

# Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

## The Antiquities of the Jews ( book 15 chapter 11)

*(How Herod Rebuilt The Temple And Raised It Higher And Made It More Magnificent Than It Was Before; As Also Concerning That Tower Which He Called Antonia.)*

### 1.

[380] And now Herod, in the eighteenth year of his reign, and after the acts already mentioned, undertook a very great work, that is, to build of himself the temple of God, and make it larger in compass, and to raise it to a most magnificent altitude, as esteeming it to be the most glorious of all his actions, as it really was, to bring it to perfection; and that this would be sufficient for an everlasting memorial of him. [381] But as he knew the multitude were not ready nor willing to assist him in so vast a design, he thought to prepare them first by making a speech to them, and then set about the work itself; so he called them together, and spoke thus to them: [382] "I think I need not speak to you, my countrymen, about such other works as I have done since I came to the kingdom, although I may say they have been performed in such a manner as to bring more security to you than glory to myself. [383] For I have neither been negligent in the most difficult times about what tended to ease your necessities, nor have the buildings I have made been so proper to preserve me as yourselves from injuries; and I imagine that, with God's assistance, I have advanced the nation of the Jews to a degree of happiness which they never had before. [384] And for the particular edifices belonging to your own country, and your own cities, as also to those cities that we have lately acquired, which we have erected and greatly adorned, and thereby augmented the dignity of your nation, it seems to me a needless task to enumerate them to you, since you well know them yourselves; but as to that undertaking which I have a mind to set about at present, and which will be a work of the greatest piety and excellence that can possibly be undertaken by us, I will now declare it to you. [385] Our fathers, indeed, when they were returned from Babylon, built this temple to God Almighty, yet does it want sixty cubits of its largeness in altitude; for so much did that first temple which Solomon built exceed this temple. [386] Nor let any one condemn our fathers for their

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

negligence or want of piety herein, for it was not their fault that the temple was no higher; for they were Cyrus, and Darius the son of Hystaspes<sup>1</sup>, who determined the measures for its rebuilding; and it hath been by reason of the subjection of those fathers of ours to them and to their posterity, and after them to the Macedonians, that they had not the opportunity to follow the original model of this pious edifice, nor could raise it to its ancient altitude. [387] But since I am now, by God's will, your governor, and I have had peace a long time, and have gained great riches and large revenues, and, what is the principal filing of all, I am at amity with and well regarded by the Romans, who, if I may so say, are the rulers of the whole world, I will do my endeavor to correct that imperfection, which has arisen from the necessity of our affairs, and the slavery we have been under formerly, and to make a thankful return, after the most pious manner, to God, for what blessings I have received from him, by giving me this kingdom, and that by rendering his temple as complete as I am able."

### 2.

[388] And this was the speech which Herod made to them; but still this speech affrighted many of the people, as being unexpected by them; and because it seemed incredible, it did not encourage them, but put a damp upon them, for they were afraid that he would pull down the whole edifice, and not be able to bring his intentions to perfection for its rebuilding; and this danger appeared to them to be very great, and the vastness of the undertaking to be such as could hardly be accomplished. [389] But while they were in this disposition, the king encouraged them, and told them he would not pull down their temple till all things were gotten ready for building it up entirely again. And as he promised them this beforehand, so he did not break his word with them. [390] But got ready a thousand wagons, that were to bring stones for the building, and chose out ten thousand of the most skillful workmen, and bought a thousand sacerdotal garments for as many of the priests, and had some of them taught the arts of stone-cutters, and

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<sup>1</sup> Achashverosh

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

others of carpenters, and then began to build; but this not till every thing was well prepared for the work.

