

The Holy Hill

The Mount of Olives

By Gerry Watts

During 1992 and 1993, I was working hard on studying the gospel accounts, trying to piece together the events of Christ's life on earth. As a result of this, I wrote an unpublished paper entitled 'The Chronology of the Life of Jesus the Messiah.' I'm still hoping that one day I may be able to write a book based on this paper that will read like a commentary of the events of Christ's life, tying all four accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John together as a cohesive whole.

Anyhow, during this time I also took a trip to Israel in '93, staying in Jerusalem and visiting many sites. While I was there, I found myself being drawn to the Mount of Olives. I visited it a number of times, walking around the various 'holy' places and churches that are scattered over the hill (though I am a little sceptical of Christendom's holy shrines). I enjoyed the view at the top, where the panorama of the old city of Jerusalem was quite stunning, with the Temple Mount dominating the scene. I made sure that I took a few pictures.

I was already very aware of how much of a key place this large hill known as the Mount of Olives (or Olivet) played in Christ's life, and that the Scriptures make it very clear that some awesome events were to occur on this hill. I also believed at that time that Christ would return to this mount (based on Zechariah 14:4-5), the same mount from which He had ascended into the heavens back in 33 AD, but I didn't fully realise then just how significant this place really is in God's plan of things for this present earth. During the years that followed, this fact became much clearer to me.

At that time, though, I was doing some research into the ritual of the Sacrifice of the Red Heifer, mentioned in Numbers 19. During the flight to Israel, I sat next to an archaeologist and she told me that they were researching some findings on the Mount of Olives in relation to the altar of the Sacrifice of the Red Heifer. This information, along with a thorough study of Scripture in relation to the Mount of Olives, led me to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus was crucified on this Mount, and that He was also entombed there (probably in the garden of Gethsemane) and that He rose from the dead there.

Add to this the fact that He later ascended into the heavens from this Mount makes this the most Holy place on this earth. It's no wonder that this place was revered by early Christians. If it could be said that there is a physical place on this earth where heaven touches the earth, this Mount would be it, because Jesus *is* The Stairway to Heaven (Genesis 28:10-19; John 1:51) and His feet have already stood on this Mount causing earth-shattering events to take place both physically and spiritually.

So after years of study and contemplation, here are the reasons why I believe that the Mount of Olives is The Holy Hill. The following details can only highlight how amazing God's Word really is - and that is why I find it so enthralling. I pray that you will too. Let us take a little journey through Biblical history in relation to this special and significant place in the land of Palestine, and let the picture unfold.

The Land of Moriah

Back in the time of Abraham, the area around the Old City of Jerusalem was known as the land of Moriah. It was essentially made up of the three main hills or mounts which became known as **Mount Zion, Mount Moriah** and **Mount of Olives**. It was to this area that God instructed Abraham to go with his son Isaac, after which he was commanded to sacrifice his son *on one of the mountains there that God would show him, but we are not told which one* (Genesis 22:2). When Abraham had arrived at the place on one of these mounts, he built an altar for the sacrifice. As we know, God stopped him from sacrificing Isaac, his only son, and He supplied him with a ram instead. The only human sacrifice that God ever commanded was to come later in the form of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus, the true Lamb of God.

At that time, the ancient city of Salem was located on **Mount Zion**, which later became the original city of Jerusalem under King David (Genesis 14:18-20; 2 Samuel 5:6-10; Hebrews 7:1-3). So Abraham wouldn't have built his altar on that mount. Centuries later, David purchased the threshing floor of Araunah (or Ornan) the Jebusite, which was located further up on **Mount Moriah**, and he built an altar to Yahweh there. This became the site of the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1). It is likely that this high ground above the ancient city of the Jebusites was already being used as an area of sacrifice or farming at the time of Abraham. So it is highly unlikely that Abraham would have built his altar on this mount either.

Many believe that Abraham built his altar on Mount Moriah as this later became the place of sacrifice in Solomon's Temple, which, as a sanctuary, was the dwelling place of the manifest Glory of God. But the Ultimate Sacrifice of God's Son, the Messiah, which is foreshadowed in the Abraham/Isaac event, didn't occur in the Temple courts on Mount Moriah, nor did it occur on Mount Zion, but it occurred outside the city of Jerusalem. Out of the three hills in that area, there is only one mount remaining that is situated outside Jerusalem - the **Mount of Olives**.

