luke moves from the “big picture” to specifics and particulars. In chapter two, Luke wrote that “many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.” Now Luke will give a particular example of one of these wonders and signs that took place through Peter.

I. Acts 3:1 — Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.

The ninth hour (3:00 PM) was the hour of the daily evening (we might say afternoon) sacrifice (cf. Exod. 29:38-39), and as Luke points out, this was also—for the Jews—the hour of prayer. In Acts 10, we’ll learn that Cornelius (a God-fearing Gentile) was praying in his house during the ninth hour (10:2-3, 30). Were Peter and John going up to the temple to participate in the traditional Jewish prayers? It’s possible, but Luke doesn’t say this explicitly, and he never specifically mentions the evening sacrifice. We already know that the believing Jews were “daily devoting themselves with one accord in the temple” (2:46). The ninth hour, then, would have been the obvious time for these daily meetings (cf. 2:42). The ninth hour was also the perfect time for public witness and evangelism. The Jews who had come to the temple for the evening sacrifice could observe the disciples’ gatherings and listen to the apostles’ teaching about Jesus. In chapter 5, an angel will tell the apostles: “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life” (5:20). Later in chapter 5, Luke will tell us: “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, [the apostles] did not cease teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ [*ho Christos*; the Messiah]” (5:42). Peter and John were going up to the temple in order that they might pray with and teach the new believers and also in order that they might proclaim to everyone who would listen the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

II. Acts 3:2 — And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried, whom they used to set down daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.

We don’t know which gate was the Beautiful Gate. We don’t know if it was one of the gates leading into the temple complex and the court of the Gentiles or if it was one of the gates leading into the outer courts of the temple proper (I think the first option is more likely; see p. 9). In any case, this man’s lameness was such that apparently he wasn’t even able to limp or move about with the aid of a crutch. Luke tells us that he had to be carried by others. Furthermore, this man’s lameness wasn’t something he had sustained recently in an accident, but something he had suffered with from birth. Later, we’ll learn that he’s now more than forty years old (4:22). For more than forty years, the muscles in this man’s feet and ankles and legs had atrophied. Even if modern medicine could have reversed the cause of his lameness (which, most likely, it could

not), could any amount of physical therapy have restored life and strength to his muscles? Having had to be carried everywhere he went for over forty years, we're faced with the overwhelming impossibility of any natural healing. We're also faced with the pitiable state of this man who had never taken a step in his life and whose daily existence consisted of sitting on the ground at the gate of the temple and begging alms.

III. Acts 3:3-5 — When [this man] saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But when Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him, he said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

The point seems to be that Peter "fixed his gaze" on the lame man in the sense of looking intently at him (cf. Lk. 22:56; Acts 7:55; 11:6) and discerning something about him. In chapter 14, Luke will tell us how Paul "fixed his gaze" on another man who had been a cripple from birth and how in doing so he saw (or discerned) that he had faith to be saved (healed; 14:8-10). So here, I would suggest that Peter was in some sense discerning by the Holy Spirit that this lame man was a man of faith—however basic that faith might have been.

Having, then, fixed his gaze on him, Peter said to him, "Look at us!" Luke paints a vivid picture. The lame man had seen Peter and John about to go into the temple and asked them for alms, but that's not to say he ever looked them in the face. There were many who passed him by every day and no doubt he was accustomed to people giving him alms without ever paying him much attention. He wasn't looking up at Peter or John because, of course, he wasn't expecting that they would really be looking at him. So what must it mean when Peter stops and actually speaks to him, and says, "Look at us"? Naturally, the lame man began giving them his undivided attention, expecting to receive something from them — expecting, probably, a larger gift of alms than was usual.

IV. Acts 3:6-8 — But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And leaping up [*exalommiai*], he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping [*hallomai*] and praising God.

Luke has already emphasized the overwhelming impossibility of any natural healing, as well as the lame man's pitiable plight. Now, in stark and wonderful contrast, he emphasizes the wonder and the indescribable joy of this miraculous healing. Again, I think we're meant to assume some basic level of faith in the lame man (cf. 3:16). Peter may have seized him by the right hand and raised him up, but we don't need to imagine him "dragging" the lame man up. The lame man had to be willing to attempt getting up—something he had never attempted in over forty years. Simply to attempt getting up was perhaps a sign of the faith that this man had and that God was even then working in his heart (cf. Lk. 5:17-26). Furthermore, Luke tells us that his immediate response upon being healed was to be "praising God."

