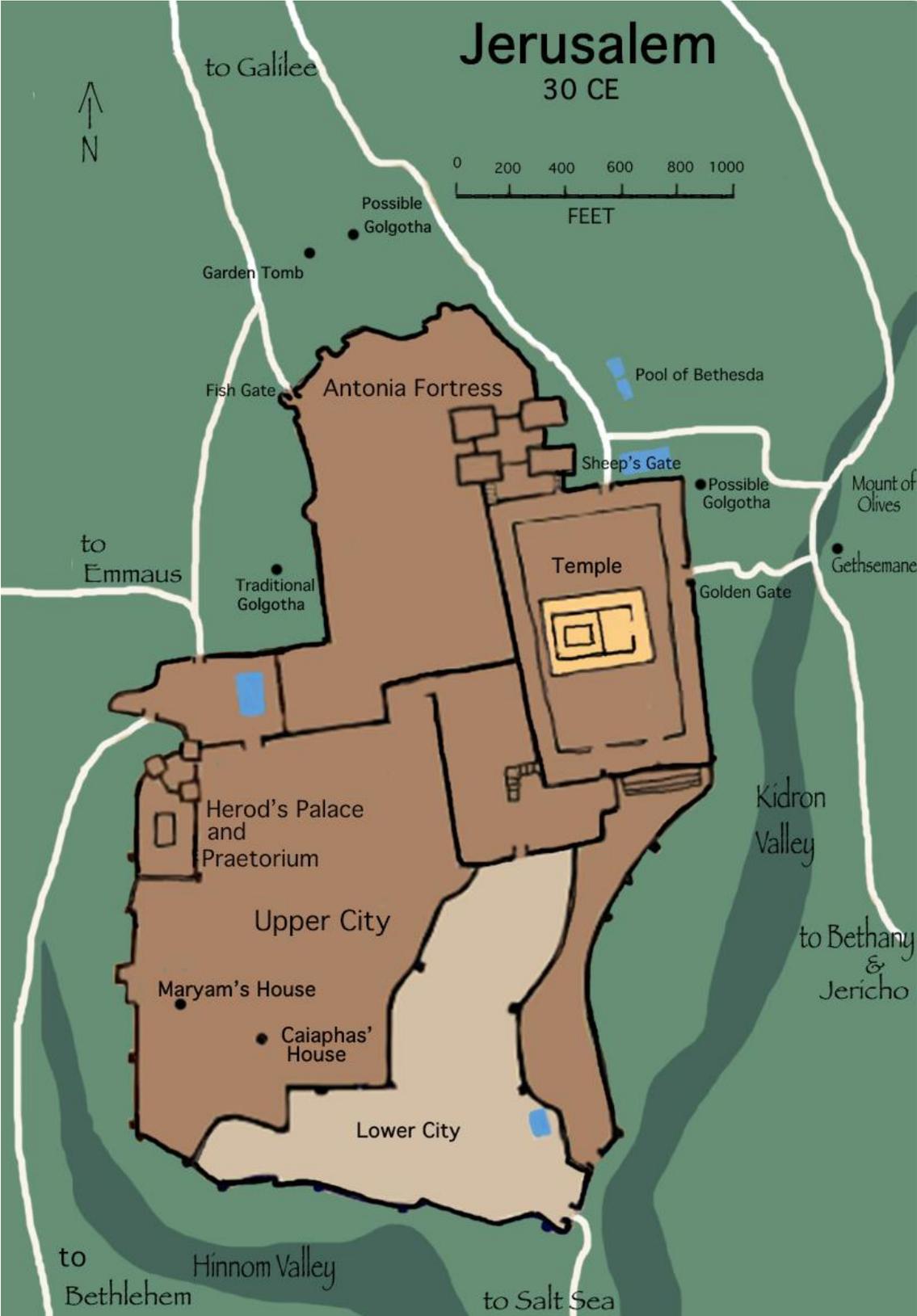


First Century Israel



Map of Jerusalem, 30 CE

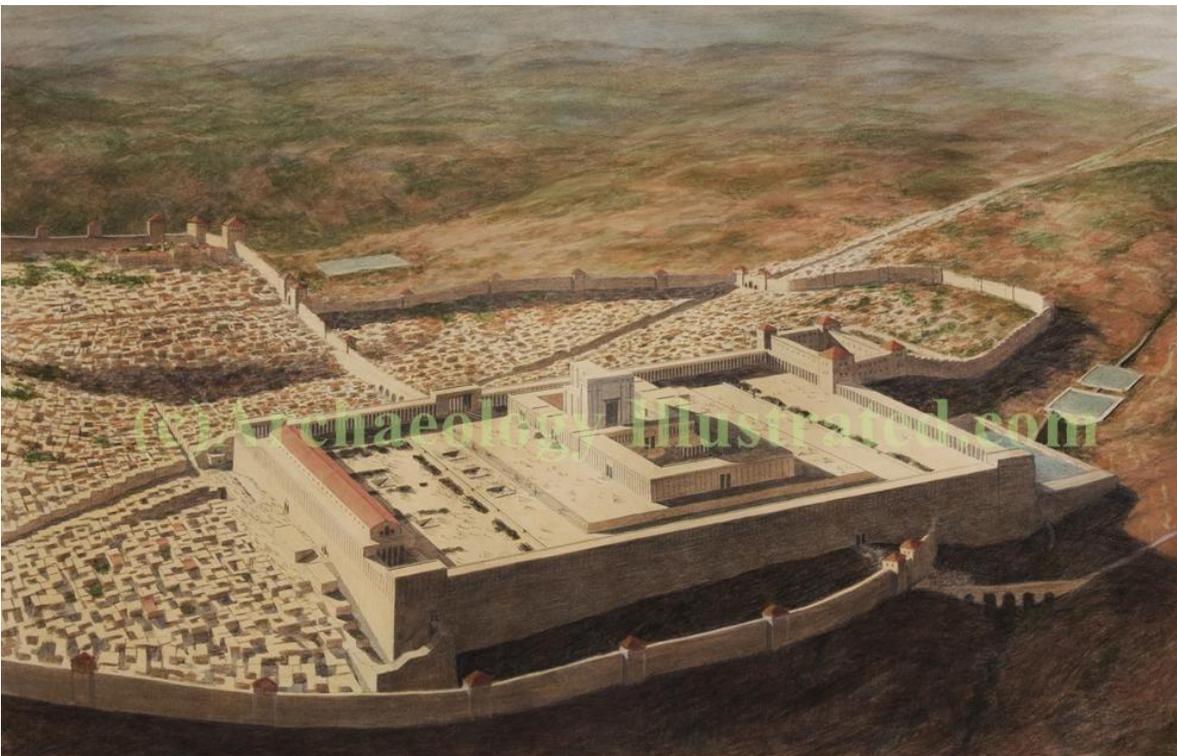