So there is every reason to believe that Abraham was commanded to build his altar on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.

We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. **And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood**. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

(Hebrews 13:10-13 NIV)

David and Absalom

The account of David and his rebellious son Absalom, who sought to usurp the throne of his father with dire consequences, is a fascinating yet heartbreaking story. It can be found in 2 Samuel 13-19. The whole episode is a type of the story of Jesus, the true King of Israel and Root of David, who is betrayed and hated by some of His own people who seek to usurp His throne and kingdom.

The most interesting thing about this account is the part where David humbly leaves Jerusalem, along with those loyal to him, rather than fight with his son Absalom. It specifically states that with great sorrow he left Jerusalem (evidently by the East Gate) and travelled across the Brook of Kidron, in the Ravine of Kidron, and went up the Mount of Olives to the summit (2 Samuel 15:23, 30).

The writer also mentions the fact that people used to worship God on the summit of the **Mount of Olives** (2 Samuel 15:32), so this is an indication that this place was greatly revered in ancient times and was used for the worship of God via an altar of sacrifice. This probably stemmed from the fact that Abraham had worshipped on this mount after he was tested with the giving up of Isaac.

It is no coincidence that the Kidron (or Kedron) Brook is mentioned in the New Testament in relation to the Passover night on the eve of Christ's death, when Jesus crossed the Kidron with His disciples to go to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (John 18:1). Jesus and His disciples used to spend a lot of time on the Mount of Olives, particularly in the olive grove or garden known as Gethsemane, and this was how Judas knew where to find Him when he came to arrest Him on that night (John 18:2-3). But as we learn from the gospel accounts, the Mount of Olives had an even bigger role to play during the final days of Christ's life on earth, and we shall soon see the significance of this mount during those final days of the true King of Israel, the Son of David.

So, there is every reason to believe that Christ fulfilled the type of David by leaving Jerusalem on the East road, crossing the Kidron Valley and ascending the Mount of Olives, where He was crucified (sacrificed) near the summit amid much sorrow, because the majority of the people had rejected Him.

The Place of Skulls, Golgotha

The animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant are types and shadows of the various aspects of Christ's ultimate Sacrifice. This is particularly true in the case of the special rituals made on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and also in the Sacrifice of the Red Heifer (Leviticus 16 and Numbers 19). In both rituals, the bodies of the sacrifices had to be burned up outside the camp of Israel. In the case of the Red Heifer, the whole ritual, including the sacrifice itself on an altar which became known as the Miphkad Altar, had to occur in a designated holy place *outside the camp* (Numbers 19:3).

It is these two rituals that the writer to the Hebrews is referring to in Hebrews 9:13. There were a number of other sacrificial offerings in the Law that required that the bodies and inner parts of the animals were to be burned in a designated

'clean' place *outside the camp* and the ashes buried. In effect, this was a holy dumping ground for the remains of the sacrifices.

After the temple was built in Jerusalem, the city itself became synonymous with the 'camp' of Israel, which had the Tabernacle/Temple in its midst. The term 'outside the camp' came to mean 'well outside the walls of the Old City.' In the book *The Holy Land* by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, it states that the priestly procession of the Sacrifice of the Red Heifer, led by the High Priest, came through the East Gate of the Temple, then went across the Kidron Valley via a special causeway, and then up the Mount of Olives to the summit (following the road known as The Descent of the Mount of Olives - cp. Luke 19:37), where the sacrifice took place on an altar there known as the Miphkad Altar, and the bodies were burned up near the altar (page 125, the *Mishna* is used as his source. See also *The Temple: Its Ministry and Service* by Alfred Edersheim).

This is also the place where the bodies of the sacrifices on the annual Day of Atonement, as well as some of the daily sacrifices, would've been burned up as well. This particular area on the **Mount of Olives** was the designated 'clean' place *outside the camp* where the altar for the Red Heifer ritual was located, as well as the ash heap. It is also worth mentioning here that the procession for the release of the Scapegoat on the Day of Atonement also followed the road up the Mount of Olives and over the other side, eventually releasing the goat in the Judean wilderness.

