

Temple Mount at Jerusalem

A summary of Ernest L. Martin's book, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*
by Robert Martin

Josephus gives a different perspective of the temple than what is accepted by most historians today. This may be due to the Jews' distrust of Josephus for having capitulated to the Romans during the onslaught of Jerusalem. In reality, he was trying to save his people from the destruction and terror that would inevitably befall them with their continued resistance. Unfortunately, Josephus' capitulation to the Romans caused many within the Jewish community to view him as a traitor, and thus many within Jewish academia have dismissed him as a historian.

However, Josephus was fully aware of the cardinal features of the Temple Mount: It was built directly over the subterranean Spring of Gihon, and there were caves within its subsurface. These features were also witnessed by Aristeeas of Egypt three hundred years before Josephus and confirmed by the Roman historian Tacitus (115 AD), who quoted eyewitnesses that were in Jerusalem before 70 AD.

Josephus informs us that Mount Zion, the City of David, was the first citadel protecting the Temple Mount from the south. Later, John Hyrcanus (Maccabees) built a palace north of the Temple Mount called Baris. Hasmonaean princes used this palace, and later, Herod the Great made it into a citadel. He renamed it Fort Antonia, in honor of Marcus Anthony. With great effort, Herod built Fort Antonia into a large enclosed area for the Romans to garrison an entire legion along with their auxiliary personnel.

Josephus Understood the Symbolism of the Gihon Spring

Gihon Spring was the only natural spring of pure water within five miles of Jerusalem in any direction. Pure water was an indispensable requirement for the essential rituals of the temple. Because of this spring of pure water, the temple was a microcosm of the Garden of Eden. (One of the rivers that flowed through the Garden of Eden was the river Gihon.) The water of Gihon was symbolic of the Water of Life.

The Gihon Spring was about a quarter mile south from today's Dome of the Rock. There are no caves or spring in the vicinity of today's Dome of the Rock. This information is crucial in determining the correct location of the Temple Mount. Josephus was fully aware of the symbolism involving the Gihon Spring and the Throne or the Holy of Holies of Almighty God, which the learned men of Judaism have ignored.

The Location of Mount Zion, Ophel and Fort Antonia

Josephus understood that the original site of Mount Zion (it was actually a mound) was located on the southern third of the southeast ridge. This was where David had built his city, and it became known as the "Lower City" of Jerusalem. The limits of David and Solomon's Jerusalem were between Kidron Valley to the east and Tyropoeon Valley to the west, with both valleys merging at the south end of the southeast ridge. The Tyropoeon Valley was gradually populated as Jerusalem grew toward the west during the time of King Uzziah. In the latter part of the second century BC, the Maccabees extensively populated this valley, and it became known as the "Upper City."

The Hinnim Valley was to the immediate west at the south end of the western hill adjoining the Kidron and Tyropoeon Valleys at the foot of the southeast ridge. On the southern third of this ridge there were two mounds: Zion and "Ophel" (literally "humped mound"). From south to north, the two mounds together were about 400 yards in length. The distance from the top of Mount Zion to the top of Mount Ophel was over 200 yards. This ridge continued to ascend northward from Mount Ophel to where an outcrop of rock was protruding, which today is called the Dome of the Rock. The Dome of the Rock is located over 600 yards north from the top of Mount Zion and 400 yards from the top of Mount Ophel.

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The Temple Mount was built on Mount Ophel over the subterranean Gihon Spring, below which were numerous subsurface caves. From this mount, the Water of Life for the temple services was immediately available. It was renowned for its purity (sweet water) over that of any other spring in the entire region.

Writing of this, Josephus states, “Now on the north side of the temple was built a citadel (Fort Antonia), whose walls were square and strong and of extraordinary firmness. The kings of the Hasmonaean dynasty, who were also high priests before the time of Herod, called it the Tower.” Josephus further informs us, “Fort Antonia dominated the temple.” This fortress guarded the security of the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the fortress itself.

From the north, it was impossible for one to see the temple because Fort Antonia obscured the view. The hill on which the Tower of Antonia stood was the highest of the three mounds (Zion, Ophel, and Fort Antonia) on the north end of the southeast ridge.

During the Hasmonaean dynasty, the tower of Baris was expanded to become Fort Antonia. It adjoined the new city Bezetha and further obscured the Temple Mount from the north of Jerusalem. An aqueduct coming from Bethlehem supplied Fort Antonia with water that was stored in 37 cisterns for the Tenth Legion and their support personnel, which numbered approximately 10,000 men.

No Rock Outcropping Associated with the Temple

There is no reference in Scripture or any secular historical source that describes a natural outcropping of rock located at the highest point of the ridge or hill that was associated with the Temple Mount. This includes the sites of the temple floor, the Holy of Holies and the Altar of Burnt Offering.

The Altar of Burnt Offering was formally used as a threshing floor. It is clear that the threshing floor was a level area on top of Mount Ophel, not an irregular formation of rock on top of a ridge.

Solomon built the east wall of the temple that reached upwards from the base on the east side of the hill. The foundation was built below the Kidron Valley floor, and the visible wall began from the bottom of the valley and extended upwards for three hundred cubits (450 feet). An area between the top of the hill and an artificial embankment that Solomon had built along the Kidron Valley was completely filled in with rubble and large rocks known as millo. The millo reached the top of Mount Ophel, 300 cubits—about 40 to 45 stories—above the Kidron Valley floor, further extending the temple platform to the east. As viewed from the Mount of Olives on the east, the temple area looked like a modern skyscraper with a huge platform 150 by 450 feet.

