

Jerusalem and Israel May 2019

Commentary for June 17, 2019 —Observations on Monumental Structures

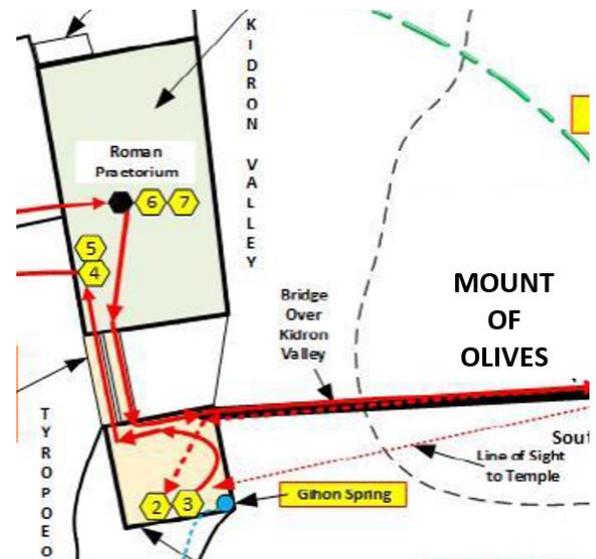
It has been years since I was last in Israel and Jerusalem. With Jerusalem as my primary interest, in May my wife Robin and I traveled to Israel and met up with a tour group Bob Cornuke was assisting as a speaker. Bob and I spoke to the group and I was filmed for a video documentary being made (to be released toward the end of this year). In this Commentary, I want to give my impressions of some of the monumental structures in Israel.

First, about the Temple: nothing has been discovered by archaeologists that would deny the biblical and historical evidence for a Gihon location of the Jerusalem Temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, or the expansion by King Herod. However, there is much archaeological evidence, as well as biblical and historical testimony, that shows the traditional site (the Haram esh-Sharif) is not the "Temple Mount" but is the remains of Fortress Antonia.

In the City of David south of the Haram, thousands of people every year take the popular public tour given daily (except Saturdays) which includes the area above and inside the Gihon Spring water complex. At that site, there are large remains from the First Temple period, and Hasmonean walls dated after the return of Israelites from Babylonian exile. However, there are no remains of a Herodian Second Temple structure — none at all. This is exactly what we should expect, as I will explain.

The statements by Jesus in Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13, and Luke chapter 21 all prophesied that all stones from the Herodian Temple would be dismantled and not one stone would remain upon another, including foundation stones that supported the entire structure above them.

In those Gospel texts Jesus spoke to His disciples as they viewed the Temple complex looking west across the Kidron Valley from the Mount of Olives. Fort Antonia was north of the Temple. Tour groups today view the same vista from the Mount of Olives to gain a perspective on the Temple, just as was done then when the disciples questioned Jesus on when the Kingdom of God would come to earth.



Temple, Antonia, and the Mount of Olives
ELM Timeline Project, "Final Movements of Christ," p 2 of 2

Second, the lack of physical evidence from the Herodian Temple should not deter anyone from accepting a Temple location above the Gihon Spring. Lack of physical evidence confirms what Jesus said: there would be no remains and there are none. The stones of the Temple were thrown down and used elsewhere when the city was rebuilt later. The lack of evidence is

explained in eyewitness accounts by the Jewish historian Josephus after Jerusalem was captured. Josephus said the Temple was so demolished that no one would believe it ever existed. The monumental Herodian Temple ceased to exist.

Josephus also wrote that the city of Jerusalem was laid even with the ground, but the foundation stones of buildings were not dug up. Josephus confirmed the prophecy of Jesus in Luke that the city of Jerusalem would be leveled to the ground. Here is His statement:

“For the days shall come ... that your enemies [1] shall cast a trench about you, and compass you round, and keep you in on every side, And [2] shall lay you even with the ground, and your children within you; and they [3] shall not leave in you one stone upon another; because you knew not the time of your visitation.”

• Luke 19:43–44

There are 1st century archaeological finds in the city of Jerusalem with remains below the ground. One is the [Burnt House Museum](#) presenting an excavated house from the Second Temple period with artifacts six meters below street level in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Another site is the nearby [Wohl Museum in the Old City of Jerusalem](#) (click to watch the 21 minute video). The Wohl Museum is a house of a wealthy owner, perhaps a high-ranking priest. Here also, the important findings were below the surface. Both the Burnt House and the Wohl Museum house were destroyed in 70 AD. Josephus confirms the prophecy of Jesus about the city of Jerusalem:

“Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground ... as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited.”

