

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 recent assertions 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 in the City of David. This idea has also become a flashpoint of controversy and Christian division, often resulting in zealous opposition to those who hold to the original, historical view of Herod's Temple location—for highly questionable eschatological reasons.

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 sensational 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.

Temple Remnant or Retaining Wall?

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 (and other's) videos, though recorded on location in Jerusalem, confirm that his understanding of history and archeology is greatly lacking. For instance, Jesus predicted that the Temple would be destroyed to that last stone, which occurred exactly as He predicted in AD 70. A section of ancient wall, however—the 'Western' or "Wailing' wall, is claimed by some adherents of this theory to be a still-standing portion of the Temple itself, leading them to conclude that the actual temple *must* have stood elsewhere. This in turn would suggest that the existing platform above the Wall was instead the location of the Antonia Fortress—a Roman barracks confirmed by the New Testament Scriptures and numerous historical writings to be attached to the northwest edge of the Temple Mount.

The still-standing Western Wall, however, has been confirmed by history, archeology, eye-witness documentation, engineering and more, to be an exposed section of the massive retaining wall surrounding the thirty-six-acre platform on which Herod's Temple once stood. Though the Temple was utterly obliterated as Jesus predicted, the massive platform (though badly damaged) remained—later to become the site of a Jupiter temple, a garbage dump and a Moslem shrine. Archeologists, along with 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.

Moreover, the Jewish people have historically held the existing Temple Mount as sacred* from the first century BC until the Roman Emperor Hadrian banished them from Jerusalem and, as history recorded, 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 temple location and acted according to their knowledge. Further, accounts and descriptions by Josephus, the Gospel writers and other ancient historians who were either 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 the Antonia Fortress attached to the platform's northwest corner.

Even more, there is no archeological evidence that 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. The extensive excavations south of the southern Temple Mount retaining wall have yielded no proof whatsoever of a Jewish Temple being situated there. This is evidenced by the fact that no credentialed archeologist or historian ever set forth such a hypothesis, much less acted on it.

Was There Enough Water for a Temple Mount Temple?

Another argument for the Temple location being at the City of David was its need for huge volumes of water for daily operations (i.e., ceremonial cleansings, washing away sacrificial animal blood, etc.). This idea revolves around the location of the Gihon Spring, a

* The Western 'Wailing' Wall is the section of the retaining wall deemed nearest to the original location of the Temple's Holy of Holies

still functioning fresh-water source flowing from the eastern flank of the Ophel ridge, upon which the City of David actually sits. Advocates of the City of David Temple location teach that there were no known flowing water sources north (and uphill) of the Temple Mount—placing the Temple further downhill and much nearer to the Gihon Spring.

In fact, during the First and Second Temple periods there were *several* active springs north of the extant Temple platform and Antonia site that have since dried up. Further, during the Second Temple period two aqueducts channeled water from Solomon's Pools near Bethlehem to feed reservoirs and cisterns located in Jerusalem's upper and lower cities. The upper city reservoirs and cisterns supplied the western portion of Jerusalem, including the vast complex of cisterns and subterranean channels beneath the Temple Mount platform. Additionally, situated to the immediate north of the platform are the Bethesda Pools and the great Pool of Israel, which also supplied year-round water to the Temple.

Those who press the argument for a City of David Temple on the basis of a water shortage have stumbled into a logical fallacy: if the existing platform was actually the Antonia Fortress because there was not enough water available for daily Temple operations, then how much water would be required to supply an entire resident Roman legion—six thousand men, two thousand support troops, cavalry (including hundreds of horses with stables) and an unspecified number of servants? This makes the 'water source' assertion a moot point.

A Legion or a Cohort?

The water-source assertion leads to yet another problem with the claim that the Temple Mount was in fact the Antonia Fortress. The contention that the Antonia housed a full Roman legion presumes that the footprint of fort's historic location was far too small to accommodate such a huge population of soldiers—therefore the Temple Mount must have been the Antonia.

Josephus described the Antonia as a rectangle measuring about 490' long (E to W) by 260' wide (N to S), with walls 60-75' high. Three of the four corners of the structure were crowned with 75' towers, with the NE tower reaching 115'. Josephus bragged that the fort

could house a Roman legion, yet his writings describe a castle for a cohort (600 legionaries plus support troops)—not a camp for a legion. Josephus also described the *Temple* as the dominating structure of Jerusalem, with the Roman fort policing the Temple area from the NW corner. In Acts 21:33-35, Luke described the Antonia as a Roman barracks and not a legionary camp, which could only have housed a cohort—a powerful force in and of itself—that could be quickly reinforced by Roman garrisons known to have been situated to the west and northwest, both inside[†] and outside the city[‡]. These recent assumptions run cross-current to ancient descriptions and archeology about the size and occupancy of the Antonia mainly due to Josephus' bloated personnel statistics as he wrote under the scrutiny of his Roman superiors. His recorded measurements of the Antonia, however, tell a different story.

Another proposal for the Temple Mount being a Roman legionary fort is suggested by its shape, size and massive fortifications. This proposition, however, overlooks the mindset and background of its builder, Herod the Great. Herod was a paranoid man of diminutive stature who zealously pursued a big legacy—resulting in his construction of gigantic structures and monumental cities. Fortresses like Masada, Machaerus, Cypros and Herodian (to name a few) were designed as impenetrable shelters should he fall into disfavor with Rome or the general population. His palace in Jerusalem was also an impressive citadel, but for Herod, the true last refuge in Jerusalem was to be his remodel of the Temple Mount, which he built with all the features of an enormous stronghold in the style of Rome.

