

The Temple That Won't Quit

Constructing sacred
space in Orlando's
Holy Land Experience
theme park

BY JOAN R. BRANHAM

Illustration by Demetrios Psillos



The ancient Jewish Temple

in Jerusalem has captured the religious, scholarly, and popular imagination from antiquity to today. Its nonnegotiable status as exemplar of sacred space has been a perennial source of artistic and theological inspiration for subsequent religious traditions wishing to stage spatial sacrality in their own building designs. The Temple's very name conjures up a variety of institutions, mythological and real—including the Tabernacle of Mosaic tradition, the legendary Temple of Solomon, the visionary Temple of Ezekiel, the post-exilic Temple of Zerubbabel, and the Herodian Temple of the first century. The conflation of these distinct entities into a single, aggregate "Jerusalem Temple" creates an invented construct that asserts a unified whole based on the sum of disparate chronological, archaeological, and textual parts.¹

Indexing the recurrent fascination with the Jerusalem Temple in the recent past has been a spate of three-dimensional, architectural models, most notably of the Second Temple or Herodian structure. For example, the Jerusalem Holy Land Hotel's outdoor model (Fig. 1), now located at the Israel Museum, measures over 2,000 square meters, at a 1 to 50 ratio scale, and was designed in the 1960s and 1970s by Hebrew University archaeologist Michael Avi-Yonah.² Here *ancient Jerusalem*, constructed within the environs of *modern Jerusalem*, serves as a microcosmic self-referent to its macrocosmic and politically fraught context. Leen Ritmeyer's models of the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, Herod's Temple, and the Temple Mount are more recent examples that have toured the United States, from the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.—in the 1998 exhibition "The Mountain of the Lord"—to their current home and exhibition space at Yeshiva University in New York. And still undergoing various revisions is the 1983 model (Fig. 2) by Alec Garrard, a farmer and Methodist lay preacher in Norfolk, England. This structure was built in the barn of Garrard's "Moat Farm," and as he tells us, comprises thousands of individual clay bricks, all handmade and baked with care in the family's oven.³

These modern three-dimensional Temple reconstructions have their historical precedents, of course, in the two-dimensional visual canon. Synagogues from as early as the third century CE recapitulated Temple imagery for a variety of purposes. Frescoes from the Dura Europos synagogue (Fig. 3), for example, reveal a fusion of Temple iconography and synagogue space. The Torah Shrine, the defining feature of the synagogue's architecture, which held the scrolls of scripture, displays a centrally placed Temple façade flanked by Temple accoutrements on the left, such as the menorah, lulav, and etrog, and the binding of Isaac on the right—a reminder of the Temple's association with Mount Moriah, the traditional site of the *Akedah* or sacrifice of Isaac. On the one hand,

1. For the history and legacy of the Jerusalem Temple and Temple Mount, I cite just a few diverse treatments: John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Praeger Publishers, 2008); William J. Hamblin and David Seely, *Solomon's Temple: Myth and History* (Thames and Hudson, 2007); Leen Ritmeyer, *The Quest Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Carta, 2006); Joan R. Branham, "Penetrating the Sacred: Breaches and Barriers in the Jerusalem Temple," *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon Gerstel (Harvard University Press, 2006), 6–24; Simon Goldhill, in *The Temple in Jerusalem* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Yaron Eliav, *God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Space, and Memory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Adolfo Roitman, *Envisioning the Temple: Scrolls, Stones, and Symbols* (The Israel Museum, 2003); Jon D. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Green (Crossroad, 1986), 32–61.

2. Michael Avi-Yonah, *Pictorial Guide to the Model of Ancient Jerusalem at the Time of the Second Temple*, rev. ed. Yoram Tsafrir (Palphot Ltd., 1992).

3. I thank Alec Garrard for his conversations by phone; see his book, *The Splendor of the Temple: A Pictorial Guide to Herod's Temple and Its Ceremonies* (Kregel, 2000).

this artistic composition, as well as other Temple images within ancient synagogues, calls to mind the sanctity of the Temple in order to memorialize the Jewish architectural ancestor. At another level, such images load the visual dice, as it were, evoking the Temple's sacred presence and status to impart a residual and vicarious sacrality to the environment of the synagogue itself.⁴

The work of a number of historians of religion and art has shown that typological re-presentations of the Temple abound in the Christian tradition as well.⁵ For example, the sixth-century mosaic floor of the Theotokos Chapel at Mount Nebo exemplifies the way in which the Temple's image serves as a literal foundation for Christian liturgy and space (Fig. 4).⁶ An outline of the Jerusalem Temple, here a tetrastyle structure with portico, flaming altar, and Holy of Holies, is flanked by approaching animals identified in the Greek inscription as sacrificial offerings. As I have discussed at greater length elsewhere,⁷ this mosaic establishes a pictorial and metonymic relationship between the Christian altar area and Jerusalem Temple space, and through its representation claims the Temple within the church's own sacred pedigree. Furthermore, the strategic positioning of the Temple mosaic is centrally placed and underfoot, as the officiating priest enters the altar area. He physically stands on the Temple's image, which now acts as a visual and theological platform from which to negotiate the new, bloodless sacrifice of Christianity.

