

Fifth Sunday of Lent - March 22, 2026

Video Online Bible Study with Rev. Gary E. Mathiesen

“Tell Me Something Good”

~ *Grounding Ourselves in the Good News of Lent* ~ “The Good News Is ... Rooted In Justice, Mercy and Faithfulness”

John 8:2-11 (Matthew 23:23)

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ JOHN 8:2-11 ~ “THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY”

~ SOME PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS - IS THIS TEXT IN OR OUT? AND - WHO ARE THE BAD GUYS? ~

☞ John 7:53-8:11 - This story may not have belonged originally to the Gospel of John. The most ancient authorities omit 7:53-8:11; other authorities add the passage here or after John 7:36 or after John 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations of the text; one authority places this text in a footnote and does not include it elsewhere in the text.

☞ Note of Caution - Do NOT demonize the teachers of the law, the Pharisees or the Jewish Law. All Jewish Law is not inherently legalistic or rigid. In fact, Judaism has a rich history of holding Written and Oral Torah together to interpret and reevaluate the Law.† Also, the Gospel writers are clear that many teachers of the law and Pharisees gave Jesus serious consideration as “the Christ” and many supported him (Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, argued for fair treatment of Jesus: see John 7:50-52; The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee ... a credential he used for ill and good, see Acts 8:1; 23:6)

~ THE SETTING ~

☞ 7:1-8:59 - In chapters 7-8 John records strong opposition to Jesus as the Messiah (including several threats on his life) ... and yet, several people “*put their faith in him.*” (see 7:31). John seems to collect all the various arguments made against Jesus and place them together in these two chapters.

☞ v. 7:43 “*Thus the people were divided ...*” - Jesus is in the temple courts teaching openly and publicly (as other teachers would do). We have come to a place in John’s Gospel where there is no middle ground regarding the nature of Jesus.

☞ v. 2 “*At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him.*” (See also 7:14; 7:28) Jesus openly/publicly taught in the temple courts during the Feast of Tabernacles †† when the crowds were large.

~ THE TEST ... WHERE’S YOUR LOYALTY? ~

☞ v. 3 “*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery.*” Where is the man? Why was only one offender brought in before Jesus? This woman is a prop for the Pharisees and the teachers of the law to pressure Jesus for an answer about the Torah and the Roman law. They could care less about the sin of adultery (or any other sin she may have committed) ... otherwise they would have also brought in the man.

☞ vv. 4-5 “*Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?*”
Three observations:

1. This woman is being publicly humiliated and minimized by powerful men. This woman could have/should have kept her in private custody while discussing their accusation of her sin before Jesus. This is nothing more than theater.

2. Jewish law required more than happenstance or compromising circumstances to convict someone of adultery ... witnesses were required who had seen the act of adultery. This would have required BOTH parties to be charged with adultery and both be stoned (see Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22).
3. Right in the middle of all these arguments for/against Jesus being the Messiah (John chapters 7 & 8) comes this story of a woman caught in adultery.

Conclusion: This story is LESS about forgiveness and MORE about legal/lawful procedure.†††

The Trap Is Set:

☞ v. 6a *“The [Pharisees and teachers of the law] were using this question as a trap ...”* The word for “trap” is actually “test” ... with a negative connotation ... ex. “That refrigerator is cheap.” A positive connotation means the refrigerator is a good price > or < negatively, the refrigerator is junk.

☞ πειράζω - peirazó - to try, make trial of, test in a bad sense: to test one maliciously, craftily to put to the proof a person’s feelings or judgment. (See Matthew 16:1; Matthew 19:3; Matthew 22:18, 35; Mark 8:11; Mark 10:2; Mark 12:15; Luke 11:16; Luke 20:23; John 8:6)

☞ If Jesus allows the woman to leave the temple courts without judgment, then he violates the letter of the Law regarding people caught in adultery (see Lev. 20:10). If Jesus says stone her, then Jesus violates Roman law (sedition) because locals were forbidden the right of capital punishment ... a verdict that belonged only to the Roman courts and law (see John 18:31).

~ **THE RESPONSE ... BE THE FIRST** ~

☞ v. 6b *“But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.”* Is Jesus “buying” time by doodling? Is Jesus writing something - like the sins of the Pharisees and teachers of the law - in the dirt? Is Jesus writing in the dirt in order to diffuse/decrease the tense situation? Does it matter what Jesus is writing in the dirt?

