

THE USE OF ἄγλος FOR THE SANCTUARY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA, PHILO, AND JOSEPHUS

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The recent responses by Norman Young¹ and Richard Davidson² to Roy Gane's article, "Re-Opening *Katapetasma* ('Veil') in Hebrews 6:19,"³ illustrate a difference of scholarly perspective on the meaning of τὰ ἄγια in Hebrews.⁴ While both Young and Davidson agree with Gane's conclusion that *katapetasma* in Heb 6:19 most likely refers to the inner curtain before the Most Holy Place, they disagree on whether the OT imagery behind Heb 6:19 is best understood in the context of the Day of Atonement ministry within the Most Holy Place (Young) or to the more general inauguration of the whole sanctuary (Davidson). An essential part of their disagreement revolves around whether the uses of τὰ ἄγια in Hebrews refer to the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary⁵ or whether these uses constitute a more general reference to the whole sanctuary.⁶ Since τὰ ἄγια in the LXX generally refers to the whole sanctuary, Davidson argues for its same use in Hebrews. While Young concedes that τὰ ἄγια in the LXX regularly refers to the whole sanctuary, he

¹Norman H. Young, "The Day of Dedication or The Day of Atonement? The Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 61-68; idem, "Where Jesus Has Gone as a Forerunner on Our Behalf," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 165-173.

²Richard M. Davidson, "Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young's 'Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited,'" *AUSS* 40 (2002): 69-88; idem, "Christ's Entry 'Within the Veil' in Hebrews 6:19-20: The Old Testament Background," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 175-190.

³Roy E. Gane, "Re-Opening *Katapetasma* ('Veil') in Hebrews 6:19," *AUSS* 38 (2000): 5-8.

⁴Though Gane's article did not directly deal with the issue of how τὰ ἄγια is used in Hebrews, the question was raised indirectly by implication since George Rice's understanding of *katapetasma* was tied to his view that τὰ ἄγια referred to the whole sanctuary in general, not specifically to the Most Holy Place. See George E. Rice, "Within Which Veil?" *Ministry*, June 1987, 20-21; idem, "Hebrews 6:19: Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning *Katapetasma*," in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed. F.B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 229-234 (reprinted with corrections by the author from *AUSS* 5 [1987]: 65-71); idem, *The Priesthood of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*[s] (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 1-56.

⁵E.g., Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, NIBCNT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990).

⁶E.g., Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

argues that the context of Hebrews would lead “any first-century Jew”⁷ to associate the term with the Most Holy Place and the Day of Atonement.

To understand Hebrews from the perspective of its original first-century audience, it is crucial to pay attention not only to the use of τὰ ἅγια in the LXX and in the immediate context of Hebrews itself, but also to the larger context of the contemporary use of τὰ ἅγια during the first century. Surprisingly, this has been largely overlooked. While much has been written regarding the meaning of τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews and some regarding the use of ἅγιος in the LXX, virtually no published research has dealt with the use of ἅγιος in early Jewish literature written in Greek.⁸ Without the latter, there is insufficient evidence to draw a firm conclusion about how “any first-century Jew” might have understood what he or she read in Hebrews. It is important, therefore, that any determination of the use of τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews must also consider the larger context of its contemporary Jewish usage. This article will attempt to fill some of that void by examining the use of ἅγιος as it occurs in the extrabiblical Jewish writings written in Greek and referred to as the OT Pseudepigrapha, as well as the works of Philo and Josephus.⁹

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

We begin with the use of ἅγιος in those writings generally believed to have been written between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. that are commonly known as the OT Pseudepigrapha. The examination of ἅγιος in the OT Pseudepigrapha is significant since it provides insight into the use of ἅγιος in Jewish literature written after the LXX and is, therefore, in closer proximity to the milieu of Hebrews. In the singular and plural, ἅγιος appears approximately 97 times throughout the OT Pseudepigrapha.¹⁰ The majority of these occurrences are used adjectivally in such phrases as “holy angels” (1En. 20:2-7), “holy words” (1En. 1:2), “sacred things” (T. Levi 14:8), and “holy people” (Sib. Or. 5:432). Used in relation to the tabernacle, ἅγιος appears 11 times

⁷Young, “Where Jesus Has Gone,” 172; idem, “The Day of Dedication,” 64.