By the end of the medieval period, Christian typological use of the Temple tradition had itself become a sort of interpretive art form. The fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript by Jean Fouquet (Fig. 5), titled "Building the Temple of Jerusalem," portrays Solomon directing the Temple's construction, from the hoisting and installation of heavy masonry to the sculpting of statuary. But this Jerusalem Temple has suspiciously taken on features of a Gothic church. Here, the Christianized version of the Temple acts to formulate ecclesiastical space as "the New Temple," appropriating and displacing the ancient prototype, both figurally and conceptually.

Ancient and medieval strategies to conjure Temple iconography take on a new twist in the twenty-first century's reanimation of the Jerusalem Temple at a recently established and controversial biblical theme park, the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida (Fig. 6). Located in a tourist mecca of the world, this so-called "living, biblical history museum" deploys large-scale replicas of both the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and Herod's Temple. From Synagoga to Ecclesia to Fantasia, as it were, the Temple emerges yet again as a theological stratagem, this time within a complex technological simulacrum. Ultimately, in its "small world" approach—condensing 4,000 years of distinctive histories into 15 acres of fun-in-the-sun theological entertainment—the Orlando Jerusalem Temple serves as a literal backdrop to evangelical Christianity, whose typological tactics, I will argue, both echo and revise those of early Christianity in an effort to merge Judaism and Christianity into a homogeneous and harmonious entity.

At the cost of \$16 million, the Holy Land Experience recreates the city of Jerusalem between the years 1450 BCE and 66 CE, and is advertised as a "total sensory experience, blending sights, sounds, and tastes to transport guests 7,000 miles away and 3,000 years

4. For further discussion of the relationship of the synagogue to the Temple, see Shaye Cohen, "The Temple and the Synagogue," in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. T. G. Madsen (Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1984), 151–174; S. Safrai, "The Temple and the Synagogue," *Synagogues in Antiquity*, ed. A. Kasher, A. Oppenheimer, and U. Rappaport (Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute, 1987), 48–49 (in Hebrew); and for Temple imagery in synagogues, see my two articles: "Vicarious Sacrality: Temple Space in Ancient Synagogues," *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, vol. 2, ed. Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher (E.J. Brill, 1995), 319–345, and "Sacred Space Under Erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Early Churches," *The Art Bulletin*, 74, no. 3 (1992): 375–394.

5. For example, Robert Ousterhout has outlined links between the Temple and a number of buildings: "The Church of Santo Stefano: A 'Jerusalem' in Bologna," *Gesta*, 20, no. 2 (1981): 311–318, "The Temple, the Sepulchre and the Martyrion of the Savior," *Gesta*, 30 (1990): 44–53, and his unpublished paper for which I thank him: "New Temples and New Solomons: The Rhetoric of Byzantine Architecture." Also see Carol Krinsky, "Representations of the Temple of Jerusalem before 1500," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 33 (1970): 1–19; scholarly articles from various authors dedicated to this subject in "The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Art" *Jewish Art* 23/24 (1997/98); Helen Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple: The Image of the Temple of Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity* (Oresko Books, 1979); and Joan Comay, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1975).

6. S. J. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo* (Franciscan Press, 1941), 235–237.

7. Joan R. Branham, "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces: Menses and the Eucharist in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Spring 2002, 19, and "Sacred Space Under Erasure," 381–382.

back in time.” Dominating and defining the theme park stands a towering six-story replica of the façade of Herod’s Temple, built to one-half the scale of the original.

ITEC Productions Corporation⁸—the technology company that developed various Walt Disney enterprises, Universal Studios’s Islands of Adventure, SeaWorld, and Blockbuster Entertainment—designed and produced this project by referencing Aviyonah’s Jerusalem model, simulating white Jerusalem limestone and golden filigree on the Temple’s architectural surface. Like Cinderella’s castle just down Interstate 4 at Disney World, the Temple serves as an iconic backdrop, anchoring and orienting the visitor’s experience from any vantage point in the park.⁹

The park was created and opened by Zion’s Hope, Inc., a Christian ministry that specializes in proselytizing to Jews (discussed below), and has recently been bought by Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN), a popular American faith-based broadcaster of religious television and media.¹⁰ The park’s status as a not-for-profit religious organization exempt from paying taxes to the State of Florida, as well as its controversial synthesis of Christian evangelism, public commercialism, and re-presentation of Jewish history, have sparked a number of debates. In the limited space here, I will focus primarily on the latter issues, addressing the original *raison d’être* behind the park, as well as the park’s current mission after TBN’s takeover.¹¹ In both its original and redacted forms, the Holy Land Experience draws upon the image of the Temple and other elements related to biblical archaeology to simulate an invented amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity, juxtaposing ancient tradition and modern sensibility in a way both powerful and problematic.

Similar to Universal Studios across the street, the Holy Land Experience promises fun and excitement for the whole family.¹² The park’s brochure cover (Fig. 7) depicts “modern Jerusalemites” wearing sunglasses to differentiate them from their ancient counterparts. Upon its opening, the park’s website announced its singular purpose as “to provide answers to life’s most important questions: ‘Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is life really all about?’” Surely, no other theme park is offering that at a \$35 value. The Jerusalem Gold Annual Membership at \$120 offers guests the ultimate Holy Land experience, including unlimited entry, special discount on Passover Seder presentations, and free parking.