☞ v. 7 *“When they kept on questioning [Jesus], he straightened up and said to the [teachers of the law and Pharisees], “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”* Jesus turns the question back to the accusers ... but with a twist: if you are without sin - ANY sin - then go ahead ... throw a stone at her. My guess - with all these people watching this spectacle, I am pretty sure any one of the teachers of the law or Pharisees would have had someone watching who could point out a sin or two of the accusers! The accusers could NOT take that chance.

☞ v. 8 *“Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.”* Same question as in verse 6. BUT ... the intensity of the charges are now focused on the accusers. My guess - Jesus is allowing the pressure/stress of picking up a stone to increase on the accusers. Jesus shifted the spotlight from the woman and Jesus to her accusers.

☞ v. 9 *“At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.”* Were the accusers afraid to be the first to throw a stone? Were the accusers conscience-stricken? Did the older accusers realize the zeal of prosecuting an adulteress and putting Jesus “in his place” was not winnable theologically/politically?

~ **THE INCONVENIENCE OF MERCY †††† ...** ~

☞ v. 10-11 *“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

☞ “Woman” - (γύναι) is the vocative (direct address) form of the Greek word gyne (γυνή), meaning "woman" or "wife". Often used in the New Testament, it serves as a polite, respectful, or affectionate address, equivalent to "Lady," "Dear woman," or "Madam". (It is the root of the English prefix "gyne-" (e.g., gynecology). See also John 2:4 in Jesus' address to his mother in the story of the water turning to wine.

☞ *“... leave your life of sin.”* Jesus neither condones or condemns the woman. She is “free” to live as God has called her to live ... in mercy.

☞ Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail asserts that “mercy is ... hardly ever merited.” Jesus talks a lot about mercy (see Mtt 5:7; 18:21-22; Luke 23:34 for examples). Jesus is speaking about and offering mercy to “a woman whom I am rather inclined to think has received little mercy in her life ...” Further, she states, “It’s entirely possible she ‘deserves’ little of what Jesus is offering her. Mercy is what we ask for when we have messed up so mightily ... that we face ... the death of who we thought were.”

☞ The inconvenience of mercy “is a practice of hoping and knowing that there is more than the thing that hurts us - more than the thing that haunts us. Mercy is what makes us God’s own.”

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ MATTHEW 23:23 ~ “THE MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS OF THE LAW”:

v.23 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

☞ Simply put - You don’t say one thing to make you look good and do another thing. Justice, mercy and faithfulness are NOT a show. It is what you do. See also Micah 6:8 *“... what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION ...

1. Who is being put on trial in this story? Jesus? The woman? The accusers?
2. What are the teachers of the law and the Pharisees hoping for by testing Jesus in this way?
3. Why was Jesus a threat to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees?
4. Does the woman deserve mercy? How would you describe mercy?
5. How do you balance mercy and justice? How does faithfulness “fit” into mercy and justice?
6. Put yourself in the crowd watching: What is your reaction to this scene?

NOTES ...

† Sanctified Art Commentary pg. 24.

†† Feast of Tabernacles/Booths [Sukkot] - The great feast in the Jewish year, celebrating the completion of the harvest and commemorating God's goodness to the people during the desert wanderings (see Lev. 23:33-43; Deut. 16:13-15). The name of the feast came from the leafy shelters in which people lived throughout the seven days of the Feast. It is celebrated on the 15th of the Hebrew month Tishri ... or late September to mid-October as per the Gregorian calendar. It was one of three pilgrimages Israelites were commanded to make to the Temple in Jerusalem (see Deut 16:16).

††† In *Jesus For Everyone*, Amy-Jill Levine points out that the Greek word for "test" (peirazó) in John 8:6 is the same word used ... when Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. "The story itself is not technically about forgiveness. It is about legal procedure ..." [Sanctified Art]

†††† Courtesy Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail Commentary on John 8:2-11, Sanctified Art.

