

## Where was the pinnacle on which Jesus stood?

A Bible reader knows the temptation story of Jesus. At the second item of temptation some people wonder how high the temple pinnacle could have been and how Jesus actually got on the roof.

As a child I imagined that Jesus had stood on the ridge of a house at a height of 15 metres and looked down from there. That was quite high for me.

Later on I saw the flat roof of the temple and I thought that Jesus had just been there, above the Blessed Sacrament, and an angel might have lifted him up.

In the meantime I think more soberly. I realised that the gospels are an extremely short version of a big story about Jesus. They tell us only the most important things and that from an everyday life, which was of course known to the readers of that time. Unfortunately, this knowledge has been lost to us late born readers and therefore the circumstances of some events remain hidden from us.

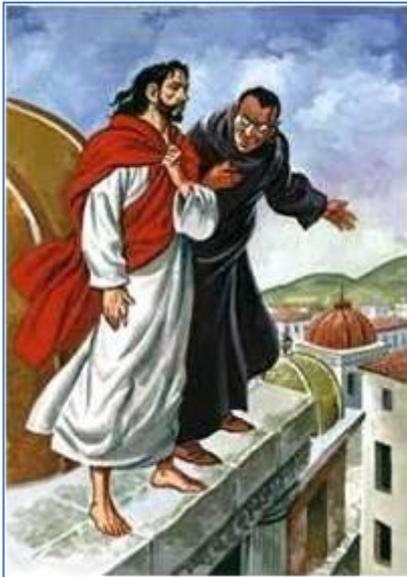


Image 1: Unknown artist; Jesus and the devil at the second temptation.  
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In order to better remember the situations of that time and to be able to understand the Bible more correctly, I like to research what life was like around the time of Jesus.

Where Jesus actually stood and how he got there is not necessarily something you need to know and it is not very helpful to find out. But it is fun for me to follow unimportant questions to expand my useless knowledge. For example a report about an archaeological stone find with the inscription "To the place of the trumpet".

In historical research, due to lack of accurate data, one often has to make assumptions and consider what normal behaviour might have been like. First, of course, one analyses

### The Temptation of Jesus Matthew 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But He answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command His angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'" 11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him.

*English Standard Version (ESV)*

exactly the few data one has and then one dares to draw conclusions that are likely to result from the circumstances. This is what we are doing now:

Applied to our case: We have the words in the Bible text and we can guess what the temple looked like and what kind of actions there were in it.

### About the terms:

**"led"**: Jesus did not "climb" e.g. on a roof, he was obviously led to a place, "guided", which was also accessible (!) for a rabbi.

**"Temple"**: this word includes on the one hand the main building with the Holy and Blessed Sacrament, but also the whole district with all its outbuildings, the Temple Mount<sup>1</sup>. By the way, in Jesus' time the Jerusalem Temple was one of the most impressive complexes of the Roman Empire.

**"Pterygion"**: The Greek Bible text uses the word pterygion, which means pinnacle, end, edge and merlon.

<sup>1</sup> The surface of the Temple Mount under Solomon (ca. 1000 B.C.) probably measured 262 x 262 m = ca. 70,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Even during the renovation under Hezekiah (ca. 700 BC) and the reconstruction under Serubbabel (ca. 500 BC) the size probably remained the same. The Hasmoneans extended the area to approx. 80,000 m<sup>2</sup> and celebrated the inauguration of the renovation in 164 BC with the Hanukkah festival (Festival of Lights), which is still celebrated today for one week in December.

Herod the Great doubled the area to 141,280 m<sup>2</sup> (14 hectares = 20 football fields) by means of a mighty retaining wall. This was huge for that time and is still huge for our time. It was the largest platform (approx. 300 m approx. 470 m) and the largest temple complex in the ancient Mediterranean area. Source: Encyclopaedia of the Bible by Rienecker, Maier, Schick, Wendel in the SCM Verlag page 1142 ff.



Image 2: After the excavation, the old Roman road on the temple wall shows the dents caused by the falling stones;  
Photo with permission by  
Paul Laju → <http://lajupaulk3.blogspot.com/>

It is known from old reports that the golden merlons on the holy temple shone wonderfully in the sun, even in the distance. Because the temple was not a castle, the merlons were ornaments and balustrades.

No non-priest was allowed on the roof of the actual temple. It was an area that could not be entered because it was in the holy area.