Arriving at the park, a mockup of Jerusalem’s Damascus Gate (combined with elements from other historic gates in Jerusalem) greets the visitor upon leaving their car. The visitor also encounters Roman and Greek ruins, real date palms, olive trees, pomegranate and acacia trees, as well as Jerusalem Thorn trees, which we are told are the kind “used for the crown during Christ’s crucifixion” (Fig. 8). These living plants promise the visitor entering the turnstiles that “authentic artifacts” may lie ahead.

Inside, visitors are greeted by the blast of a shofar while employees—all of whom purportedly have “a relationship with Jesus”¹³—walk around in Cecil B. DeMille-style robes interacting with the crowds (Fig. 9). Some of these actors, such as the blind man from the Gospels, later end up in the Jesus Ministries show to get healed. In addition to the larger-than-life reconstructions, the park boasts

8. ITEC’s project statement lists the design challenge: “compress thousands of years of biblical history down to a three-to-four hour guest experience,” *Project: The ITEC Solution*, www.itec.com/images/pdfs/solutions/holyland.pdf. See Adam Goodheart’s short review (“Once again, Florida has made history. Quite literally made it . . .”) in “Theme Park on a Hill,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 2001.

9. See discussion by Annabel Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, and Theme Parks* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 193.

10. See TBN’s announcement, “Trinity Broadcasting Network Acquisition of ‘Holy Land Experience’ Theme Park Seeks to Change More Lives,” June 9, 2007, www.tbn.org/index.php/7.html?nid=217.

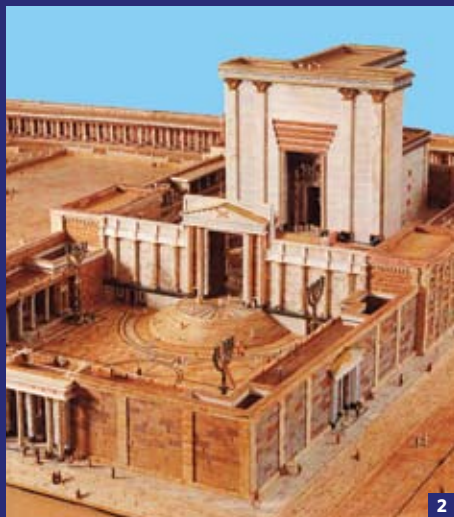
11. Much of the research here draws from the Holy Land Experience website; material posted there has shifted and changed periodically, but all major shifts will be noted later in the body of text. For coverage of the initial politics behind the TBN merger and the park’s new leadership, see Brad Flora, “The Holy Land Experience: Who Shall Inherit the Kingdom?” August 28, 2007, www.newsinitiative.org.

12. The comparison with Universal Studios comes directly from Trinity Broadcast Network; in its June 9, 2007 press release, Paul Crouch, Jr., TBN vice president of administration, states: “Universal Studios . . . We want the ‘Holy Land Experience’ to be a faith-based version of that,” www.tbn.org/index.php/7.html?nid=217.

13. See the park’s website employment page, which explains, “At *The Holy Land Experience* we are currently looking for qualified associates that demonstrate Christian characteristics to subordinates, peers, & management staff,” www.holylandexperience.org/abouthle/employment.html. Also see Burke O. Long, “Bringing the Holy Land to Orlando,” *SBL Forum*, July 2005.



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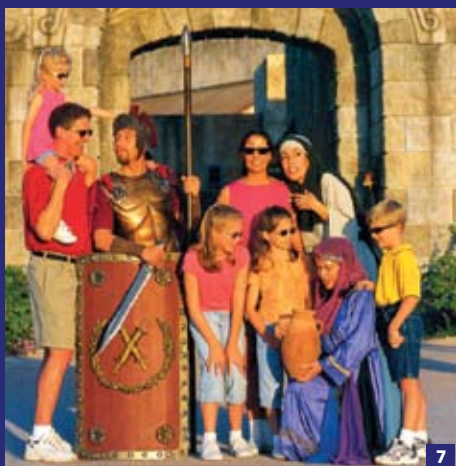
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1. Model of Herodian Temple at the Holy Land Hotel (former location), Jerusalem; 2. Model of the Jerusalem Temple by Alec W. Garrard; 3. Image of Temple façade on Dura Europos Torah Shrine; 4. Image of Jerusalem Temple with altar and fire, Theotokos Chapel on Mt. Nebo; 5. Jean Fouquet, "Building the Temple of Jerusalem," illuminated manuscript; 6. The Holy Land Experience Jerusalem Temple; 7. Brochure cover with actors and guests; 8. Holy Land Experience entrance with "ruins."

1. Courtesy Todd Bolen/ BiblePlaces.com; 2. Courtesy Tim Dowley Associates Ltd, London; 3. After Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, The Synagogue*, Yale University Press; 4. After Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*, Franciscan Press; 5. Permission Bibliothèque Nationale de France; 6-7. Courtesy The Holy Land Experience ; 8. Courtesy of Joan R. Brahmam

the world's largest indoor model of first-century Jerusalem where educational sessions by the park's "biblical archaeologists" take place daily (Fig. 10).

