

# Fortress of Antonia? or Temple Mount?

by Ronald J. Gordon ~ © 2017 All Rights Reserved

In east Jerusalem, there is a 32-acre raised trapezoidal area called the Haram al-Sharif (*noble sanctuary*) by the Arabs. For many years, there has been an ongoing debate as to whether this was the place where both Solomon and Herod built their temples, or, was it the fortress of Antonia, named after Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) the patron of Herod the Great. Most of the evidence in favor of both Temples on the Haram is based on assumption, tradition, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century model builders who have genuinely tried to reconstruct how they believe the ancient city of Jerusalem must have appeared. But evidence that the Haram was the place of the Antonia Fortress is monumental. Following are a few of the more convincing points that would lend support for the latter theory from eyewitnesses, architecture, geography, logic, and archeology.

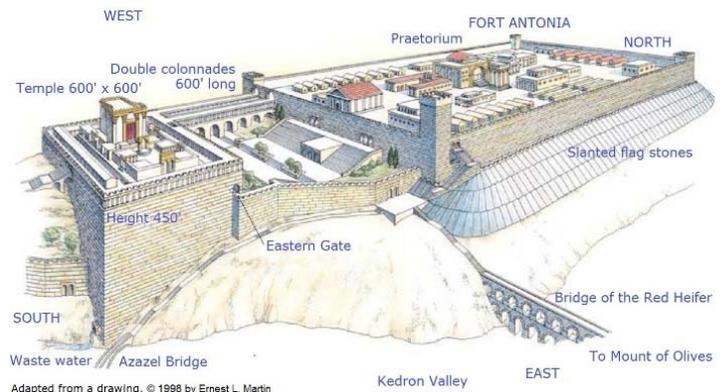
1. **The Roman 10<sup>th</sup> Legion** was housed in the Antonia Fortress. Legions were composed of about 6,000 soldiers and perhaps 2,500 to 3,000 support staff. Most Roman forts were literally small cities within the larger city. They were comprised of administrative quarters, troop barracks, a fire department, bakeries, their own judicial courts, stables, granaries, and some even had brothels. Josephus the historian recounts it as follows, “*The inward parts had the largeness and form of a palace. It being parted into all kinds of rooms, and other conveniences; such as courts, and places for bathing, and broad spaces for camps: insomuch that by having all conveniences that cities wanted, it might seem to be composed of several cities; but by its magnificence it seemed a palace.*” (Wars, book 5, chapter 5, paragraph 8) Recent model builders exhibit their version of the fortress as a very small building in the upper northwest part of the Haram. Seriously, does this model appear to be “*composed of several cities?*” Where is the “*largeness*” and “*broad spaces for camps*” and “*all conveniences that cities wanted?*” He described the fortress as a palace. This looks more like an intimidating prison. Josephus states that the Fortress was 75 cubits from West to East which is nearly that of the Haram. Of the four corner towers, the height of three were 50 cubits and the fourth on the southeast was 70 cubits. Modelers incorrectly show all towers at the same height.



How could 8,000 people fit into the above small building? The size of many Roman forts throughout Europe were 20 to 30 acres in size. If replicated to scale, this small model building could not accommodate more than a few hundred men. It would be more reasonable to believe that the Haram was actually the location of the Antonia Fortress. Next to Hadrian’s wall in northern Britain is Fortress Segedunum which is typical of Roman forts. One commentator suggested that Antonia may actually have contained only 600 troops instead of 6,000. If that is the case, then consider the transfer of Apostle Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea in Acts 23:23, “*Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred.*” That’s 470 men, leaving only 130 to maintain the fort against an entire city of thousands of people who don’t like you. No military commander would dare make such an error in resources. A legion was 6,000 men.

In his book *The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot*, Ernest L. Martin presents a drawing that most accurately conforms to those dimensions related by Josephus, especially the wall of “*three hundred cubits*” (450 feet), east of the Temple. The present walls surrounding the Haram do not give us a section anywhere near this height. After analyzing Martin’s drawing, we can more accurately see a Roman fort that looks like a city.