⁸Though somewhat dated, the principal work in this area is still that by Henry S. Gehman, “*Hagios* in the Septuagint, and its Relation to the Hebrew Original,” *VT* 4 (1954): 337-339; and Alywn P. Salom, “*Ta Hagia* in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *AUSS* 5 (1967): 59-70. While frequently cited, Salom’s examination of τὰ ἅγια in the LXX is of limited use since his study failed to include the LXX references that were the basis for his findings. Outside of the LXX, Salom’s study only referenced one passage in Philo and three references in Josephus where τὰ ἅγια occurs.

⁹This article is a revision of chap. 3 of my M.A. thesis, “A Study of *Ta Hagia* in the LXX, Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus, and Its Implications in Hebrews” (M.A. thesis, Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2000), 65-87.

¹⁰The Greek text from the OT Pseudepigrapha is taken from Albert-Marie Denis’s *Concordance Grecque des Pseudépigraphes d’Ancien Testament* (Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1987).

throughout four books.¹¹ We will examine its use in each book in the chronological order that scholars believe the books were composed.

The Sibylline Oracles

Third Sibyl, a composite work written over a number of years, contains only one reference to ἅγιος that appears to refer to the sanctuary. The reference occurs in 3:308, a section dated to 163-145 B.C.E.,¹² as part of a woe pronounced on the Babylonians for their destruction of the Jerusalem temple. According to the account, the Sibyl announces that Babylon's judgment is to fall from heaven (ἐξ ἁγίων). Whereas Collins interprets ἁγίων as a reference to "holy ones,"¹³ the idea of a heavenly judgment is better understood as a reference to the heavenly sanctuary, the place from where the judgment of God issued forth.¹⁴ The idea that God's judgment emerges from his holy temple in heaven was common in the OT (e.g., Isa 26:21; Jer 25:30; 32:20 LXX; Ps 20:2; 19:3 LXX), and it makes sense that the author would draw on that sacred tradition. The concept of a judgment coming from the heavenly sanctuary is also developed later in the Apocalypse of John (cf. Rev 16:1ff.).¹⁵

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

Though scholars are divided on the exact date when the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* was composed, its use of the LXX indicates that it is in closer proximity to the time of Hebrews than is the LXX itself.¹⁶ While the singular form of ἅγιος appears only once in relation to the sanctuary (*T. Levi* 8:17), the plural form is used four times in the *Testament of Levi* and once in the *Testament of Asher*.¹⁷

The first use of ἅγιος in the *Testament of Levi* appears in the singular form in 8:17, where Levi is told in vision that he and his descendants have been given the responsibility of the ministry of the Hebrew cultus: "From among them will be high priests, judges, and scribes, and by

¹¹*Sib. Or.* 3:308; *T. Levi* 8:17; 9:9, 11; 18:2b, 18, 19, 53; *T. Ash.* 7:2; *Pss. Sol.* 1:8; 2:13; 8:11.

¹²J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:354-355.

¹³*Ibid.*, 369.

¹⁴R. H. Charles also translates it as a reference to the sanctuary, "the Holy Place" ("The Testament of the XII Patriarchs," in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, ed. R. H. Charles [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913], 2:384).

¹⁵The lack of the definite article should not be taken as an indication against understanding the passage as a reference to the sanctuary since the definite article is missing in other references to the sanctuary (e.g., Ps 19:3 LXX).

¹⁶H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:777-778.

¹⁷*T. Levi* 18:2b, 18, 19, 53; *T. Ash.* 7:2.

their word the sanctuary [τὸ ἅγιον] will be administered” (8:17). This may be an allusion to Num 3:38 LXX, where Moses, Aaron, and his sons were assigned the responsibility of carrying out the sacred charge of τοῦ ἁγίου. As in Num 3:38, the singular τὸ ἅγιον refers to the entire sanctuary complex.¹⁸

A representative example of the plural usage is found in *T. Levi* 9, where Isaac is depicted as passing on specific instructions to Levi regarding the sacrificial regulations. Levi is warned to beware of fornication because by it his descendants would in the future defile τὰ ἅγια (9:9). In order to prevent his own defilement of the sanctuary, he is instructed to marry a virgin and to bathe before he enters and leaves τὰ ἅγια precincts (9:11).