ARTIST RENDERINGS OF JERUSALEM IN THE FIRST CENTURY, C.E.

From the Southwest



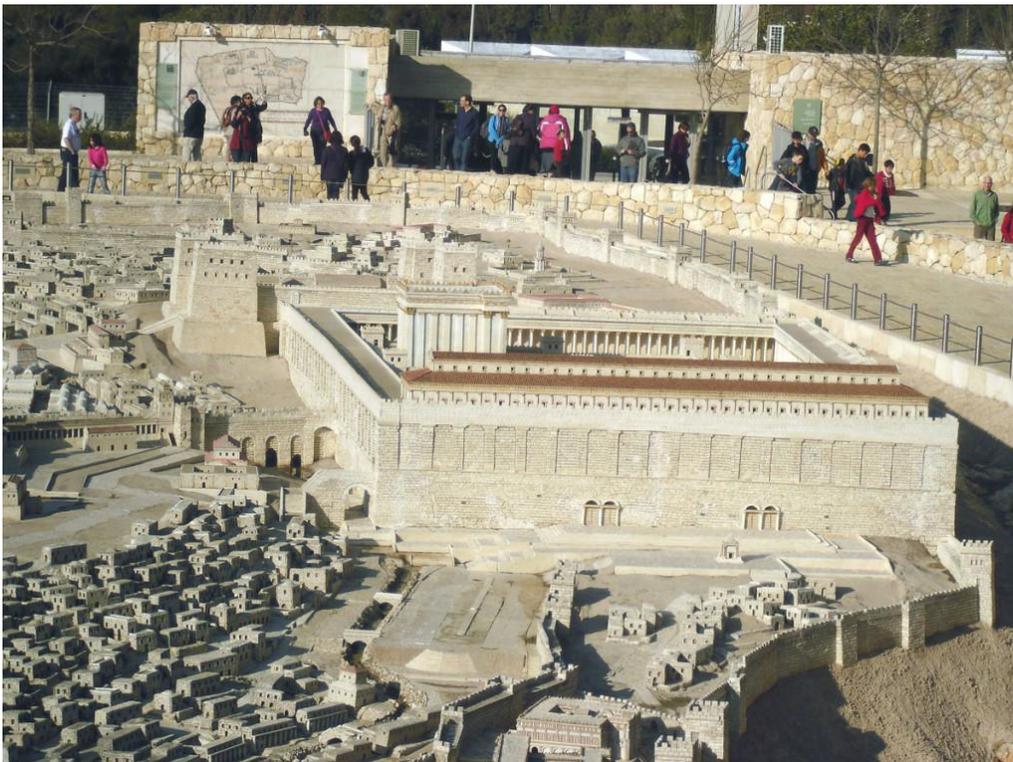
From the East/Southeast (The Mount of Olives)



