

**A** (Chapel) The priest counts his adopted order as having its roots in the (Jeru-) Salem area, but together with a group of somewhat disheveled pilgrims who lounge through the outer halls, he's recently come back from an anticipated sojourn into the wilderness eastward beyond Jordan. They all had expected to find the barrenness of those culturally significant environs conducive to a meditative prayer retreat. However, they'd encountered an unsettling intimation of malevolent feeling seemingly lurking amidst the badlands. As their reflections began to turn against the contentedness they were seeking, it was deemed prudent to abandon the experience and remove to the city.

**B** (Kitchens) A potter is being instructed by one of the scullery maids on the desired shape of an improved stoneware churn, after the last one had to be discarded as unusable. For such a sturdy piece, the potter may have to construct a larger oven kiln in order to fire it at the required high temperature. It seems that all this is needed for the cook to be able to prepare some softer dishes for children of an age too young to stomach the rich foods that the palace generally prefers to have served.

**C** (Infirmary) The word hospital is derived from the notion of hospitality, and much of what was then available for health care was comparable to the good Samaritan taking the wounded man to a waystation inn and paying for his upkeep in recovery. The infirmary is such a place for staff and others who might need to stabilize, watched over by a henchman, somewhat like a stableboy. A doctor might be summoned for a house call to diagnose or treat an ailment, but being committed to a ward was viewed almost as fearfully as consignment to the dungeon, as it appeared to be an extension of the battlefield surgery. Healing was something to be prayed for while being salved with balm, or fed chicken soup.

**D** (Dressing rooms) A pair of seamstresses are reeling off some prepared cloth to be cut into lengthy strips then hemmed and dyed to make various types of girdling for both men and women's attire. They facetiously note the "fine raiment" of the loose smock and tunic you wear, and ask to borrow you for a model in producing belts for shepherds of all ages. These are made more like wide sashes long enough to wind about the body or over a shoulder, and besides being useful in the girding up/ tucking into of long robes for legwork, can be draped as an apron, spread as a wrap or muffler, and provide a pouch or purse carrying place: even it is said, capable of transporting a lamb.

**E** (Drawing room) The herald finds oil of this kind useful on ceremonial occasions, but merely a tool of his trade. Anointing of one's hair or hands, beyond its cosmetic use, was then intended as a sign of preparation to ritual cleanness for guidance or wellbeing upon chosen authoritative recipients, patients, and professors or preachers. Associatively as a symbol of appointing, it called for attention from the populace at large to a consideration of the anointed's condition. It would have been viewed as an admission - a setting apart or calling out of the subject; in contrast to the similarly cleansing submission of baptism (to repentance or reinstatement) as an entering into the fellowship of souls: "the circumcision made without hands."

**F** (Dining hall) You're pressed into helping a footman lower the elaborate chandelier to adjust and polish its reflectors, due to complaints of incommensurate lighting being shone upon the high status table positions. With seating privileges ranged around a central table, there's a requirement for both host and guests to inspect the occupants, made even more contentious by the unavoidability of intermixing delicate combinations of opposing viewpoints: Roman & Greek, Jew & gentile, noble & tradesman, town and countryman, political rival and ally; and the preconception that eating with someone demonstrates an approval of him or her. It's reminiscent of the psalmist's description: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

**G** (Waiting room) It's supposed that God has left no prophetic voice in Israel for the 400 years since the time of Malachi and Nehemiah. But even with the cultural movement toward the synagogue tradition, people still resort to the temple they'd rebuilt at that time under Zerubbabel, then recently reconstructed through Herod, with the expectation of some form of inspired demonstration from the attending priests. Seeing this incident has reminded you that some months back, the crowd waiting for the return of a designated server who'd gone into the inner temple to burn incense found him to have been struck dumb with a visitation he could not tell.

**H** (Parlor) Between times, the matron is taking pains to entertain a lady sent as a spokeswoman for the Samaritan community as a whole. This lady is lobbying for inclusion of her people in the celebrations to come, emphasizing the traditional importance of their locale in Jewish history. In her city of Shechem she points out are such sites as Jacob's Well and the Tomb of Joseph. Overall, Samaria has been ready to reach accord with Herod's governance, even acquiescing in his proposed renaming of their capital as Sebaste in a Greek-speaking tribute to Augustus Caesar.