### 3.

[391] So Herod took away the old foundations, and laid others, and erected the temple upon them, being in length a hundred cubits, and in height twenty additional cubits, which [twenty], upon the sinking of their foundations fell down; and this part it was that we resolved to raise again in the days of Nero. [392] Now the temple was built of stones that were white and strong, and each of their length was twenty-five cubits, their height was eight, and their breadth about twelve. [393] And the whole structure, as also the structure of the royal cloister, was on each side much lower, but the middle was much higher, till they were visible to those that dwelt in the country for a great many furlongs, but chiefly to such as lived over against them, and those that approached to them. [394] The temple had doors also at the entrance, and lintels over them, of the same height with the temple itself. They were adorned with embroidered veils, with their flowers of purple, and pillars interwoven. [395] And over these, but under the crown-work, was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators, to see what vast materials there were, and with what great skill the workmanship was done. [396] He also encompassed the entire temple with very large cloisters, contriving them to be in a due proportion thereto; and he laid out larger sums of money upon them than had been done before him, till it seemed that no one else had so greatly adorned the temple as he had done. There was a large wall to both the cloisters, which wall was itself the most prodigious work that was ever heard of by man. [397] The hill was a rocky ascent, that declined by degrees towards the east parts of the city, till it came to an elevated level. [398] This hill it was which Solomon, who was the first of our kings, by Divine revelation, encompassed with a wall; it was of excellent workmanship upwards, and round the top of it. He also built a wall below, beginning at the bottom, which was

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

encompassed by a deep valley; and at the south side he laid rocks together, and bound them one to another with lead, and included some of the inner parts, till it proceeded to a great height. [399] And till both the largeness of the square edifice and its altitude were immense, and till the vastness of the stones in the front were plainly visible on the outside, yet so that the inward parts were fastened together with iron, and preserved the joints immovable for all future times. [400] When this work [for the foundation] was done in this manner, and joined together as part of the hill itself to the very top of it, he wrought it all into one outward surface, and filled up the hollow places which were about the wall, and made it a level on the external upper surface, and a smooth level also. This hill was walled all round, and in compass four furlongs, [the distance of] each angle containing in length a furlong. [401] but within this wall, and on the very top of all, there ran another wall of stone also, having, on the east quarter, a double cloister, of the same length with the wall; in the midst of which was the temple itself. This cloister looked to the gates of the temple; and it had been adorned by many kings in former times. [402] And round about the entire temple were fixed the spoils taken from barbarous nations; all these had been dedicated to the temple by Herod, with the addition of those he had taken from the Arabians.

### 4.

[403] Now on the north side [of the temple] was built a citadel, whose walls were square-cut, and strong, and of extraordinary firmness. This citadel was built by the kings of the Hasmonean race, who were also high priests before Herod, and they called it the Tower, in which were repositied the vestments of the high priest, which the high priest only put on at the time when he was to offer sacrifice. [404] These vestments king Herod kept in that place; and after his death they were under the power of the Romans, until the time of Tiberius Caesar. [405] under whose reign Vitellius, the president of Syria, when he once came to Jerusalem, and had been most magnificently received by the multitude, he had a mind to make them some requital for the kindness they had shewn

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

him; so, upon their petition to have those holy vestments in their own power, he wrote about them to Tiberius Caesar, who granted his request: and this their power over the sacerdotal vestments continued with the Jews till the death of king Agrippa. [406] But after that, Cassius Longinus, who was president of Syria, and Cuspius Fadus, who was procurator of Judea, enjoined the Jews to reposit those vestments in the tower of Antonia, [407] for that they ought to have them in their power, as they formerly had. However, the Jews sent ambassadors to Claudius Caesar, to intercede with him for them; upon whose coming, king Agrippa, junior, being then at Rome, asked for and obtained the power over them from the emperor, who gave command to Vitellius, who was then commander in Syria, to give it them accordingly. [408] Before that time they were kept under the seal of the high priest, and of the treasurers of the temple; which treasurers, the day before a festival, went up to the Roman captain of the temple guards, and viewed their own seal, and received the vestments; and again, when the festival was over, they brought it to the same place, and showed the captain of the temple guards their seal, which corresponded with his seal, and reposit them there. [409] And that these things were so, the afflictions that happened to us afterwards [about them] are sufficient evidence. But for the tower itself, when Herod the king of the Jews had fortified it more firmly than before, in order to secure and guard the temple, he gratified Antonius, who was his friend, and the Roman ruler, and then gave it the name of the Tower of Antonia.

