

Fort Antonia, Josephus, a Contradiction

Commentary for January 1, 2017 — **Can Josephus' Statements be Reconciled?**

After you read the "[January 2017 Newsletter](#)," I know you will enjoy reading and listening to the article, "Gihon Temple Evidence: Jeff Rense Interview of Ernest Martin." It is a lively discussion about the true location of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, made after the book.

Now to the title of this article. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote about Fort Antonia and its physical relation to the Temple of God in Jerusalem — it was north of the Temple. Dr. Ernest Martin's research on the location of the Temple¹ led him to conclude that the traditional, so-called "Temple Mount" (the Harem esh-Sharif) is actually the remains of Fort Antonia. Josephus makes two statements about Antonia that seem to contradict one another. **First:**

"Titus gave orders to his soldiers that were with him to dig up the foundations of the tower of Antonia, ..."

Then, days later,

... the rest of the Roman army had, in seven days' time, overthrown [some]² foundations of the tower of Antonia, and had made a ready and broad way to the temple."

- *Josephus, Wars of the Jews 6.93, 149, Whiston Translation*

Eleazar son of Yair, the leader of the Zealots at the desert fortress of Masada also tells of the destruction of Jerusalem. **Second citation:**

"Where is this city that was believed to have God himself inhabiting therein? It [all Jerusalem] is now demolished to the very foundations; and has nothing but that monument of it preserved. I mean the camp of those who has destroyed it, which still dwells upon its ruins."

- *Josephus, Wars of the Jews 7.376, Whiston Translation* [the words in brackets are mine]

- The first quotes say the Romans "dug up the foundations" and had "overthrown foundations" of Antonia.
- The second quote says "the camp" of the conquerors, meaning Fort Antonia,³ was the only recognizable feature of Jerusalem that continued to exist.⁴

So, were the foundations dug up and overthrown, and Antonia recognizable as the Roman camp? Actually, both events happened — if you understand the correct location of Antonia. Compare the diagrams at the top of the next page.

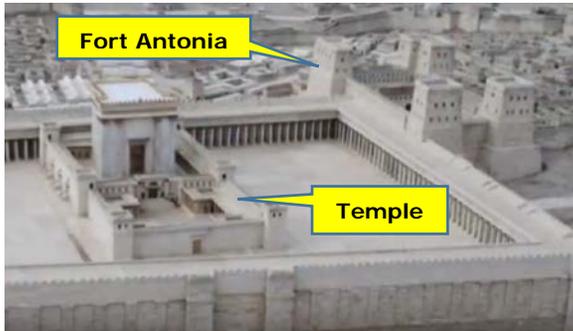
¹ *The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot* (2000).

² The word "some" in brackets is Whiston's addition.

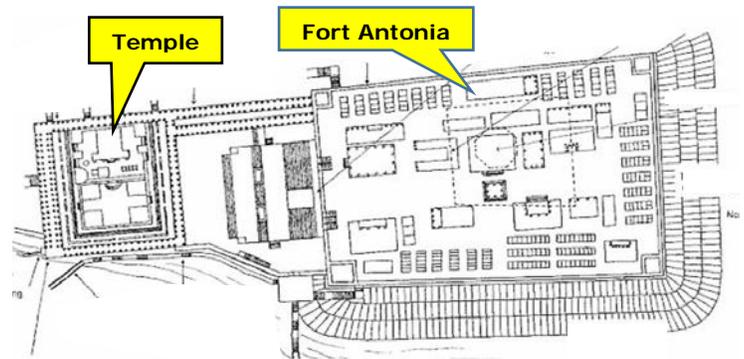
³ Fort Antonia was long occupied by the Romans until the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion in 66 AD.

⁴ The rest of Jerusalem was leveled to the ground as Jesus prophesied (Luke 19:41–44), and Josephus confirmed (*Wars* 6.413, 7.1–3). Three towers were allowed to remain at first, but later demolished.

Traditional View of Temple-Antonia



Dr. Ernest Martin's View of Temple-Antonia



Competing Theories of Temple-Antonia Location

The traditional theory (the left illustration) is that the Temple was located on the so-called "Temple Mount," while Fort Antonia was a small structure on the northwest corner of the present day Harem esh-Sharif. This is unlikely however because Josephus tells us that Fort Antonia, particularly on the Jewish feasts, contained an entire legion at full strength:

"... for a Roman legion [*tagma*, in Latin] was permanently quartered there, and at the festivals took up positions in arms around the porticoes to watch the people and repress any insurrection movement."

This is roughly 5,400 men (*Wars of the Jews* 5.244) with perhaps 4,000 more people who provided goods and services to the Roman troops.

Compare it with the illustration on the right. That Fort Antonia is much larger than the Temple rather than smaller. It could easily hide the view of the Temple from the north (the right side of the diagram, *Wars of the Jews* 5.238, 246), and it certainly appears capable in size and structure to accommodate several thousand people (*Wars of the Jews* 5.240–242).

Of course, there is much more convincing evidence in Dr. Martin's *Temples* book than comparing the Antonia mentioned in Josephus. Nevertheless, once you begin to look at the so-called "Temple Mount" as being Fort Antonia, it will be difficult for you to change back. When viewed from the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley, the "Temple Mount" looks like a fortress because it was designed to overawe everyone who saw it. The massive Antonia fortress overlooked and protected the stunningly beautiful Temple to the south.

The Solution

Both statements about Fort Antonia are true. The foundations were dug up and overthrown, the buildings on the platform were destroyed, and the corner towers on Antonia, and the stones on the walls have decidedly two parts. **First**, the stones below the surface of the Harem esh-Sharif are massive with carved ridges in them, somehow moved into place where they remain to this day. **Second**, are the layers of stones above surface level. The stones are smaller, haphazardly placed when the Ottoman Turks rebuilt the walls in 1535 AD. That material was used for ramps to attack the Temple from Antonia.