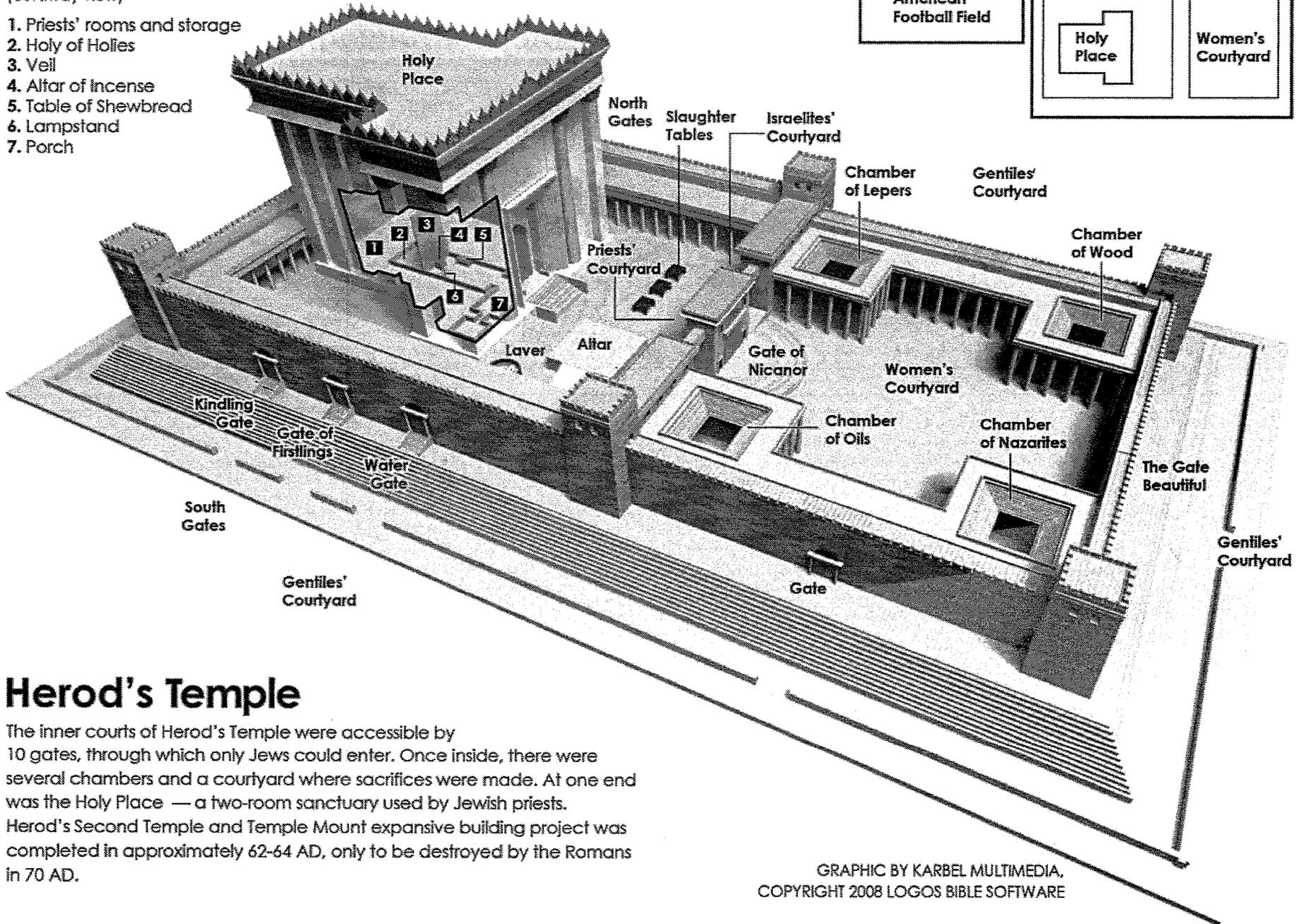
Addendum: "Jerusalem" map

Addendum: "Herod's Temple" diagram

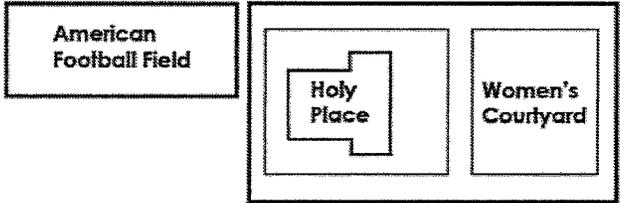
INSIDE THE HOLY PLACE

(cutaway view)