The *Psalms of Solomon*

The *Psalms of Solomon* are a collection of eighteen psalms that appear to have been composed by a group of Jews in response to the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey and the Romans in 63 B.C.E.¹⁹ An apparent reference to Pompey’s death in 48 B.C.E. may indicate that the psalms were finally brought together sometime after that event. While the singular form of ἅγιος is not used of the sanctuary, the plural form is used three times.²⁰ Outside the use of the plural forms of ἅγιος, no other words are used of the sanctuary. The three plural references to τὰ ἅγια occur in three of the four pivotal psalms (Pss 1, 2, 8, 17) relied on for dating.²¹ The first reference is in *Pss. Sol.* 1:8, where the lawless actions of the Romans are said to have surpassed all the wicked deeds

¹⁸Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 161.

¹⁹For a more detailed discussion, see R. B. Wright, “Psalms of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:639ff.

²⁰*Pss. Sol.* 1:8; 2:3; 8:11. R. B. Wright translated the genitive plural ἁγίων in *Pss. Sol.* 11:1 as “sanctuary” (“sound in Zion the signal trumpet of the sanctuary; announce in Jerusalem”). While “sanctuary” is a viable translation of ἁγίων, it seems better to understand it here as “saints” in the context of a gathering back to Jerusalem. Neither σάλλπιγγι nor σημασίας is used in conjunction with ἁγίων as “sanctuary” in the LXX. Herbert Edward Ryle and Montague Rhodes James understood *Pss. Sol.* 11:1 as a reference to blowing a “holy trumpet” (ΠΙΣΑΛΜΟΙ ΣΟΛΟΜΟΝΤΟΣ, *Psalms of the Pharisees, Commonly Called the Psalms of Solomon: The Text Newly Revised from all the MSS: Edited, with Introduction, English Translation, Notes, Appendix, and Indices* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891], 101). G. Buchanan Gray’s translation, however, seems more likely: “Blow in Zion on the trumpet to summon the saints” (“The Psalms of Solomon,” in *APOT*, ed. R. H. Charles [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913], 2:643). For a lucid study of the use of trumpets in early Judaism, see Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 11 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1987), 210-216.

²¹Wright, 639-641.

of the Gentiles before them in that they “completely profaned the sanctuary [τὰ ἅγια] of the Lord.” R. B. Wright comments that τὰ ἅγια “may refer specifically to the services and sacrifices of the sanctuary as in Lev 19:8, or more generally to the temple itself as in Ezek 5:11; 23:38, inclusive of both the buildings and the rites.”²² While the former is possible, the latter interpretation better reflects the immediate context, where *Pss. Sol.* 2:1-2 describes both the violation of the temple buildings and rites by the “sinner” (Pompey), who “broke down” the temple walls and went up to the “place of sacrifice.” This may be an allusion to what was the greatest sacrilegious action taken by the Romans—Pompey’s entrance into the Holy and Most Holy Places.²³ In *Pss. Sol.* 2:3, the psalmist attributes the sacrilegious actions of Pompey and the Romans as a divine chastisement for the godless behavior of the “sons of Jerusalem,” which had already defiled τὰ ἅγια.

This same general reference to the entire sanctuary also fits with the third reference to τὰ ἅγια in 8:11, where the Romans are said to have stolen from the sanctuary of God.

The Holy of Holies

In addition to the uses of ἅγιος mentioned above, there are two occurrences in the OT Pseudepigrapha where a form of the literal translation τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου is used of the Holy of Holies.

In the *T. Levi* 3:4, the author uses the phrase ἁγίῳ ἁγίων to refer to God’s dwelling place in the highest heavens. The context convincingly indicates that ἁγίῳ ἁγίων was not used in mere reference to the heavens as God’s dwelling place, but as a direct reference to the specific place where God dwells, i.e., the Most Holy Place in the heavenly tabernacle. Having specified the place where God dwelt, v. 5 further describes heaven by means of temple terminology: angels are seen sacrificing “to the Lord in behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones.” As H. C. Kee notes: “The liturgy performed in the heavenly archetypal sanctuary corresponds to the offerings in the earthly temple, which is a copy of the heavenly (Exod 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8).”²⁴

