



Proclaiming Salvation Today

Hebrews

Model 3:
Communion (Hebrews)

Welcome

- (1) Puzzle and context
- (2) The Temple: background information
- (3) Contrasting priesthoods
- (4) How did this come about?
- (5) Synthesis
- (6) Jesus of History?
- (7) The joy of the Gospel?
- (8) And so...?

Puzzle and Contexts

(1) Hebrews: P45 earliest extant copy from about 200 AD.

(2) Writing?

(a) Letter? Sermon really

(b) Very close to 1 Peter and 1 Clement

(3) Time?

(c) After the destruction of the Temple; most likely post 70 AD.

(d) Information re the cult is taken not from experience but from the Pentateuch

(e) Used by 1 Clement, so before 95/96 AD.

Puzzle and Contexts

(3) Author?

- (f) Paul? (Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Epaphras, Mary [!])
- (g) Within the Pauline tradition; not aware of Gospels or even stories about Jesus
- (h) Master of Greek language and rhetoric; highly educated (Middle Platonism); LXX is his bible

(4) Audience?

- (i) The title “To the Hebrews” is secondary
- (j) Mixed community of Jewish and Gentile *Christians*, experiencing some kind of harassment
- (k) Mostly like written to Roman Christians by a Roman Christian teacher from abroad

Puzzle and Context

- (1) Jesus himself was a layman
- (2) As a follower of John the Baptist, he was critical of the Temple
- (3) Jesus by-passed the OT priestly system and brought people into direct contact with God
- (4) *On this topic we have much to say and it is difficult to explain, since you have become sluggish in hearing.*
(Hebrews 5:11)