The expression of his joy was unbounded — like a child without any inhibitions. Luke tells us that he leapt up and stood upright and began to walk and that he entered the temple with Peter and John, walking and leaping and praising God. When, suddenly, you can stand and walk after

never having taken a step in your life—after more than forty years of having to be carried by others—do you think you’ll care at all how you look to others? Not only does this man’s leaping reveal the boundless extent of his joy, it also reveals how instantaneous and total and complete was this miracle of healing. To go in an instant from an inability even to stand to now leaping for joy at forty plus years of age is a wonderful and an amazing thing. So Luke concludes his account of the miracle with these words:

V. Acts 3:9-10 — And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were recognizing him, that he was the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Of course, what Luke intends for us to be asking is, “What does this *mean*?” This is the question that Peter himself is about to answer (3:11-26). What does this miracle mean not just for the man who was healed, but for “all the people”? What does this miracle mean for us?

In order to answer this question, we do also have to ask what this miracle means for the man who was healed. Obviously, it means he’s no longer lame. But is that all? Is the exuberance and unbounded joy of this man of faith (3:16) to be explained only in terms of a “bare” physical healing? Remember what Peter said to him: “In the name of Jesus Christ [in the name of Jesus *the Messiah*] the Nazarene—*walk!*” This isn’t just a miraculous healing. This is a miraculous healing performed in the name of Jesus the Messiah. And when we ask, “What does the Messiah have to do with a lame man walking?” we must be able to see how the answer is “everything.” Before we go any further, we really need to set some context.

VI. The eschatological kingdom of the Messiah: heaven on earth.

While heaven is only truly opened to us in the New Covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus, some of the most vivid and concrete descriptions of heaven are actually to be found in the Old Testament. There’s a sense in which heaven, as the dwelling place of God, is above and beyond us and separate from us. Heaven, as the dwelling place of God, is contrasted with this earth, as the dwelling place of men (cf. Mat. 6:10; 7:11; Lk. 9:16; 18:13; Acts 1:11; Heb. 9:24). And yet the ultimate goal and destiny of man is not to remove from this earth into “heaven,” but rather to live forever with God upon this earth—not this earth as we know it today, which has been “subjected to futility” and which “groans and suffers the pains of childbirth,” but this earth as it will be one day when the creation has been “set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20:22). But how can this be? If heaven is “above,” then how can our future goal and destiny be to live forever upon a renewed and recreated earth?

Under the Old Covenant, Jerusalem (or Zion)—as home to the temple—was the “city of God” (1 Kings 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kings 23:27; Ps. 46:4).

- Psalm 87:1–3 — His foundation is in the holy mountains. Yahweh loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God.

But this city was still temporal and destructible, and so it was just a shadow—or a type and picture—of an indestructible and eternal city that was still to come (cf. Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16). With the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ’s blood and the inauguration of the last days, the author of Hebrews says that we have “come [now] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22-24). The Apostle Paul says that while “the present Jerusalem... is in slavery with her children... the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother [she is the city of our birth]” (Gal. 4:25-26; cf. Ps. 87:1-7). In another place, Paul says that God has “raised us up with [Christ], and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

In keeping with the Old Testament shadow and type, “heaven” is portrayed in the New Testament under the image of a city—the city of God which is our mother (cf. Phil. 3:20). On the one hand, we’ve “already” come to this heavenly Mount Zion—to this Jerusalem which is above; we’ve already been seated with Christ our King in the heavenly places; we’re already experiencing the blessings of this eschatological Zion. And yet we still look forward to the day when this creation is transformed—when the first heaven (the sky above) and the first earth are changed into a new heaven and a new earth in which only righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13)—and when the holy city, New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:1-2). Our ultimate goal and destiny is not to remove from this earth into heaven, but to live forever in the city of God which has come down out of heaven to earth—“the city which has foundations,” says the author of Hebrews, “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10; cf. Rev. 21:10-22:5). It’s then that these words of the Apostle John will be fulfilled:

- Revelation 21:3–4 — Behold, the tabernacle [the city-temple; cf. Rev. 21:16, 22] of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things passed away.

