

# The Mount Of Olives – Place of Jesus' Death, Resurrection & Ascension

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## **Introduction**

For centuries believers have debated over where exactly Jesus' resurrection and crucifixion took place. Now in the light of a greater understanding of Jewish traditions, closer scrutiny of the scriptures themselves, and archaeological research, the mystery is removed and we can confidently declare that Jesus was crucified and resurrected on the Mt. Of Olives

## **Evidence From Hebrews**

Ezekiel 43:71 refers to an altar located east of the Temple "without the sanctuary." Here the important sacrifice of the Red Heifer was performed. Where is this altar in relationship to the Temple? Jeremiah records that it was located near the southern summit of the Mount of Olives directly "east of the Temple," 'outside the camp' of Israel some 2000 cubits (about 1000 yards) east of the central part of the Temple. In the time of Jesus this

was slightly down slope from the southern summit of the Mount of Olives in full view of the Temple from the west

Confirmation that Jesus was crucified near the summit of the Mount of Olives, about a half-mile east of the Temple Mount is found in the New Testament itself, in the Book of Hebrews. It states that the crucifixion occurred "without the camp" and "without the gate" of Israel (Heb. 13:11-13).

These geographical references may mean little to us today, but to first century Jewish people in the Jerusalem area they could only mean one thing - Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives "without THE gate" and without THE camp." This refers to a special gate - the gate to the eastern region outside the city limits of Jerusalem. Golgotha was located at the southern summit of the Mount of Olives.

The Temple at Jerusalem was patterned after the Tabernacle of Moses, which was a portable Temple. The Book of Hebrews calls the Temple that Herod refurbished "the Tent." The Temple or Tent had three main sections and three altars. Most people only mention two altars, but the third is the most important when discussing Jesus' crucifixion.

Further east from the altar of burnt offering was the third section of the Temple called "the court of the Israelites". Outside the three main sections was a vast enclosure built by Herod called "The Court of the Gentiles". This court had an eastern wall with only ONE gate – a gate leading to the East from the Temple Mount over the Kidron Valley to the Mt of Olives. In the time of Jesus there was a double tiered arched bridge supporting roadway which led from the Eastern gate of the Temple to the top of the Mount of Olives. It was built by the priests and was

known as "the bridge of the red Heifer." It connected the Eastern gate to a sanctified road that led up to the third altar of the Temple which was near the summit of the Mount of Olives. It is this altar that is referred to in the Book of Hebrews and that was associated with the death of Jesus (Hebrews 13: 10-13) *"We have an altar from which those who serve the Tabernacle have no right to eat For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the High Priest for sin; are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also that He might sanctify the people with His own blood suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to meet Him, outside the camp bearing His reproach."*

We must recognize that this was a literal altar. The statement about 'the bodies of those beasts burnt outside the camp' is literal, referring to literal animals and the third altar is a literal altar of the Temple which was associated with the sin offerings. This altar near the summit was where the Red Heifer was killed and burnt and where special sin offerings were burnt to

ashes in accordance with the Law of Moses. (Lev. 4:12)

Ezekiel 43:21 calls it the appointed place' located "without the sanctuary" and "the outward sanctuary". (Ezekiel 44) Unfortunately this altar is forgotten by most Christians. Recognizing its existence and importance plays a key role in identifying the place of Jesus' crucifixion. The sacrifices of this third altar are the prime ones mentioned in the Book of Hebrews. (Heb. 13:12-13)

Early Christians were familiar with this outside altar. They knew that the location' of these offerings was to be "in a clean place" "outside the camp". (Lv. 4:12). There was only one place outside Jerusalem in the time of Jesus where these offerings were burnt to ashes – the Mount of Olives

Jewish records from the period show the precise location of this 'clean place' where the third altar was situated is stated in the Book of Hebrews - east of the sanctuary i.e. on the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives was the most sacred location outside the walls of Jerusalem, because it faced the Holy of Holies. From here one could look westward over the Eastern Wall of the Temple, directly into the sanctuary. The Eastern Wall was made lower than the other walls to allow full view into the sanctuary exterior, including the curtain hung in front of the Holy Place. The purification water of the ashes of the Red Heifer could only be obtained in Jerusalem opposite the eastern entrance of the Temple - the 'clean place' on top of the Mount of Olives.

Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives to purify not only the earth but the heavens themselves near the spot where the purifications for Israel were ordained to take place. It was here that Jesus, the greatest of all sin offerings, was crucified for us.

### **The Garden Tomb & The Church of the Sepulcher Excluded**

The Church of the Sepulcher, built by Helena the mother of Constantine, in the 4th century, and the Garden Tomb north of the Damascus Gate, have nothing to do with the

rituals of the Old Covenant. The Eastern Gate and the Mount Olives, on the other hand, are closely associated with them in the Book of Hebrews.

During the Crusader period the rocks in the area just north of the Damascus Gate were known as "Jeremiah's Grotto." It has no connection with the Old Temple types or ritual.

The hill outside the Garden Tomb With its cave holes does resemble a skull today and so was hailed as a possible sites for Golgotha "The Place of The Skull" of the Bible. However in the time of Jesus these 'eye sockets' were not there. A traveler in 1610 drew detailed pictures of the area and his pictures show no skull-like formations. Over the past 20 years archaeologists have identified all the tombs around the Garden Tomb area, including the Garden Tomb itself, as being from the Iron Age i.e. 700 years before Jesus.