“*But in future ages the people added new banks ... and when they had built walls on three sides of the temple round about, from the bottom of the hill, and had performed a work that was greater than could be hoped for, the lowest court of the temple was erected to the height of three hundred cubits and in some places more. Yet did not the entire depth of the foundations appear: for they brought earth, and filled up the valleys: as being desirous to make them on a level with the narrow streets of the city.*” (Wars, book 5, chapter 5, paragraph 1) This drawing also reveals how it was possible from Antonia to “*look down*” on the Temple as stated by Josephus. “*It was erected upon a rock of fifty cubits in height: and was on a great precipice.*” (Wars, book 5, chapter 5, paragraph 8) Note also that Martin presents the southeastern tower to be higher (70 cubits) than the other three (50 cubits). An item not presented in the vast majority of the models. Everything nicely conforms to that which was described by Josephus. He was an eyewitness who shares that which he personally experienced. Now, everything more realistically seems to fit historical observations.



Adapted from a drawing, © 1998 by Ernest L. Martin

Adapted from a drawing, © 1998 by Ernest L. Martin

# Fortress of Antonia? or Temple Mount?

by Ronald J. Gordon ~ © 2017 All Rights Reserved

For over twelve years, Don Esposito, the Director of Hayahad Bible Seminars in Israel has been asking Temple-on-the-Haram proponents to give him undeniable proof that both Temples were actually built on the Haram. Esposito has respectfully asked for at least dialogue to begin wherein exchanges of opinions may be appreciated. To this date, no one will even begin dialogue with him. Why? Perhaps because there is no irrefutable archeological proof that the Haram was the site of both Temples.

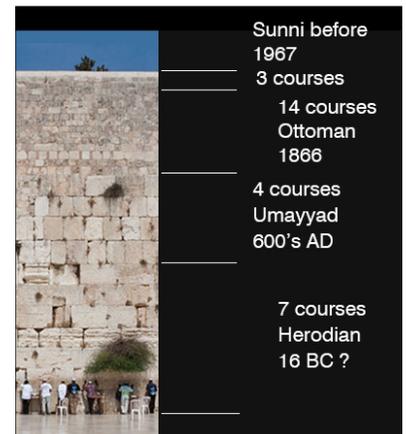
2. **Flavius Josephus** was a 1<sup>st</sup> Century witness to the destruction of Jerusalem. He was a Jewish general who was captured by the Romans during the rebellion (66-70 A.D.). Years later he was granted the opportunity to write and publish his experiences, which have been regarded by most scholars and historians as extremely accurate descriptions of events and places, although with perhaps a moderate bias for Roman interests. After all, he continued to live at their gracious behest. Josephus describes the fortress as occupying the highest part of this hill above the Kidron Valley, so that the *“Temple could not be seen from the north”* (Wars, book 5, chapter 5, paragraph 8). Instead, the model builders depict Herod’s Temple as being at a higher elevation than the Antonia Fortress, which is just the opposite of Josephus’ eyewitness testimony. He further stated that one must *“look down”* on the Temple from the fortress. (Wars, book 5) Who is right? The Modelers with recent assumptions, or a 1<sup>st</sup> Century eyewitness that personally walked those very grounds? Josephus recounts the total destruction of the city of Jerusalem to its foundations, except for the Antonia Fortress which still remained upon the ruins of the city. *“Where is this city that was believed to have God himself inhabiting therein? It is now demolished to the very foundations: and hath nothing but that monument of it preserved; I mean the camp of those that hath destroyed it: which still dwells upon its ruins.”* (Wars, book 7, chapter 8, paragraph 7)

In plain words, he states that the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were completely destroyed, only the Antonia Fortress survived. Thus, the famous Wailing Wall is really a portion of Antonia. Jesus was correct, *“There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down,”* Matthew 24:2. If the Wailing Wall was actually a part of the Temple, then its many courses of stone would prove that Jesus’ prediction of devastation was wrong, because all these stones *“upon another ... were not thrown down.”* So entirely complete was the total destruction of the city and the Temple that Josephus stated: *“it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.”* (Wars, book 7, chapter 1, paragraph 1)

3. **No Stones from Solomon** at any level in the Western Wall. Foundation layers of stone from Solomon’s time appear only in the lower City of David. The first 7 courses of this wall are from the time of Herod the Great. If king Solomon built his Temple on the Haram, then where are those stones from the time of Solomon? They do not exist at any location of the massive walls surrounding the Haram. But, finding Herodian stones would be expected if Herod laid the foundation layers for the Antonia Fortress. Most people visiting the Western “Wailing” Wall, or viewing pictures of it, fail to realize that the top 21 layers were added much later by different Arab sects who completely reconstructed the entire Haram.