The Oasis Palms Café serves Holy Land fast food: the Goliath Burger, Jaffa Hot Dog, Centurion Salad, Samson-Size Drumstick, and a Land of Milk and Honey dessert (Fig. 11). In the Old Scroll Shop, Jewish and Christian gift merchandise—such as Jewish menorahs, ritual prayer shawls, and yamulkes—is available. There are action figures, including an alluring Esther; Peter and John; and Moses, with burning bush accessory. The gift shop is also stocked with frankincense and myrrh, as well as matching Jewish and Christian mug sets, one with God's name in Hebrew, the *Tetragrammaton*, and the other with *Jesous Christos* in Greek. Fully integrating the symbols of the two religions are the Star of David necklaces merged with Christian crosses made from olive wood from the real Holy Land (Fig. 12).

The mixture of Jewish and Christian symbolism carries over to the original nomenclature used for the Holy Land Experience's Temple as well. "Temple of the Great King" creates several levels of ambiguity, leaving open the question: are we referring to YHWH , divine King of Israel, King Herod the Great, builder of the Second Temple, or the "Christian King" who worshipped there, namely Jesus?¹⁴ Inside the Temple is an auditorium, the "Theater of Life," where visitors settle down in air conditioning to view the entire history of the world in a 20-minute video that begins with the creation story of the Garden of Eden, moves to the binding of Isaac, and culminates in the crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming of Christ. Like the park itself, the cinematic experience abbreviates and condenses human history into informational bites essential to a supersessionist worldview.

The Temple is the fulcrum of the park's layout and the literal backdrop to Christian dramas performed daily. While the Temple acts as a historical stage set for events that took place in Jerusalem, the real backdrop being presented is the authoritative sacred space of the Temple itself. In the actual Herodian Temple, the presence of sacrificial blood on a large and central four-horned altar took center stage and defined the layout and function of the space itself. At the Holy Land Experience's Temple show, "Ancient Festivals of the Biblical World," the centrality of blood and sacrifice is recapitulated in a dramatic presentation with the high priest, where gestures of sacrifice take place but a giant red silken cross literally replaces the animal blood on a smoking four-horned altar (Fig. 13). This strange juxtaposition of cross on altar, both instruments of sacrifice, acts to convert the actual physical structure of the Jewish Temple and its accoutrements into a Christian understanding of the death of Jesus as the definitive blood sacrifice.

Criticism has come from several sectors of the Christian community concerned about the Holy Land Experience's potential to trivialize and consumerize faith.¹⁵ The Jewish community, however, has been the source of the harshest criticism, taking issue with the motive of founding president and chief executive officer of Zion's Hope, Marvin Rosenthal. A grandson of Orthodox Jews, Rosenthal converted to Christianity as a teenager and was ordained a Baptist minister at age 33. Calling himself a "Hebrew Christian,"

14. As will be noted later, TBN has made some recent revisions to terminology.

15. Religion writer and journalist Mark I. Pinsky has followed the history of the theme park as well as that of TBN; see his review of Christian and Jewish responses in "Six Flags Over Israel," *Christianity Today*, March 5, 2001, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=6476.

Rosenthal's unapologetic goal is to bring the gospel's message to Jews.¹⁶ The mission statement of Zion's Hope tells us:

The purpose of Zion's Hope is a simple one, yet also bold, direct, and far-reaching. Zion's Hope seeks to graciously proclaim to the Jewish people their need for personal salvation through Jesus the Messiah and to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to all men regardless of race, religion, gender, education, or national origin. Accordingly, Zion's Hope seeks to educate the Bible-believing church concerning the place of Israel in both history and prophecy and assist it in fulfilling its God-given obligation to rightfully include the Jewish people in its program for world evangelism.¹⁷

Many Jewish leaders have perceived this mission, gracious or not, as disrespectful to the integrity of the Jewish religion, and such proselytizing efforts have ignited a number of protests from local Jews, like Scott Marks, who staged a demonstration as the park opened its doors to the public in 2001 (Fig. 14).¹⁸ Many moderate Jewish responses echoed that of Arthur Teitelbaum of the Anti-Defamation League, who invoked the First Amendment and said that Zion's Hope had the absolute right to build a theme park based on the Bible, but that the Jewish community would be deeply offended if the intention was to target Jews for conversion or make false comparisons between Judaism and Christianity.¹⁹ Others, such as the Jewish Defense League's Irv Rubin (now deceased), demonstrated against the park's opening, denouncing Holy Land Experience founder Marvin Rosenthal as a "soul-snatcher" with a decided goal of "the spiritual destruction of the Jewish people."²⁰ According to the BBC, Rubin claimed that Mr. Rosenthal's organization was part of a larger effort that had succeeded in converting 250,000 Jews to Christianity in the United States.²¹