### **The Area of The Camp**

In the first century the Jewish authorities established a 'camp area' surrounding the temple and the City of Jerusalem in the circular fashion that Moses ordained. The area of this

circular camp, extended 2000 cubits (about 3000 feet) almost to, the summit of the Mount of Olives. Anything within that 2000 cubit circle would have been considered 'inside the camp' No executions could take place "inside the camp", (Numbers 15:35), and the scriptures specifically state that Jesus was executed "outside the camp." For a site to be considered as a possible site of Jesus' crucifixion it could not be within a 2000 cubit radius of the Holy of Holies. The summit of the Mount of Olives was outside this 2000 cubit radius.

Hebrews 13:11 says *"the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the High priest, for sin are ALL burned 'without the camp."* Hebrews 13:12 says that Jesus also suffered *"without the gate"*.

The camp area was a circle with a boundary that was 2000 cubits in radius from the inner Temple. It extended therefore beyond the walls of the City of Jerusalem. This means that the area of the Garden Tomb and Church of the Sepulcher, though outside the *walls* of the city at this

time of Jesus, were well INSIDE the *camp* and therefore could not possibly have been sites of execution, since Jesus was crucified outside the camp. (N.B. It was an important principle of Temple ritual that all 'unclean things', animal and human, had to be dealt with and disposed of to the east.)

### **Evidence In Roman Law**

Roman Law often required that the place of execution was to be as close as possible to the scene of the crime or the scene the arrest. Since Jesus was arrested and executed by the Romans on the grounds that He claimed to be a king, the site of his 'crime' would be the most likely site of His crucifixion. The site where He permitted the crowd to hail Him as King was the Mount of Olives. Gethsemanie, the site of His arrest was also on the Mount of Olives,. It would be logical therefore on the basis of their law for the Romans to crucify Jesus there.

On Palm Sunday *"as He drew near to Jerusalem, near Bethpage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives"* He let the people proclaim Him King of Israel and the

world. (Mark 1 I: 1) Bethpage where He mounted the donkey was on the southern summit of the Mount of Olives (close to the altar of the sin offering). This became the site of His 'crime' against Rome. When He was in Jerusalem, Jesus lived on the Mount of Olives. (Luke 21:37; 22:39, Jn. 18:2)

### **Golgotha**

The word "Golgotha" is the Hebrew word for "skull". It is not identical in meaning to the English word. It does not necessarily mean the entire head, but "the top of the head", nor does it necessarily mean the head of a dead person. The Greek word 'kranion' is usually translated 'skull' but it too refers to the bony top of the head. The word 'golgolet' was also used as census term equivalent to the English idiom 'head count' or 'poll'. We do know that for Temple tax and other purposes head counts of pilgrims were made on the Mount Of Olives before they entered the Temple area. It is possible that the word "Golgotha" comes from these polls.

"Place of the skull" could mean either the summit of the mountain or

a place where census were taken. It does not imply a place with a skull-like configuration. In the early Christian era the top of the Mount of Olives was known as the "rosh" or 'head' of the mountain

### **Evidence From Early Christianity**

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the summit of the Mount of Olives was regarded as the headquarters of the early Christians. This was the case, until the time of Constantine. During the three and a half centuries before Constantine there is only one tradition of any 'holy place' which was esteemed by Christians – the Mount of Olives". In the Days of Constantine, the Church of the Sepulcher was a shrine to Venus!

Eusebius, the Bishop of Jerusalem, in the days of Constantine, and a great historian, stated that Christians from all around came to visit the cave near the summit of the Olives and regarded it as the site of Jesus' resurrection. The focal point of pilgrims' interest in the early centuries was a cave just west of the skull (head) of the Mount. This cave was

revered as Jesus' tomb. The tomb of Joseph of Aramathea had been a cave or grotto that had been enlarged and in this same area many of the early bishops of Jerusalem were buried.

### **Evidence in the Gospels**

Perhaps the greatest proof that the Mount of Olives was the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus comes from the gospel accounts themselves.

*"Jesus when He had cried out again with a loud voice, 'yielded up His Spirit. And behold the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom: and the earth quaked and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised ... NOW when the centurion" and those who were with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake AND the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'"* (Matthew 27:51-54) The scriptures plainly state that the centurion and the guards of Jesus saw Him die and at same time saw the veil of the Temple split

in two. The only place from which one could see both – events was if one were standing on the Mount Of Olives This is virtually conclusive proof from the gospels themselves that the death of Jesus took place on the Mt Of Olives.

During the Red Heifer and other purification sacrifices that took place on the Mount of Olives, the priests had to be able to overlook the Temple. According to Josephus the outer curtain in front of the Holy Place was about 82 feet high and 24 feet thick. It hung from a stone lintel and weighed about 30 tons or more! It was this curtain that was torn from top to bottom at the time of Jesus' death. From the Mount Of Olives the centurion and his party just like the priests With the Red Heifer sacrifices, had a clear view of what was taking place in the courts of the Temple.

## **Conclusion**

The Mount Of Olives is the place of Jesus' end-time teaching, the place of His prayer for Jerusalem, the place where He was hailed as Messiah, the place of His arrest, the place of His crucifixion,

the place of His resurrection, the place of His Great Commission, and promise of the Holy Spirit, the place of His Ascension, and the place to which He will return in glory!! It is no wonder it is called the Mount of Olives, the Mount of the anointing or the Mount of the Messiah. It echoes with the past and quivers with future promise.

*The above is based on 'The Secrets Of Golgotha' by Dr. E.L. Martin. Available from Box 25000, Portland, Oregon 97225.*  
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