Suleiman the Magnificent was the tenth and longest-reigning sultan of the Ottoman Empire, from 1520 to his death in 1566. He ordered the ruined city walls of Jerusalem to be restored in 1535. The project took four years to complete, between 1537 and 1541. Numerous tourists to modern Jerusalem do not realize that most of the walls surrounding the Haram were built fifteen centuries after the time of Christ’s earthly ministry. The pinnacle of the Temple where Jesus was tempted by Satan does not exist on any part of the modern Haram, although most assume the location to be at the reconstructed southeast corner.

4. **A Torah Niche** is a sacred recess into the front wall of ancient synagogues where the Jewish scrolls were deposited. The entire building was so constructed that the Torah Niche pointed directly toward the Holy of Holies, a feat easily accomplished near the city of Jerusalem. Ruins of a synagogue adjacent to the Tomb of David, just outside the former walls of ancient Jerusalem, still retains its original Niche. However, its degree of alignment does not point to any part of the raised Haram. Were these ancient builders unaware of the exact location of their Temple? Or perhaps, they did know its location and precisely aligned this Torah Niche with the Holy of Holies of that day. If that was the case, then the ancient Temples were not situated on the Haram.



# Fortress of Antonia? or Temple Mount?

by Ronald J. Gordon ~ © 2017 All Rights Reserved

5. **The Large Dining Room** which Herod Agrippa added to the royal palace, near the Jaffa Gate, offered him the freedom to view daily activity within the many Temple areas while lounging and eating in comfort. It angered Jewish authorities that anyone from that higher elevation of the palace in the western part of the city could monitor their sacred procedures. Agrippa was not well liked by the populace, and to also have the opportunity for him to view their private activities only increased an already tense situation. So, the Jewish authorities built a wall along the western cloisters to prevent anyone from viewing their holy activities. King Agrippa, along with Festus the governor, demanded that the wall be removed. Temple authorities protested to Nero, the Roman emperor, who decided that the wall should remain. *“About the same time king Agrippa built himself a very large dining-room in the royal palace at Jerusalem, and was situate upon an elevation, and afforded a most delightful prospect to those that had a mind to take a view of the city, which prospect was desired by the king; and there he could lie down, and eat, and thence observe what was done in the temple; which thing, when the chief men of Jerusalem saw they were very much displeased at it. They therefore erected a wall upon the uppermost building which belonged to the inner court of the temple towards the west, which wall when it was built, did not only intercept the prospect of the dining-room in the palace, but also of the western cloisters that belonged to the outer court of the temple also.”* (Antiquities, book 20, chapter 8, paragraph 11)

Herod’s palace was about 110 feet higher than the Dome of the Rock. But the angle from the former palace to the Dome would be directly in line with the back of the main Temple building, and would have obscured the view of everyone at the palace or elsewhere in the western part of the city. However, if the Temple was located south of the Haram, the angle and greater elevation would have been nearly spot-on for viewers looking down from the palace.

6. **Real Pool of Siloam Discovered** which corroborates Josephus who stated that he saw thousands of worshipers in the many Temple courts. Many scholars regard Josephus as a faithful 1<sup>st</sup> Century witness until he describes attributes of the Second Temple, at which point his descriptions are slightly variant from the careful work of modern day researchers, who then largely ignore him. This attitude has recently begun to change, especially with the discovery of a giant mikveh at the southern end of the city of David. Mikvehs are ritual cleansing pools of naturally flowing water (Leviticus 15:13) for Jews who are about to enter a holy place. Experts have now designated this new find as the real Pool of Siloam mentioned by Jesus. The framework surrounding the previous Siloam had been designed by Empress Eudocia of Byzantium around 460 A.D. She was also the wife of Roman emperor Theodosius II. Both pools are situated at the terminus of Hezekiah’s tunnel which brings fresh running water from the Gihon Springs.



In the fall of 2004, Jerusalem city workers in the process of repairing a large sewer pipe accidentally discovered steps. Eli Shukrun of the Israel Antiquities Authority contacted archeologist Ronny Reich who was excavating at the Gihon Spring. They uncovered a gigantic pool estimated to be 225 feet long, which is sixty feet longer than an Olympic swimming pool at 164 feet. It was a ritual cleansing pool or mikveh with three groups of five stairs, each separated by narrow landings on three sides of the pool. A fourth side is concealed under a fruit orchard behind a Greek Orthodox Church. James Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary reacted to the discovery by saying, *“This may be the most significant and largest mikveh ever found.”*

Why would it make any sense to ritually cleanse oneself at Siloam and then walk 1/3 of a mile to the Haram and risk becoming unclean again? It would make greater sense to place this giant mikveh in close proximity to the Temple. The Gihon Spring would provide all the water necessary for such activity. (גִּיחֹן, Gihon means “gushing”) *“And there is an inexhaustible supply of water, because an abundant natural spring gushes up from within the temple area.”* (Letter of Aristeas) Take special note that he states there was a “natural spring that gushes,” which pleasingly refers to the Gihon.

