

Apocalyptic Literature

Principles of
Interpretation



Apocalyptic

- "Apocalypse" (Ἀποκάλυψις) is a Greek word meaning "revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling."
- Prophecies of future events.

Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature

- Usually deal with judgments on peoples and nations.
- Mixture of facts and symbols.
 - Indication of Facts: “At that time” “Immediately after”
 - Indication of Symbols:
 - “Sign” or “Signs”
 - Numbers: Seven, Ten, Twelve, and their multiples
 - Animals and Beasts
 - Celestial Bodies (Sun, Moon, Stars)

Most Important Principles for Interpretation of Apocalyptic Literature

- Context

- **CONTEXT**

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Another Important Point

- We don't have to agree on everything!

Matthew 24/Mark 13/Luke 21

Prophetic Utterances
of Jesus



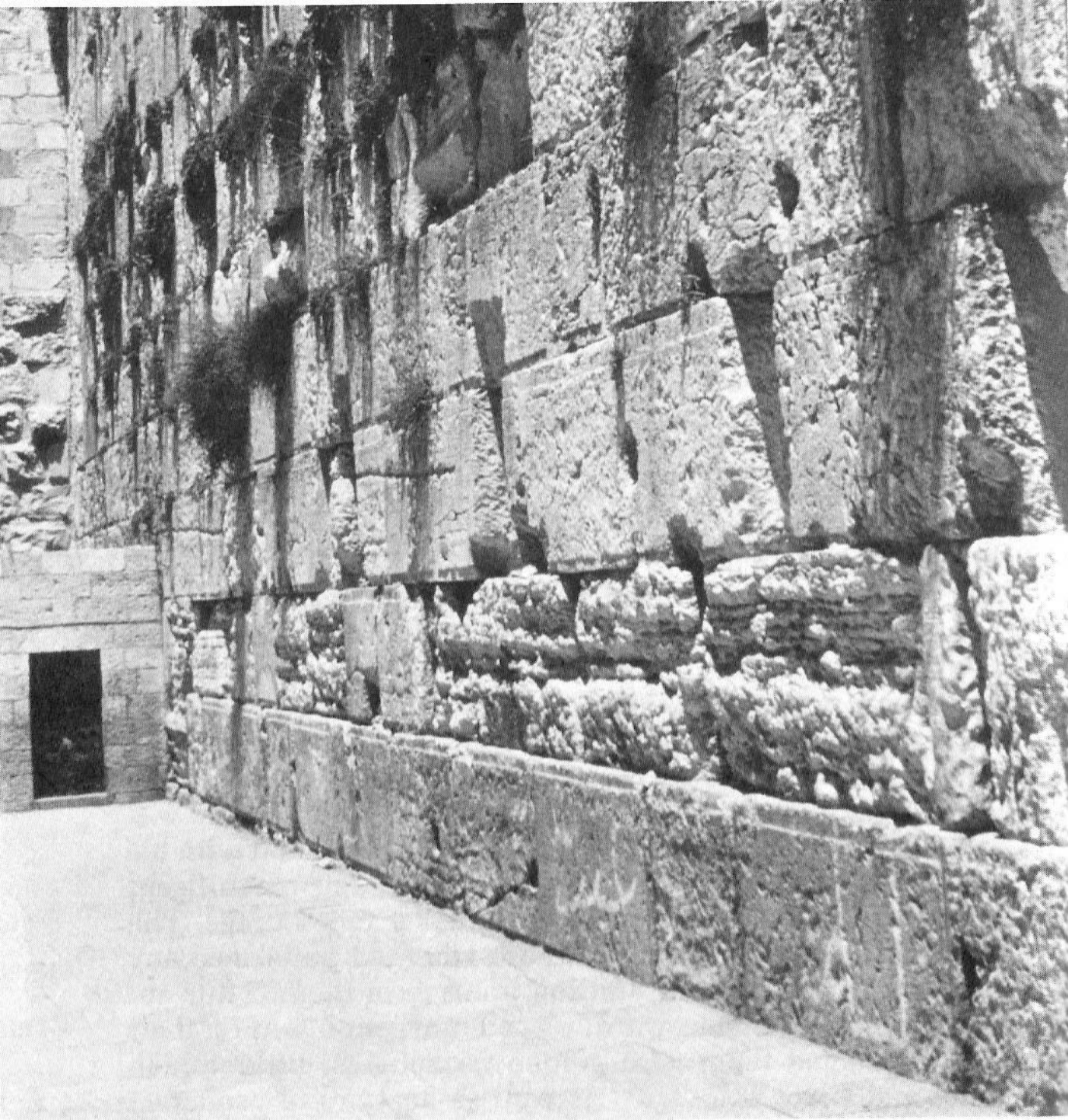
Background (Context)