• Josephus, Wars of the Jews 7.1, 3 (Loeb ed.)

Later Titus ordered the foundations of the Temple be dug up and uprooted, going beyond the destruction done to the city. See Chapter 11, [“Every Stone Uprooted from the Temple,”](#) in Dr. Ernest Martin’s book, [The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot](#), pages 180–181, 184–185.

“Where now is that great city, the mother-city of the whole Jewish race ... Uprooted from her base, she [the city] has been swept away ... we saw that holy city razed by an enemy’s hands, that sacred sanctuary [the Temple] so profanely uprooted!”

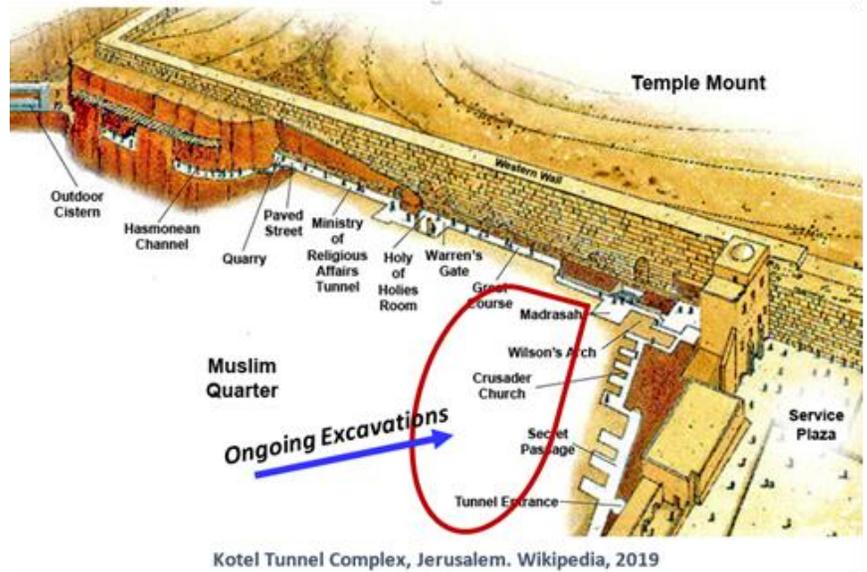
• Josephus, Wars of the Jews 7.375, 376, 379 (Loeb ed.)

The city remained a quarry of stones even in the time of Eusebius the Christian historian in the 4th century AD, some 250 years after its destruction. Certainly some original stones from the Temple were taken from the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys, reused and are in the present walls of Jerusalem, the upper walls of the Haram, and other buildings in the city.

However, there are no remains of the Herodian Temple in the City of David above the Gihon Spring, nor are there any scattered large stones cut in the Herodian pattern. Archaeological evidence of a Gihon Temple comes only from biblical and historical records. The prophecy Jesus gave to His disciples (and to us in Scripture) is still true today. The foundation stones and all the Temple stones were uprooted with no stone upon another.

Other Pre- and Post-Herodian Monumental Structures

North of the City of David, along the western wall of the (the so-called "Temple Mount") just north of the Wailing Wall, there are large underground structures generally called the Kotel. Some of these structures are cisterns for collected rainwater from north of the city. They are in addition to the many cisterns on the Fort Antonia platform (the Haram esh-Sharif). Some are 40+ feet deep with vaulted roofs. Construction covered many decades: the Hasmonean period (160 BC to King Herod in 37 BC), later work was done by Herod and Roman construction. It is difficult to determine what portions of structures belong to what era because construction styles from different eras are mixed together in a jumble.



In the area of the illustration above, I marked as "ongoing excavations," a new tour has recently opened that shows these massive underground structures. Herod improved upon them, as did the Romans. At some unknown period, perhaps by the Arabs, they were filled in with dirt and forgotten. These structures were discovered by Charles Warren in the late 1800s. The latest excavations have been going on for a long time.