In addition to the Temple, other Jewish landmarks appear in the Holy Land Experience and serve theatrical purposes for Christian dramas, such as the Qumran caves—site of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Fig. 15). In the daily show "Behold the Lamb," Qumran forms the backdrop for Jesus' bloody walk to Calvary (Fig. 16). With Roman centurions yelling "Clear the path!" the performance resembles a medieval passion play in its narrative and graphic qualities. In the midst of cell phones ringing, cameras clicking, videocams rolling, and tourists drinking lemonade, a blood-drenched Jesus stumbles and falls, is nailed to the cross, crucified, taken down, and found missing from the empty tomb. A woman calls out, "He is Risen"—a motif carried through to the topiaries in the park's landscape architecture—and the crowd finally glimpses a resurrected Jesus, cleaned up and in white robes (Fig. 17). Afterward, visitors applaud and line up for a photo op, not with Mickey or Minnie, but with a bloody-handed, friendly centurion, or pose as if they are rolling back the stone at Jesus' tomb (Fig. 18).

The Orlando passion culminates at a replica of the so-called Garden Tomb (Fig. 19), the site in Jerusalem regarded by many Protestant Christians as the place of Jesus' burial, in preference to the quite different Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the structure widely held by Catholic and Orthodox Christians to be the tomb of Christ. The Jerusalem Garden Tomb (Fig. 20) was championed in the 1880s by General George Gordon, the British military adventurer best known to modern Americans through the 1966

16. See Mark I. Pinsky's chapter, "The Holy Land Experience: The Word Made Flesh," in *A Jew Among the Evangelicals: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Westminster John Knox, 2006), 129–144.

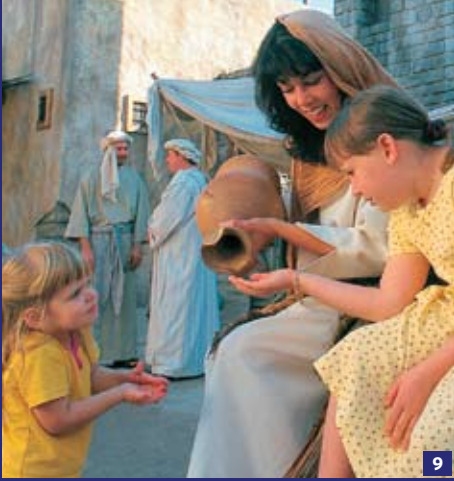
17. See Zion's Hope website: http://www.zionshope.org/ZH_ministry.aspx

18. Mike Schneider, "Christian Theme Park Opens Amid Protests," February 2, 2001, www.staugustine.com/stories/020601/sta_0206010044.shtml.

19. Malcolm Brabant, "Jewish Fury at the 'Holy Land' Park," *BBC News*, February 5, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1154643.stm>.

20. Schneider, "Christian Theme Park," and Brabant, "Jewish Fury."

21. Brabant, "Jewish Fury."





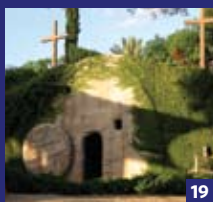
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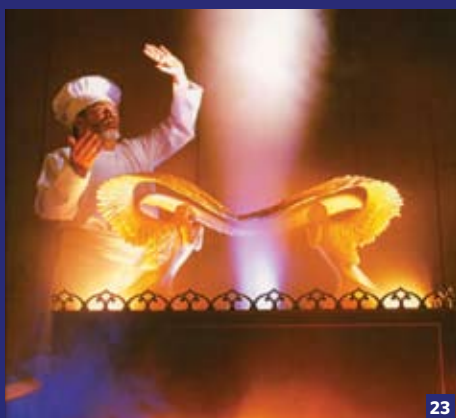
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9. Employees in costume at Holy Land Experience with guests; 10. "Biblical archaeologist" giving presentation at the Holy Land Experience's indoor model of first-century Jerusalem; 11. Holy Land Fast Food; 12. Star of David Necklaces with Crosses in Holy Land Experience gift shop; 13. "Ancient Festivals" show at Holy Land Experience with red cross superimposed on Jerusalem Temple altar; 14. Scott Marks protesting the 2001 opening of the Holy Land Experience; 15. Qumran caves at Holy Land Experience. 16. Jesus carrying cross in "Behold the Lamb of God" show; 17. Jesus in front of Qumran caves; 18. Tourist rolling back the stone at Jesus's tomb, The Holy Land Experience; 19. Garden Tomb of Jesus at Holy Land Experience; 20. Gordon's Garden Tomb, Jerusalem; 21. "Rabbis" in the "Ministries of Jesus" show; 22. Jerusalem street scene; 23. High Priest and Ark of Covenant, Wilderness Tabernacle; 24. Map of theme park.