**I** (Workshops) To test the refining of metal composing their latest set of chisels and gouges, the woodworkers are in the process of making some small nested doll forms. This allows them to rate how these tools perform on the different varieties of woods that they're prone to shaping. For the innermost, resistant acacia/ shittim wood from wilderness groves is chosen as was used in the ark & tabernacle. Over that is fragrant cedar from Lebanon as used in the temple. Containing those is the laurel/ bay wood so native to Canaan. And lastly the cypress/ gopherwood that made up Noah's ark.

**J** (Dayroom) The entrance of two waiters causes a stir, as they're debating the proper allotment of a serving vessel that became chipped in washing and was then donated to the servants by the quartermaster. It is an otherwise finely glazed, two- handed drinking cup called a grail, and seems to attract interest in its possession from all in the room. At length, an agreement to resolve the problem by casting lots among those present is reached. So, after an adequate set of knucklebones is collected and their representation fully explained, a circle is formed to assure interreliance, and the rolling begun.

**K** (Nursery) Childbearing women often voluntarily separate themselves, either by custom or preference, for a time both before and after a birth. The harem here provides a haven for those expecting, as well as a secure and well supported theater for deliveries. Younger children of the palace may be shuttled between the nursery and reserved bed chambers by nursemaids typically enlisted and monitored by their charges' mothers. In this way, accommodation may be arranged potentially for some number of Herod's overall 10 wives and 15 children, who're normally dispersed among his holdings throughout the kingdom.

**L** (Audience bay) One of the officers of the watch calls for you to shore up some loosened blocks from an access archway that was damaged by an oxcart with a timber load that tried to wedge through. The driver complains to the watchman levying a fine that the passage is as small as the eye of a needle, and had he been injured by being crushed against the wall like Balaam on his ass, he could be the one bringing suit. He evidently has on his mind his return to the sheltered caravanserai outside where ox and ass are stabled.

**M** (Storerooms) You get hurriedly directed to try to shield the perimeter of a stone- lined grain pit from a spreading pool of wine spilled across the dirt floor. Looks like one swollen wineskin split open and its drenching fall caused a second one to burst in turn. The porter then goes to make a closer inspection of the few racked skins, lamenting in a distracted manner the inattention of the bulk of lowly porters who come and go without a care for old and patched wineskins. Now to get in touch with the provisional goatherd for a new supply of skins, before becoming a scapegoat over this.

**N** (Arcade) The cashiers who sell at these stalls are also acting as tellers or moneychangers: accepting any foreign coinage and returning the local coin in change. However, there's no fixed rate of exchange so they can shortchange a transaction then recoup for themselves with a smaller fee to Roman mints. This is one way of technically circumventing prohibitions against charging usury (additional interest to be repaid for loaned money). A Jewish faction known as the Zealots finds these practices abhorrent, with their zeal aimed specifically against the idea of rendering tribute to any but God.

**O** (Throne room) Herod was elevated to kingly stature under the Roman imperium as successor to his Idumean father initially installed as procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar. By effective governance of Judea in his turn he acquired oversight of Galilee, then his representation on behalf of the nation won appointment as nominal "king of the Jews." He has forcefully if not forcibly infused a mixture of Palestinian, Jewish, Greek, and Roman influences into the cultural as well as political standards of the day, and a few of the Jewish community labelled Herodians who're in sympathy with such tolerance are here conferring with one of their delegations who've come down from Galilee.

**P** (Bed chambers) You are surprised to be confronted by a live rooster strutting across one of the balconies. It calls to mind the insertion into the Jewish plan of three night watches the "cockcrowing" watch under the Roman system. So now there are the evening, mid(-dle)night, cockcrow, and morning watches. Perhaps this bird is here at Herod's behest, who prides himself in being active before the cock crows. Which may indicate that he went through some sleepless late nights, like the one Peter will be facing years from now.