Our examination of the use of ἅγιος in the OT Pseudepigrapha has revealed that both the singular and plural forms of ἅγιος are used in reference to the sanctuary in general. However, when an author desired to make a specific reference to the Holy of Holies, the plural form of

²²Ibid., 651. Gray, 631, translated this as “the holy things” of the Lord, but noted that the Greek may also mean “sanctuary” and the Syriac version can only mean “sanctuary.” Ryle and James, 6, 10, contend, however, that both *Pss. Sol.* 1:8 and 2:3 refer “not to the Temple building but to the sacrifices and worship.”

²³*A.J.* 1.152.

²⁴Kee, 789. The prologue to *3 Bar.* also employs another form of the Hebraism (τὰ τῶν ἁγίων ἅγια) to refer to the Holy of Holies.

ἅγιος by itself was not employed. Instead, one of the forms of the phrase τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου was used to refer to the Most Holy Place.

Philo

Philo (ca. 20-25 B.C.E. to ca. 45-50 C.E.) wrote within a few decades of the composition of the book of Hebrews. While Philo's writings reveal a variety of terms and expressions used in reference to the tabernacle (e.g., ναός, ἱερόν, ἁγίασμα, and σκηνή), our examination will focus on the plural and singular forms of ἅγιος.

Singular Usage

The singular form of ἅγιος occurs only twice in reference to the tabernacle; both are found in the third volume of Philo's *Legum allegorice*.²⁵ In the context of the passage, Philo is concerned with how the reasoning faculties should control the passions of pleasure that reside in the "breast and belly."²⁶ Because the "Sacred Word" understood how strong such passions could be, a remedy was provided in the allegorical interpretation of the breastplate of the high priest in Exod 28:30. In the process of explaining how the breastplate cures and heals the deviant passions of the heart, Philo includes a partial quotation of Exod 28:30 LXX. While the LXX refers to the Holy Place, the literal sanctuary is clearly not Philo's concern.²⁷ The singular references to ἅγιος are used merely as a part of a quotation that provides Philo with a springboard for his allegorical interpretation of the text. Thus, the use of ἅγιος in *Leg.* 3.119 and 125 reveals no insight into Philo's understanding or use of the singular form.

Plural Usage

The plural form of ἅγιος occurs twelve times in Philo and seems best understood as a general reference to the sanctuary.²⁸ The following examples are noteworthy. Colson and Whitaker render *Post* 173: "He [Moses], the seventh from Abraham, does not, like those before him, haunt the outer court of the Holy Place [τῶν ἁγίων] as one seeking initiation, but as a sacred Guide has his abode in the sanctuary [ἐν τοῖς ἁδύτοις]."

This passage occurs within the context of Philo's discussion of Gen

²⁵*Leg.* 3.119, 125. Unless otherwise noted, all Greek text and translation of Philo are from the Loeb Classical Library.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷The singular form ἅγιον also occurs in *Plant.* 53, where Philo quoted Exod 25:17. In the quotation, Philo replaced ἁγίασμα with ἅγιον, and through his allegorical hermeneutic understood the "Holy Place" to refer to the cosmos and not to the literal sanctuary.

²⁸*Post.* 173; *Migr.* 104; *Her.* 226; *Fug.* 93, 100; *Somm.* 1.207, 216; *Mos.* 2.87, 114, 155; *Spec.* 1.115, 296.

4:25 and the raising up of “another” seed after the death of Abel. While Cain was separated from God and Abel left the world of mortals, Philo depicts Seth as the one who “will never relinquish” the human race, but be “enlarged” in it. This enlarging is seen in the descendants of Seth—Noah, Abraham, and down to Moses. Philo envisioned Moses as the greatest of Seth’s descendants and depicts him as the one who did not have to relate to God from the outer courts of the sanctuary, but as one who was able to dwell within the Most Holy Place itself. Colson and Whitaker’s translation, however, fails to denote the difference between τῶν ἁγίων and τοῖς ἁδύτοις by translating them respectively as “Holy Place” and “sanctuary.” Philo’s use of τῶν ἁγίων and τοῖς ἁδύτοις indicates that the contrast was between the outer courts of the temple and the Holy of Holies within the temple. It is also noteworthy that Philo chose to use ἁδύτοις for the *inner sanctum* rather than using the plural τῶν ἁγίων.²⁹

Of the remaining eleven uses of the plural, ten are clearly used of the sanctuary in general. The only passage where the plural form might possibly be understood to refer to a specific compartment of the temple is in *Her.* 226.