Now by the time of Jesus, there was a place *outside the walls of Jerusalem* that was called the **Place of Skulls** or, in Hebrew, Golgotha. Even though its exact location is unknown, it is clear from the name itself that it had to do with a place of death or sacrifice, and it was also near a road with many people passing by. I believe that it has a strong connection to the above place of sacrifice and burning on the **Mount of Olives**. It was to this Place of Skulls that Jesus was taken and crucified, where He fulfilled all the types and shadows as the Ultimate Sacrifice of God at the hands of the priests (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33; John 19:17-18). He was taken *outside the camp* to be sacrificed so that He could bring true cleansing to all people (Hebrews 13:11-13). He was also the Scapegoat that took all the sins of Israel and the world up the **Mount of Olives** and into the desert of death.

So, there is every reason to believe that Christ fulfilled the type of the Ritual of the Red Heifer (as well as the other sacrifices in the Law, and the Scapegoat) by leaving Jerusalem on the East road, crossing the Kidron Valley and ascending the Mount of Olives, where He was crucified (sacrificed) near the summit at the Place of Skulls, outside the camp.

The Fulfillment in the Life of Jesus

Jesus spent a lot of time on the **Mount of Olives** with His disciples during His ministry. He often stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in the village of **Bethany**, which, along with the neighbouring village of Bethphage, was located on the top of the Mount of Olives. In His final week, He entered Jerusalem as her King, riding on the donkey and colt, coming down the Mount of Olives from the two villages at the top via the Jericho road and The Descent of the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-45). On this occasion, He was not fully accepted as the

rightful King of Israel entering through the East Gate into the temple. In fact, He was outrageously rejected, but the time came (and now is) when a remnant of Israel and the nations did accept Jesus as her King/Messiah, entering the New Jerusalem.

He then stayed at Bethany, traveling back and forth to teach at the temple every day from the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:17; Luke 21:37-38; John 8:1-2). On the eve of His death, after they had eaten their Passover meal in the city, Jesus crossed the Kidron valley with His disciples and went to the Mount of Olives, where they entered a garden known as **Gethsemane**. This was something they often did when they were in Jerusalem (Matthew 26:30, 36; Mark 14:26, 32; Luke 22:39-40; John 18:1-2). It was here that the events of Christ's betrayal and unlawful arrest unfolded.

This garden on the Mount of Olives would have been an olive grove owned by a rich businessman. The name Gethsemane is of Hebrew origin meaning 'trough of oil' or 'olive press.' This indicates that this grove was used for the production of olive oil. It may have been used for producing the oil for the temple lamps and for the anointing oil. It also appears that Jesus and His disciples were given permission to enter this garden, as it would not otherwise have been open to just anyone. It is fitting that on that day, in the garden, Jesus was crushed in His soul and spirit like an olive in the olive trough, bringing forth the true oil of anointing and of light.

We are later told that near the place where Jesus was crucified was a garden, in which a new tomb had been cut in the rock, probably by the owner of the garden. It was here that Jesus was entombed and where He subsequently was raised from the dead. We are also told that the tomb belonged to a prominent rich member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who was also a secret follower of Jesus, named **Joseph of Arimathea**.

It was Joseph, along with Nicodemus, who was given permission by the Roman authorities to take down the body of Jesus for burial, once the authorities were assured that He was dead (John 19:38-42; Luke 23:50-53; Matthew 27:57-60). This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah stating that the Messiah would be entombed in a rich man's tomb (or cave cut in the rock) located in a place among the tombs of the unbelievers (the wicked).

"And He is given His tomb with the wicked, a cave from the rich, in His death." (Isaiah 53:9 CV).

If Joseph had not intervened, Jesus would not have been buried so quickly in a decent tomb. This was because He had died the death of a common criminal, whose bodies were often thrown into the local rubbish dump, the valley of Hinnom (or Gehenna), as well as the fact that His family were not wealthy and He had lost His father, so they could not have afforded a decent burial so quickly. Yet God made sure that His Son got a decent burial in the new tomb of a rich man, among those whom He had died for.

I strongly believe that all of the evidence points to this: **that Jesus was entombed in the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, which was one and the same garden that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who gave Jesus and His close followers permission to use the garden, and he**

eventually gave Him his new tomb. It was here that, consequently, Jesus also rose from the dead.

The Ascension and the Return

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to many of His followers, but He especially appeared to the Twelve apostles over a period of forty days, teaching them about the kingdom and their coming mission (Acts 1:3). On the fortieth day, He took them to the **Mount of Olives**, near Bethany, on the **East of Jerusalem**, where, defying the laws of gravity, He ascended into the sky, and was then hidden from them in the air by a cloud, a cloud of glory, not a rain cloud! (Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-12).