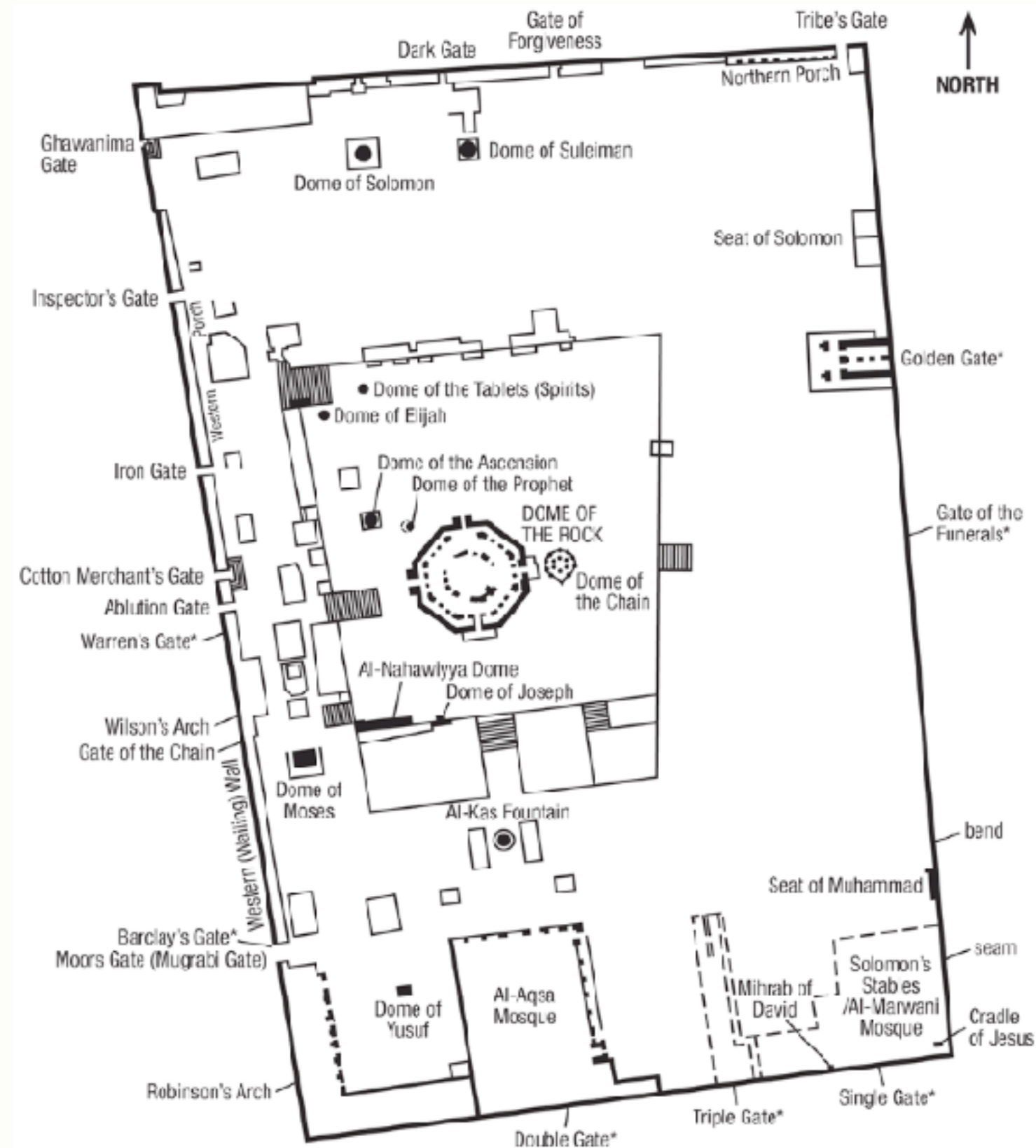
Temple



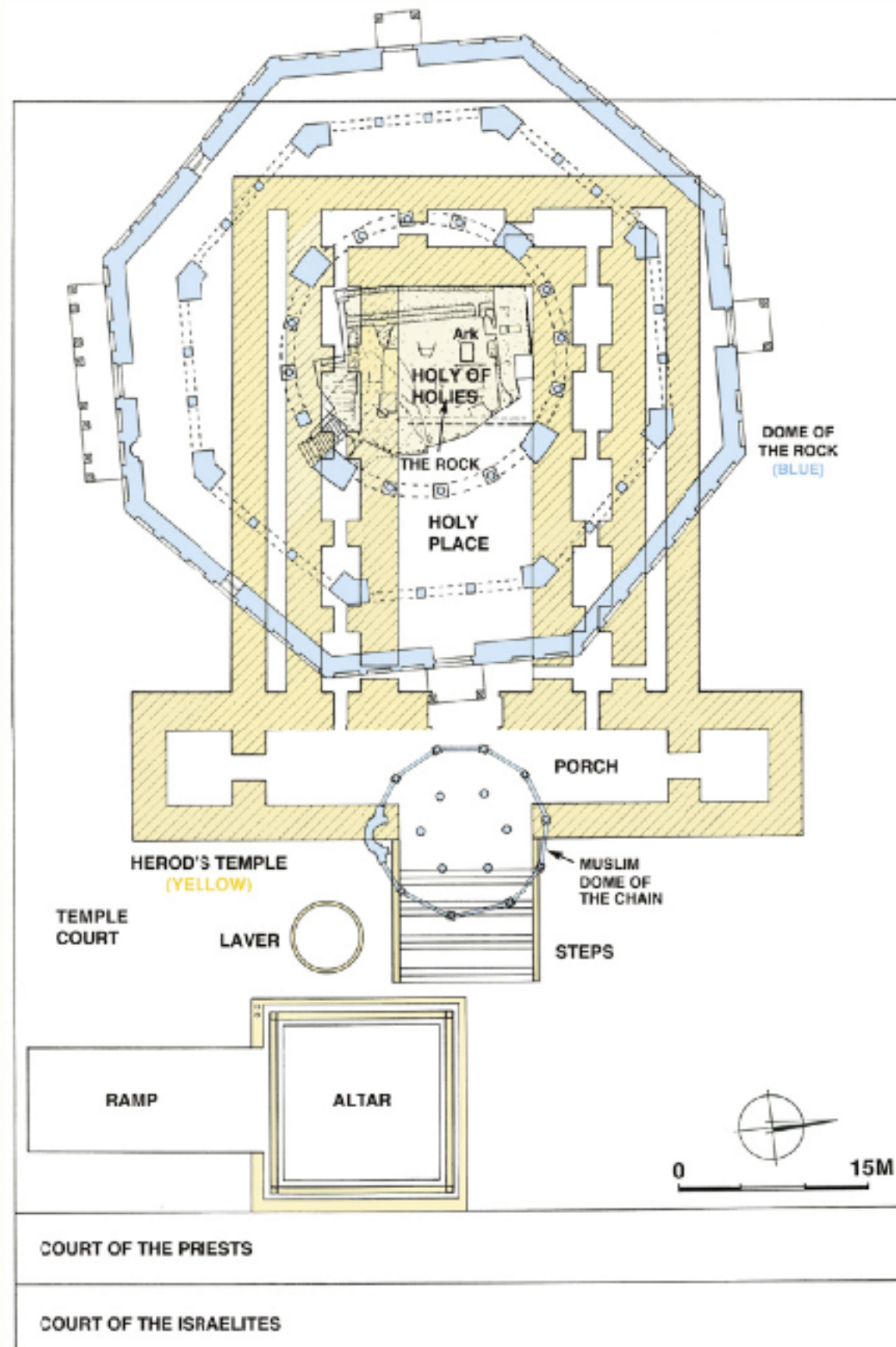
Old City of Jerusalem Today

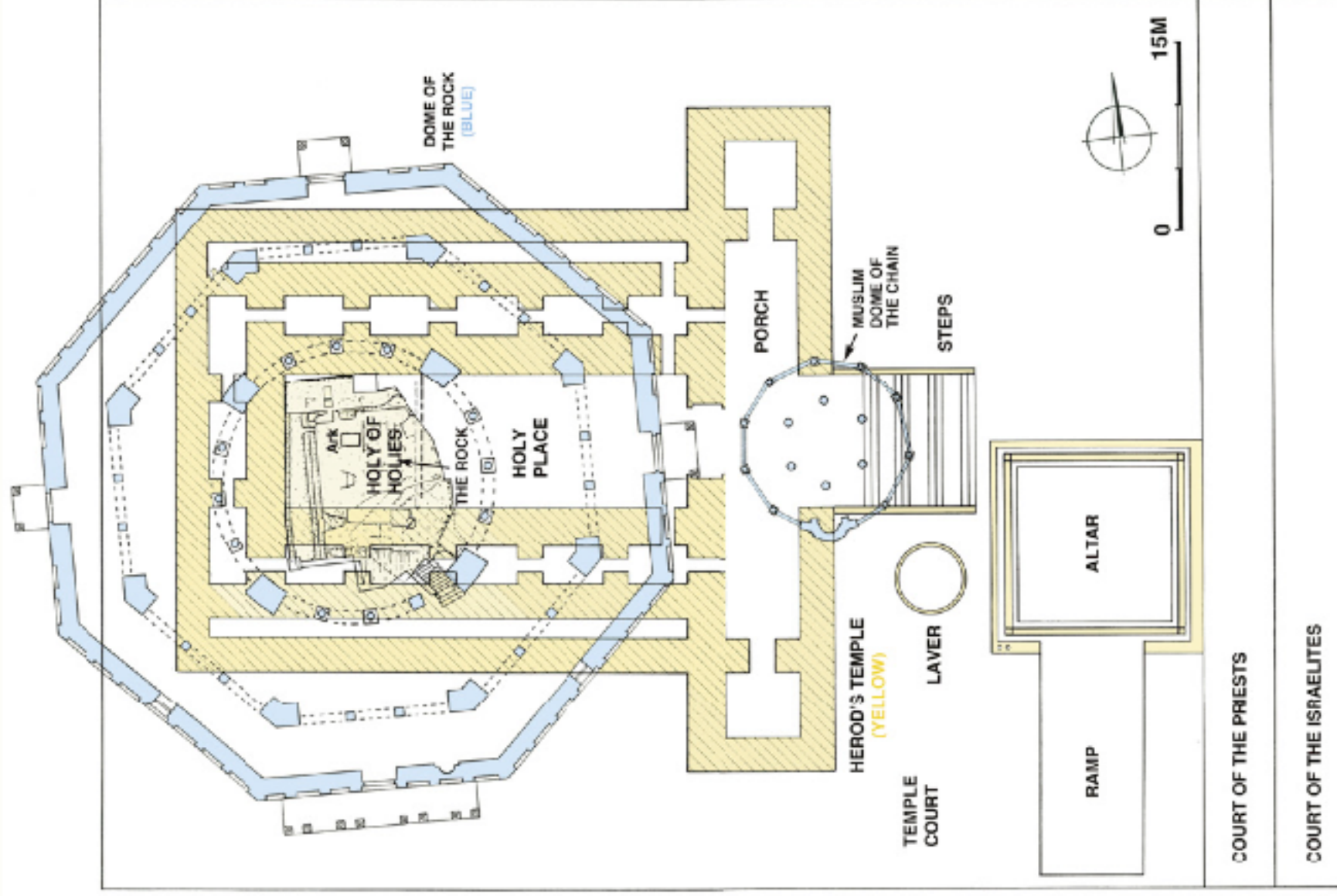


Plan of the Temple Mount Today

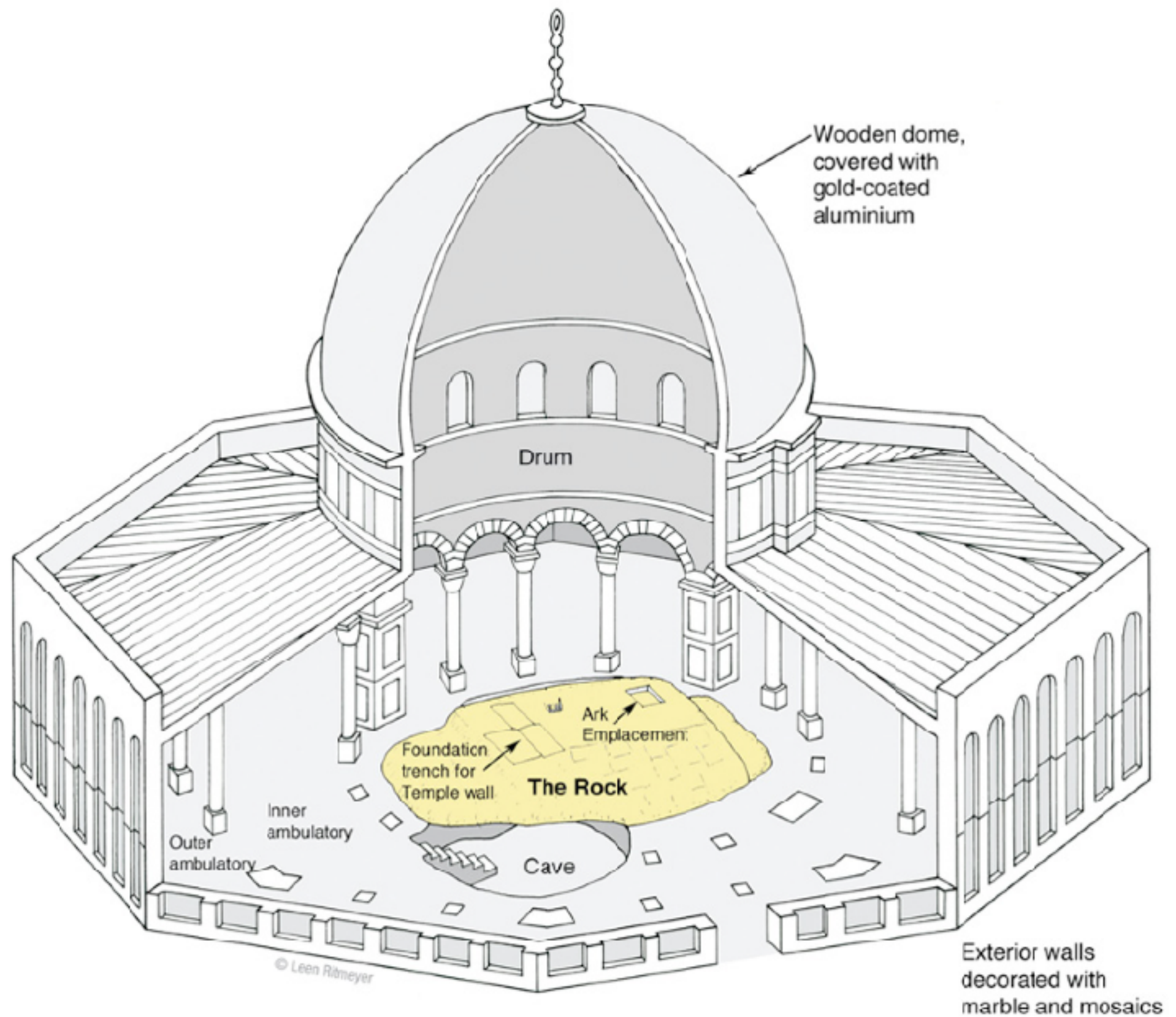


*A sealed gate





Cross Section of the Dome of the Rock





Dome of
the Rock

50 ft (16 m)
original height