9, 16, 17, 21-24. Courtesy of Holy Land Experience; 10-13, 15, 18, 19. Courtesy of Joan R. Branham; 14. Courtesy of Associated Press; 20. Courtesy of compass.org

movie *Khartoum*, starring Charlton Heston. Gordon, a pious evangelical, was in Jerusalem on a pause between colonial campaigns, and seems to have been unimpressed by the cluttered church literally overlaid with centuries of Catholic and Orthodox piety and liturgy, and presumably by its foreignness too. He claimed the other, more idyllic garden site was the original tomb, partly by mistakenly identifying the placement of ancient and medieval city walls, but just as importantly finding it a more genial vehicle for the somewhat pastoral piety of nineteenth-century Protestantism. In her book, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, and Theme Parks*, Annabel Wharton elaborates on the Protestant avoidance and outright rejection of the Holy Sepulchre: "Protestant Christians found the ancient church, with its architectural irregularities and multiple miracle-chapels, its candles, icons, ex-votos, incense, and complex religious politics, too crudely corporeal and human for their more cerebral and Romantic piety."²² In Orlando, a similar theology and piety seem to inform the careful selection and reconstruction of this and other Jerusalem sites, producing a particular kind of holy land "experience" connected to Protestant ideals, but also to American values, privileging feelings, and the experiential in religious practice.

The mapping of Protestant narratives onto ancient Jewish and Christian histories, as well as the park's most explicit departure from its first-century restoration of Jerusalem, takes place in the Holy Land Experience's themed exhibit, the Scriptorium. The architectural form of this building evokes Byzantine, domed, ecclesiastical structures from Ravenna and Constantinople, and in turn their highly evolved sacramental rituals. At the Holy Land Experience, however, the Byzantine sacred space is devoted not to the ritual of the Eucharist but instead to the Word of God. During the hour-long walking tour of the Scriptorium, guests encounter more than a dozen time periods and geographical settings crafted to support the history of Bible production. Guests are greeted by a lifelike talking "animatronic" figure of the Bible translator John Wycliffe. There's a Babylonian courtyard dominated by a recreation of the impressive Ishtar Gate to give a palpable context to the clay cuneiform tablets in the exhibit. Visitors travel from an ancient rotunda echoing with "the voices of the prophets" to Egypt's historic Library of Alexandria to view ancient papyri; from an early church bindery from Constantinople to Gutenberg's fifteenth-century print shop in Mainz, Germany, including a working replica of his revolutionary printing press; from William Tyndale's ransacked workshop in Cologne to London's vast Metropolitan Tabernacle, a scene of nineteenth-century evangelical preaching; and from a simple prairie church on the plains of the American Midwest, where guests learn about missionaries to a rotunda for the tour's finale, featuring major biblical personalities in an impressive laser show where tablets of the Ten Commandments are etched in fire atop Mount Sinai. The lights go out and an enormous cross hangs suspended and illuminated overhead. Finally on their way out, Ex Libris, the Scriptorium's book shop, offers guests an extensive selection of Bible and history-related merchandise.

The Scriptorium pursues a logocentric historical narrative, foregrounding literary traditions and the sacralization of the Bible itself, all the while carefully avoiding the story of Christianity's own

22. See Annabel Wharton's longer discussion of the tomb, *Selling Jerusalem*, 200ff. Also see Frank Johnson's discussion of tomb and dramas that take place around it, "The Holy Land Experience," *SBL Forum*, July 2005.

history and tradition of cultic worship. Standing in contradistinction to the sacrificial spaces of the Temple, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, or Byzantium's history and culture of ritual, the Scriptorium represents the Protestant antidote to gesture, sacrament, and action in its presentation of words, ideas, and personal faith.²³

At the Scriptorium, the tourist not only encounters imitations and evocations of the ancient world, but real artifacts and relics, all connected to the history of Bible production. In fact, the Scriptorium, which originated as a fundamentalist "Center for Biblical Antiquities" in Michigan, is claimed to house the largest private collection of biblical texts and artifacts in the world. Today it doubles as a research institute as well as a theme park display.

The work of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Ivan Karp, and others has alerted us to problems inherent in museum displays, especially in the collapsing of categories between the real and the represented.²⁴ While the Scriptorium displays authentic artifacts, including clay cuneiform tablets, ostraka, and papyri, the most controversial are the park's holdings of Torah scrolls. The Harvard Pluralism Project reported in 2002 that, "Segments of Hebrew Torah scrolls are attached directly to the walls and sprayed in acrylic throughout the park. The Central Florida Jewish community has expressed outrage with Zion's Hope for its possession of anywhere up to 30 deteriorating Torah scrolls that are part of the Scriptorium collection."²⁵ Because some of the scrolls are believed to be more than 600 years old, concern has been expressed by local Jewish leaders, like Rabbi Daniel Wolpe, who said at the time of the park's opening: "A Torah should not be a display item. It is a holy item, and it should not be used. If a synagogue took a holy item of another faith and displayed it like it was a museum piece, the other faith would be justifiably upset. We would be justifiably upset to see something holy to us used as a museum piece."²⁶ Marvin Rosenthal of the Holy Land Experience responded matter of factly that Torah scrolls are on display in museums worldwide. An additional problem related to the scrolls is the question of provenance. Because the Van Kampen Foundation, which initially built the private biblical collection and supplied the scrolls, has no documentation about the scrolls' origins, some have speculated that the Torahs may have been among those stolen from European synagogues during World War II and its aftermath.²⁷

