

The Early Believers in Yeshua & the Second Temple

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In the light of the New Testament and the Ancient Jewish Literature

It is interesting that the first story in the Acts of the Apostles after the account of Pentecost is happening in the entrance to the Jerusalem Temple. It seems to me that this is not an accidental order that Luke was just retelling as he received from his sources. When one starts looking for the place of the Jerusalem Temple in the life of the early church, and specially as it has been accounted in the book of Acts it is immediately evident that the Temple in Jerusalem had a very important place at least in the mind of the writer of the Acts of the Apostles. Here is a list of the stories and passages that speak of the Temple in the Acts of the Apostles, with some comments that will deal with the text and context. After dealing with the texts I should be able to make some observations and comments that will bear an application to our times.

Acts 2:46, "Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts . . ."

At once after the events of the day of Pentecost the writer of the Acts tells us this curious comment, namely that the disciples "continued to meet together in the Temple courts." The word that makes me want to ask questions is "continued." Was the Temple in Jerusalem the usual place of meeting for the disciples of Yeshua the Messiah. Does this "continued" mean only after the events of the day of Pentecost or should we say that even before the day of Pentecost it was the costume of the disciples of Yeshua to go to the Temple to pray. Was there a circumstance in which the disciples of Yeshua made the Temple their usual place of "meeting." If so, than why? I would propose to you that Yeshua's disciples were like all of Israel, and like Yeshua himself Temple going, and Temple worshipping Jews. Yeshua revered the Temple in Jerusalem and called it, "My Fathers' house. . ." (foot note 1)

Acts 3:1-2, "One day Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer-at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the Temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the Temple courts."

In this verse like in chapter 2:46, we see two of Yeshua's Apostles going up to the Temple at the time of prayer. There were two prayers in the Jerusalem Temple during the first century B.C./A.D. a morning prayer and an afternoon prayer. The afternoon prayer was called "Mincha". It was "Mincha" that Peter and John went to the Temple to prayer. One of the most ridiculous arguments that I have ever heard from Christians is that Peter and John, and Paul, would not go up to the Temple to pray, but they would go to "hunt" for souls. There is nothing that stands more opposite to the spirit of the Good News, and evangelism than to presume that Peter and John, and Paul in the Synagogue went to these places just to hunt for Souls, and not to pray with sincerity and truth to the God of Israel. In fact we will see in the continuation that Paul even at the very end of his "career" after preaching to many Gentiles and Jews, still comes to the Temple in

Jerusalem makes, “offerings” and “bring gifts to my people.” Peter and John met the lame man at the Gate Beautiful leading into the Temple. They heal this nameless lame man in the name of Yeshua the Messiah. (foot note 2)

Acts 4:1, “The priests and the captain of the Temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.”

In this episode we find Peter and John again “speaking to the people” in the Temple. This was in the aftermath of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. People from Jerusalem could not keep what happened in the courts of the Temple a secret, and soon the Temple guard came to arrest Peter and John and to stop them from speaking of Yeshua’s resurrection to the public. It is interesting to follow the text of the Acts and see that Peter and John returned to the courts of the Temple even on the next day after they were miraculously released from the prison. The Temple courts were the place of gathering and worship. Note the next verses from Acts chapter five

Acts 5:20-21, 24-25, “Go, stand in the Temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.” 21 At daybreak they entered the Temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. . . 24 On hearing this report, the captain of the Temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. 25 Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple courts teaching the people.”

In chapter 3, Peter and John went to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray “Mincha”. The miracle of healing the lame man happened by the power of God. In this chapter we are told that an Angel of the Lord gave them instruction to stand in the Temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life. This is after they had been arrested and warned not to preach any more about Yeshua and His resurrection from the dead. The Temple courts was the place that they normally met to worship, and to serve the people with the power of God (foot note 3). The tenacity of Peter and the Apostles was not just an act of courage and dedication to the goal. The Apostles had a sense of mission to their own people. They felt that the message of “salvation” is the most important thing that Israel their own flesh and blood has need of at that time. Their sincerity was not in question, and their proclamation was not for gain. They like all the Jews went to the Temple in the first place to pray, and in the second place to teach in every possible venue the good news that Yeshua is the Messiah (foot note 4).

Acts 21:26-29 26 The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the Temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them. 27 When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the Temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the Temple area and defiled this holy place.” 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the Temple area.)