Entrance to
Wilson's Arch

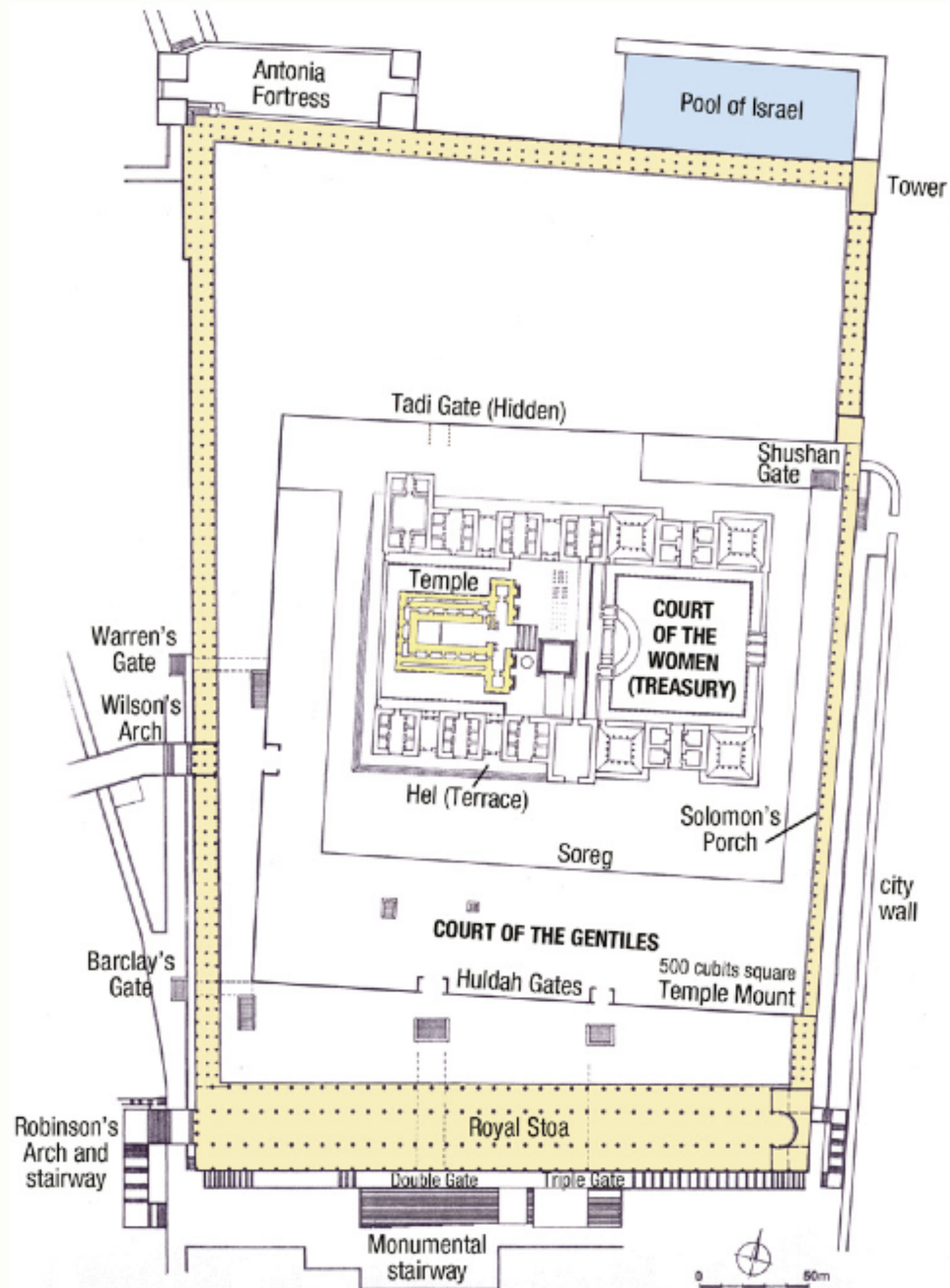
62 ft (19 m)
exposed height

Entrances to
Western Wall
Tunnels

50 ft (16 m)
below ground

Modern Western Wall Plaza



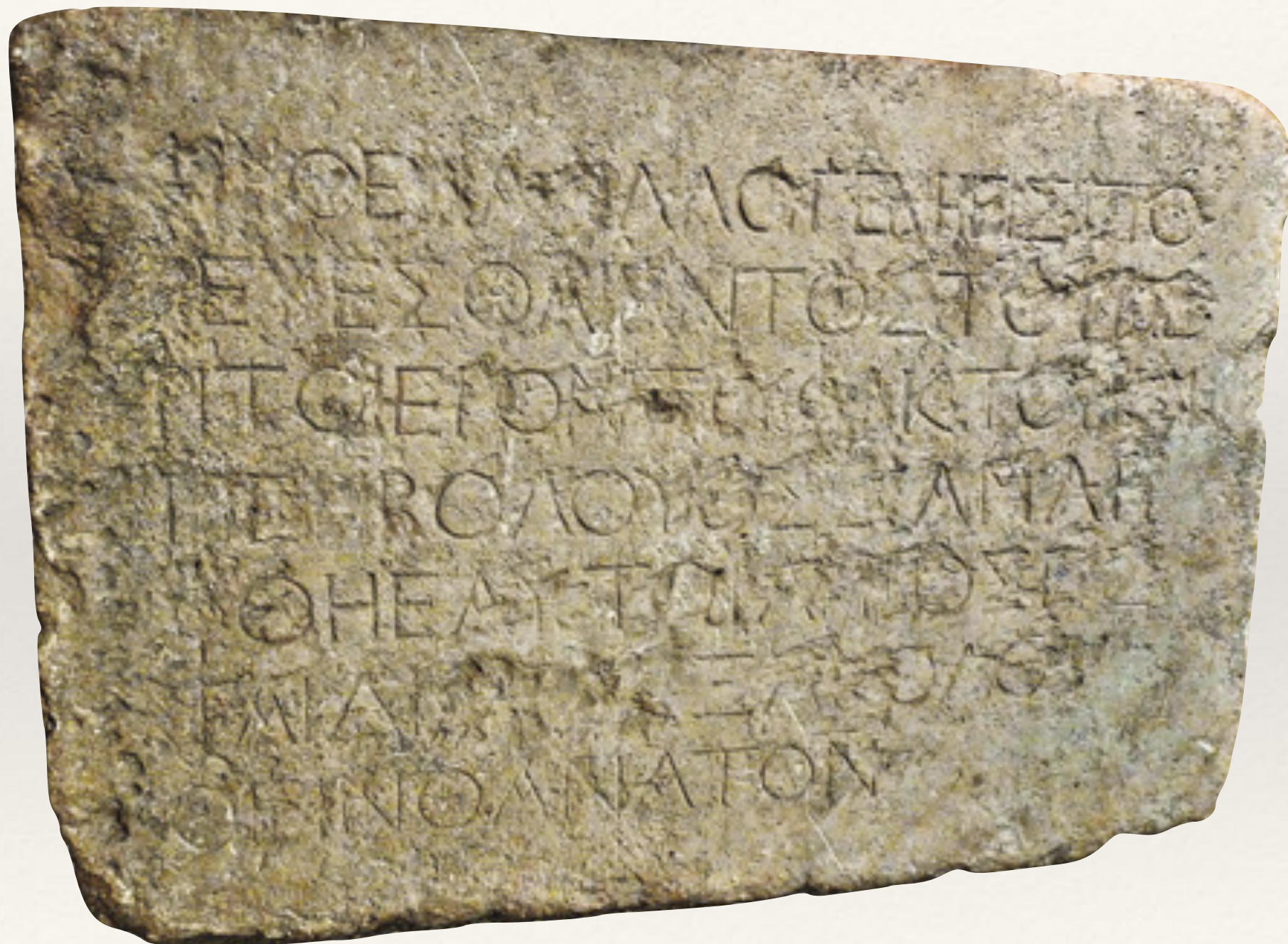


Court of the Gentiles

- (1) The expansive Court of the Gentiles sported a popular bazaar underneath the protective roof of the Royal Stoa.
- (2) Here moneychangers exchanged local coinage for the pure silver Tyrian shekel so that a proper offering could be made to the temple. (The Tyrian shekel was required because Roman currency was defiling and the Romans forbid the Jews to coin their own money.)
- (3) Here, too, vendors sold animals for use as burnt offerings.

