

Was Herod's Temple Actually on the Temple Mount?

The Controversy of the Jewish Temple Location

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When a new archeological find is unearthed, it reveals, but rarely reinvents history. Neither is the case with the recent assertion that the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was actually a Roman garrison and that the Jewish Temple was situated elsewhere, on a massive man-made platform to the south. This idea has also become a flashpoint of controversy, often resulting in zealous opposition to those who hold to the original, historical view of Herod's Temple location for a highly questionable eschatological reason.

Bob Cornuke, president of the Bible Archeology Search and Exploration Institute (BASEI) is the champion behind Earnest Martin's idea that the Temple was not located on Jerusalem's historical Temple Mount but rather on a now-destroyed platform south of the existing Temple Mount at the upper end of the City of David. Mr. Cornuke is an intelligent man—a world-traveler, adventurer, theologian and author of several sensationalist books in which he purports to have found the real Mt. Sinai (a theory that may have merit), the location of Noah's ark and so forth.

His assertion that Herod's temple was located south of the existing Temple Mount, however, conflicts with overwhelming archeological, historical, eyewitness and extant evidence. His videos, though recorded on location in Jerusalem, confirm that his understanding of history and archeology is greatly lacking. For instance, since Jesus predicted that the Temple would be utterly destroyed—which it was, and yet a section of wall still stands, this 'Western Wall' could not possibly be part of the Temple—therefore it must have stood elsewhere. This would in turn suggest that the existing platform above the Wall was actually the Antonia Fortress—a Roman fort. The still-standing Western Wall, however, is in fact an exposed section of the massive retaining wall surrounding the thirty-six-acre platform on which Herod's Temple stood. The Temple was utterly obliterated just as Jesus predicted, but the platform was left standing, later to become the site of a Zeus temple, a garbage dump and a Moslem shrine. Archeologists along with both ancient and modern historians, journalists and scholars—whether hyper-religious or secularist critics—overwhelmingly agree that the destroyed Temple originally stood atop the existing platform.

More than all others, the Jewish people have historically held the Temple Mount as sacred (the Western 'Wailing' Wall being a section of the retaining wall closest to the original location of the Temple's Holy of Holies) from the late first century, until Hadrian banished them from Jerusalem and, as history states, built a temple to Jupiter on the site of the Jewish Temple to deliberately defile it. In other words, Hadrian, the Romans and the Jews *knew* the location and acted according to their knowledge. Further, accounts and descriptions by Josephus, the Gospel writers and other ancient historians who were eyewitnesses, interviewed eyewitnesses or had access to now vanished written accounts attest to the location of Herod's Temple as the centerpiece of the existing platform, with a Roman garrison, the Antonia Fortress, attached to the platform's northwest corner.

Further, there is no archeological evidence the Temple ever existed anywhere else. There have been some valid speculations that the actual location may have been a hundred meters north or south of the Dome of the Rock, but they still place the Temple on the platform. All the vast excavations south of the Temple Mount—past and present—have revealed no proof whatsoever of the Temple being situated there—evidenced by the fact that no archeologist has set forth such a hypothesis or acted on the hypothesis. Mr. Cornuke’s proposed platform would have towered almost four hundred and fifty feet (his estimate) above the bedrock and would have required a volume of stone that rivaled the Great Pyramid in Egypt. Further, the engineering for such a stone structure would be incapable of supporting the sheer mass of the project, especially the suggested SE corner. Roman arches like those of ‘Solomon’s Stables’ could not have supported its own weight, let alone the massive sixteen-story temple structure atop the alleged platform. Even more, the workforce necessary to construct such a wonder would have been all but impossible to employ (Jews didn’t use slaves), nor do the ancient quarries in and around Jerusalem reflect a fraction of the extracted ashlar necessary for such a massive project.