**'Not named'**: Because the location of the merlon is not described in detail, this point might have been unimportant or common knowledge. The latter is more likely because the text uses the specific article. It says 'the merlon' there. This fact is an indication that it could have been the special, prominent and well-known place of the trumpeter.



Image 3: Stone with Hebrew inscription: "To the place of trumpeting"; Photo: Ekeida; © GNU license

### About the location:

"To the Place of the Trumpeters" is the text on the stone that was found. The Bible often speaks of the blowing of the trumpet or the ram's horn<sup>1</sup>, and usually this is done in a ceremonial way.

**A high retaining wall** surrounded the entire temple area. A high hall was then built upon it all around. The southwest corner of the hall was particularly high above the city and offered the best, a very sublime view over the city of Jerusalem and beyond.

**Excavation**: At the southwest corner of the temple a special stone was found under the crushed rubble<sup>2</sup>. It was obviously a corner stone of the former parapet. A niche was carved into it, so that one could get closer to the edge and thus be seen well from the city. This stone bears, as I said, the inscription "To the place of the trumpet". which indicates that the heralds stood here to blow the shofar, signalling the advent of holy days.



Image 4: The trumpeter on the pinnacle of the temple  
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<sup>1</sup> **The shofar** was originally a ram's horn (Josephus, Ant. V. 5,6), later it was also made of metal. It was used mainly for its loud and wide sounding tones for signals and especially to announce holy days. (Exodus 19,16, 19; 20,18; Isaiah 58,1).

<sup>2</sup> **Dents**: The Romans destroyed the temple in 70 AD. During excavations, large dents were found in the street below, which had been beaten by the force of the large falling stones. Nearly all the stones have been used for other building measures in the meantime, so it is very pleasing that the stone mentioned could be found.

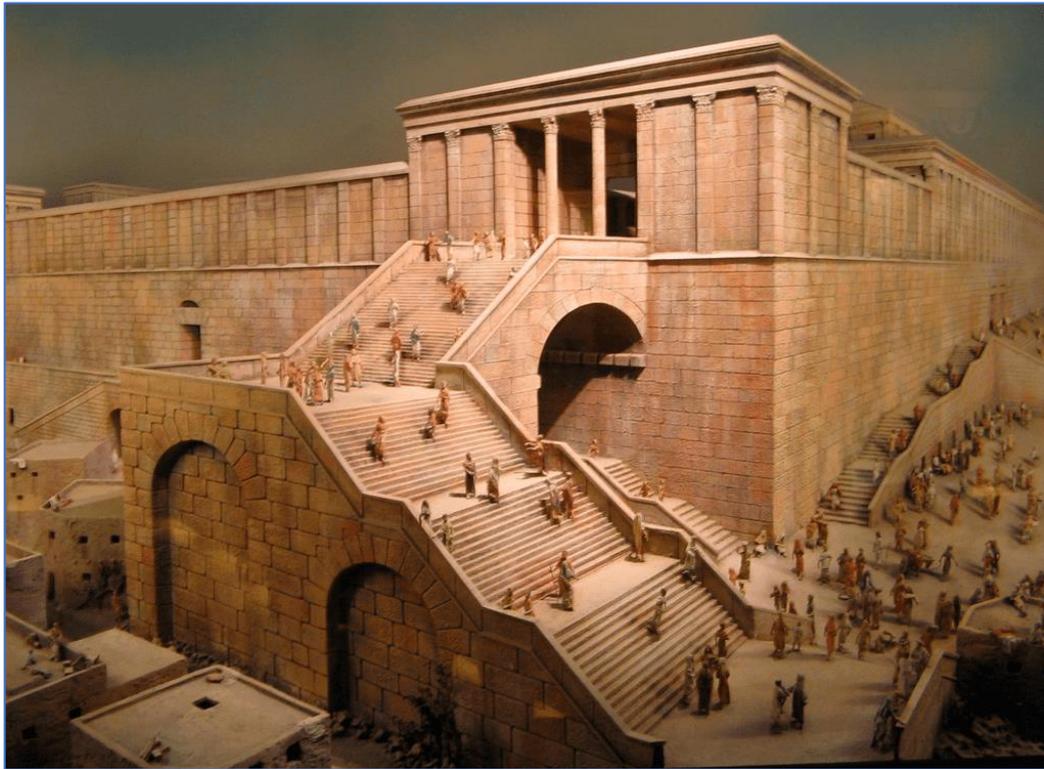


Image 5: Reconstruction model of the old Jerusalem in the museum of David Castle, Robinson arch; Vodnik (Водник); © CC license

### **Consideration:**

1. This stone was at the place of the temple from where one could best overlook the city. It was the place where priests stood overlooking Jerusalem while blowing trumpets to announce the Sabbath and the beginning of the feast days. The Feast of Trumpets refers specifically to this act.