1. Priests' rooms and storage
2. Holy of Holies
3. Veil
4. Altar of incense
5. Table of Shewbread
6. Lampstand
7. Porch



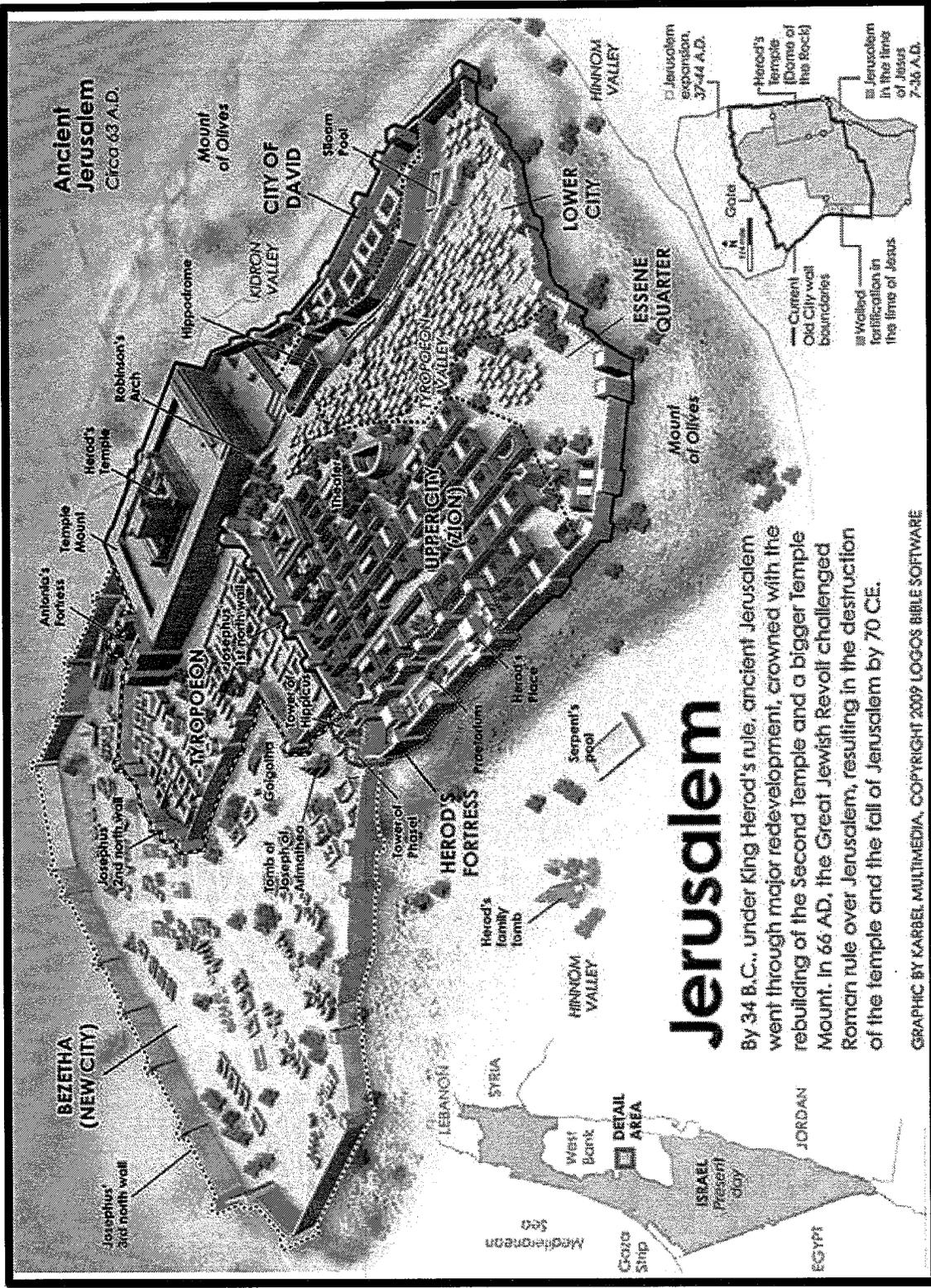
Size comparison (approximate):



Herod's Temple

The inner courts of Herod's Temple were accessible by 10 gates, through which only Jews could enter. Once inside, there were several chambers and a courtyard where sacrifices were made. At one end was the Holy Place — a two-room sanctuary used by Jewish priests. Herod's Second Temple and Temple Mount expansive building project was completed in approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

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Jerusalem

By 34 B.C., under King Herod's rule, ancient Jerusalem went through major redevelopment, crowned with the rebuilding of the Second Temple and a bigger Temple Mount. In 66 AD, the Great Jewish Revolt challenged Roman rule over Jerusalem, resulting in the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem by 70 CE.

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