

Antonia Fortress

Names (also known as)

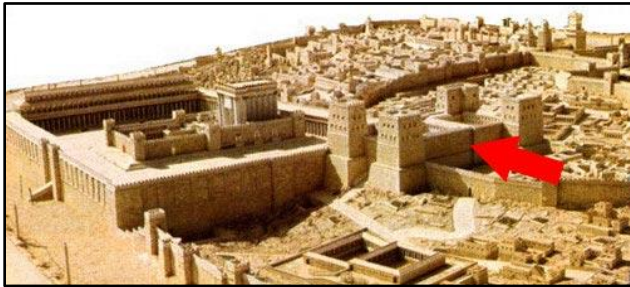
Tower of Antonia

Etymology

Named after Mark Antony, the name ‘Antony’ is said to mean in Latin – “Highly praiseworthy”, and in Greek – “Priceless.”

In Acts 21:34 the fortress is called a “castle” – Greek *parembolē* - from a compound of two words – *para* and *emballo*; a throwing in beside (juxtaposition), that is, (specifically) battle array, encampment or barracks.

Location/Description



It was located on the Northwest corner of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Antonia Fortress was a military fortification and Josephus recorded that the whole Fortress of Antonia appeared as one tower and therefore he referred to it as the Tower of Antonia. Josephus provided meticulous detail including the courts and baths resembled a palace. It was rectangular in shape, measuring about 490 feet (150 metres) long east to west, by 260 feet (80 metres) wide north to south, with walls about 60-75 feet (18 to 23 metres) high. Each corner had a high tower, three of which were 75 feet (23 metres) high. The tower in the northwest corner, which overlooked the Temple area, however, was about 115 feet (35 metres) high. According to Acts 21:35 stairs connected the Antonia Fortress with the Temple area. The northwest tower was later known as Strato’s Tower. The western wall was built upon the edge of the cliff overlooking the Tyropoeon

Valley. The north wall was directly across the hill Bezetha and there was a deep mote between them. The rock hid the Temple from view on this side according to Josephus. From the southern wall one could see over the entire Temple area. The eastern wall overlooked the Pool of Bethesda and the Kidron Valley.

Scriptural references

New Testament

Acts 21:34,37,40

Famous characters

Herod, Mark Antony, Apostle Paul.

Brief history

The Fortress of Antonia was built in 35 BC and named in honour of Herod’s friend and Roman Triumvir Marcus Antonius also known as Mark Antony. It was actually Mark Antony who had requested that the Senate make Herod King of Judea as an eastern boundary to the Roman Empire. At some point the Romans took over the Antonia Fortress and placed a garrison there.

It is described (by Josephus) as a small city, a palace for a king and a barracks for many soldiers. There were apartments, cloisters, baths and large courtyards. There were also stairs that led down from the Fortress to the porticoes of the Temple court at the extreme north side. It is also written that there was a deep passageway underground, which went from the fortress to the Court of Israel, mainly for use in uprisings and emergencies.

Scriptural importance

The Apostle Paul was arrested and taken to the fortress, upon which he asked permission to speak to the hostile Jews. The Roman soldiers having heard Paul say that he was a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city and gave him permission to speak from the stairs.

Sources:

Biblehistory.com; Wikipedia

(Compilers – Greg and Yvonne Pipe)