2. This high southwest corner with the place of the trumpet player was a well-known, prominent, and clearly arranged place and easily accessible. It was the highest vantage point in Jerusalem.

From the lower core of Jerusalem this high corner blocked the view of the actual and even higher temple building and was therefore the apparently highest point.

The place was very prominent and well known, and therefore it was not necessary for the readers of the Matthew report at that time to describe it in detail.

3. It is easy to imagine that Jesus, standing on this dignified and 42 m high place, had bad thoughts whispered to him.

### **Literature and links to the topic:**

1. <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-echoes-rosh-hashanah-place-trumpeting>
2. Encyclopaedia of the bible by Rienecker, Maier, Schick, Wendel in SCM Verlag
3. <http://lajupaulk3.blogspot.com>
4. <https://www.mysteriesofthemessiah.net/2016/01/05-02-04-wilderness-mountains-the-devil-tempts-jesus>

### **Conclusion:**

The miracle of the temptation story of Jesus, which was demanded by the devil, would have had an excellent setting at the southwest corner of the temple platform. Here a huge staircase (Robinson Arch) led up to a high gate of the temple. At the corner, the road from Antonia ran down the western wall to the Hulda Gates, the meeting place of the Jewish pilgrims. So there were always many people here and the devil would have had a large audience. A jump of 42 metres height would certainly have been a great spectacle. However, Jesus was not a sensational actor and sensational miracles, for their own sake, were far from him.

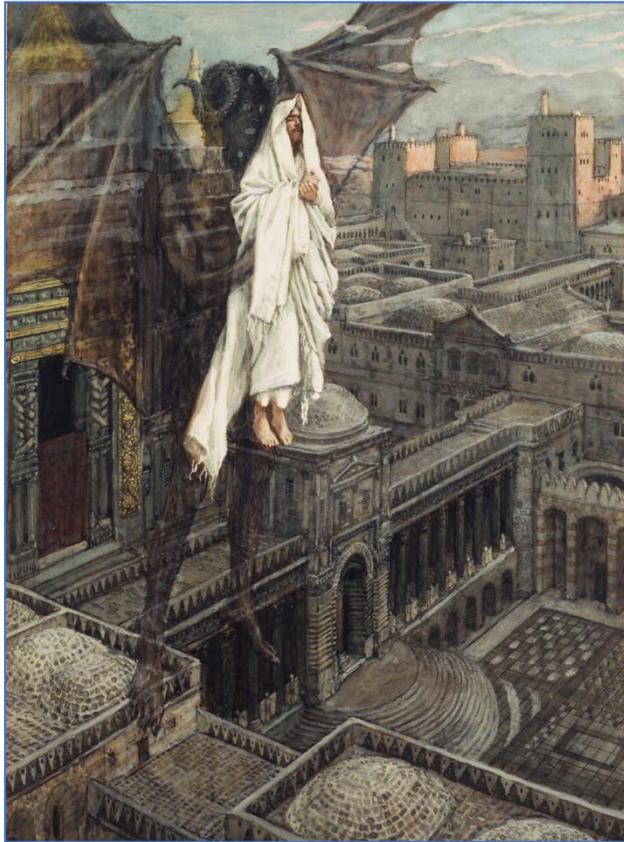
Rather he wanted to help people and win followers.

The pinnacle of the temple of Jesus' story of temptation could therefore be located at the southwest corner of the temple.

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**Old ideas about the second temptation of Jesus:**



Picture 6: James Tissot (French, 1836-1902); Jésus porté sur le pinacle du Temple; place: Brooklyn Museum, © License purchased there in public download.



Picture 7: Jesus was tempted. Hebrews 4:15a; artist unknown; Source: marysrosaries.com/collaboration; © public domain



Picture 8: Sandro Botticelli, mural painting, Rome, Sistine Chapel, Temptation of Christ and the purification sacrifice of the leper



Figure 9: Copper engraving from a French illustrated bible Paris 1728, Jesus' temptation by the devil; © in the public domain