

HEROD'S PALACE

Herod's palace was built on an elevated platform (similar to his temple) in the last quarter of the first century B.C. This platform measured approximately 1,100 feet from north to south, and 200 feet from east to west (McRay, 118). It was located along the northwestern wall of the upper city of that time. The palace consisted of two main buildings, each containing baths, banquet halls, and rooms for hundreds of guests. They were lavishly furnished, and most of the vessels were made of silver and gold. Between these wings of the palace were gardens, porticos, groves, canals, and pools decorated with bronze statues (Josephus *Wars* 5.4.4).



Model of First-Century Jerusalem



Josephus, when discussing Herod's palace, described three lofty towers that Herod had built on the north side of the complex and named after a friend and relatives.

- 1) Phasael, named after Herod's brother, was the largest and tallest tower.
- 2) Hippicus, named after a friend, was the second tallest tower.
- 3) Mariamne, named after Herod's Hasmonean wife whom he murdered, was the shortest and most beautiful tower.

The towers stood on a crest above the western hill. They were furnished with baths, fine apartments, and water reservoirs (*Wars* 5.4.3). Remnants of at least one of the towers' lower courses have survived, being integrated into the Citadel (Tower of David) inside the Jaffa Gate.



Herod's Towers
(Jerusalem Model Viewed from the West)

This palace functioned as a principle residence for Herod the Great, along with his palaces at such places as Masada, Herodium, Jericho, and Caesarea Maritima. Since Herod's palace served as the official residence of Roman governors when they came to Jerusalem during the Passover, it was where Pilate would have resided. This is most likely the location of the Praetorium referred to in the Bible, where Jesus' trial was held (Mt. 27:27; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:28, 33).

The idea that Pilate's praetorium was Herod's palace in Jerusalem is supported by the literary evidence. Philo and Josephus both provided testimony that Roman governors in the first century stayed at Herod's palace while visiting Jerusalem. It was at the palace that the Jewish leaders would come before the governor's tribunal (Philo *Embassy to Gaius* 38 [299]; 39 [306]; Josephus *Wars* 2.14.8). Herod's palace had, as a part of its complex, a *bema* (tribunal or judgment platform) and an open area capable of accommodating a large crowd. From the *bema*, Pilate could interrogate prisoners, order their scourging, and condemn them to crucifixion.

These details are consistent with the testimony in the Synoptic Gospels. During Jesus' trials, Luke wrote that Pilate "called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people" (Lk. 23:13). It may reasonably be inferred that this gathering took place at the location called the "Stone Pavement" (*lithostrotos*), or "Gabbatha," in John 19:13. Matthew related that Pilate's wife sent word of her fears regarding the righteous man Jesus "while Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat" (Mt. 27:19). Mark stated that, during the trial, the soldiers led Jesus away "into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers" to mock him (Mk. 15:16). If Pilate was staying at Herod's palace and tried Jesus there, this would mean that the traditional route of the *Via Dolorosa* ("Way of Sorrows") which begins at Antonia Fortress is incorrect.



Herod's Palace
(Jerusalem Model Viewed from the Southwest)

The scourging of Christ may have taken place in the northern building of the palace complex, since the Roman troops probably would have lodged nearer to the three defense towers built by Herod. (Likely, a much larger Roman garrison bunked at the Antonia Fortress.) The soldiers lodging at the palace must have served as a bodyguard, first for the Herodian kings and then for the later Roman governors.

In A.D. 66, the Roman governor Florus executed many Jews by crucifixion, which incited the First Jewish Revolt. Jewish rebels burned down Herod's palace, and only the three towers survived (*Wars* 2.17.7-8). After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Titus set up the Tenth Legion among the ruins (*Wars* 7.1.1-2). Therefore, after the palace was destroyed, its site still served as a military barracks.



Tenth Legion Fretensis Inscription
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

Herod's palace complex was located in the area presently occupied by the Tower of David Museum (Turkish Citadel), a police station, and an Armenian school and garden. Major excavations have been carried out in that area. When discoveries from those excavations are coupled with Josephus' descriptions of Herod's palace, a detailed picture of the complex comes to light. On the north stood the three massive towers as well as the military barracks, whereas on the south was the other residential wing. In between, there were beautiful gardens, porticoes, and other amenities.



Jaffa Gate and the Citadel



Middle Section with Dressed Stones from a Herodian Tower