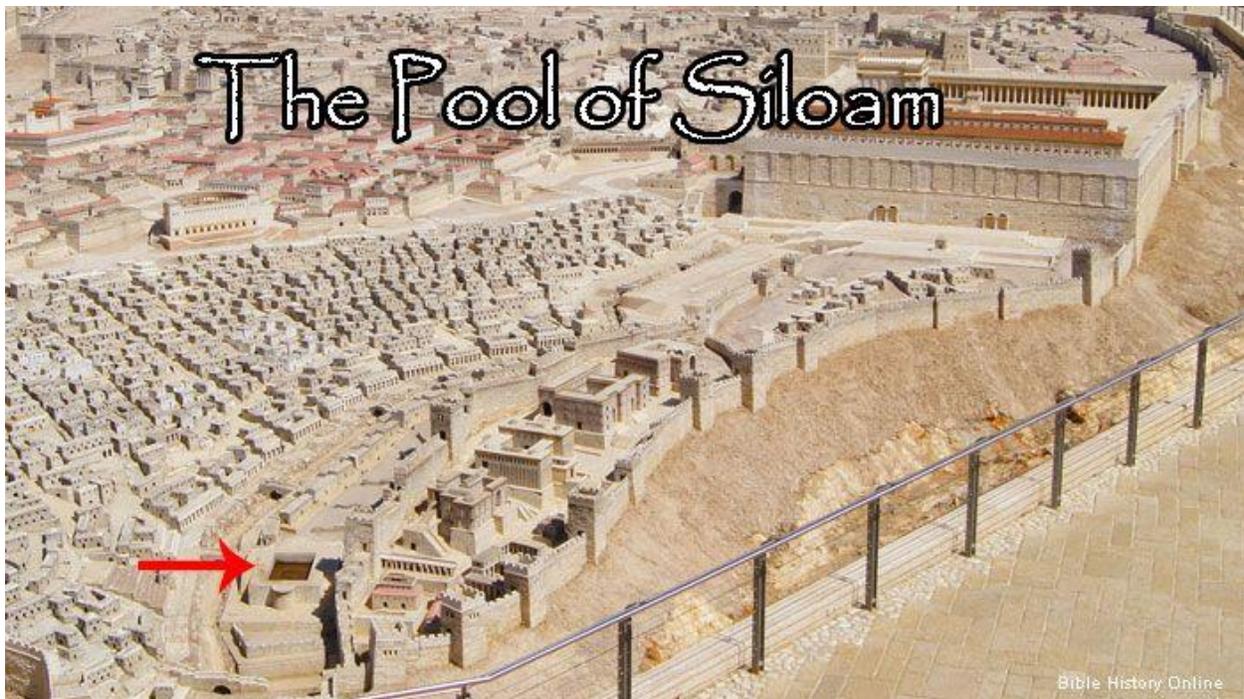
From the East/Northeast (Mt. Scopus)



The Archaeological Model of Herod's Temple, Now at the Israel Museum:



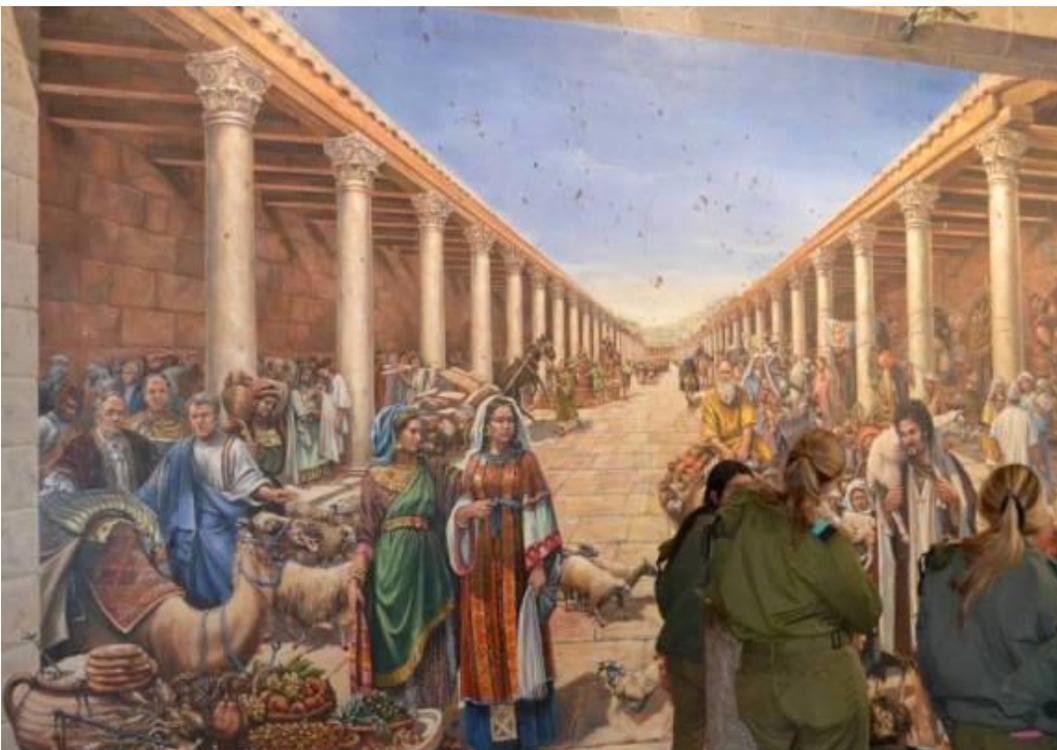
The Archway and Steps Leading to the Temple Mount



Street Scenes



The “Principal Cardo” main shopping thoroughfare



A typical home (cutaway view)



GROUPS IN JERUSALEM

- Roman authorities and military
- Priests and Temple hierarchy: scribes, elders

Sectarian Groups (Josephus):

- Sadducees: aristocratic circles
- Pharisees: leaders of the common people. NOT a political party: their authority rested on the public perception of their piety.

The Pharisees likely had a liberal wing and a conservative wing, known as

“The House of Hillel”

and

“The House of Shammai”

“They believed that the ancestral tradition was as binding as the written Torah of Moses.”

- “Fourth Philosophy”

HILLEL AND SHAMMAI (Jewish Virtual Library)

In the first century [BCE](#), [Babylonian](#) born Hillel (later known as Hillel the Elder) migrated to the [Land of Israel](#) to study and worked as a woodcutter, eventually becoming the most influential force in Jewish life. Hillel is said to have lived in such great poverty that he was sometimes unable to pay the admission fee to study [Torah](#), and because of him that fee was abolished. He was known for his kindness, gentleness, concern for humanity. One of his most famous sayings, recorded in [Pirkei Avot](#) (Ethics

of the Fathers, a tractate of the [Mishnah](#)), is "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?" The [Hillel organization](#), a network of Jewish college student organizations, is named for him. Hillel and his descendants established academies of learning and were the leaders of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel for several centuries. The Hillel dynasty ended with the death of Hillel II in 365 [CE](#).

Hillel the Elder's friendly adversary was Shammai, a native of the Land of Israel about whom little is known except that he was a builder, known for the strictness of his views. He was reputed to be dour, quick-tempered and impatient. Both lived during the reign of [King Herod](#) (37-4 BCE), an oppressive period in Jewish history because of the [Roman](#) occupation of the Land of Israel. Shammai was concerned that if Jews had too much contact with the Romans, the Jewish community would be weakened, and this attitude was reflected in his strict interpretation of Jewish law. Hillel did not share Shammai's fear and therefore was more liberal in his view of law.