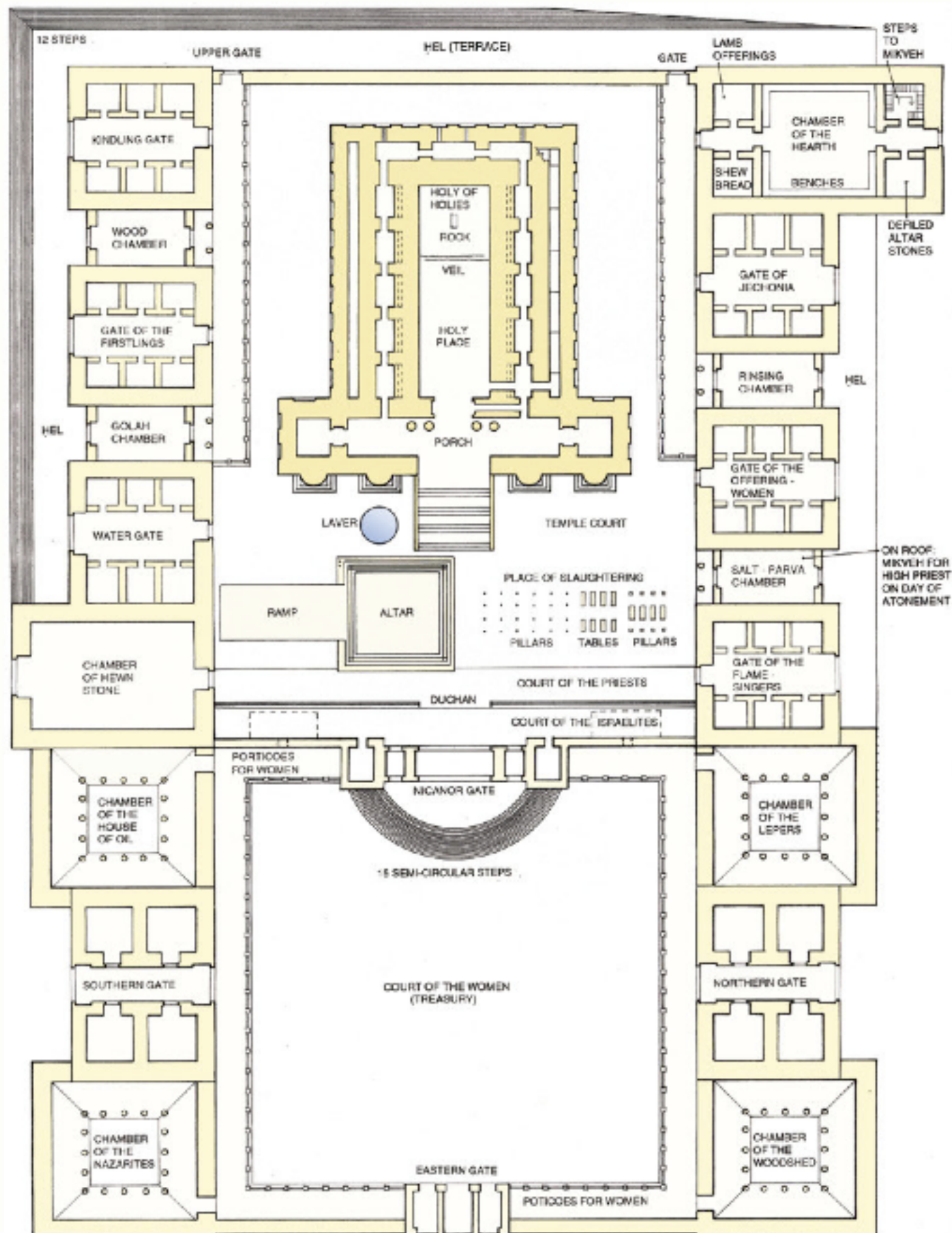
Court of the Gentiles

Court of the Gentiles



Court of the Women

- (1) The Court of the Women, the largest of the courts, was a square courtyard measuring 233 feet (71 m) on each side (a football field is 360 feet long).
- (2) Some scholars estimate that at the time of the feasts it could have held 6,000 worshipers at one time.
- (3) It was not only open to ceremonially purified Jewish women, but also to ritually impure priests, Nazirites, and even lepers.



