



Chapter 10

***HISTORICAL
RECORDS AND
THE MOUNT
OF OLIVES***

In this book I have been showing that Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives far enough east of Jerusalem to be “outside the camp” yet high enough up the mountain to be able to view the Temple curtain from the site. This latter indication makes it certain that the crucifixion could not have been too far east (that is, over the ridge of the mountain itself) because this would have prevented the spectators from seeing the Temple curtain. The evidence makes it pretty clear that Golgotha, “The Polling Place,” must have been near the summit of Olivet and facing the Temple and Jerusalem which could be seen to the west.

Interesting enough, there is (or rather was) a small knoll or hillock located at the exact southern summit of the Mount of Olives and it is described by a Christian pilgrim who visited the site in A.D.333. He is known in history as the Bordeaux Pilgrim and he wrote an itinerary of his trip from Europe to the Holyland and to Jerusalem itself. He gives us valuable information about some of the important geographical areas in and around Jerusalem before major building programs were constructed by later Christians

which in some cases altered the previous features of the land quite drastically. His description of the southern summit of Olivet is most instructive and it will go a long way in helping to identify the exact spot of “Golgotha” — the site of Jesus’ crucifixion.

The Bordeaux Pilgrim tells us that on top of the Mount of Olives there was a *monticulus* which in Latin means “little hill” or “hillock.” In his words he called it “a little hill on top of the mountain.” And what is most important to the matter of the crucifixion site, is the fact that the Pilgrim also called the “Golgotha” discovered by Helena, the mother of Constantine, on the *west* side of the city (found only seven years before) as a *monticulus*. He used the same word to describe both sites! But note this. The Pilgrim was able to see that a great deal of building activity was progressing around and upon the *monticulus* discovered by Helena, but in contrast, the *monticulus* on top of the Mount of Olives was apparently in its natural state and free of buildings. Even modern archaeological investigations have been made on and around the “little hill” on the summit of Olivet and it was found that the site was uninhabited at the time of Jesus (Hoade, *Guide to the Holy Land*, p.260). This is important to realize because Jesus was crucified near a garden area (not in a built-up region) and this indicates that the spot was apparently free of buildings.

Golgotha in Tradition and History

Be this as it may, what does this *monticulus* have to do with the site of Jesus’ crucifixion? It could have very much to do with it because the Bordeaux Pilgrim had more to tell us about this location. The Pilgrim said, to the puzzlement of scholars over the centuries, that on this “little hill” the transfiguration of Jesus took place! This was a blatant geographical mistake because it is clear from the Gospels that the actual transfiguration occurred in the region of Galilee many miles north of Jerusalem. And even the Christian authorities in Jerusalem a short twenty years after the Pilgrim reported this information were assured that the transfigura-

tion happened in Galilee and not on the Mount of Olives (Cyril, *Catech.*xii.16). Admittedly, however, some of the common people were still making the mistake of thinking the transfiguration was on Olivet as late as the time of Jerome (*Comm.Matt.*5:1).

But why the confusion? The fact is, there were several different words used in Latin to denote the crucifixion of a person. One of them was *transfigere* which meant to transfix a person with nails or some other sharp instruments. And remarkably, this word which meant “transfixiation” was one which was very close phonetically to that which meant “transfiguration.” The word for “transfiguration” was *transfigurare*. For a comparison of both Latin words and how similar they are, see the Oxford Latin Dictionary, ed.1982, p.1964; also the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary, vol.XI, pp.258,259; and Merriam-Webster (3rd ed.), p.2427.

In spoken Latin (and with various Latin accents found among the pilgrims and residents of Jerusalem when the Pilgrim was there) the words *transfigere* and *transfigurare* could well have sounded similar to the Bordeaux Pilgrim. And since he probably composed his final work long after he left Palestine and without the means to apply any critical apparatus to the understanding of Palestinian geography, he could well have confused the site of the Jesus’ transfiguration (*transfigurare*) with that of Jesus’ transfixiation (*transfigere*). But even the Latin people in Jerusalem at the time of the Pilgrim were also making the mistake of thinking the transfiguration occurred on Olivet. The truth is, however, the “little hill” (*monticulus*) on top of the Mount of Olives was not the place of the transfiguration. It was the place of the transfixiation (the crucifixion) of Jesus.

Golgotha and King David

There is even another historical incident that could help to show this. The Old Testament tells us that when King David was fleeing Jerusalem at a crucial time in his life, he ascended the Mount of

Olives and went to a designated site on the mountain in order to worship God (II Samuel 15:30). This location was at the very top of Olivet and he went to the same *monticulus* that the Bordeaux Pilgrim had reference to. In the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, the translators called this spot “The Rosh (Head).” The word is used in the Greek Septuagint as though *Rosh* were the name of a place, and a place that was so well-known by the general population of Jerusalem that the translators simply referred to it as (*The Rosh*). It was there that King David worshipped God.