Hillel was the more popular of the two scholars, and he was chosen by the [Sanhedrin](#), the supreme Jewish court, to serve as its president. While Hillel and Shammai themselves did not differ on a great many basic issues of Jewish law, their disciples were often in conflict. The [Talmud](#) records over 300 differences of opinion between Beit Hillel (the House of Hillel) and Beit Shammai (the House of Shammai). The [rabbis](#) of the Talmud generally sided with the rulings of the School of Hillel, although the Sages believed that both views were valid. Sixteenth-century kabbalist [Rabbi Isaac Luria](#) (the "Ari") said that not only are both the words of the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel enduring on the conceptual level, but each has its time and place on the pragmatic level as well. In our present world, we follow the rulings of the House of Hillel, but in the era of [Messiah](#), the majority opinion will shift in favor of the House of Shammai, and their rulings will then be implemented. The Ari believed that in our present reality, where divine commandments must be imposed upon an imperfect world, the rulings of the House of Hillel represent the ultimate in conformity to the divine will, while the rulings of the House of Shammai represent an ideal that is too lofty for our present state (which is why we perceive them as "stricter" and more confining) and can only be realized on the conceptual level. In the era of Messiah, the situation will be reversed: a perfected world will embrace the more exacting application of Torah law expressed by the House of Shammai, while the Hillelian school of interpretation will endure only conceptually.

Hillel's rulings were often based on concern for the welfare of the individual. For example with regard to the remarriage of an [aquna](#), whose husband is not known with certainty to be alive or dead, the view of Hillel (and most of his colleagues) was that she can remarry even on the basis of indirect evidence of the husband's death. Beit Shammai required that witnesses come forth with direct testimony before she was permitted to remarry. Another example of his leniency as compared with Shammai involves [converts](#); Hillel favored the admission of proselytes into Judaism even when they made unreasonable demands, such as one did by demanding that the whole Torah be taught to him quickly "while standing on one foot." Hillel accepted this person as eligible for conversion, whereas Shammai dismissed him as not serious about Judaism.

Commerce and the Temple in First-Century Jerusalem by [David Hendin](#)

The Torah commands [pilgrimage](#) "up to Jerusalem" for three festivals: Passover, Shavout, and [Sukkot](#).

In the first century C.E., when pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem, they frequently encountered [money changers](#) and merchants around the Jerusalem temple. Merchants sold animals—doves or cattle—for temple sacrifices; it was easier for travelers to buy an animal near the temple than to bring one along.

When Jews traveled to Jerusalem from other lands, they brought money for room, board, and souvenirs. Most importantly, they were required to pay the annual half-shekel tribute to the temple. The currency they had would be of their native land or acquired in trade along their way.

Money changers performed a key service when they converted the varieties of local coinage into the required tribute of silver shekels or half-shekels of Tyre ([Tosefta](#) Ketubbot 13:20, [Exod 30:11-16](#)). Many writers have suggested that the Tyre currency was preferred because it did not defy the [Decalogue](#) by depicting the graven image of a foreign king, and that is true. But the Tyre coins portray a [pagan](#) god of Tyre, Melqarth-Herakles—which was certainly even more offensive!

Images on coins, however, do not contaminate them even for payment to the temple. The [Mishnah](#) explains that money is [unclean](#) only if it is used for another purpose, such as for jewelry ([Mishnah](#) Kelim 12:7). The law stated that the temple must not be shortchanged in any way, so the silver coins of Tyre were most likely mandated because they were of good silver and true weight at a time when many coins were debased or lightweight.

The [New Testament](#) uses several words for money changers. In [Matt 21:12](#), *kolybistes* refers to the changing of foreign currency; *trapezites*, used in [Matt 25:27](#), derives from the root "trapeze" or "table" (hence the "tables of the money changers"); in John, *kermatistes* from the Greek *kermitizo* means "to cut small," or to give small change.

These different words represent the functions of the money changer. A banker would hold or transfer funds (a fee was charged but was precisely defined so as not to violate the biblical [prohibition](#) against charging interest in [Deut 23:20-21](#)). A trader would exchange foreign currency for a fee and would change coins to larger or smaller denominations for a fee.

Money changers and animal merchants were ubiquitous around the temple, even in the outer Court of the Gentiles. The money changers and sellers of livestock were forced to operate outside of the temple. Indeed, archaeological excavations along the Western Wall of the [Temple Mount](#) in Jerusalem have revealed a street and a row of small shops that likely housed money changers, sellers of small animals, and souvenir merchants.

Theirs was a good business, especially during the pilgrimage holidays. It's easy to imagine how money changers and other merchants could become rowdy while competing for business ("Change here! Our commissions are lower!"). This competition must have reached a point of offensiveness when Jesus upended their tables and cleansed the temple of commerce.

David Hendin, "Commerce and the Temple in First-Century Jerusalem", n.p. [cited 11 Mar 2022].

Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/passages/related-articles/commerce-and-the-temple-in-first-century-jerusalem>