Matt 21-23; Mark 11-12; Luke 19-20

- Triumphant entry – Coming kingdom (Mk 11:10)
 - Weeping over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44)
- Parable of Tenants - Divine judgement to come upon the nation of Israel. (Lk 20:15-18) (Mk 12: 9-11) (Matt 21: 40-44)
- Woes on teachers of the law and Pharisees and on that generation (Matt. 23: 29-36)
- Jesus weeps for Jerusalem – “Your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23: 37-39)

Matt 24: 1-2; Mark 13: 1-2; Luke 21:5-6

- “What massive stones and magnificent buildings.” (vs-1)
 - Josephus says the stones were white, strong, 50’x24’x16’ (foundation), 57’x7’x9’ (superstructure)



Base of western
(Wailing) wall of
the temple
platform

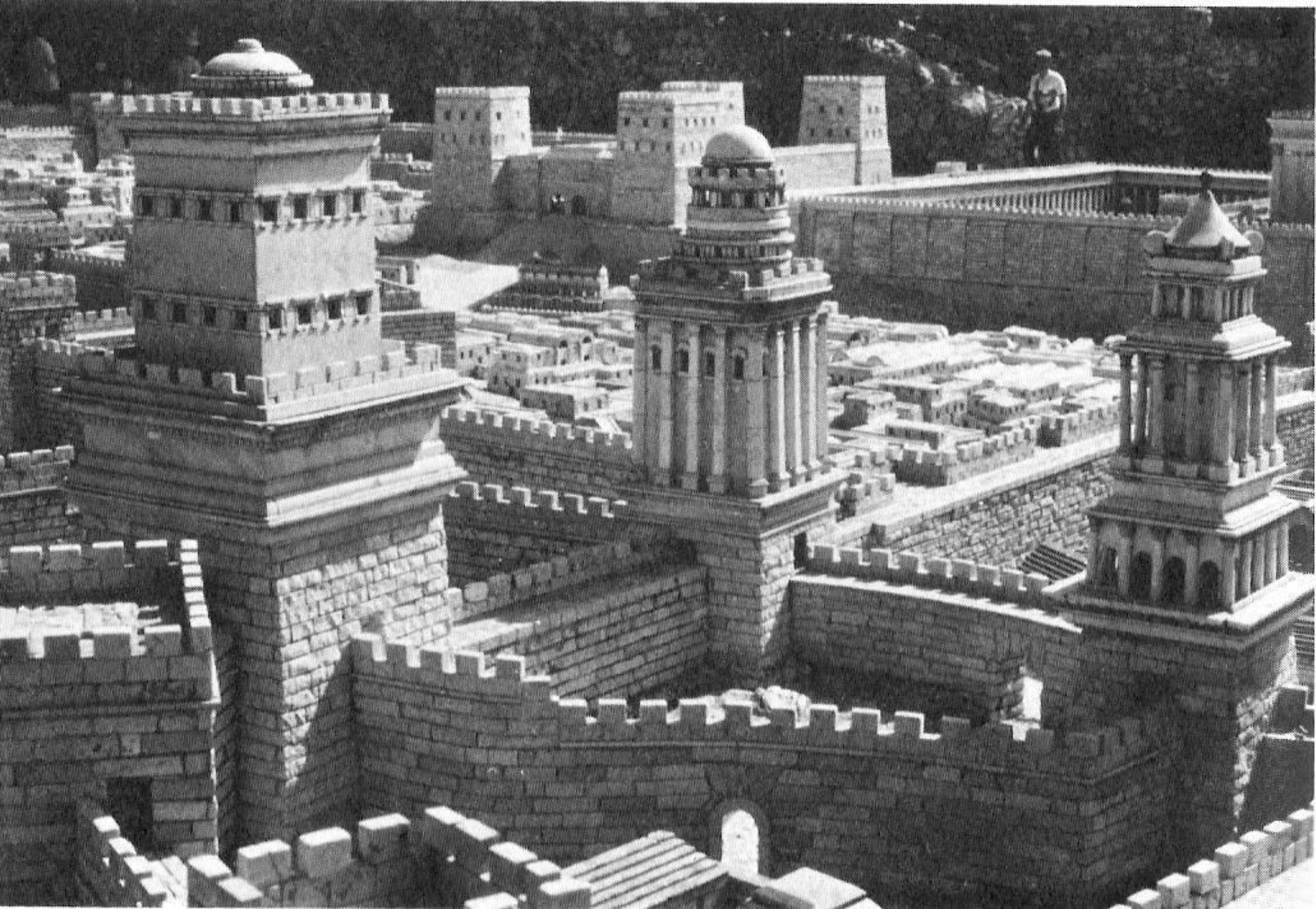


Southeastern Corner of temple platform in Jerusalem with great block of Herodian masonry nearly to the top. Walls also plummet underground 24 meters below present surface.