### 5.

[410] Now in the western quarters of the enclosure of the temple there were four gates; the first led to the king's palace, and went to a passage over the intermediate valley; two more led to the suburbs of the city; and the last led to the other city, where the road descended down into the valley by a great number of steps, and thence up again by the ascent for the city lay over against the temple in the manner of a theater, and was encompassed with a deep valley along the entire south quarter. [411] But the fourth front of the temple, which was southward, had indeed itself gates in its middle, as also it

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

had the royal cloisters, with three walks, which reached in length from the east valley unto that on the west, for it was impossible it should reach any farther. [412] And this cloister deserves to be mentioned better than any other under the sun; for while the valley was very deep, and its bottom could not be seen, if you looked from above into the depth, this further vastly high elevation of the cloister stood upon that height, insomuch that if any one looked down from the top of the battlements, or down both those altitudes, he would be giddy, while his sight could not reach to such an immense depth. [413] This cloister had pillars that stood in four rows one over against the other all along, for the fourth row was interwoven into the wall, which [also was built of stone]; and the thickness of each pillar was such, that three men might, with their arms extended, fathom it round, and join their hands again, while its length was twenty-seven feet, with a double spiral at its basis; [414] And the number of all the pillars [in that court] was a hundred and sixty-two. Their capitals were made with sculptures after the Corinthian order, and caused an amazement [to the spectators], by reason of the grandeur of the whole. [415] These four rows of pillars included three intervals for walking in the middle of this cloister; two of which walks were made parallel to each other, and were contrived after the same manner; the breadth of each of them was thirty feet, the length was a furlong, and the height fifty feet; but the breadth of the middle part of the cloister was one and a half of the other, and the height was double, for it was much higher than those on each side. [416] But the roofs were adorned with deep sculptures in wood, representing many sorts of figures. The middle was much higher than the rest, and the wall of the front was adorned with beams, resting upon pillars, that were interwoven into it, and that front was all of polished stone, insomuch that its fineness, to such as had not seen it, was incredible, and to such as had seen it, was greatly amazing. [417] Thus was the first enclosure. In the midst of which, and not far from it, was the second, to be gone up to by a few steps: this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death. [418] Now this inner enclosure had on its southern and northern quarters three gates

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

[equally] distant one from another; but on the east quarter , towards the sun-rising, there was one large gate, through which such as were pure came in, together with their wives. [419] But the temple further inward in that gate was not allowed to the women; but still more inward was there a third [court of the] temple, where into it was not lawful for any but the priests alone to enter. The temple itself was within this; and before that temple was the altar, upon which we offer our sacrifices and burnt-offerings to God. [420] Into none of these three did king Herod enter, for he was forbidden, because he was not a priest. However, he took care of the cloisters and the outer enclosures, and these he built in eight years.

### 6.

[421] But the temple itself was built by the priests in a year and six months; upon which all the people were full of joy; and presently they returned thanks, in the first place, to God; and in the next place, for the alacrity the king had showed. They feasted and celebrated this rebuilding of the temple. [422] And for the king, he sacrificed three hundred oxen to God, as did the rest every one according to his ability; the number of which sacrifices is not possible to set down, for it cannot be that we should truly relate it. [423] for at the same time with this celebration for the work about the temple fell also the day of the king's inauguration, which he kept of an old custom as a festival, and it now coincided with the other, which coincidence of them both made the festival most illustrious.