Other major challenges to Mr. Cornuke’s proposition include:

- The ongoing excavation and location of Queen Helena’s first-century mansion and the probable foundations of the Hasmonean Acra, discovered on the north edge of the City of David
- The established route of two recently excavated first-century pilgrim roads tracing the draw of the Tyropoeon Valley (both located on the same acreage as hypothetical temple site)
- The large number of Herodian-temple period mikvehot adjacent to the south wall of the existing platform (mikvehot attached to a Roman structure?)
- The discovery of the ‘trumpeting stone’ among Great Revolt debris at the SW corner of the extant Temple Mount

But perhaps the greatest fallacy of Mr. Cornuke’s proposition is the absence of any associated ashlar in extant debris or secondary construction in and around Jerusalem. If his theory held merit, there would have been huge mountains of ruined blocks to be repurposed in future centuries of construction, which do not exist outside the known volume of the historic destructions of the city.

Ironically, the people who agree with Mr. Cornuke are the Wakf, its leader, the Mufti and all fundamentalist Muslim groups bent on the elimination of Israel. Mr. Cornuke’s theory is a welcome idea to these dangerous and disingenuous groups who have declared openly that the Jewish Temple was never on the platform because it was a myth asserted by “lying Jews” to claim sacred Muslim territory.

The real question, however, is why has this hypothesis generated so much excitement in the evangelical community—especially among pre-millennialists? Simply put, people who believe we are in the end times (as I do) love predictability concerning the prophecies of Christ’s return, as evidenced by those who set rapture dates, predict His imminent return with blood moons and Christian-based astrology, et al—not the least of which is the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple on its original location in Jerusalem (Daniel 9, Matt. 24,

etc.). Premillennial Christians (again, I am one) continue to seek rational solutions to the predictions of Biblical prophecy, including the problem of the location of the third temple. Since the Temple Mount today is fiercely Muslim, it appears there is little hope that a new Jewish Temple could ever be rebuilt on the existing platform as long as Islam prevails at the site. Mr. Cornuke's theory offers a convenient solution: if the Temple was originally located *south* of the existing platform in territory currently held by Jewish authorities, it could easily be reconstructed there. Thus, the temple sacrifices could be resumed at any time unimpeded by Islamic opposition (Daniel 9:27), accelerating the prophetic timetable of Christ's second coming. Sensational, to say the least.

Here's the rub: the antichrist, according to the prophet Daniel, will be instrumental in allowing the Jews to resume their sacrifices, implying they will have a temple at which to perform them. Further, the Jews have historically insisted that their next Temple (or at least the alter) must be situated on the exact location of the previous Temples, placing it in at the center of the existing platform—squarely atop Islam's third holiest site. Only a miracle could bring about such an improbable and explosive arrangement—which is exactly what the Bible prophetically proposes.

According to Daniel 9:27, the antichrist will broker an impossible deal with the Jewish, Gentile and presumably Islamic world for the Jews to resume their sacrifices where the Temple once stood. *A miracle*. Anyone who could pull off such a diplomatic coup would be dubbed a messiah by the Jews and worshipped as a god by the world—which, according to Bible prophecy, is exactly what they will think of the antichrist. The idea of placing the Temple in a more convenient location is prophetically unnecessary and worse, downplays the utterly improbable 'miracle' that will thrust the antichrist onto the world stage. Since Scripture prophesies that this *must* happen, rebuilding a temple on the extant platform is God's stated plan and the prophetic catapult that launches the antichrist to the pinnacle of the world power game.

On a personal note, my opinion is of little value compared to the mountain of empirical evidence and scholarship concerning the historical location of the Temple. It would behoove you to explore it on your own. Even so, my own on-site observations, examinations and decades-long study of the evidence for the temple location on the existing platform are entirely at odds with Mr. Cornuke's flawed assertions. Further, the once reputable K-House, who produced his well-made video on the subject now gives me pause.

It appears that those who embrace Mr. Cornuke's position do so because they haven't personally examined the enormous volume of contradictory, extant evidence. I would be happy to personally show you around Jerusalem and visit the excavations and museums, where you can see what was—and wasn't there. I go every year.