Related to questions of religious display are issues of exhibiting ethnicities and cultures. Burke Long, Frank Johnson, and others have compared the Holy Land Experience to similar American theme parks and world's fairs—such as Palestine Park in New York, or Christ of the Ozarks in Arkansas—pointing out the orientaling themes that pervade them.²⁸ In Orlando, Christian employees engage in an interesting series of what Jeffrey D. Feldman calls "cross-dressings"²⁹—evangelical Protestants suiting up as ancient Romans, as Jesus the Jew, as good Jews who convert to the messianic truth of Jesus, and as bad Jews who heckle Jesus about being the Son of God during his ministries show in the "Judean village." While Jesus performs miracles in modest "biblical" attire, Jewish figures appear dressed in high liturgical regalia with Jewish prayer shawls; they stand strategically on the Hill of Golgotha beside the instruments of Jesus' death, signaling their association with the Jewish authorities who were ostensibly responsible for his demise

23. I thank Andrew McGowan for his helpful contributions to this section on the Protestant culture of text and sacrament.

24. See *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp, Corinne Kratz, Lynn Swajaja, Gustavo Buntinx, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Ciraj Rassool (Duke University Press, 2006); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (University of California Press, 1998); *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* ed. Ivan Karp, Steven D. Lavine, and Christine Mullen Kreamer (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Joan R. Branham, "Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space," in *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 52/53 (1994/1995): 33–47.

25. See photos and documentation of use of Torah scrolls posted in 2002 at Harvard Pluralism Project: www.pluralism.org/resources/slideshow/rodriguez/index.php, © José-Josiah Estéban Rodríguez-Sanjurjo, 2008 President and Fellows of Harvard College, and Diana Eck. See later discussion in text of the park's ostensible change in this practice.

26. "Florida: Use of Torah scrolls angers Jews," www.religioustolerance.org/news_01aug.htm, August 16, 2001.

27. Ibid.

28. Long, "Bringing the Holy Land to Orlando"; and Johnson, "The Holy Land Experience."

29. Jeffrey D. Feldman, "Cross Dressing," unpublished paper given in response panel at the Center for Religion and Media, New York University, May 2004.

(Fig. 21). And finally, the theme of *cross* dressing takes on a literal sense in the “Ancient Festivals” show when the Temple is physically clothed in a red silken cross, converting the Jewish Temple and its altar area to Christianity’s preeminent and iconic symbol. The conversion of Judaism’s legendary building mirrors Marvin Rosenthal’s own biography of conversion and reinforces the mission of Zion’s Hope to proselytize modern-day Jews.

Questions of ethnic and religious representation also emerge in the park’s claim to represent Jerusalem only up until the year 66 of the Common Era. The architecture of the streets (Fig. 22) draws, however, from later Crusader and Ottoman Jerusalem. Notably missing in Orlando’s 4,000-year spatial distillation is any deeper or positive acknowledgement of Arab or Muslim presence beyond the Arabian Chicken wrap and Bedouin Beef pita pockets at the Oasis Palms Café, where Arabic musak is piped through the speakers.³⁰ One wonders if the Holy Land Experience’s abbreviated and selective version of Jerusalem’s constituency reflects a larger abbreviated and selective theological worldview that embraces only two groups of chosen people in God’s eyes, Jews and Christians.

In their exhibition catalogue, *Encounters with the Holy Land: Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture*, Jeffrey Shandler and Beth Wegner point out that the very use of the term “Holy Land” carries polemical implications. Holy Land was a term used most frequently in the nineteenth century to denote the territory of the Bible—frozen in time and removed from history.³¹ Such nomenclature disregards changing political and territorial entities that have shaped the area, manifested in a range of other signifiers, such as the Levant, Palestine, Zion, and Eretz Israel, among others. Moreover, efforts at monumentalizing the Herodian Temple in this recreation of Jerusalem involves more than mere reconstruction. Its presence places the Dome of the Rock, which sits on the same spot today, under a kind of erasure, I would argue, and brings to fruition in Orlando an evangelical and dispensationalist agenda for Jerusalem.

The most problematic of all the exhibits may not be the Jerusalem Temple, but its own archetypal forerunner, the Wilderness Tabernacle. The website boasts: “Inside the Wilderness Tabernacle, join other guests on a remarkable high-tech, multimedia exploration of Israel’s ancient priesthood, which points to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.”³² The show begins with a recording of a Hebrew prayer from Yom Kippur.³³ Our guide is a priestly descendent of Aaron, Moses’ brother. The show portrays him lighting the menorah and offering sacrifice, and culminates with steam shooting out of the Ark of the Covenant at 40 miles per hour in a scene evocative of “Iron Chef” meets *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Fig. 23). At the end of the performance, voices chant that one day the promise of Zion will be fulfilled, and the burnt offerings of the ancient Hebrews “would someday lead to God offering the ‘perfect lamb’ to die for the sins of the world.” A white outline of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus flash on the screen.³⁴ As Burke Long put it, “It is a de-Judaized construction of historical Judaism.”³⁵

The typological mapping of Christian belief systems and symbols onto Jewish sacred and sacrificial history is familiar to us from patristic and medieval operative strategies. But I wonder if there is an additional or even fundamentally different element at work

30. For a discussion of Zion’s Hope’s approach to Islam, see Ronald Lukens-Bull and Mark Fafard, “Next Year in Orlando: (Re)Creating Israel in Christian Zionism,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 9 (2007), <http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/2007/2007-16.html>.