The episode of Paul in the Jerusalem Temple in the book of Acts takes more than a third of the book by

volume, and probably is one of the reasons that Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles. In order to understand these events better we must look at them in perspective. In Acts chapter 15 we have the record of the conference that Paul and the leaders of the community of believers held in Jerusalem to discuss the issue of circumcision for the Gentiles who are turning toward God. The up-shot of these discussion was a compromise to allow the Gentiles into the "Body of Christ" or "the community of the saints" without compelling them to totally convert to Judaism and circumcision. The only requirements that the Apostles made were to have the Gentiles follow the laws that were given by God to Noah and his family. Those laws would obviously apply to all mankind since according to the Word of God all men after the flood were descendants of Noah's family. Paul and Barnabas took the letter from the Apostles in Jerusalem to the congregations in Asia Minor, and informed the communities that the Gentiles would be welcomed into the fellowship of the saints without the requirement of circumcision. With this letter Paul also raised funds for the "saints of Jerusalem" from among the Gentile fellowships in Asia Minor and Greece. He made a major effort to bring these donations of charity to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (Shavuot), because it is the feast of first fruits, and the giving of the Torah. It is on this occasion that the elders of the community of believers in Jerusalem meet Paul as he comes into the city and boast before him in the following manner:

19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. (Acts 21:19-24).

Paul told the elders of Jerusalem "what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." The elders of Jerusalem first tell him that the community of believers in Jerusalem is made up of "thousands of Jews who believe and have zeal for the Torah." This they speak to Paul in my opinion in order to set the stage and confront him with the rumors that Paul had been teaching Jews "to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs." In order to remedy these rumors Yacov (James in the English Bibles) proposes: "Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law." From this proposal of the elders of the Jerusalem community we can learn both the practices and the attitudes of the Jerusalem believers toward the Temple in Jerusalem. Here are some observations from this text:

The elders of the community of believers were afraid of the reaction of the Jerusalem church to the rumors of Paul teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons, and take light the Law of Moses.

The church in Jerusalem saw going to the Temple and participation in "purification vows" as a test of "faithfulness" and "orthodoxy" of their faith in Yeshua. In other words, Paul's going to the Temple and paying for the "purification vows" of these four men, would be a proof to the Jerusalem church that the rumors about his teaching Jews against the Law of Moses, would be totally dispelled. The early church in

Jerusalem looked at Temple rites as an authoritative station for the authenticity of their faith in God and in His Messiah. They continued to frequent the Temple and to participate in the normative Jewish practices as all the rest of Israel did at that time.

Paul, of course, complied with the request of Yacov and the Jerusalem elders. He took these four men to the Temple, paid for their “purification vows” and on that occasion released himself of the vow that he took in Cenchrea (foot note 5). This compliance of Paul to Yacov’s request does not indicate a weakness in Paul’s faith as some Christian commentators have deemed. It indicates the commitment of Paul to the Temple and to the Jewish standards of faith in the Torah. Paul a number of times after this occasion repeats the claim: “I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets (foot note 6).” The Temple was a major part of Jewish worship and the community life. We hear already in the earliest parts of the Gospels of Joseph and Mary bringing Yeshua to the Jerusalem Temple at the end of his twelfth year to the Temple for his “bar-mitzvah.” We hear of Yeshua going to the Temple on every occasion when he visited Jerusalem. We hear of Yeshua calling the Temple “my Father’s house.”

There were sects in Judaism of the first century, like the Essenes that had a very negative attitude toward the Jerusalem Temple and considered it and it’s priest evil and defiled. But, that is not the attitude that one perceives from the New Testament and specially not from the book of Acts. The Apostles of Yeshua go to the Temple, offer sacrifices, and give “gifts of money” in the Temple. As least one of the reasons for Paul to make a special trip to Jerusalem for the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost or feast of weeks) is to fulfill the command of making a pilgrimage at least once each year to Jerusalem for the feast (foot note 7). This is made very clear in Paul’s defense that is recorded in Acts 24:14-18: *“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. 17 “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings (foot note 8). 18 I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the Temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance.”*

Acts 22:17-19, “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the Temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ he said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ 19 “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you.’”