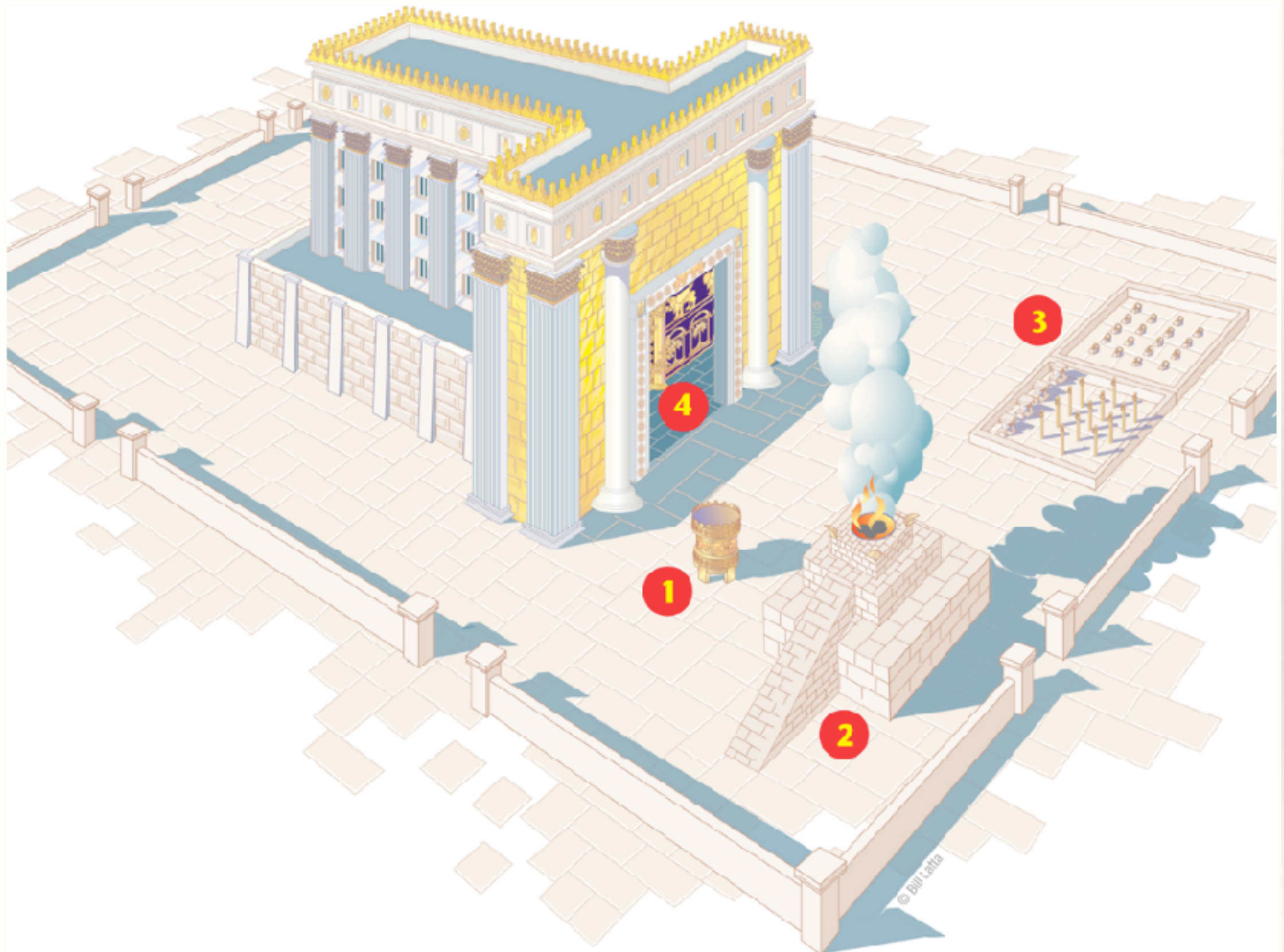
Israelites

- (1) The Court of the Israelites was limited to ritually pure Jewish men. It was entered by the curved staircase leading up to the Nicanor Gate.
- (2) This court consisted of a narrow hall 233 feet (71 m) wide and 19 feet (5.8 m) deep. Beneath this court were rooms that opened into the lower Court of the Women.
- (3) These were used for storing musical instruments and equipment used by the Levites.

Priests?

- (1) All priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests. While priests (Hebrew *kohanim*) and Levites (Hebrew *leviyim*) both belong to the same tribe of Levi, they come from different descendants within the tribe.
- (2) Priests were male descendants of Aaron, Moses brother, the first high priest. Levites (who served the temple) were any male descendants of the tribe of Levi, including the descendants of Moses and Miriam his sister.
- (3) Priests and Levites shared the responsibility of serving in the tabernacle, and later, the temple.
- (4) However, priests alone were responsible for conducting the sacrifices while the Levites assisted them in various duties such as construction and the maintenance of the temple.