Other Massive Structures in Israel

Many other sites in Israel have massive structures from the past. The ancient city of Caesarea Maritima ("by the Sea") was dedicated by King Herod in 22 BC. No natural harbor existed on the eastern Mediterranean coast for best passage to Jerusalem, so Herod created an excellent harbor for sea-going ships with proximity to Jerusalem. He used a Roman technique of hardening cement underwater, perhaps used for the first time at Caesarea.

"The *basileia* features prominently in Josephus' description of Herod's building programs at Caesarea. Agrippa I was struck by fatal illness in the theater and died in the palace. 'Herod's praetorium' was the destination of the apostle Paul for a hearing before Antoninus Felix at Caesarea (Acts of the Apostles 23:35). Later, Herod Agrippa II and his sister Berenike visited a new governor, Porcius Festus, there and heard Paul's self-defense in the *akroaterion* ([a place of judgment] Acts 25:23). Josephus, in relating the incident of the standards at Caesarea (*Wars of the Jews* 2.169–74; *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.57), mentions a demonstration outside of the palace which moved into the adjacent stadium.

Together these narrative sources provide an image of the palace, stadium (amphitheater, hippodrome), and theater in close proximity to one another. Such a constellation of palace and public buildings in the southern area of the city, however, was unknown to excavators until the last quarter of this century. Only

the theater, excavated in 1958 by A. Frova had been recognized since the mapping efforts of Conder and Kitchener in the 1880s. The palace and Josephus' amphiteatron [a sports stadium], however, remained lost to memory."

- "[Caesarea Maritima, About Caesarea](#)"¹

Excavations continue today, expanding the tourist area and giving us an idea of the grand scale of Caesarea in ancient times. The city was the capital of the Roman province of Judea. During Jewish feast days troops were transferred from Caesarea to Jerusalem to keep peace.

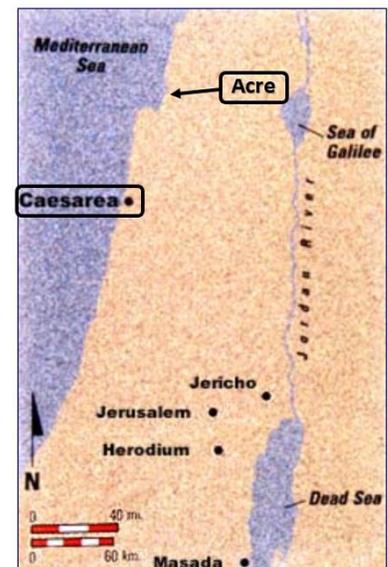
The tourist area today is much greater than when we first visited Caesarea in 1983 on a tour with Dr. Ernest Martin. Then the major features were the theater and aqueduct. Since that time, the excavations have uncovered impressive finds: a large palace, other official buildings, and large bathhouses with large near-complete 1st century BC mosaics. Also excavated nearby were large and impressive Crusader structures built 1,000+ years after Herod a few hundred yards north of the ancient city.

Monumental Crusader Constructs at Acre

The city of Acre in the Crusader era also saw excavations of massive vaulted structures, with large defensive constructions seeming to be several castles. Excavators had to "dig out" these buildings after they were filled in by Turkish rulers to prevent reuse later by crusaders ("Franks" as the Turks called them) should they return to Judea.²

I mention all these large structures because they indicate periods of great wealth in the land that paid for these very expensive great structures in the land of Israel. Israel was a rich land in ancient times, and later during Crusader and Turkish periods. The wealth of Judea returns whenever water is plentiful, and it fulfills the biblical description of it being "the land of milk and honey."³

There were several periods of history in Israel when monumental large-scale and long-term building projects were ongoing. The Crusader defensive castles and bastions and great halls with large open spaces are just as impressive as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher begun in the 4th century AD, and later expanded. The greatest structure with the largest stones is the remains of Fort Antonia (the Haram esh-Sharif) begun by King Herod. It is still there today for everyone to view just as it was seen by Jesus and His disciples.



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¹ See the information on the Caesarea "[Excavations](#)" webpage, University of Pennsylvania Museum.

² See the website <http://www.akko.org.il/en/>. These are not structures from a medieval festival or Renaissance Fair. These are historic great structures being studied, preserved, and even restored.

³ These constructions were expensive and took years, even decades to build. Remember, it was said that the Temple had been under construction for 46 years early in the ministry of Jesus (John 2:20).