While the disciples were still looking up into the sky, amazed at what they were witnessing, two men appeared, dressed in white, standing beside them. They said to the disciples, *'Why are you standing here looking into the sky?'* In other words, why are you standing there looking at Him disappearing as though you will never see Him again? They then told the disciples *'This Jesus, Whom you are watching going up into heaven, **will come in the same manner as you are seeing Him go.**'* That is, **Jesus the Messiah will return to the air or atmosphere of this earth in exactly the same way as you are seeing Him leave: physically and visibly, in a cloud of glory.**

It is commonly believed that Christ will also return to His land and His people of Israel via this mount of Olives, but it doesn't actually say that in this particular text in Acts 1. The prophet Zechariah prophesied that Yahweh Himself would ultimately stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, in connection with a Day of judgment for Jerusalem, in which the people of Israel will flee eastwards as a consequence of earth-shattering events on the Mount. In this way He would do battle with His enemies (Zechariah 14:3-5).

I have come to see that this was all fulfilled in Christ's first coming, being described with some hyperbole (exaggerated figures of speech) as is common in the writings of the prophets. Jesus the Messiah, as the Word of God Himself, did stand on the Mount of Olives, many times, but ultimately He was crucified there and He rose again there. On that great Day (literally both days), there was an earthquake, physically and spiritually, that moved the mountain and figuratively split it in two, forming a valley of judgment (or escape, depending on which way you view it) in which the people fled eastward, to the sunrise.

(There are some elements of this prophecy in Zechariah 14, especially concerning the battle for Jerusalem, that were fulfilled in Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Seleucid armies, and also the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. These things are considered in the section [The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed](#).)

In relation to this prophecy, during His final week, Jesus sat on the hillside of the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple and the city of Jerusalem, talking to His disciples about the coming destruction of the temple and the city, which occurred in 70 AD, and His subsequent return in power and glory (Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4). Then at the time of His ascension from the Mount of Olives, the two messengers tell the disciples that Jesus will return in the same manner as they've seen Him leave.

Ezekiel's Vision of the Glory

In light of these glorious events, there's an extremely interesting vision that the prophet Ezekiel saw concerning the Presence or Glory of Yahweh. In Ezekiel 10-11, the prophet saw the Glory of God *leave* the temple in Jerusalem **until it rested on the mountain East of the city** (11:22-23). This is where that particular vision ends. Then in chapter 43 another vision picks up where the first one had left off. Ezekiel sees the Glory of Yahweh *coming* from the East, through the Eastern gate of the new temple, where the Glory fills the temple itself (43:1-5).

It is interesting to note that both the departure and the return of the Glory in these visions are surrounded by prophecies of the re-gathering and the restoration of Israel in accordance with the New Covenant. God has not forgotten His promises and all shall be (and much has been) fulfilled as prophesied, ultimately being fulfilled through His Ecclesia.

It is also interesting to note that the sun rises in the East and travels across to the west, and throughout Scripture, the direction of the East is usually associated with distance from God (e.g. East of Eden, the captivities were usually to the East), and the direction of the West is usually associated with nearness to God. In that Day, the Sun of righteousness shall rise in the East with healing in its wings, to radiate those who fear His Name and to bring His people near to God (Malachi 4:2).

These visions are ultimately typifying the ascension of Christ from the land of Israel, and His return to the True Temple of God via the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He is the true Presence and Glory of God. He was rejected by His people after He entered Jerusalem through the East gate, riding on a donkey, but the time came when He triumphantly returned to them in spirit to establish His kingdom.

On that Ascension Day back in 33 AD, the Glory left Jerusalem and the temple, and rested on the **Eastern Mount - the Mount of Olives**. Yet even now, the Glory or Presence of God dwells in His Temple. The Mount of Olives was truly the most holiest place on earth, yet this Mountain has been superseded by the Holy Mountain of God's spiritual Kingdom, the Kingdom of Light, where heaven actually touches the earth - His People. We are holy because of the One who makes us holy, and He alone is to be worshipped.

(Since originally writing this article, my findings have been confirmed by my discovery of the book **Secrets of Golgotha: The Lost History of Jesus' Crucifixion** by Ernest L. Martin.)