### 7.

[424] There was also an occult passage built for the king; it led from Antonia to the inner temple, at its eastern gate; over which he also erected for himself a tower, that he might have the opportunity of a subterraneous ascent to the temple, in order to guard against any sedition which might be made by the people against their kings. [425] It is also

## **Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash**

reported, that during the time that the temple was building, it did not rain in the daytime, but that the showers fell in the nights, so that the work was not hindered. And this our fathers have delivered to us; nor is it incredible, if any one have regard to the manifestations of God. And thus was performed the work of the rebuilding of the temple.



# Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

## The War of the Jews (book 5 chapter 5)

*(Description Of The Temple)*

### 1.

[184] Now this temple, as I have already said, was built upon a strong hill. At first the plain at the top was hardly sufficient for the holy house and the altar, for the ground about it was very uneven, and like a precipice. [185] But when king Solomon, who was the person that built the temple, had built a wall to it on its east side, there was then added one cloister founded on a bank cast up for it, and on the other parts the holy house stood bare. But in future ages the people added new banks<sup>2</sup>, and the hill became a larger plain. [186] They then broke down the wall on the north side, and took in as much as sufficed afterward for the compass of the entire temple. [187] And when they had built walls on three sides of the temple round about, from the bottom of the hill, and had performed a work that was greater than could be hoped for, (in which work long ages were spent by them, as well as all their sacred treasures were exhausted, which were still replenished by those tributes which were sent to God from the whole habitable earth,) they then encompassed their upper courts with cloisters, as well as they [afterward] did the lowest [court of the] temple. [188] The lowest part of this was erected to the height of three hundred cubits, and in some places more; yet did not the entire depth of the foundations appear, for they brought earth, and filled up the valleys, as being desirous to make them on a level with the narrow streets of the city. [189] wherein they made use of stones of forty cubits in magnitude; for the great plenty of money they then had, and the liberality of the people, made this attempt of theirs to

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<sup>2</sup> But note, that what Josephus here says of the original scantiness of this Mount Moriah, that it was quite too little for the temple, and that at first it held only one cloister or court of Solomon's building, and that the foundations were forced to be added long afterwards by degrees, to render it capable of the cloisters for the other courts, etc., is without all foundation in the bible, and not at all confirmed by his exacter account in the Antiquities. All that is or can be true here is this, that when the court of the Gentiles was long afterward to be encompassed with cloisters, the southern foundation for these cloisters was found not to be large or firm enough, and was raised, and that additional foundation supported by great pillars and arches under ground, which Josephus speaks of elsewhere, Antiq. B. 15. Ch. 11. sect. 3. (*whiston*)

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

succeed to an incredible degree; and what could not be so much as hoped for as ever to be accomplished, was, by perseverance and length of time, brought to perfection.

### 2.

[190] Now for the works that were above these foundations, these were not unworthy of such foundations; for all the cloisters were double, and the pillars to them belonging were twenty-five cubits in height, and supported the cloisters. These pillars were of one entire stone each of them, and that stone was white marble. [191] And the roofs were adorned with cedar, curiously graven. The natural magnificence, and excellent polish, and the harmony of the joints in these cloisters, afforded a prospect that was very remarkable; nor was it on the outside adorned with any work of the painter or engraver. [192] The cloisters [of the outmost court] were in breadth thirty cubits, while the entire compass of it was by measure six furlongs, including the tower of Antonia; those entire courts that were exposed to the air were laid with stones of all sorts. [193] When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits, its construction was very elegant. [194] Upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that "no foreigner should go within that sanctuary" for that second [court of the] temple was called "the Sanctuary". [195] And it was ascended to by fourteen steps from the first court. This court was four-square, and had a wall about it peculiar to itself. [196] The height of its buildings, although it were on the outside forty cubits, was hidden by the steps, and on the inside that height was but twenty-five cubits; for it being built over against a higher part of the hill with steps, it was no further to be entirely discerned within, being covered by the hill itself. [197] Beyond these thirteen steps there was the distance of ten cubits; this was all plain. [198] whence there were other steps, each of five cubits a-piece, that led to the

