

## THE SOUTHERN STAIRS

This photograph shows the southern stairs as viewed from the west, looking onto the stairs and Herod's massive Temple.

On the right side of the photo is a straight joint in the wall. This is the beginning of Herod's extension of the Mount to the south (left), which enlarged the Mount by more than 100 feet. The less crafted stones to the right are clearly visible, showing the contrast between the old Temple Mount and Herod's extension. The massive stones of Herod's construction also contrast sharply with the smaller stones laid above them later in history.

The partially reconstructed "broad staircase," also called the Southern Stairs, led to massive Double Gates. Pilgrims entered these gates and went through magnificent passageways leading to the floor of the Mount above. The width of these stairs was more than 200 feet! The staircase was composed of 30 steps, with a landing after each step. This layout probably made the ascent slow and respectful. Part of the staircase has not been reconstructed so we can see the structures beneath it.

On the foreground side of the steps were ritual baths—*mikvoth* (one of them can be seen just on the right side of the photograph at the bottom of the steps)—where worshippers could bathe to be ceremonially clean before worship. After the baths was another smaller stairway (no longer existing), which led to smaller gates, the Triple Gates, believed to have been for priests to enter the storerooms located under the Temple Mount floor on this corner of the platform.

Archaeologists believe there was a large plaza at the foot of the staircase to handle traffic of literally millions of pilgrims during the major festivals. One can imagine people, including families with children, joyfully climbing the stairs to the Gentile Court above and then to the Temple itself. The view from the Mount of Olives, where this picture was taken, must have been spectacular as throngs of pilgrims went up the stairs to worship God. Jesus was among this crowd, both as a boy and as a rabbi with his students.



It has been suggested that the Christian fulfillment of the Jewish feast of Pentecost (Shavuot) may have occurred on these steps (Acts 2). Since it was 9:00 AM on a holy day, the time of morning prayer, large crowds would have been entering the Temple. The disciples went daily to the Temple Courts, so they too would have been arriving for morning worship. This staircase was also used by other rabbis as a place to teach. There were baths nearby, where the baptism of 3,000 converts could have taken place. In his sermon, Peter referred to David's tomb, which was in the city nearby. Wherever the miraculous events of Acts 2 occurred, the large crowds of pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the festival did hear the disciples' message and believed that Jesus had come as God's Messiah. At that moment, the disciples were filled with God's Spirit and became his new, living, growing Temple (1 Cor. 3:16—17).