Solomon built no walls on the north, west, and south sides. However, in the course of time this hilltop area was enlarged, filling in some of those areas and enclosing the hill from its base at the floor of the Kidron Valley on the east and the Tyropoeon Valley on the west. Its southern and northern sides extended westward over the ridge between the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys. The final foundation of the temple was shaped like a cube, and the area on top of the Temple Mount was a perfect square platform.

Solomon built his palace and judgment hall just south of the temple. This was the area of Mount Zion and the city of David, around which Jerusalem evolved. In the second century BC, Mount Zion was leveled during the time of Simon the Hasmonaean, just south of Mount Ophel. After that time the Temple Mount was not obscured from the south by the higher elevation of Mount Zion.

The Gihon Spring

The Temple Mount had a natural spring with an unlimited supply of water coming from underneath the Holy of Holies. Scriptural references require a water source to be associated with the temple and its function. The Gihon Spring is referred to numerous times in the book of Psalms and by the prophets.

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During the time of David and Solomon, Gihon Spring supplied the Siloam Pool and fed the Kidron Valley. Toward the end of the eighth century BC, King Hezekiah built a tunnel to supply underground water from the Gihon Spring to western Jerusalem (II Chron. 32:30). Hezekiah built this tunnel because he was expecting a siege against Jerusalem by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria.

Before 70 AD, the Jews often used the word “Siloam” to describe the whole system of the Gihon Spring—Siloam Pool, Hezekiah’s underground tunnel and the channels into the Kidron Valley. (Christians did not use the name “Gihon” but continued to use “Siloam” to describe this water network even into modern times.)

It is most significant that the pure water of Gihon Spring under the Temple Mount ran near the seat of the Holy of Holies, symbolic of the seat of Almighty God’s throne. John’s description of God’s throne in Revelation shows a river of water coming out from beneath the throne: “Then he showed me a pure river of *the* water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

Destruction of the Temple Foretold

Micah prophesied of the destruction of the temple (Mic. 3:10-12): “Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor justice, and pervert all iniquity. They build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for a bribe, and the priests thereof teach for pay, and the prophets thereof divine for money. Yet will they lean upon the Lord, saying is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple as the bare hills.”

Jesus confirmed this prophecy as the writers of the gospels agree: Matthew 24:1-2 and Mark 13:1-2: “And after going out, Jesus departed from the temple; and His disciples came to *Him* to point out the buildings of the temple. But Jesus said to them. ‘Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there shall not be left here even a stone upon a stone that shall not be thrown down.’”

Luke 19:43-44: “For *the* days shall come upon you that your enemies shall cast a rampart about you, and shall enclose you around and keep you in on every side, and shall level you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you a stone upon a stone, because you did not know the season of your visitation.”

Luke 21:5-6: “And while some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and consecrated gifts, He said, ‘As for these things that you now see, *the* days will come in which *there* shall not be left *one* stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.’”

Fort Antonia’s walls were 40 cubits (60 feet) high. Inside these walls, the buildings and grounds were built on a level platform. At the four corners of the walls were towers. Three of these towers were 50 cubits (75 feet) high, and the southwest tower was 70 cubits (105 feet) high. This higher tower overlooked the entire temple court to the south of Fort Antonia.

Josephus wrote that all of Fort Antonia was built over and around a rock outcrop at the summit of the ridge. Today, a mosque stands over this rock formation known as the Dome of the Rock. Completed by Abdul el-Malik in 691 AD, the mosque covers the remainder of this protruding rock but occupies only a very small fraction of the entire surface area of the 36-acre artificial platform that the Romans built.

Fort Antonia and the Roman Legion

A Roman legion had 5,000 infantry troops and with them 5,000 support personnel. There were 278 military personnel per acre within Fort Antonia.

The Roman garrison was the dominant feature of Jerusalem, a continuous reminder to the Jews of Rome’s supremacy. Further, being four and one-half times greater in area than the Temple Mount, Fort Antonia was intimidating, and therefore, a successful tool of psychological warfare to secure Jewish conformity to Roman authority.

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The crowds that assembled at the temple during the Holy Days were overseen by 2,000 Roman troops. In order to prevent disorder and riots among the Jews, they were stationed on a 45-foot wide walkway built atop the four rows of colonnades that surrounded the temple grounds. During the Jewish festivals, there were three rotations of guards, totaling 6,000 soldiers, each day.

Josephus' Description of the Colonnades

The colonnades between the temple and Fort Antonia were extended around the outer edge of the entire Temple Mount platform. These colonnades were roofed with the roadway 30 cubits (45 feet) wide. The colonnade roadway was the vantage point from which the Roman troops were able to guard the entrances and exits to and from the temple as well as keep a watchful eye on the inside area of the court (with the exception of the inside of the temple). In addition, the colonnade roadway gave them nearly instant access from Fort Antonia to the temple area. The double colonnade-bridge that connected the temple with Fort Antonia was one stade (600 feet). Josephus described two colonnades as military roadways that were an integral part of the temple. These two colonnades led from the south (west corner) wall of Fort Antonia to the gate on the north (west corner) wall of the Temple Mount. Called the Tadi Gate, this north wall was not used by the general public but only by the Roman Legion.

The Romans were very astute in military engineering and constructed their fortifications with this advantage. They understood well that the key to controlling Jerusalem was to manage and control the Temple Mount. Fort Antonia's protection was its dominant position over the Temple Mount.