Herod's Temple Cutaway



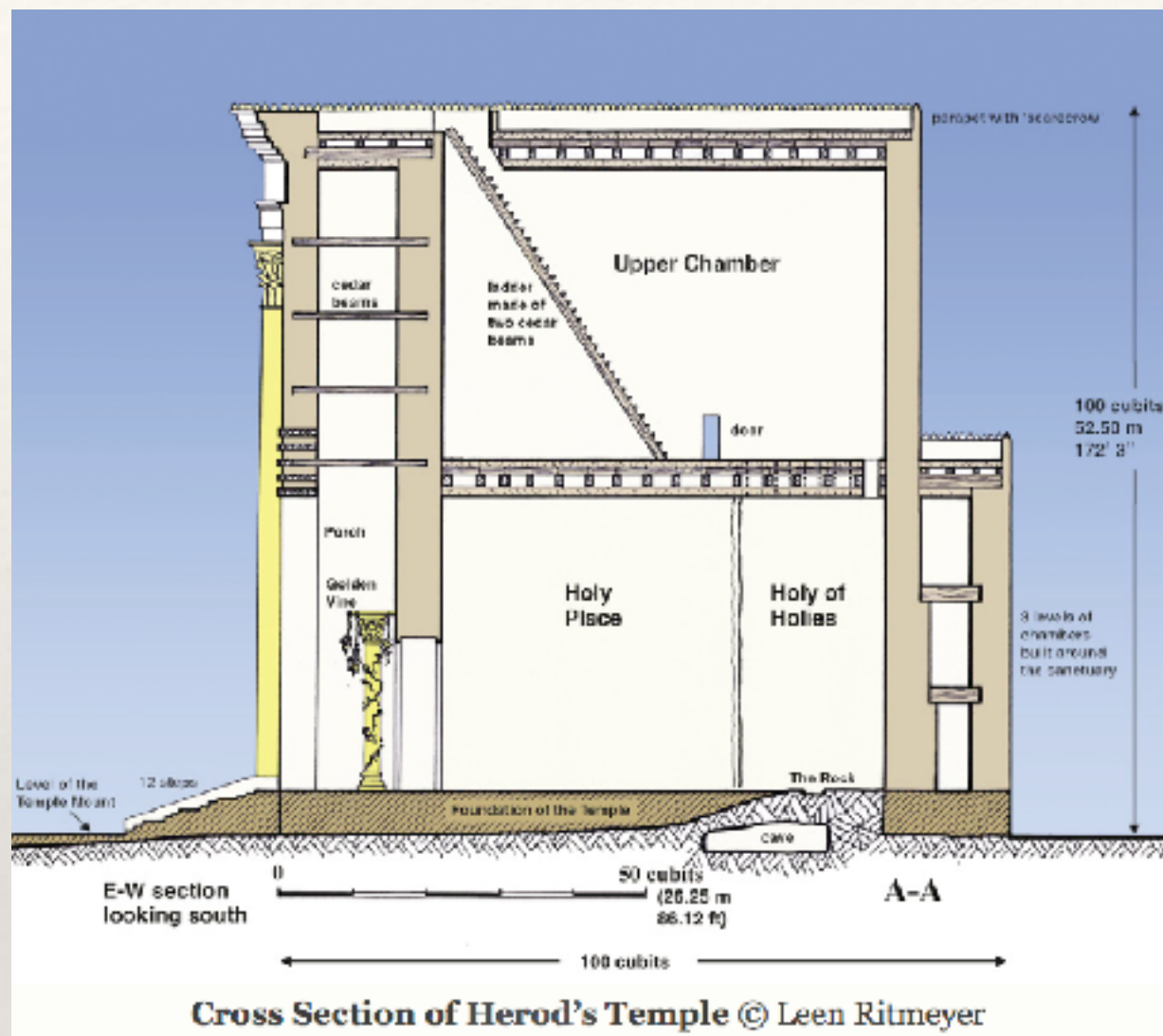


The Holy Place

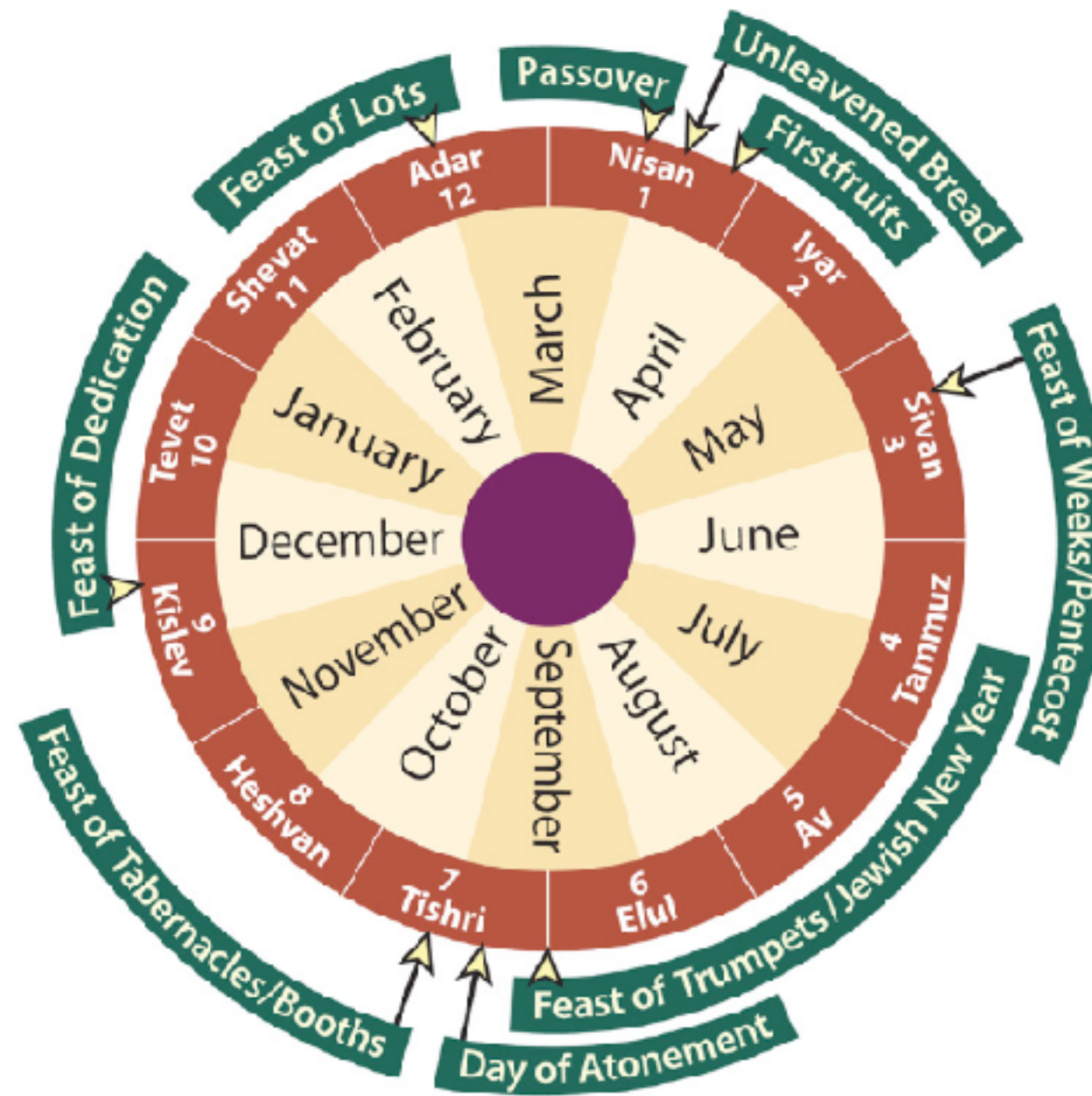
- 5** Double-Folding Doors and Outer Veil
- 6** The Golden Lampstand (Menorah)
- 7** The Table of Showbread
- 8** The Golden Altar of Incense

The Holy of Holies (Most Holy Place)

- 9** The Inner Veil
- 10** The Foundation Stone
- 11** Chambers of the Inner Sanctuary



Tabernacle



Tabernacle

(1) Divine presence

(2) Covenant

(3) End of the Exile

(4) Socio-Political
institution

(5) National sovereignty

(6) National Blessings

(7) World-wide blessings

(8) Prayer

High Priest

- (1) Sacrifices on the Day of Atonement
- (2) Prayers of intercession before the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant on the
- (3) Day of Atonement
- (4) Management and supervision of the other priests



Holy of Holies

- (1) The Holy of Holies (Hebrew *qodesh haqqodashim*) was technically known as the *Devir*. No part of the sanctuary had greater sanctity than this small square room 34. 4 feet (10. 5 m) in length and breadth and 69 feet (21 m) in height.
- (2) While the priests served within the Holy Place, no one but the high priest, and only on one day- the Day of Atonement- was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies.
- (3) Following the biblical precedent (Ezra 5: 15), the priestly workmen had built the temple with the Holy of Holies in the exact same location as the previous two structures: over the bedrock platform (an exposed portion of Mount Moriah) known as the Foundation Stone.

Ritual Purity

- (1) People could become unclean in a number of ways: for example, having a skin disease, eating certain foods, or touching a carcass.
- (2) Some of these things were associated with death (the consequence of sin), but the association of others (such as the dietary laws) are less clear. Nevertheless, they were violations of sanctity because God revealed them as such.
- (3) In the temple complex, the closer a person got to the location of God's presence, the higher the requirements for holiness or ritual cleanliness.
- (4) People who had become unclean could be restored by undergoing various rituals and waiting for a set period of time.

Sacred and Profane

- (1) Holy - qadosh / sanctus - “cut off” - sanction / sanctuary
- (2) Profane and pro-fanum - outside the sanctuary
- (3) This division is found in many societies
- (4) Holy = place, time, persons and actions
- (5) Key idea: separation from the profane
- (6) God’s transcendence is symbolised by the systematic negation of the ordinary and the everyday

Contrasting Priesthoods

- (1) OT sacrifice: animals, who cannot represent humans
- (2) Repeated sacrifices, therefore incomplete
- (3) The priest himself was a sinner
- (4) The temple was shadow of the heavenly sanctuary
- (5) God promised a new priesthood (Melchizedek)

Contrasting Priesthoods

Heb 5:1 For every high priest is taken from among the people and appointed to represent them before God, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal compassionately with those who are ignorant and erring, since he also is subject to weakness, 3 and for this reason he is obligated to make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. 4 And no one assumes this honour on his own initiative, but only when called to it by God, as in fact Aaron was.

5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming high priest, but the one who glorified him was God, who said to him, **“You are my Son! Today I have fathered you,”** 6 as also in another place God says, **“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”** 7 During his earthly life Christ offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. 9 And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 and he was designated by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Contrasting Priesthoods

(1) Why Melchizedek?