Here Philo describes the sanctuary (τοῖς ἁγίοις) as containing only three pieces of furniture: the candlestick, table, and altar of incense. The use of τοῖς ἁγίοις could be understood to refer exclusively to the outer compartment of the temple, the Holy Place. There is, however, another possibility. It could also be understood to refer to the entire temple house and thus be understood in harmony with Philo’s overall use of the plural form. According to Josephus, when Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E., he entered into both the Holy and Most Holy Places.³⁰ All Pompey reportedly saw in the temple, however, was “the lampstand and the lamps, the table, the libation cups and censers . . . and a great heap of spices and sacred money.”³¹ Later, in a description of the Holy of Holies, Josephus states: “Nothing at all was kept in it; it was unapproachable, inviolable, and invisible to all, and was called the Holy of Holies.”³²

Since, according to Josephus, the Holy of Holies was empty (*B.J.* 5.219), the only furnishings within the whole temple would have been the candlestick, the table, and the altar of incense. Thus, in light of the use of the plural form of ἅγιος elsewhere in Philo and the historical details from Josephus, τοῖς ἁγίοις in *Her.* 226 may be a reference to the

²⁹This same distinction between ἁδύτοις and ἅγια also occurs in *Mos.* 2.87.

³⁰Josephus, *J.W.*, in *The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 1.152; 5.219. Unless otherwise noted, translations of Josephus are taken from this version.

³¹*Ibid.*, 1.152.

³²Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Williamson, rev. ed., intro., nn., and app. E. Mary Smallwood (New York: Penguin, 1981), 491.

entire temple and not an exclusive reference to the Holy Place.

The Holy of Holies

When Philo desires to single out the *inner sanctum* of the temple, he does so by the use of specific terminology such as ἀδύτοις (e.g., *Legat.* 306) or by some other qualifying phrase (e.g., *Somn.* 1.216). As in the LXX and the OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo also uses a form of the phrase τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου to refer to the Holy of Holies. The phrase τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων is used five times by Philo in exclusive reference to the Most Holy Place.³³

A noteworthy example of the use of this phrase occurs when Philo makes reference to Lev 16 and the ministry of the high priest in the Holy of Holies: “For when the high priest enters the Holy of Holies (τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων) he shall not be a man” (*Somn.* 2.189).³⁴

As Colson and Whitaker’s translation indicates, Philo clearly refers to Lev 16:17 LXX, where the singular form τῷ ἁγίῳ is used to refer to the Most Holy Place. What is significant, however, is Philo’s choice not to use the singular τῷ ἁγίῳ to refer to the Most Holy Place as the LXX does,³⁵ but instead to use the expression τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων.³⁶ It would seem that if the plural form of ἅγιος were used idiomatically during the first century to refer to the Holy of Holies, Philo would have used it here rather than replacing it with the more specific phrase for the Most Holy Place. Moreover, even if one overlooks the fact that Philo seems to have had little knowledge of Hebrew, there is not even precedence in the Hebrew text for his translation, since the Hebrew does not read קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים but only קֹדֶשׁ. It appears that for Philo the sanctity of the holiest part of the temple is best described with some qualifying term to indicate its most holy nature. The fact that in *Somn.* 2.189 Philo chose not to use the plural form of ἅγιος for the Most Holy Place, combined with his other uses of ἅγιος and the other ways he refers to the Most Holy Place, leads to the conclusion that he did not understand the plural form of ἅγιος to be a valid term for referring only to the Holy of Holies. Instead, as also seen in the OT Pseudepigraphical literature, Philo uses the plural form of ἅγιος by itself to refer only to the whole sanctuary.

³³*Leg.* 2.56; *Her.* 84; *Somn.* 2.189, 231; *Mut.* 192. Colson and Whitaker suggest that the phrase τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων in *De Mutatione Nominum* should be amended to read “τὰ ἅγια <τῶν ἁγίων> τῶν ἁγίων (the holy place from the holy of holies)” (*Mut.* 192 n. 3).