Our ultimate destiny is not in heaven above, but in “heaven on earth.” Because we’re living “already” in the last days, we’ve come “already” to the Jerusalem that is above, but one day this Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God. We see, then, that the eschatological people of God (which people we are) can only exist in connection with the eschatological city of God—the city which is “our mother”; the city of our birth; our true and eternal home.

It’s in the light of all this, then, that we come to read those passages where the messianic blessings of “heaven” (of life in the eschatological Zion) are described in terms of God’s grace and favor poured out upon the lame. We read in Isaiah chapter 33:

VII. Isaiah 33:20–24 — Behold Zion, the city of our appointed times; your eyes will see Jerusalem, an abode at ease, a tent which will not be folded; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its cords ever be torn apart [perfect peace and security]. But there the Mighty One, Yahweh, will be for us a place of rivers and wide canals on which no boat with oars will go, and on which no mighty ship will pass—for Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king; He will save us... Then the prey of an abundant spoil will be divided [abundance and

prosperity]; *the lame will take the plunder*. And no one who dwells there will say, “I am sick”; the people who inhabit there will be **forgiven their iniquity**.

The picture, here, is one of perfect well-being both in body and in soul. “The city of our appointed times” refers to Zion as the place where God’s people would come for the annual feasts and festivals to *rejoice* before the Lord because of all His abundant provisions and to worship before Him as their judge, and lawgiver, and king. Furthermore, the blessings of health, and abundance, and perfect peace and security were all to be grounded in the reality that the people who would inhabit Zion would be “forgiven their iniquity.”

What we need to see, then, is that it’s not possible to separate the “physical” and “material” blessings of life in this eschatological Zion from those deeper and more ultimate “spiritual” blessings from which they spring. Participation in the “spiritual” blessing of forgiveness of sin is the guarantee of our participation in the fullness of all the eschatological blessings that God has promised. So here in Isaiah 33, we see the lame taking the plunder and the reality that in this city there will be no one who says, “I am sick.” Why? Because these are the ones who will be “forgiven their iniquity.” We’re reminded of Jesus’ words to the scribes and Pharisees in Luke chapter five:

- Luke 5:23–25 — “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? “But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, get up, and, picking up your stretcher, go home.” And immediately he rose up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.

We read next in Jeremiah chapter 31:

VIII. Jeremiah 31:1–9 — “At that time,” declares Yahweh, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people” [**covenant relationship**]. Thus says Yahweh, “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when it went to find its relief.” Yahweh appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. Again I will build you, and you will be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! Again you will take up your tambourines and go forth to the dances of those celebrating [**joy**]. Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the planters will plant and will enjoy them [**abundance and prosperity**]. For there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out, ‘**Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to Yahweh our God.**’” For thus says Yahweh, “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the head of the nations [**joy**]; make it heard, give praise, and say, ‘O Yahweh, save Your people, the remnant of Israel.’ Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, *among them the blind and the lame*, the woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; a great assembly, they will return here. With weeping they will come, and by supplication I will lead them [**repentance and faith**]; I will make them *walk* by streams of waters [**perfect peace and security**], on a straight path in which they will *not stumble* [**righteousness**]; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn” [**covenant relationship**].

Here we see the joy of covenant relationship restored between God and His people. And we see that it's from this ultimate "spiritual" blessing of being in restored covenant relationship with Yahweh that all other eschatological blessings flow (ultimate abundance and prosperity, perfect peace and well-being, and unbounded celebration and joy). Notice, again, the picture of Zion restored, and of the people observing and celebrating its appointed times ("there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out, 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to Yahweh our God'"). It's in connection with this restored eschatological Zion that we see Yahweh gathering His people from the remote parts of the earth—among them the blind and the lame—and making "them [even the "lame"] [to] walk by streams of waters, on a straight path in which they [even the lame] will not stumble." We read in Micah chapter four:

IX. Micah 4:1–8 — Now it will be that in the last [lxx: *eschatos*] days the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the head of the mountains, and will be lifted up above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it. And many nations will come and say, "Come and **let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh and to the house of the God of Jacob**, that He may instruct us from His ways and that we may walk in His paths" [**righteousness**]. For from **Zion** will go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples and will render decisions for mighty, distant nations. And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war [**perfect peace and security**]. And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree [**abundance and prosperity**], with no one to make them tremble, for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken. Though all the peoples walk each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God forever and ever. "In that day," declares Yahweh, "***I will assemble the lame*** and gather the banished, even those upon whom I have brought calamity. ***I will make the lame a remnant*** and the outcasts a mighty nation, and Yahweh will reign over them in **Mount Zion** from now on and forever. And as for you, tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of **Zion**, to you it will come—even the former dominion will come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem."

Here again we see the emphasis on a restored Zion as the city where God dwells and where "many nations" (the elect people of God from every tongue and tribe and people and nation) will go up to learn His ways and to worship before Him. And here, again, we see how that ultimate "spiritual" blessing of righteousness is the source and wellspring of all those other eschatological blessings such as peace and security, and abundance and prosperity, and celebration and joy. Here again we see how Yahweh, in that day, will assemble the lame, and how the lame will be the remnant over whom He will reign in Mount Zion. We read in Zephaniah chapter three:

X. Zephaniah 3:14–20 — Sing for joy, O daughter of **Zion**! Make a loud shout, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem [**joy**]! Yahweh has taken away His judgments against you [**pardon and forgiveness**]; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in your midst; you will fear evil no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O **Zion**; do not let your hands fall limp. Yahweh your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save [**perfect peace and security**]. He will be joyful over you with gladness; He will be quiet in His love; He will rejoice over you with joyful singing [**covenant love and faithfulness**]. ***I will assemble those who grieve about the appointed feasts—They were from you, O Zion***; the reproach of exile is a burden on them. Behold, I am going to deal at

that time with all those who afflict you, *And I will save the lame* and gather the banished, and I will turn them—in their shame—into praise and a name in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; indeed, I will give you to be a name and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says Yahweh [**abundance and prosperity**].

Did you see all the same themes again? Again, we see Zion restored as the place where God’s people will rejoice in the appointed feasts. Again, we see God’s people pardoned and forgiven because of God’s covenant love and faithfulness. Again, we see that from this wonderful “spiritual” blessing of pardon and forgiveness springs all the eschatological blessings of perfect peace and security, of ultimate abundance and prosperity, and of unbounded celebration and joy. And again, we see in connection with this eschatological Zion God’s salvation of the lame, turning the lame into praise and a name in all the earth and restoring their fortunes before their own eyes.

There are some who see the New Testament church’s future as “spiritual” and “heavenly” (a spiritual people) and Old Testament Israel’s future as “physical/material” and “earthly” (an earthly people) Can you see, now, the problem with this? What this fails to see in the first place is that the Church is New Covenant Israel. But what this fails to see in the second place is that the Old Covenant “earthly” was always typological of the New Covenant “heavenly” and that ultimately even the New Covenant “heavenly” is that which comes down to this earth. This means that the “spiritual” eschatological blessings (which we partake of today) and the “physical” and “material” eschatological blessings can never be separated—they’re all of one piece together.

If Luke has had all four of these passages in his mind when he recounts for us the healing of the lame man, then we know he especially has in mind this prophecy from Isaiah:

XI. Isaiah 35:1–10 — The wilderness and the desert will be delighted, and the Arabah will rejoice and flourish; like the crocus it will flourish profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon [**joy and abundance**]. They will see the glory of Yahweh, the majesty of our God. Strengthen limp hands, and give courage to the knees of the stumbling. Say to those with an anxious heart, “Be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you” [**perfect peace and security**]. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. *Then the lame will leap [hallomai] like a deer*, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. Then the scorched land will become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes. And a roadway will be there, a highway, and **it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not pass by on it, but it will be for him who walks in that way, and ignorant fools will not wander on it [righteousness]**. No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; these will not be found there [**perfect peace and security**]. **But the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of Yahweh will return and come with joyful shouting to Zion**, with everlasting gladness upon their heads. They will attain delight and gladness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away [**the joy of sins forgiven and the curse removed**].