- (a) Genesis 14 and Ps 110
- (b) Abraham brought him offerings, and, “in the loins of their ancestor” the Levites recognised the superior priesthood of Melchizedek
- (c) Melchizedek was of mysterious origin (“without father, without mother”)
- (d) Melchizedek’s destiny was mysterious (“without end of life”)

(2) Without father, without mother, without genealogy, he has neither beginning of days nor end of life but is like the son of God, and he remains a priest for all time. (Hebrews 7:3)

Contrasting Priesthoods

Melchizedek's priesthood his superior

But Melchizedek who does not share their ancestry collected a tithe from Abraham and blessed the one who possessed the promise. Now without dispute the inferior is blessed by the superior, and in one case tithes are received by mortal men, while in the other by him who is affirmed to be alive. And it could be said that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid a tithe through Abraham. **For he was still in his ancestor Abraham's loins when Melchizedek met him. (Hebrews 7:6–10)**

Contrasting Priesthoods

A change of priesthood was promised and did take place

So if perfection had in fact been possible through the Levitical priesthood—for on that basis the people received the law—what further need would there have been for another priest to arise, said to be in the order of Melchizedek and not in Aaron's order? For when the priesthood changes, a change in the law must come as well. Yet the one these things are spoken about belongs to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever officiated at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord is descended from Judah, yet Moses said nothing about priests in connection with that tribe. (Hebrews 7:11–14)

Contrasting Priesthoods

The OT priesthood: repeated, therefore not effective

So with these things prepared like this, the priests enter continually into the outer tent as they perform their duties. But only the high priest enters once a year into the inner tent, and not without blood that he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is making clear that the way into the holy place had not yet appeared as long as the old tabernacle was standing. This was a symbol for the time then present, when gifts and sacrifices were offered that could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper. They served only for matters of food and drink and various washings; they are external regulations imposed until the new order came. (Hebrews 9:6–10)

Contrasting Priesthoods

The OT Tabernacle: only a sketch of the true, heavenly reality

The place where they serve is a **sketch and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary**, just as Moses was warned by God as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For he says, “See that you make everything according to the **design shown to you on the mountain.**” But now Jesus has obtained a superior ministry, since the covenant that he mediates is also better and is enacted on better promises. (Hebrews 8:5–6)

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands—**the representation of the true sanctuary**—but into heaven itself, and he appears now in God’s presence for us. And he did not enter to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the sanctuary year after year with blood that is not his own, for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by his sacrifice. (Hebrews 9:24–26)

How did this come about?

(1) Prayer

- (a) Heb 5:7 During his earthly life Christ offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion.

(2) Obedience

- (b) Heb 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered.
- (c) Heb 10:5 So when he came into the world, he said, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me 6 “Whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you took no delight in 7 “Then I said, ‘Here I am: I have come—it is written of me in the scroll of the book—to do your will, O God.’” 8 When he says above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you did not desire nor did you take delight in them” (which are offered according to the law), 9 then he says, “Here I am: I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first to establish the second. 10 By his will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

How did this come about?

(3) Communion

- (d) Heb 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil), 15 and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death. 16 For surely his concern is not for angels, but he is concerned for Abraham's descendants. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 For since he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.
- (e) Heb 4:14 Therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathising with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help.

(4) Entry

- (f) Heb 8:1 Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up.
- (g) Heb 9:24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands—the representation of the true sanctuary—but into heaven itself, and he appears now in God's presence for us.

Synthesis

- (1) Abolition of the Levitical priesthood
- (2) Foreshadowed in Melchizedek, fulfilled in Jesus
- (3) Not by sacred separation but by communion
- (4) Thus setting aside radically the human construct /
projection of the sacred and the profane

Synthesis

- (5) Sacrifice, yes: communion
- (6) But not of blood / atonement in that sense
- (7) Instead by Jesus' faithful obedience and prayer
- (8) Thus he became our entry to the very presence of God, independently of sanctuary, priesthood and blood offering

Jesus of History?

- (1) Dissident follower of the Baptism, with a prophetic critique of the Temple (Matthew 3)
- (2) The Temple Action: the end such a system of worship (Mark 11)
- (3) Foresaw the end of the Temple (Mark 13)
- (4) Proclaimed God and brought God's presence to people in the everyday (in the *pro-fanum*)
- (5) Brought holiness / wholeness to people while by-passing the Temple system and Sabbath observance
- (6) Brought holiness / wholeness to people while by-passing / breaking the dietary and purity laws

The Joy of the Gospel?

An evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelisers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelising community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may

prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelisation consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord's gift, it also bears fruit. An evangelising community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. (EG 24)

The Joy of the Gospel?

The new Jerusalem, the holy city (cf. Rev 21:2-4), is the goal towards which all of humanity is moving. It is curious that God's revelation tells us that the fullness of humanity and of history is realised in a city. **We need to look at our cities with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares.** God's presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and

groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice. This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered. God does not hide himself from those who seek him with a sincere heart, even though they do so tentatively, in a vague and haphazard manner. (EG 71)

And so...?

(1) In contact with the Pauline tradition

(a) Mercy seat / atonement: Rom 3:21-26 and Heb 7:1-10:18

(b) New covenant: 2 Cor 3:1-11 and Heb 7:22-10:16

(c) Intercessor Rom 8:34 and Heb 6:19-10:22

And so...?

(2) In continuity with the Jesus tradition

(3) Jesus is a priest (unexpectedly)

(a) Not because of spilling of blood / suffering

(b) But because of prayer, faithfulness and communion

(c) Thus, breaking down for ever distinction of sacred and profane

And so...?

- (4) Jesus, by his death and resurrection, both fulfilled and abolished the OT sanctuary and priesthood
- (5) The biblical roots of his priesthood lay not in Levi but in Melchizedek
- (6) Jesus did away with the distinction “sacred” and “profane”, by identification not separation
- (7) Jesus’ “sacrifice” was the gift of himself, in faith and obedience to God, entering the true sanctuary
- (8) Jesus’ faith opens for us a way to God
- (9) Hebrews matches Jesus’ ministry and Paul’s teaching

And so...?

Although he was a son, he learned **obedience** through the things he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

When he says above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you did not desire nor did you take delight in them” (which are offered according to the law), then he says, “**Here I am: I have come to do your will.**” He does away with the first to establish the second. (Hebrews 10:8–9)

Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, **the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.** For the joy set out for him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Therefore he had to **become like his brothers and sisters in every respect**, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17)

And so...

- (1) Do these teachings of Hebrews speak to us today?
- (2) What kind of disciple should I be?
- (3) What kind of church should we be?

Summary

- (1) Jesus: kingdom, identity, faithfulness
- (2) Paul: compassion, solidarity, faithfulness, relationship
- (3) John: healing, new creation, love, service
- (4) Hebrews: communion with common humanity
- (5) NB: the “receptions” are always rooted in the teaching and practice of the historical Jesus

Reading

- (1) José Pagola *Jesus. An historical approximation* (fifth expanded edition)
- (2) Eugene Boring *Introduction to the New Testament*
- (3) E. Boring and F. Craddock *The People's New Testament Commentary*
- (4) Bible: New English Translation (www.bible.org)