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

gates<sup>3</sup>, which gates on the north and south sides were eight, on each of those sides four, and of necessity two on the east. For since there was a partition built for the women on that side, as the proper place wherein they were to worship, there was a necessity for a second gate for them: this gate was cut out of its wall, over against the first gate. [199] There was also on the other sides one southern and one northern gate, through which was a passage into the court of the women; for as to the other gates, the women were not allowed to pass through them; nor when they went through their own gate could they go beyond their own wall. This place was allotted to the women of our own country, and of other countries, provided they were of the same nation, and that equally. [200] The western part of this court had no gate at all, but the wall was built entire on that side. But then the cloisters which were between the gates extended from the wall inward, before the chambers; for they were supported by very fine and large pillars. These cloisters were single, and, excepting their magnitude, were no way inferior to those of the lower court.

### 3.

[201] Now nine of these gates were on every side covered over with gold and silver<sup>4</sup>, as were the jambs of their doors and their lintels; but there was one gate<sup>5</sup> that was without the [inward court of the] holy house, which was of Corinthian brass, and greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold. [202-206] Each gate had two doors, whose height was severally thirty cubits, and their breadth fifteen<sup>6</sup>. However, they had large spaces within of thirty cubits, and had on each side rooms, and those, both in breadth and in length, built like towers, and their height was above forty cubits. Two

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<sup>3</sup> Yosifun's number of steps (19) seems different than what the Mishnah says, (12 to Ezras Nashim, 15 to Ezras Yisroel, and four more steps to the Ezras kohanim). However, Rashi in Yoma (16a) says that the twelve steps in front of the Ezras Nashim was on the whole Har Habayis, from north to south. So, from Har Habayis past these steps, to the northern or southern gates of the Azarah, was 19 steps, just like Yosifun says, and there is no question.

<sup>4</sup> the Mishnah only says gold, so he must be referring to the doorposts and lintels

<sup>5</sup> Sha'ar Nicanor

<sup>6</sup> Yosifun exaggerates, they were really twenty amos by ten

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

pillars did also support these rooms, and were in circumference twelve cubits. Now the magnitudes of the other gates were equal one to another; but that over the Corinthian gate, which opened on the east over against the gate of the holy house itself, was much larger; for its height was fifty cubits; and its doors were forty cubits; and it was adorned after a most costly manner, as having much richer and thicker plates of silver and gold upon them than the other. These nine gates had that silver and gold poured upon them by Alexander, the father of Tiberius. Now there were fifteen steps, which led away from the wall of the court of the women to this greater gate; whereas those that led thither from the other gates were five steps shorter.

### 4.

[207-214] As to the holy house itself, which was placed in the midst [of the inmost court], that most sacred part of the temple, it was ascended to by twelve steps; and in front its height and its breadth were equal, and each a hundred cubits, though it was behind forty cubits narrower<sup>7</sup> ; for on its front it had what may be styled shoulders on each side, that passed twenty<sup>8</sup> cubits further. Its first gate was seventy cubits high<sup>9</sup>, and twenty-five<sup>10</sup> cubits broad; but this gate had no doors; for it represented the universal visibility of heaven, and that it cannot be excluded from any place. Its front was covered with gold all over, and through it the first part of the house, that was more inward, did all of it appear; which, as it was very large, so did all the parts about the more inward gate appear to shine to those that saw them; but then, as the entire house was divided into two parts within, it was only the first part of it that was open to our view. Its height extended all along to ninety cubits in height, and its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth twenty<sup>11</sup>. But that gate which was at this end of the first part of the house was, as we have already observed, all over covered with gold, as was its whole wall about it; it

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<sup>7</sup> Mishnah says thirty

<sup>8</sup> Mishnah says fifteen

<sup>9</sup> Mishnah says forty

<sup>10</sup> Mishnah says twenty

<sup>11</sup> Mishnah says eleven

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

had also golden vines above it, from which clusters of grapes hung as tall as a man's height. But then this house, as it was divided into two parts, the inner part was lower than the appearance of the outer, and had golden doors of fifty-five cubits altitude, and sixteen in breadth; but before these doors there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them having their colors the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other. This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.