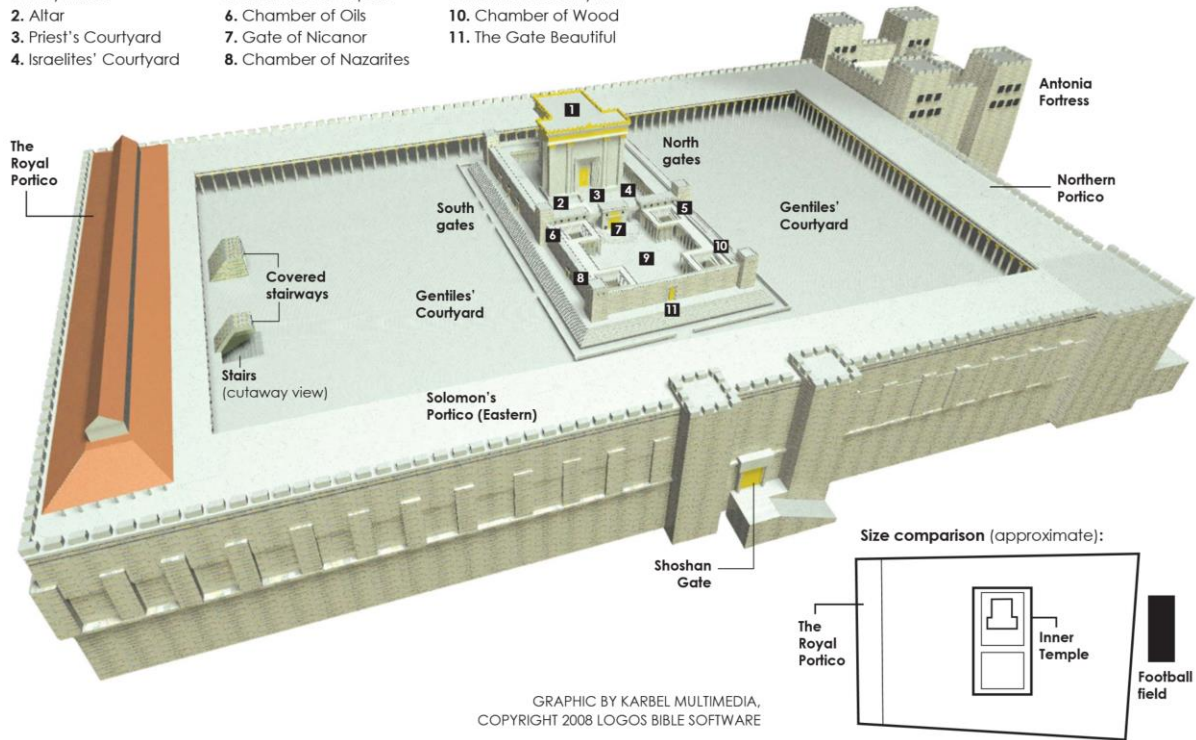
We see again the picture of eschatological Zion as the eternal home of all the redeemed. In that day, Isaiah says, “the lame will leap like a deer.” And now, in Acts, Luke tells us how the lame man, having been healed in the name of Jesus the Messiah, “leaping up,” was “leaping and praising God.” What does this miracle mean, then, for us who have believed in Jesus, the Messiah? It means that we have all come to the eschatological Zion—the Jerusalem that is above; “the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” That’s what the lame man walking and leaping for joy means. It means that those ultimate eschatological blessings of forgiveness of sins and perfect righteousness and restored covenant relationship with God are now (“already”) ours. That’s what the lame man walking and leaping for joy means. And so the lame man walking and leaping for joy is also the sign and guarantee to us of that future day when the Jerusalem that is above (and which is even now “our mother,” the city of our birth) will come down out of heaven from God and we will be raised to live in that city where all the lame will leap like the deer, and where no one will ever say, “I am sick.” The lame man walking and leaping for joy is the sign and the guarantee of that day when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain, because the first things have passed away (Rev. 21:3-4).

Finally, then, the lame man walking and leaping and praising God is an invitation and a call to each one of us to share in his joy, and to be always praising God. Have you come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God? Are you waiting, now, for that day when the Jerusalem that is above—and that is our mother—comes down out of heaven from God?

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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