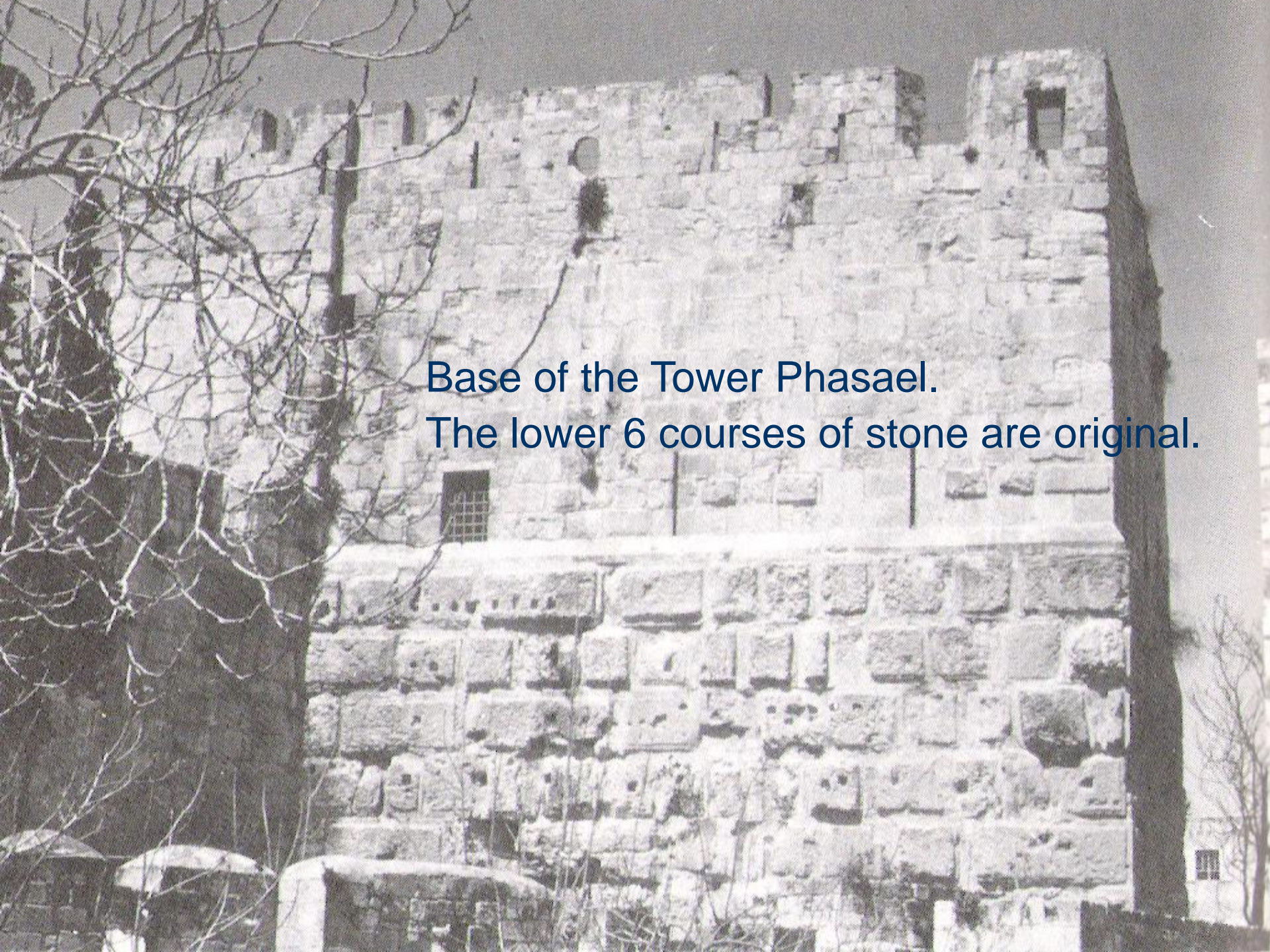
Matt 24: 1-2; Mark 13: 1-2; Luke 21:5-6

- “What massive stones and magnificent buildings.” (vs-1)
 - Josephus says the stones were white, strong, 50’x24’x16’ (foundation), 57’x7’x9’ (superstructure)
- “Not one stone will be left on another” (vs-2)
 - Proverbial of complete destruction (not literal?)
 - Titus ordered the Romans to dig up the foundations of both the city and the temple. Reported “did with a plough-share plowed the temple grounds” (Mic 3:12)
 - Read Josephus, Wars Book vii Chap 1 Sect 1.





The three great towers which guarded Herod's Palace



Base of the Tower Phasael.
The lower 6 courses of stone are original.

Mark 13: 3

- View of temple from the Mt. of Olives.







Matt 24: 3; Mark 13: 4; Luke 21: 7

- Mark 13: 4, Luke 21: 7 have two questions:
 - When will these things happen?
 - What will be the sign they are about to be fulfilled?
- Matt 24: 3 has three questions:
 - When will this happen?
 - What will be the sign of your coming?
 - **2nd Coming?**
 - **Coming in judgement on Israel and Jerusalem?**
 - **Coming into his kingdom?**
 - And of the end of the age?

Matt 24: 4-14; Mark 13: 5-13; Luke 21: 8-19

- These verses make it clear these are not the sign; but they will occur prior to the sign (of the destruction of the Temple).
 - Don't be deceived. Mt-4, Mk-5, Lk-8
 - Don't be alarmed, the end is still to come. Mt-6, Mk-7, Lk-9
 - Only the beginning of birth pains (initial contractions). Mt-8, Mk-8
 - The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world, and then the end will come. Mt-14, Mk-10

Matt 24: 5, 11; Mark 13: 6, Luke 21: 8

- False Christs