31. *Encounters With the Holy Land: Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Shandler and Beth Wegner (National Museum of American Jewish History, 1998), 11–12.

32. The Wilderness Tabernacle is designed to be a three-quarter scale reproduction of the original, and alternatively described as the site “to move the Israelites closer to God, while also providing a shadow of future glory—the coming of Christ,” www.holylandexperience.org/discoverhle/featuredexhibits.html#B.

33. For more on the use of Hebrew prayer, see Terry Mattingly, “Orlando’s New Holy Land,” *On Religion*, <http://tmatt.gospelcom.net/column/2001/03/21/>.

34. Beth Birnbaum, “Touring Orlando’s ‘Holy Land’: Monday in the Theme Park With Jesus,” *Free Inquiry Magazine*, 21, no. 4 (September 2001). Also see Dana Canedy, “A Biblical Theme Park in Florida Begets Ill Will,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2001.

35. Long, “Bringing the Holy Land to Orlando.”

here. The Holy Land Experience departs from early Christian devices, which aimed to appropriate yet decisively distinguish Christianity from Judaism, all the while asserting Christianity as the successor to its precursor. Like the Cross and Star of David necklaces in the gift shop, or tapestries hanging nearby that illustrate the grafting together and co-existence of Christian and Jewish symbols, Orlando's Holy Land Experience attempts not to distinguish and affirm disparities between Judaism and Christianity, but rather to dissolve differences that define the two traditions. In a nutshell, it's okay to accept Jesus and stay Jewish.

This premise continues to define the underlying principle of the park despite the change in ownership. For example, the new proprietor, Trinity Broadcast Network, has made a number of changes: the Temple of the Great King is now referred to simply as the Great Temple; there are no more Torah scrolls glued up on the walls as display items; the appearance of the park is being spruced up to serve as a backdrop for television shows and movies, creating a "faith-based Universal Studios"; and the language of the mission that once targeted Jews now seeks "to graciously proclaim to all people . . . the need for personal salvation through Jesus."³⁶ Yet, TBN chief of staff Paul Crouch, Jr. recently affirmed that the park still "wants people educated in the Torah, the Wilderness Tabernacle" and that the "Jewish believer doesn't have to forgo Judaism to be a Christian believer."³⁷ Walking through the Orlando turnstiles, the visitor experiences a strange juxtaposition of Jewish and Christian landmarks in a complex theological landscape that merges the two religious traditions into one make-believe, synthetic construct.

This is most evident in the map of the Holy Land Experience provided to visitors (Fig. 24), where an unobstructed path leads the visitor effortlessly among Jewish and Christian entities — from the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and Qumran caves, to the Garden tomb of Christ, past the Jerusalem Temple and Oasis Palms Café, to the Byzantine Scriptorium.³⁸ While medieval pilgrimage itineraries, such as twelfth-century crusader maps of Jerusalem,³⁹ reconfigured actual geographical features to fashion a landscape overlaid with Christian typological understanding, the Holy Land Experience literally levels mountains and moves rivers in its three-dimensional, interactive evocation of Christianity's own Jewish hinterland. The Orlando pilgrimage route does more than geographically and temporally juxtapose and conflate these locations into a condensed landscape. The visitor experiences them without disjuncture within a strategy of weaving and aggregation that presents Jewish and Christian elements, not in competition or even succession, but as a single congruent organization. To quote Timothy Beal, author of *Roadside Religion*, which addresses another such theme park, Holy Land USA in Bedford, Virginia, "the production of space is a form of biblical interpretation" in itself.⁴⁰ In other words, built environment acts as exegesis.

The topographical proximity of the sites links them symbolically into a seamless theological and historical narrative, presenting Judaism and Christianity as simultaneously co-existent and compatible entities. Pivotal to this composite narrative stands a reinvented and structurally converted Jerusalem Temple, acting as center and axis mundi to the entire site, and manifesting the inescapable symbolic power of a Temple that won't quit. ■

36. www.holylandexperience.org/about/mission.html.

37. Paul Crouch, Jr., chief of staff, Trinity Broadcast Network in May 2008 interview with Jennifer Molina of Newsweek.com: "The park wants people educated in the Torah, Wilderness Tabernacle. But there is a Messianic element."

38. For one modern pilgrimage account of the condensation of space, see John D. Spalding, "Authentic Replica: My Holy Land Experience," *The Christian Century* 119 (July 3–10, 2002): 14–15. Also see pilgrimage discussion in Lukens-Bull and Fafard, "Next Year in Orlando."

39. Compare with other pilgrimage maps, *Holy Land in Maps*, ed., Ariel Tishby, (The Israel Museum, 2001).

40. See Timothy Beal's treatment of the "narrative arrangement of space" in religious theme parks in *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith* (Beacon Press, 2005), 40–43, and "Biblical Recreation," *SBL Forum*, July 2005.

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JOAN R. BRANHAM is chair and associate professor of art and art history at Providence College. She also serves as vice president and chair of fellowships at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. During the 2007–08 academic year, she was acting director and Research Associate of the Women's Studies in Religion Program at HDS.