³⁴*Somn.* 2.189. In a different passage, *Heir.* 84 n. a, Colson and Whitaker comment on Philo’s use of Lev 16:17: “The real meaning of the text is, of course, ‘there shall not be another man in the temple till the priest comes out.’”

³⁵The singular form of ἅγιος is used seven times in the Pentateuch for the Most Holy Place, all of which are from Lev 16 (2, 3, 16, 17, 20, 23, 27). John Williams Wevers notes that the singular form in Lev 16 appears to be “uniquely used to designate the adytum” (*Notes on the Greek Text of Leviticus*, SBLSCS 44 [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1977], 240-241).

³⁶An identical use of τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων occurs in *Somn.* 2.231 and *Her.* 84.

Josephus

Flavius Josephus's (37–post 100 C.E.) use of ἅγιος is extremely significant for understanding the contemporary Jewish usage of τὰ ἅγια since he would have been a contemporary with the author of Hebrews. In his first work, *The Jewish War*, published around 75 C.E., Josephus uses the singular and plural forms of ἅγιος almost forty times in relation to the sanctuary. In his second major work, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, published some twenty years later, the use of ἅγιος in reference to the sanctuary dwindles to only two occurrences. In his final two works, *The Life* and *Against Apion*, written in the second century during the reign of Emperor Trajan, ἱερόν and ναός continue to be used of the temple, but the use of ἅγιος disappears entirely.

Singular Usage

The singular form of ἅγιος is used a total of thirteen times in *The Jewish War*³⁷ and twice in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus uses the singular form of ἅγιος to refer to the sanctuary in a general sense and, as in the LXX, he also uses it at times in exclusive reference to the Most Holy Place.³⁸ The singular form, however, is not used in exclusive reference to the Holy Place.

The Sanctuary

In *BJ* 5.184–247, Josephus provides a description of the temple complex. Having described the original boundaries of the temple (ἱερόν) mount and the process by which it was expanded through the years, Josephus continues his tour across the Colonnade and into the outer court of the sanctuary precinct. At the center of the outer court stood the Temple House, the Court of the Israelites, and the Court of the Women, surrounded by a 4½-foot balustrade. At various points along the balustrade, signs were posted forbidding any Gentile, on penalty of death, of entering into τοῦ ἁγίου (5.194). Josephus then gives the precise meaning of τοῦ ἁγίου: “For that second (court of the) the temple [ἱερόν] was called “the Sanctuary” [ἅγιον]. Here Josephus is contrasting the outer court of the sanctuary, often called the Court of the Gentiles, with the actual precincts of the temple itself, where only Jews were allowed to worship. In both cases, the singular form is used as an inclusive reference to the temple and its inner courts.³⁹

A clear example of the singular use of ἅγιος occurs in *B.J.* 5.394. In

³⁷*J.W.* 1.26, 152; 4.150, 151, 159; 5.194, 195; 385, 394; 6.73, 95, 99, 260.

³⁸*Lev* 16:2, 3, 16, 17, 20, 23, 27.

³⁹E. Mary Smallwood, “Introduction, Notes, and Appendixes to Josephus,” in *The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Williamson, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1981), 448 n. 46.

the midst of a passionate appeal for his countrymen to put down their weapons and surrender to the Romans, Josephus reminded them of the consequences their forefathers suffered when they were defeated in battle by Antiochus Ephiphane: "This city was plundered by our enemies, and our sanctuary [τὸ ἅγιον] made desolate for three years and six months."

Another noteworthy reference is *B.J.* 1.152, where Josephus describes Pompey's entrance into the sanctuary: "But there was nothing that affected the nation so much, in the calamities they were then under, as that their holy place [τὸ ἅγιον], which had been hitherto seen by none, should be laid open to strangers." At first glance, it might appear that τὸ ἅγιον refers specifically to the Holy of Holies, but the context suggests that the violation refers to both the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. This is indicated by the fact that Pompey is not only described as entering the place where "it was not lawful for any to enter but the high priest," but that he also "saw what was repositied therein, the candlestick with its lamps and the table." While the singular form can be used to refer to the Most Holy Place (e.g., Lev 16 LXX), the detail provided by Josephus suggests that the singular form τὸ ἅγιον was used to refer to the entire temple house (cf. *B.J.* 5.194-5; *A.J.* 3.125).⁴⁰

The Most Holy Place

There are two passages where Josephus uses the singular form of ἅγιος in what may be an exclusive reference to the Most Holy Place.