- Acts 21:38 Paul accused of being an Egyptian who led 4000 assassins into the desert a false prophet. (See Josephus' summary from Adam Clark)
- Dositheus, a Samaritan, pretended he was the Christ foretold by Moses.
- A man named Theudas said he was a prophet. Josephus says "he deceived many"
- Josephus says that there were so many imposters of this type that almost every day some were taken and killed by the Romans.

Matt 24: 6-7, Mark 13: 7-8, Luke 21: 10-11

- Wars and Rumors of War
 - Josephus, Tacitus, and Eusebius tell of almost constant slaughter from wars, especially due to rebellion instigated by the Jews from AD 30 to 70.
 - 20,000 killed at Caesar, 13,000 at Scythopolis, 2,500 at Ascalon, 2,000 at Ptolemais, 50,000 at Alexandria, 10,000 at Damascus (by Syrians and others)
 - Caligula order statue to be set up in the Temple. When the Jews refused, they were so worried about it causing a war that they neglected to till the land.

Matt 24: 6-7, Mark 13: 7-8, Luke 21: 10-11

- Earthquakes

- Historians mention earthquakes during the time in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Campania, and two in Rome.
- Josephus tells of a severe earthquake in Judea accompanied by a “dreadful tempest.”

- Famine

- Foretold by Agabus (Acts 11:28). Confirmed by Suetonius, Tacitus, Eusebius and Josephus

Matt 24: 9-14 Mark 13: 9-13; Luke 21: 12-19

- Handed over, flogged, hated, betrayed
 - Persecution of Christians by Jewish and Roman authorities
 - Book of Acts is full of such accounts
 - I Thess. 2:14-16
- Gospel preached to the whole World
 - Col. 1: 6, 23; Rom. 10:18
 - Probably relating to the Roman world (see Lk. 2: 1)