Herod was ethnically an Idumean, religiously a Jew, but politically a Roman. He was a citizen and regional puppet king of the Empire, who admired the might and resolve of Rome and sought to impress Caesar by outdoing Rome's many enormous constructions. The suggestion that the Temple Mount had the shape of a Roman legionary encampment derives from Herod's devotion to Rome and his desire to remain in good standing with Caesar. But was the platform ever used as a permanent legionary fortress? Every eyewitness account (of any era) and scientific analysis of the enormous complex testifies to

[†] Herod the Great's palace on the western ridge of the city housed a permanent garrison as well as barracks for Praetorians when the Roman Governor was in residence.

[‡] Luke further reinforced this barracks-multi-camp scenario by his observations in Acts 23:23-32.

the contrary. The shape and architecture were indeed Roman because Herod was Roman and dedicated to Caesar, but the huge platform-fortress was specifically engineered to protect Herod's remodeled Temple—which itself was designed and built as an impenetrable stronghold within a fortress. It was so secure, in fact, that it became the last refuge of the Jews to fall during the Great Revolt in AD 70.[§]

The Alternate Platform Proposition

To address certain problems raised by the Temple Mount-Antonia theory, its proponents have suggested that Herod built *another* Temple platform to the south of the existing platform. This alternate platform, said to have towered almost 450 feet (their estimate) above the Kidron Valley, would have required a volume of stone rivaling that of the Great Pyramid in Egypt. Further, any engineering for such a structure would have been incapable of supporting the incredible mass of the stone ashlars, especially the towering SE corner of the proposed platform. Even Roman arches like those comprising 'Solomon's Stables' (the interior supporting structure of the southern Temple Mount platform) could not have supported the enormous height and weight, let alone the massive sixteen-story temple structure atop the alleged platform. Even more, the workforce necessary to build such a wonder would have been all but impossible to employ (Jews did not use slaves), nor do the ancient quarries in and around Jerusalem reflect a fraction of the huge number of ashlars necessary for such a gigantic project.

Where are all the leftovers?

Perhaps the greatest fallacy of the alternate Temple platform proposition is the absence of a huge volume of ruined ashlars in archeological excavations or in secondary construction in and around Jerusalem (imagine if the Great Pyramid in Cairo was taken apart and its stones left lying around). If the theory any held merit, there would have been mountains of ruined blocks waiting to be repurposed in future centuries of construction, which do not exist outside the known historical destructions and reconstructions of the city.

[§] Masada fell in AD 73 after a three-year interval of 'cleanup' after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, marking the 'official' end of the Great Revolt and national Israel (Ezekiel 37).

Ironically, the people who most happily agree with this theory are the Wakf (the Muslim ruling council of the existing Temple Mount platform), the Mufti (the supreme head of the Wakf) and all the fundamentalist Islamic groups bent on the elimination of Israel. This flawed theory bolsters antisemitic and militant anti-Israeli groups who claim historical Muslim sovereignty over the site—people who also assert that the location of the Jewish Temple on the existing platform was a myth invented by “lying Jews”—despite the enormous evidence to the contrary.

Other major challenges to the alternate-platform proposition include:

- The ongoing excavations and locations of Parthian Queen Helena’s first-century mansion, the probable foundations of the Hasmonean Acra and the ruins of Solomon’s palace discovered on the northern edge of the City of David, south of the existing Temple Mount platform
- The confirmed route of a recently excavated first-century pilgrim road tracing the draw of the Tyropoeon Valley south from the monumental staircase (that once ascended to the top of the platform at the SW corner of the Temple Mount) to the Siloam Pool at the southern tip of the City of David. Additionally, the road passes through a significant part of the same acreage as the proposed City of David Temple platform site)
- The large number of Herodian-Temple period mikvehot adjacent to the south, east and western walls 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 platform retaining walls
- The discovery of the remains of an ancient temple cut into in the bedrock of the City of David, attesting *not* to the great Jewish Temples, but a small pagan one, one of perhaps many built prior to David’s conquest of Jerusalem. The Jews would never have built their Temple on a pagan sacrificial site.

Why has the Temple location become an issue?

Why has this hypothesis generated so much excitement and visceral zeal in the Christian 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 unwisely 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 prophesied Third Temple. Since the Temple Mount today lies under Muslim rule, it seems 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. Thus, Cornuke’s and Martin’s theory offers a convenient solution: if the Temple was originally located *south* of the existing platform, in territory currently under the control of Jewish authorities, it could easily be rebuilt *there*. Thus, the Jewish Temple sacrifices could be resumed at any time—unimpeded by Islamic opposition (Daniel 9:27) and 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 that they *will* have some sort of Temple where they can 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 the center of the existing platform—squarely atop Islam’s third holiest site. Only a miracle could bring about such an improbable arrangement at such a volatile location—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 both will believe 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 prophecies that this *must* happen, rebuilding the Temple on the existing platform is God’s stated plan and the prophetic catapult that will propel the Antichrist to the pinnacle of the world’s power game.

On a personal note, my opinions here have 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 attesting to the Temple location on the existing platform are entirely at odds with Martin’s and Cornuke’s assertions. Further, the once reputable K-House, who produced a well-made video on the subject, now gives me pause.

Is it possible that a Third Temple *could* be built in the vicinity of The City of David? *Why not?* But as people who openly lay claim to the Truth, we must never, *ever* sacrifice our integrity. Dismissing the enormous volumes of archeological, scientific and historical evidence to ‘solve’ an eschatological ‘difficulty’ would be to do just that.

I would be happy to personally show you around Jerusalem—where I’ve lived, taught and led more than thirty study groups—where together we can visit excavations and museums—where you can see what was—and wasn’t—there. I go every year.