Calling this prominent spot by the word “*head*” has interesting ramifications. This is because the meaning of “*head*” is also found in the word “Golgotha.” The use of the word “head” also signifies that this “little hill on top of the mountain” was the southern summit (the *head*) of the Mount of Olives. In Hebrew, this highest summit of Olivet was known as the “Bamah.” It was the “high place” on the Mount of Olives and this is where King David went to worship God overlooking the city of Jerusalem to the west. It also answers to the same *monticulus* that the Bordeaux Pilgrim talked about. Indeed, this highest point on the southern summit of Olivet became known as the Imbomon (which comes from the Greek “en bommo” which means “high place” or “altar”). It is this name which has been attached to this *monticulus* on Olivet for the past 1600 years. At the present there is a small Muslim shrine built over the site.

This place was significant in the crucifixion of Jesus. It was at the very top of the Mount of Olives. Would not Pilate have wanted to crucify him at the highest point of eminence in order to heighten his degradation in the eyes of the people? Since Jesus claimed to be the King of kings, the messianic offspring of King David himself, then it would have seemed sensible to exacerbate his debasement by crucifying him at the exact spot where his father David once worshipped God when he was turned out of Jerusalem by his family and friends. It would mean that Jesus was crucified stark naked

“outside the camp” of Israel at the highest point of Olivet. There would have been no greater humiliation.

Golgotha Was a Small Hill on the Mount of Olives

When the Bordeaux Pilgrim went to the summit of the Mount of Olives to see this “little hill on top of the mountain,” he was able to observe it without any buildings covering the area. But about 50 years later, a noble woman by the name of Poemenia had a church constructed on this “little hill.” She did this because she thought this was probably the area of the ascension of Jesus back to heaven. Remarkably, on top of Poemenia’s church there was placed a great glistening cross which became the standard landmark for all people to see in the Jerusalem area (Jerome, *Comm.Soph.*,i.15). This gigantic cross was so magnificent to behold that it came to dominate all the area around Jerusalem for several decades afterwards. It could be seen for many miles by people approaching Jerusalem and it was a wonder to behold.

There is further significance to this “little hill” on the top of Olivet. It was from this region that fires were lit by the Jewish authorities in early times to signal Jews throughout the world (via a network of fire signals from mountain top to mountain top) to show when Jews should begin their yearly festivities to Yahweh. Because of this, the Mount of Olives became known as the Mountain of Light. When Brother Felix Fabri went to this very spot in the year A.D.1484 he said it was significant because King David worshipped here when he was turned out of Jerusalem. It was also the place where Jesus said to his apostles to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

The Importance of the Mount of Olives Long Recognized

Brother Felix gave seven reasons why Olivet was called “The Mountain of Light.” First, it was because its summit was the first to catch the rays of the sun each day, even before the Temple itself received the light. Secondly, it was the Mountain of Light because

the lamps of the Temple always lit up the whole of its western side. Thirdly, this was the mountain where the great fire was lit by the priests for burning the Red Heifer sacrifice. Fourthly, because the church at the summit was always lit with many lights. Fifthly, the olive trees of the mountain provided the oil for the lamps in the Temple. Sixthly, a man at the top of Olivet could with the light of his eyes see the world far and wide. And seventhly, it was the Mountain of Light because it was the most delightful area to behold in all Jerusalem and gladdened the eyes of mankind (*Palestine Pilgrim Texts*, vol.VII,pp.495-499). Brother Felix could also have added, had he known this was the place of Jesus' crucifixion, that this was the very spot where "the Light of the world" (John 1:9) was sacrificed to atone for the sins of all mankind.

It was on this "little hill" on top of the Mount of Olives that the Church of the Ascension was built by Poemenia with its bright and glistening cross atop. Burchard of Mount Sion (about A D. 1232) said that the site was made more appropriate for the ascension when a stone bearing the supposed footprints of our Lord as he left for heaven was transported to the spot (*Palestine Pilgrim Texts*, vol.XII,p.83). That stone can be seen today under the small Muslim shrine which now occupies the site. Of course, the area of this "little hill" was not the actual region from which Jesus ascended to heaven because that was much further to the east near the village of Bethany (Luke 24:50).

Yet this "little hill on top of the mountain" that the Bordeaux Pilgrim described was important, because it was on (or near) this very spot where the crucifixion of Jesus took place. And even though the Pilgrim used the same word *monticulus* to denote the newly "discovered" Golgotha on the west side of Jerusalem (which had only come to light some seven years before), the real *monticulus* of the Gospels was on the Mount of Olives.

Once it is realized that the actual "Golgotha" was located at the southern summit of Olivet, it makes it easier to discover the *actual*

tomb in which Jesus was placed because we are told in the Gospels that it was not far from Golgotha. In chapter fourteen, I will show some new and reliable information that will locate the very tomb in which Jesus was placed and from which he was resurrected from the dead. But before we look for the very tomb of Jesus, we need to be aware of some other important historical events (which just recently have been discovered) that occurred in the precincts of the Temple and at the summit of the Mount of Olives. These new discoveries help to show just how important in a spiritual and symbolic way the top of the Mount of Olives becomes in Christian teaching.