### 5.

[215-221] When any persons entered into the temple, its floor received them. This part of the temple therefore was in height sixty cubits<sup>12</sup>, and its length the same;<sup>13</sup> whereas its breadth was but twenty cubits: but still that sixty cubits in length was divided again, and the first part of it was cut off at forty cubits, and had in it three things that were very wonderful and famous among all mankind, the candlestick, the table [of shew-bread], and the altar of incense. Now the seven lamps signified the seven planets; for so many there were springing out of the candlestick. Now the twelve loaves that were upon the table signified the circle of the zodiac and the year; but the altar of incense, by its thirteen kinds of sweet-smelling spices with which the sea replenished it, signified that God is the possessor of all things that are both in the uninhabitable and habitable parts of the earth, and that they are all to be dedicated to his use. But the inmost part of the temple of all was of twenty cubits. This was also separated from the outer part by a

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<sup>12</sup> Mishnah says forty

<sup>13</sup> Mishnah says sixty-one

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

veil<sup>14</sup>. In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies. Now, about the sides of the lower part of the temple, there were little houses<sup>15</sup>, with passages out of one into another; there were a great many of them<sup>16</sup>, and they were of three stories high; there were also entrances on each side into them from the gate of the temple. But the lower part of the temple had no such little houses any further, because the temple was there narrower, and forty cubits higher, and of a smaller body than the lower parts of it. Thus we collect that the whole height, including the sixty cubits from the floor, amounted to a hundred cubits.

### 6.

[222] Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes; for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. [223] But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were coming to it at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white. [224] On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it. Of its stones, some of them were forty-five cubits in length, five in height, and six in breadth. [225] Before this temple stood the altar, fifteen cubits high, and equal both in length and breadth; each of which dimensions was fifty cubits<sup>17</sup>. The figure it was built in was a square, and it had corners like horns; and the passage up to it was by an insensible acclivity. It was formed without any iron tool, nor did any such iron tool so much as touch it at any time. [226] There was also a wall of partition, about a cubit in height, made of fine stones, and so as to be grateful to the sight; this encompassed the holy

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<sup>14</sup> Mishnah says two veils, with an amah space in between

<sup>15</sup> the Ta'im

<sup>16</sup> Mishnah says thirty-eight

<sup>17</sup> Mishnah says it was ten cubits high, thirty-two cubits long, and thirty-two wide.

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

house and the altar, and kept the people that were on the outside off from the priests. [227] Moreover, Zavim and those that had Tzara'as were excluded out of the city entirely; women also, when their courses were upon them, were shut out of the temple; nor when they were free from that impurity, were they allowed to go beyond the limit before-mentioned; men also, that were not thoroughly pure, were prohibited to come into the inner [court of the] temple; nay, the priests themselves that were not pure were prohibited to come into it also.

### 7.

[228] Now all those of the stock of the priests that could not minister by reason of some defect in their bodies, came within the partition, together with those that had no such imperfection, and had their share with them by reason of their stock, but still made use of none except their own private garments; for nobody but he that officiated had on his sacred garments. [229] but then those priests that were without any blemish upon them went up to the altar clothed in fine linen. They abstained chiefly from wine, out of this fear, lest otherwise they should transgress some rules of their ministration. [230] The high priest did also go up with them; not always indeed, but on the seventh days and new moons, and if any festivals belonging to our nation, which we celebrate every year, happened. [231] When he officiated, he had on a pair of breeches that reached beneath his privy parts to his thighs, and had on an inner garment of linen, together with a blue garment, round, without seam, with fringe work, and reaching to the feet. There were also golden bells that hung upon the fringes, and pomegranates intermixed among them. The bells signified thunder, and the pomegranates lightning. [232] But that girdle that tied the garment to the breast was embroidered with five rows of various colors, of gold, and purple, and scarlet, as also of fine linen and blue, with which colors we told you before the veils of the temple were embroidered also. [233] The like embroidery was upon the ephod; but the quantity of gold therein was greater. Its figure was that of a stomacher for the breast. There were upon it two golden buttons like small shields,

## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

which buttoned the ephod to the garment; in these buttons were enclosed two very large and very excellent sardonyxes, having the names of the tribes of that nation engraved upon them. [234] On the other part there hung twelve stones, three in a row one way, and four in the other; a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; a carbuncle, a jasper, and a sapphire; an agate, an amethyst, and a ligure; an onyx, a beryl, and a chrysolite; upon every one of which was again engraved one of the aforementioned names of the tribes. [235] A hat, also of fine linen, encompassed his head, which was tied by a blue ribbon, about which there was another golden crown, in which was engraved the sacred name [of God]: it consists of four vowels. [236] However, the high priest did not wear these garments at other times, but a more plain habit; he only did it when he went into the most sacred part of the temple, which he did but once in a year, on that day when our custom is for all of us to keep a fast to God<sup>18</sup>. [237] And thus much concerning the city and the temple; but for the customs and laws hereto relating, we shall speak more accurately another time; for there remain a great many things thereto relating which have not been here touched upon.

### 8.

[238] Now as to the tower of Antonia, it was situated at the corner of two cloisters of the court of the temple; of that on the west, and that on the north; it was erected upon a rock of fifty cubits in height, and was on a great precipice; it was the work of king Herod, wherein he demonstrated his natural magnanimity. [239] In the first place, the rock itself was covered over with smooth pieces of stone, from its foundation, both for ornament, and that any one who would either try to get up or to go down it might not be able to hold his feet upon it. [240] Next to this, and before you come to the edifice of the tower itself, there was a wall three cubits high; but within that wall all the space of the tower of Antonia itself was built upon, to the height of forty cubits. [241] The inward parts had the largeness and form of a palace, it being parted into all kinds of rooms and

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<sup>18</sup> Really it was the opposite, the whole year he wore the fancier garments, and only on Yom Kippur he wore the plain garments.



## Josephus's description of the Beis Hamikdash

other conveniences, such as courts<sup>19</sup>, and places for bathing, and broad spaces for camps; insomuch that, by having all conveniences that cities wanted, it might seem to be composed of several cities, but by its magnificence it seemed a palace. And as the entire structure resembled that of a tower, it contained also four other distinct towers at its four corners; whereof the others were but fifty cubits high; whereas that which lay upon the southeast corner was seventy cubits high, that from thence the whole temple might be viewed; but on the corner where it joined to the two cloisters of the temple, it had passages down to them both, through which the guard (for there always lay in this tower a Roman army unit) went several ways among the cloisters, with their arms, on the Jewish festivals, in order to watch the people, that they might not there attempt to make any innovations; for the temple was a fortress that guarded the city, as was the tower of Antonia a guard to the temple; and in that tower were the guards of those three<sup>20</sup>. There was also a peculiar fortress belonging to the upper city, which was Herod's palace; but for the hill Bezetha, it was divided from the tower Antonia, as we have already told you; and as that hill on which the tower of Antonia stood was the highest of these three, so did it adjoin to the new city, and was the only place that hindered the sight of the temple on the north. And this shall suffice at present to have spoken about the city and the walls about it, because I have proposed to myself to make a more accurate description of it elsewhere.

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<sup>19</sup> In other editions, cloisters

<sup>20</sup> These three guards that lay in the tower of Antonia must be those that guarded the city, the temple, and the tower of Antonia.