**Q** (Baths) A missionary who has become respected for work with isolating and accommodating those plague victims and lepers branded as unclean, as well as advocating for better water usage in the poor sections of the city, is being asked for an opinion. It's felt that these baths should be supplied by diverting water from the more ancient and copious Pool of Siloam constructed by king Hezekiah with a connecting tunnel to the Gihon Spring, rather than the Pool of Bethesda with its lately installed porches. A third possibility is suggested: Solomon's Pools near Bethlehem and the aqueduct bringing water down from the hills to the south into the temple area.

**R** (Greenhouse) You step aside when a formally dressed man enters and makes his way carefully to a shrubbery where he bends down for a closer examination of its yellow- flowered plants. He cuts off a length of blue thread that he's carrying and ties it around one of the low branches: making you wonder if he's decorating the bush in the same manner as the tassels you can see at the hem of his garment. After he leaves, the florist explains that Pharisees pay tithes of mint, anise & cumin, and that even the branches of the hyssop, a variety of mint, are used by both them and the priests in their ritual purifications.

**S** (Ballroom) In the midst of you grouting some of the inlaid floor, guards have been brought in to keep a close watch over an exhibition of treasures brought as gifts by visiting Sabeans, now being used to decorate a reception to be held here. Their diplomatic emissary has been given leave to propound a riddle which, if answered to the visitors' eventual satisfaction, would merit a further undisclosed reward. It is said that this is a tradition that has persisted since the Queen of Sheba travelled up to test the wisdom of Solomon in a manner she'd heard of from the story of Samson.

**T** (Library) In keeping with library finds uncovered in other palace structures, this one is predominantly an accounts archive and the local administration's data dump. One of the court lawyers is seen to consult the scribes' particular indexing technic by unrolling a gleaming scroll made from a thinly swaged sheet of copper. Probably trying to resolve another argument over inheritance. Jesus' disciple Matthew had been a publican, and was conversant with such record keeping for taxation. Thus the opening census- like genealogical format in his gospel.

**U** (Gallery) A wall hanging under examination has been taken down and is being moved for better display stretched between two stone columns. As it unfolds once you've rigged the attachment clamps, you see that it's painted with a life- size portrayal of the scene in which an angel stays Abraham's hand when he was about to sacrifice his own son Isaac as God had ordained, to seal the new covenant enacted for the Hebrew people. Having so tested the patriarch's faith, God himself then provided a ram as the peace offering - shown to one side of the painting with its horns caught in a thicket.

**V** (Theater) The stage is being reset for a semi- public meeting of the Sanhedrin, with a dais for the assembled council. The theater seats are reserved for members of the religious and business community who have an interest in the outcome of the advertised proceedings. They are here to attend the council put forth a definitive ruling on what constitutes a Sabbath day's journey: as it relates to moral, civil and ceremonial law. Listening in, you hear a young man named Nicodemus recognized, who stands and says that this convocation should remind us that being based on the encampment of our tribes around the tabernacle in the wilderness, the question in consideration should emphasize a coming together rather than a ranging out: of gathering and not scattering.

**W** (Gymnasium) You get an opportunity to observe what you've heard of the rod and staff as devices wielded for authority, or instrumental as well as supportive tools. Overseeing the men and boys in training here is an instructor who can be seen standing by holding a staff with its grounded end against one foot and its top at arm's length out to one side, as though he were on sentry duty. He may use a pointing of his staff to call for attention from his assistant: the conductor who shifts a shorter rod from hand to hand as he moves about among the trainees to indicate areas of concern or as a brace if needed.

**X** (Observatory) The bright star that's appeared has caused much consternation. Back when the king of Moab, in an attempt to prevent the Israelites' invasion of Canaan, summoned Balaam out of Mesopotamia, the inspired prophet had instead foretold that: "A star shall come out of Jacob." And, feeling like he'd stepped into portentous waters too deep for him, Balaam returned to his home. Now the palace soothsayer is shaking his head, and wonders what the notables in those countries to the east who search the skies for signs will be thinking about these wondrous occurrences.