

Night in the Temple

For the service of the officiating ministers was not only by day, but also 'at night in the Temple.' From Scripture we know that the ordinary services of the sanctuary consisted of the morning and evening sacrifices. To these the Rabbis add another evening service, probably to account for their own transference of the evening service to a much later hour than that of the sacrifice.⁶⁷

There is, however, some difficulty about the exact time when each of the sacrifices was offered. According to general agreement, the morning sacrifice was brought at the 'third hour,' corresponding to our nine o'clock. But the preparations for it must have commenced more than two hours earlier. Few, if any, worshipers could have witnessed the actual slaying of the lamb, which took place immediately on opening the great Temple-gate. Possibly they may have gathered chiefly to join in the prayer 'at the time of incense' (Luke 1:10). In the modified sense, then, of understanding by the morning sacrifice the whole service, it no doubt coincided with the third hour of the day, or 9 a.m. This may explain how on the day of Pentecost such a multitude could so readily 'come together,' to hear in their various tongues 'the wonderful works of God'—seeing it was the third hour (Acts 2:15), when they would all be in the Temple. The evening sacrifice was fixed by the Law (Numbers 28:4,8) as 'between the evenings,' that is, between the darkness of the gloaming and that of the night.

Such admonitions as 'to show forth thy faithfulness every night upon an instrument of ten strings and on the psaltery' (Psalm 92:2,3), and the call to those who 'by night stand in the house of the Lord,' to 'lift up their hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord' (Psa 134), seem indeed to imply an evening service—an impression confirmed by the appointment of Levite singers for night service in 1 Chronicles 9:33; 23:30. But at the time of our Lord the evening sacrifice certainly commenced much earlier. Josephus puts it down (Ant. xiv. 4, 3) as at the ninth hour. According to the Rabbis the lamb was slain at the eighth hour and a-half, or about 2:30 p.m., and the pieces laid on the altar an hour later—about 3:30 p.m. Hence, when 'Peter and John went up together into the Temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour' (Acts 3:1) it must have been for the evening sacrifice, or rather half an hour later, and, as the words indicate, for the 'prayer' that accompanied the offering of incense. The evening service was somewhat shorter than that of the morning, and would last, at any rate, about an hour and a-half, say till about four o'clock, thus well meeting the original requirement in Numbers 28:4. After that no other offering might be brought except on the eve of the Passover, when the ordinary evening sacrifice took place two hours earlier, or at 12:30 p.m.