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COURT OF THE GENTILES The outer court of the temple where Jesus taught, where sacrificial animals were sold, and where the "cleansing of the temple" incident took place.

Introduction

The Court of the Gentiles was one of several courts attached to Herod's temple. The first-century historian Josephus mentions four courts:

1. The outer court was open to all people, foreigners included; only menstruating women were refused admission.
2. The second court was open to all Jews and, when uncontaminated by any defilement, their wives.
3. The third court was limited to male Jews who were clean and purified.
4. The fourth court was limited to priests robed in their priestly vestments.

The sanctuary was entered only by the ruling priests, clad in the appropriate apparel (Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.8 §104; Evans, *Mark*, 171).

The Court of the Gentiles was the outer court that surrounded the inner sacred courts (Utley, *Beloved Disciple*, 27; Grassmick, "Mark," 157). Although "Court of the Gentiles" is a later name not found in Josephus, the New Testament, or *Middoth* (Votaw, "Temple," 176), the book of Revelation refers to "the outer courtyard … given to the Gentiles" (Rev 11:2 NET). This court was where buying and selling of sacrificial animals took place, probably as a service for all pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to sacrifice (Blum, "John," 279). The temple area as a whole is estimated to have been able to hold about 75,000 people (Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 52).

On its east side, the Court of the Gentiles had a 49-foot-wide covered walk called the Porch of Solomon or Solomon's Portico (John 10:23; Acts 3:11; 5:12); the roof was supported by two rows of pillars with a height of 39 feet (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.5.2 §190, 192; Charlesworth, "Introduction," 14).

The Court of the Gentiles and Restricted Areas

Various measures were taken to limit Gentiles' access to the inner areas of the temple. Josephus reports that between the Court of the Gentiles and the inner sanctuary "there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits" (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.2 §§193; see Abel, *Grammaire*, 18, on the vacillation between δ, *d*; and τ, *t*; in the Greek δρύφακτος, *dryphaktos*; or τρύφακτος, *tryphaktos*, which are usually translated as "partition" or "balustrade"). The inner courts were on an elevated area "ascended to by fourteen steps from the first court" (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.2 §§195; Bickerman, "Warning Inscriptions," 387; Votaw, "Temple," 177). Signs were placed on the stone barrier near the stairs leading up to the inner sanctuary, warning non-Jews not to enter the area (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6.2.4 §124–25; Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.11.5 §417; Bickerman, "Warning Inscriptions," 387, 389). Two complete tablets written in Greek have been found that read: Μηθένα ἀλλογενῆ εἰσπορεύεσθαι ἐντὸς τοῦ περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τρυφάκτου καὶ περιβόλου (*Mēthena allogenē eisporeuesthai entos tou peri to hieron tryphaktou kai peribolou*). Ὅς δἂν ληφθῇ (*Hos dan lēphthē*), ἑαυτῶι αἴτιος ἔσται διὰ τὸ ἑξακολουθεῖν θάνατον (*heautōi aitios estai dia to exakolouthein thanaton*, "No alien may enter within the balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put

blame for the death which will ensue"; Bickerman, "Warning Inscriptions," 388; Clermont-Ganneau, "Stèle," 177–78). The inscription does not give any indication as to the legal procedure, whether it refers to "death at the hands of heaven," death by lynching, or death following prosecution (Bickerman, "Warning Inscriptions," 394–95). From Josephus we know that Roman law allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile who entered the inner sanctuary (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6.2.4 §126).

The closest New Testament example of an alleged violation of this law is in Acts 21, where Paul is falsely accused: "he [Paul] has brought Greeks into the inner courts of the temple and made this holy place ritually unclean" (Acts 21:28 NET). The reason for the hasty conclusion of the crowd is parenthetically given in the following verse: "(For they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him previously, and they assumed Paul had brought him into the inner temple courts)" (Acts 21:29 NET). Paul barely escapes death, being rescued by the Roman guard and carried to the Antonia tower that was next to the Court of the Gentiles (Acts 21:27–40; 22:22–24).

The use of a rail on temple areas to protect the holy from the profane was common in ancient religions. However, according to Bickerman, what distinguished the temple in Jerusalem was that non-Jews were excluded not because of impurity but because they were strangers; exclusion on these grounds was unusual elsewhere in the Augustan age (Bickerman, "Warning Inscriptions," 389–91).

The reference in Ephesians to "the middle wall of partition" (Eph 2:14 NET) has been understood by some interpreters as the stone wall between the Court of the Gentiles and the inner sacred courts—and therefore as a metaphor for the spiritual enmity between Jews and Gentiles. According to this understanding, Christ—through his death and resurrection—acted "to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed" (Eph 2:16 NET). Hoehner argues against this view on the grounds that Paul does not mention the temple and that the wall was still standing when he wrote Ephesians (Hoehner, "Ephesians," 625–26).

A Place of Worship or Commerce?

The Court of the Gentiles was where Jesus did His public teaching (Matt 21:23; 26:55; Luke 19:47; John 7:14) and might also have been where Simeon encountered Jesus as an infant and took Him in his arms (Luke 2:27; Bock, *Luke*, 92–93).

The Court of the Gentiles probably was where Jesus drove out the buyers and sellers and overturned the tables of the moneychangers (Mark 11:15–17), shouting, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have turned it into a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17 NET; Barbieri, "Matthew," 68; Evans, *Mark*, 171). Caiaphas, the high priest, had authorized the sale of items necessary for the sacrifices in the temple (Grassmick, "Mark," 157). Money was changed because the temple tax had to be paid in Tyrian shekels—the so-called shekel of the sanctuary—and half-shekels. The underlying reason for this was that other coinages had an uneven value and weight and because these coins had idolatrous images (Hiers, "Purification," 87; Goldhill, *Temple*, 67). Just as other temples in the ancient world, the temple in Jerusalem functioned as a bank. Explicit reference to banking activities in the temple is found in 2 Maccabees 3:10–11 (Hamilton, "Temple," 366).

The animal and money-changing businesses were a great source of income for the city. According to Josephus there was a need for an estimated 255,600 lambs at Passover in AD 66 (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6.9.3 §424). Problems arose when abuses developed and business became more important than worship (Blum, "John," 279; Blomberg, "Matthew," 68). It was against this avarice that Jesus reacted and took action—and when He did, He challenged the entire banking system of Jerusalem. Hamilton makes the case that this interference with the operations of the

temple bank—and so with the bedrock of Judaea's economy—was directly a claim for kingship (Hamilton, "Temple Cleansing," 370–71).

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