These verses that describe Paul’s defense before the crowds gathered in the outer court of the Temple in Jerusalem. Paul is standing on the steps leading to the fortress Antonia after a Roman commander ran down to save him from the angry crowd that wanted to lynch him (foot note 9). They believed that he was bringing Gentiles into the area that was for Jews only. In this defense speech Paul is relating of his return to Jerusalem after his Damascus Road experience. He tells the crowd that in the Temple, while he was praying, he fell into a trance, and heard God (“Lord” in this place stands for the “Holy Name of God.”) telling him to leave Jerusalem immediately. For Paul the Temple was still the place to go and pray to God. In fact this trance/vision that Paul receives from God in the Temple stands as a testimony of the authenticity and acceptability of his Damascus Road experience with Yeshua. The Temple in Jerusalem is the place where one still meets and communicates with God, just as the prophets of old did. This is an important note to

remember when we come to the conclusion of this article.

Acts 25:8, "Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the Temple or against Caesar."

In Paul's defense before Festus the Roman governor, in Caesarea by the Sea, Paul repeats the same refrain as he did before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. In *Acts 24:14*, "I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets. . ." In *Acts 28:17*, "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors. . ." In our text we see Paul more specifically state that he has done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the Temple. In other words Paul's attitude toward the Temple and his behavior was according to the Law of Moses, and the respect due to the "house of the Lord." It is interesting to note that Paul does not use the term "Law of Moses" here. He uses "the Law of the Jews" ὅ-ὅ which is much more generic in nature, and would be better understood by Festus who was a Roman, but at the same time it would include customs and laws that might be related to Jewish tradition and are not a part of the written Law of Moses. In the passage from *Acts 28:17*, quoted above we see that Paul states that he has "done nothing against the customs of our ancestors" referring in my opinion to the oral law of the Jewish people. There would be nothing easier for the Jewish leaders who were present in this "hearing" before Festus to point out that Paul in fact did break the Law of Moses, or did something that would be offensive or against the "tradition" or "customs" of the Jewish people. The text, however, does not indicate that the Leaders of the Jewish people brought any new evidence or facts to justify Paul's imprisonment. Paul in fact did nothing against the Temple

Summery and Conclusions:

We have examined the main passages in the Acts of the Apostles that deal with the Temple in Jerusalem and with events that took place in the Temple precinct. Here are some of the observations that we ought to be able to draw from the evidence:

1. The First Century Church in Jerusalem continued to look at the Temple as the central place of worship and service to God. The Apostles frequented the Temple for prayer and for services on regular "daily" basis that included the normative practices of "offerings" and "gifts" that all the Jews practiced.
2. The Apostles including Paul were not excluded from the normative practices and services in the Temple. Only when the "gentiles" entered into the picture, and Paul was falsely accused to have brought "gentiles" into the Temple the problems arose.
3. 4. Paul, and I presume the other leaders of the Early Church, respected and observed not only the laws from the Torah, but also every tradition and practice that all the "normative" streams of Judaism observed in regards to the Temple. This included the particular practices of taking vows and being released from them by sacrifices of thanksgiving and ritual purification.
5. The Early Church did not see any conflict between the validity of Yeshua's sacrifice and the coexistence and worship in the Temple. Yeshua's sacrifice must have been considered the completion or perfection of the sacrificial system of the Temple, but not the annulment of it (foot note 10).
6. 7. Up to a point in time the Early Church must have made the Temple grounds their regular meeting

place. We learn this from Acts 2:46, "Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts . . ." The reason for this choice of meeting place can be varied, but whatever the reason might be, it should be noticed that this was their choice. It must be concluded from this text that at least the Early Church of Jerusalem had no serious objections to meet in the courts of the Temple, and probably considered it more than appropriate to do so. When they met there for worship and study there must not have been much privacy and all their services, teachings, and if you wish singing, must have been acceptable to the proletariat of Jerusalem. In fact I would think that one of the reasons that the Temple courts were a choice place for the Early Church to use for meetings was precisely the open witness that their services and behavior be to the passers by. Let us now discuss the implications of the first century situation for the Messianic Jews today:

1. There is no Temple in Jerusalem, and it does not look very promising for the near future that there will be a Temple for Jews on Mt. Moriah. Jews agree that the Temple was taken away from us by God because of our transgressions. There are a few small splinter groups who clamor to enter the Temple mount and pray there, and demonstrate a desire to rebuild a Temple. The state of Israel has persistently forbidden any such provocation. The extent of activities of these small and extreme groups has been to demonstrate near the gates to the Temple mount, and make models of some of the Temple instruments and artifacts of worship. I am ashamed to say that there are Christian groups with untamed eschatological teachings that wish for the Jews to rebuild the Temple so that the anti-Christ might come sooner and force a speedy return of Jesus to Jerusalem. These Christian groups heavily finance at least one of these "Temple faithful" groups, in spite of the fact that their leader continually blasphemes Yeshua the Messiah, and vehemently opposes the Jewish followers of the Messiah.
2. 3. Most of the Messianic Jews and those who call themselves Messianic Jews in Israel have an ambivalent attitude toward Judaism in general, and the Temple more specifically. There is little teaching on the subject in Christian circles and in Messianic Jewish circles in Israel. On the one hand most "believers" hold fast to the teaching of the Epistles to the Hebrews that is clear about Yeshua being, Hebrews 7:27, "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." On the other hand the strong expectation of some of the Jewish people for a full restoration of all the land and the worship of God in the Jerusalem Temple lingers and leaves an echo in the soul of many. And, when you have some Christians who tend toward a more literal interpretation of the prophetic passages in Zechariah the tendency to desire a restoration of the Temple does exist.
4. 5. For me the most important lesson to be learned from the examination of the Acts of the Apostles in regard to their attitude toward the Temple is the enduring connection and observance of their Jewish heritage and life style. There is nothing in the New Testament that would indicate that any of the Apostles, including Paul, departed even a little from their faithfulness to the Torah. They all stayed faithful to their Jewish life style, to their faith that in Yeshua the Law of Moses and the Prophets of Israel are fulfilled and vindicated. They were sure that their faith that Yeshua is the Messiah is not in conflict with the revelation of God to Israel. For this reason they did not look upon going to the Temple and worshipping there as a breach of their relationship to Israel's true faith, and Yeshua's message for the world.

6. I would not like to venture and predict what will happen in Jerusalem in regard to the rebuilding of the Temple. My personal views are very close to those of Mimonides who lived in the 11th century A.D. I do not need a Temple in order to worship the God of my fathers, and give praise to Yeshua the Messiah. I can worship Him in spirit and in truth in Jerusalem or under a Jojo tree in Africa just the same. But, if there was a Temple in Jerusalem, a Temple that was "kosher" according to the instructions of God in the Torah of Moses, and a true priesthood, I would not hesitate to go up to the "house of the Lord" and do what Paul and Peter, and John did in the first century before the Temple was destroyed.

It would be extremely presumptuous of me as a Jew who believes with all his heart that Yeshua is the Messiah to say what will really happen. In the eyes of my flesh it seems undesirable to restore a dead system, or to think that in our time God would still desire to have the smell of burned flesh in His nostrils.

Those of us who are committed to the restoration of the First Century Church, the New Testament Church, or just being faithful to God's Word of truth, must hold fast to the facts that the New Testament tells us. We can not allow ourselves to build fences around the word of God that will make our whole idea of restoration a farce. We need to be open to the idea that in all things we want to be like the first century church as it is described in the whole New Testament and specially in the book of Acts.

The Apostles went to the Jewish Synagogue every Sabbath when they were in the Diaspora, they went to the Temple and met to worship God and the Messiah in the Temple courts when they were in Jerusalem. They kept the Jewish holidays, and customs, and they did welcome their Gentile brothers and sisters as equals and one in the Kingdom of God. It seems to me that when we speak of the restoration of the New Testament Church we need to take these points into account.

Foot notes:

1. Lk 2:49, "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"
NIV: Jn 2:16, "To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"
2. Acts 3:8, 10, "He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the Temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. . . . 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the Temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."
3. Acts 5:12, "And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade."
4. Acts 5:42, "Day after day, in the Temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."
5. Acts 18:18, "Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken."
6. Acts 24:14
7. Exodus 23: 17 "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD. 18 "Do not offer

the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast. "The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning. (See Also: Acts 18:21, in the King James Version: 21But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. In the NIV the translators did not think that this verse in the diplomatic text of King James has sufficient support to be included in the eclectic text of the Bible society. It seems to me that this is just one more example of the de-judiazing trends in modern western theology being reflected in the more modern editions of the English Bibles.)

8. The Greek word here is the same standard word used for "sacrifices" all through the Old Testament and New Testament. One more example of the above mentioned trend ý-ý this time in the choice of words that the translators preferred to use in the English.
9. Acts 26:21, "That is why the Jews seized me in the Temple courts and tried to kill me."
10. Prof. I. Yadin, held the opinion that the letter to the Hebrews was written to a group from the Essene community who accepted Yeshua as the Messiah and were disappointed and desperate almost to the point of giving up their faith. If Prof. Yadin's theory is correct the attitude of the letter to the Hebrews on the Temple in Jerusalem reflects the "dead sea sect's views." These views of the Essene community could have been different from those of the Pharisees who became believers