In *B.J.* 6.260, Josephus relates how Titus and his generals entered the sanctuary and saw τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον before it was consumed in flames. The precise meaning of this phrase is somewhat ambiguous, however, since it could be literally translated as "the holy place of the temple." Is Josephus referring to the Holy Place, both compartments of the sanctuary, or the Holy of Holies?

The immediate context of the passage may be taken as an indication that Josephus was referring exclusively to the Holy Place. Before the fire consumed the temple, Titus is said to have seen "what was in it" and to have marveled at how "superior" it was to any foreign temple. Since Josephus states elsewhere that there were no furnishings in the Holy of Holies (*B.J.* 5.219), the phrase τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον could be understood as a reference to the Holy Place and its contents. On the other hand, the phrase could also be a reference to both compartments of the temple. The latter would be consistent with the other examples of the singular form as described previously.

A more likely alternative, however, is that the phrase is a reference to the Holy of Holies. The phrase τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον occurs only in one other place in Josephus, where it refers to the Holy of Holies (*B.J.*

⁴⁰Both occurrences of the singular form in the *Antiquities of the Jews* also refer to the whole sanctuary (3.125; 12.413).

1.25). In *B.J.* 1.25-26, Josephus outlines the subjects he planned to cover in his work. Among others, he states that he intends to describe “the defenses of the City and the plan of the Sanctuary [τοῦ ἱεροῦ] and Temple [τοῦ ναοῦ]; and the exact measurements of these and of the altar . . . and a description of the Holy of Holies [τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον].”⁴¹ William Whiston, G. A. Williamson, and Henry St. John Thackeray all translate τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον as a reference to the Holy of Holies.⁴²

In order to understand the meaning of τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον in *B.J.* 1.25, one must consider the relationship between the three words used in relation to the sanctuary. E. Mary Smallwood notes that ναός is best understood in reference to the “central shrine” of the sanctuary (i.e., the temple itself) and that ἱερόν is generally used to denote “the enclosure and everything within it.”⁴³ Assuming this is the case, one would expect Josephus to have gone on to describe some elements in relation to the sanctuary precinct and its services (i.e., ἱερόν) and then something about the temple itself (i.e., ναός). This is just what he does. It would be redundant to understand τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον in 1.25 as a reference to the whole temple house. Moreover, if Josephus had wanted to specify the entire temple house, he could have used either ναός or ἅγιον alone. The use of both words together indicates that Josephus had in mind a different meaning than expressed in either ναός or ἅγιον. Assuming that Josephus used both phrases in the same way, it seems best to understand τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον to refer to the Holy of Holies in both *B.J.* 1.25 and 6.260.

Plural Usage

The plural form of ἅγιος appears twenty-three times in the *Jewish Wars* and is used in reference to the sanctuary in only a general sense.⁴⁴ The plural form is never used in exclusive reference to either the Holy or Most Holy Places. The following example from *B.J.* 2.341 is representative of this use of the plural form.

In order to determine the attitude of the Jews towards the Romans, Cestius sent Neopolitanus to Jerusalem. Instead of finding a seditious attitude among the people, Neopolitanus was impressed with the positive spirit of the Jews and “after paying his devotions to the sanctuary [τὰ ἅγια] of God from the permitted area, he returned to Cestius.”⁴⁵ Smallwood comments that the “permitted area” refers to

⁴¹Williamson, 30.

⁴²Whiston, 545; Williamson, 30; Josephus, *B.J.* 1.26 (Thackeray, LCL).

⁴³Smallwood, 409-410.

⁴⁴*J.W.* 2.341, 401, 539; 4.162, 171(2), 173, 182, 183, 191, 201, 242, 323, 397; 5.406, 412; 6.104, 120, 124, 128, 165, 267 (some render as “holiness”), 346.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 2.341.