Once again, Josephus has been proven to be correct! A pool this large might have accommodated hundreds of people at the same time before ascending up to the Temple. Now, it is relatively easy to understand how thousands of worshippers could have simultaneously occupied the inner precincts of the Temple. Why is it, that the testimony of an eyewitness must be regarded with suspicion, especially when Josephus has been proven correct, over and over again? Some academics have accused him of a Roman bias, yet others see him as more of a Jewish apologist. One thing that modern readers must do is take into consideration the mind of most secular historians of that period, which is to add or omit material that would make a good story.

For example, he omits a few historical events during the time of Moses and Aaron such as the Golden Calf episode in his monumental work titled *Jewish Antiquities*. In a similar manner, Old Testament writers inspired by the Holy Spirit also omit important details or whole events. The writer of 1 and 2 Chronicles omits the entire sinful affair of king David and Bathsheba.

# Fortress of Antonia? or Temple Mount?

by Ronald J. Gordon ~ © 2017 All Rights Reserved

This story can only be found in 2 Samuel 11: 1-27. It is largely assumed that the Chronicles were most certainly written after the return of the Israelites from Babylon, and perhaps the writer desired only to recount the positive elements of Jewish history.

New Testament writers are no different. Matthew groups events of Jesus' life into five blocks called discourses. They are: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the Missionary Discourse (chapter 10), the Discourse of Parables (chapter 13), the Discourse on the Church (chapter 18), and the Discourse on End Times (chapter 23-25). Each block contains subject matter according to similarities regardless of chronology, because it makes a story more interesting and easier to understand.

Although Josephus has been charged with altering some details, his contemporaries did the same thing. We cannot impose modern standards on ancient historians whose chief aim was to tell an interesting story. Otherwise, Josephus is startlingly correct in most of his writings. For example, it has been asserted that he never visited Masada, yet he writes (*War, book 7*) that its walls were seven stadia in length, or about 4,200 feet. If he was using the Herodian stadium, then he is correct within a few yards. His description of the northern palace at Masada exactly matches that surveyed by archeologist Michael Avi-Yonah. Caesarea's harbor as described by Josephus exactly matches that of Avner Raban who meticulously studied that area. Descriptions by Josephus of the Haram, the Temple, and the Fortress should be regarded with the same degree of accuracy.

7. **The Bordeaux Pilgrim** was a 4<sup>th</sup> Century unnamed visitor to the holy places of Jerusalem in 333 A.D. He traveled from the French city of Bordeaux to Jerusalem and back again. His itinerary and journal still remains. One of the most repressing experiences for him occurred at the newly built Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Upon exiting the building, with an uplifted spirit, after having viewed the supposed places surrounding the death of Jesus, he looked to the east and was disheartened to see the immense western wall and what remained of Antonia. How devastating it must have been for him to plummet from such an emotionally charged experience. The lofty Roman platform was still there. Looking eastward from this same location today, one is looking directly at the western wall of the Haram. Thus, it could not be the Wailing Wall, because the Bordeaux Pilgrim knew precisely what he was looking at, and it was all Roman.

In summary, evidence for the Haram being the location of the Antonia Fortress are exhaustive and convincing from eyewitnesses, architecture, geography, logic, and archeology. Contrariwise, there is no irrefutable proof from eyewitness testimony, corroboration, documentation with evidentiary value that would substantiate that the Haram was the location of any Jewish structure. Ingrained beliefs are very difficult to overcome. Present day model builders have successfully created in the minds of the religious public, the premise that both Temples were built on the Haram. For this reason alone, it would be nearly iconoclastic to argue that such a premise is not the case.

The Wailing Wall has become a cherished possession to modern Israelis. Understandably, it would be unthinkable for Jewish interests to engage in genuine dialogue that could possibly lead to the dismissal of its authenticity. Thus, researchers with convincing proof of the Haram being the location of the Antonia Fortress are relegated to suspicion and mistrust.