“the area outside the balustrade marking off the inner courts . . . sometimes called (without ancient authority) the Court of the Gentiles.”⁴⁶ This instance of τὰ ἅγια is clearly a general reference to the temple and the courts surrounding it (cf. *B.J.* 5.194-195).

The Holy of Holies

When Josephus refers directly to the *inner sanctum* of the temple, he does so by following the same pattern as seen in the OT Pseudepigrapha and Philo. As we have already seen, Josephus can employ the singular form of ἅγιος, specific terminology such as ἄδυτον (e.g., *B.J.* 5.236) or the phrase τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον to refer to the Holy of Holies. Josephus, however, also uses two different forms of the phrase τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου in exclusive reference to the Holy of Holies.⁴⁷

First, in describing the “inmost part” (ἐνδοτάτω μέρος) of the temple in *B.J.* 5.219, Josephus says: “In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies [ἁγίου δὲ ἅγιον].” While this is a definite reference to the Holy of Holies, the form of ἁγίου δὲ ἅγιον is unique. This is the only place in the LXX, OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo, or Josephus where both forms of ἅγιος are separated by a conjunction. The lack of the definite article in both forms of ἅγιος also occurs in *T. Levi* 3:4.

The second variant of the literal translation τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ ἁγίου as the “Holy of Holies” occurs in *A.J.* 3.125. The context contains a physical description of the wilderness tabernacle built by Moses (*A.J.* 3.102-150). In *A.J.* 3.122, Josephus describes the two inner compartments of the temple. He describes the Holy Place as “the part open to the priests,” while the Holy of Holies is referred to as the ἄδυτον. In *A.J.* 3.125, Josephus again refers to the Holy of Holies as τὸ ἄδυτον (“the adytum”): the place that was kept concealed from the Holy Place by a veil. It is at this point that Josephus says: “Now the whole temple [ὁ ναός] was called *The Holy Place* [ἅγιον]; but that part which was within the four pillars, and to which none were admitted, was called *The Holy of Holies* [τοῦ ἁγίου τὸ ἅγιον].”

Conclusion

Our examination of the overall use of ἅγιος in relation to the sanctuary in the OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus has revealed that the word can have a variety of meanings, depending upon its context (see table below). Despite the variety of uses of ἅγιος, one pattern, however, does appear to be consistent throughout: *the plural form by itself is never used to describe the Holy of Holies alone.* Whenever the plural form by itself

⁴⁶Smallwood, 432-433.

⁴⁷*B.J.* 5.219; *A.J.* 3.125.

is used, it exclusively describes the whole sanctuary in general. Moreover, whenever specific reference is made to the Most Holy Place, the plural form by itself is never used. Instead, the Most Holy Place is referred to by either the use of the singular form of ἅγιος, a more specific word such as ἄδυτον, some qualifying term like ἐνδοτάτω μέρος, or, more typically, a form of the phrase τὸ ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων.

Based on this evidence, the plural form of ἅγιος does not appear to have been part of the contemporary Jewish usage to refer to the Holy of Holies during the first century. If it had been, we surely would have expected that Josephus—who was by birthright a priest, well trained in Halakah, and, as such, one of the most important sources on first-century Jewish law—would have used it at least once in that manner. He does not. Instead, the consistent use of τὰ ἅγια to refer to the sanctuary in general throughout the LXX, OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus indicates that this was the way τὰ ἅγια was used among Greek-speaking Jews. Of course, this does not prove that the author of Hebrews used the term identically, nor does it resolve all the issues associated with the use of τὰ ἅγια in Hebrews. It would seem to indicate, however, that the customary use of the word would have led any first-century author or reader to use or understand a reference to τὰ ἅγια by itself as a reference to the sanctuary in general and not to the Most Holy Place. In this regard, the use of τὰ ἅγια in the LXX and its consistent use throughout the OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus as a reference to the whole sanctuary would favor more the OT imagery of inauguration than the Day of Atonement as the background for Heb 6:19-20 and 9:11-12.

The Use of ἅγιος by Itself for the Sanctuary in the OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus			
	Sanctuary in General	Holy Place	Most Holy Place
Singular	14	2	2
Plural	44	0	0
Total No. of Uses	58	2	2