

The Place of Jesus' Crucifixion

Commentary for December 15, 2017 — An Alternative View

[**Editor's note:** Some time after 1990 Dr. Martin composed this article for a German Bible dictionary, the *Neues Bibel-Lexikon*. His article was not accepted for publication, but his evidence was clear and concise. I footnote emendations of his later research. *DWS*]

Prepared for the Neues Bibel-Lexikon

There is biblical and historical evidence that can accurately determine the site of the crucifixion which has not been used in the past. The evidence is in three categories:

- 1) geographical indications in the New Testament;
- 2) symbolism relating to Jesus as viewed by early Jewish Christians in fulfillment of Old Testament rituals and the temple; and
- 3) new historical interpretations from Eusebius which show that the early 4th century Christian community in Jerusalem accepted the summit of the Mount of Olives as the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

1) Geographical Evidence:

A. Matthew 27:54 and Luke 23:47–48 state that the centurion and others at the crucifixion site were able to see the curtain of the temple that reputedly was severed from its top to bottom at the precise time of Jesus' death. This outer curtain could be seen outside the temple only from the upper slopes of the Mount of Olives. This fact alone places the crucifixion near the summit of Olivet.

B. Official executions in Jerusalem took place "**outside the camp**" (Numbers 15:35). In Jesus' time, the outer boundary of the camp was a radius of 2000 cubits (*circa* 920 meters) measured from the Sanhedrin hall in the temple (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 2:5). The present "Holy Sepulchre" and the Garden Tomb are inside the limits of the camp, while the southern summit of Olivet is properly outside its boundary.

C. The interrogation of Jesus took place in the "houses" of Caiaphas and Annas (his deputy) while they were resident in the temple (*Middoth* 5:4) and Jesus' trial was in the Sanhedrin hall (at the Chamber of Hewn Stones) in the temple (*Shabbath* 15a; *Rosh ha-Shanah* 31a, b). After Pilate dismissed Jesus, the author of Hebrews states that Jesus was led outside the gate and camp "bearing his reproach" (his *patibulum* for crucifixion) and that Christians have an "altar" to which they should also carry their "reproach." Since Hebrews used the Tabernacle of Moses as its standard of reference which only had east gates, the "gate" through which Jesus with his *patibulum* exited Jerusalem (and the temple enclosure) was an east gate. This one gate in the *east* wall led to the literal altar of the Red Heifer referred to in Hebrews 13:10–13 and Christians were urged to reckon that altar as the one associated with

the death of Jesus.

D. The roadway through this *east* gate led to the summit of Olivet which was called the "Rosh" (*Head*) (2 Samuel 15:30 LXX), a synonym for "Golgotha" (also meaning "Head" or "Skull").

2) Symbolic Evidence:

A. The author of Hebrews associated the Red Heifer with Jesus' sacrifice. The ashes on the altar of the Heifer (mixed with spring water) were connected with the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion (Hebrews 9:13–14).

B. The *Letter of Barnabas* said the Red Heifer was Jesus: **"The calf is Jesus: the sinful men offering it are those who led him to the slaughter"** (8:2).

C. Even the sin offering of Cain that **"couches at the gate"** had messianic (or sin-forgiving properties) and was offered **"east of Eden"** (Genesis 4:7). In the time of Jesus, the temple was analogous to Eden and the Garden (*Jubilees* 8:19). Thus, the "altar of Cain" was the same as the altar of the Red Heifer, which was also located *east* of the temple (*i.e.* "Eden").

D. Execution of a criminal in the time of Jesus was acknowledged as the criminal's own "sin offering" for himself instead of a substitute animal sacrifice (Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, p. 317). All sin offerings were sacrificed *east* of the Holy Place, and the major ones were killed further *east* at the altar of the Red Heifer. So criminals (as sin offerings) were also executed *east* of the temple **"in the presence of God."** The official execution site was just **"outside the camp"** (Numbers 15:35) near the Red Heifer altar. This was also the spot where Stephen was executed (Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 185 n.1).

E. Christians considered Jesus as dying for the sins of the world, and remarkably, he was crucified near the summit of Olivet and on the *east* slope of the Kidron Valley where Jews thought God would judge all people for their sins. The Jews even called the Kidron the Valley of Jehoshaphat (the place of God's judgment).

F. Since the Romans normally crucified a person where his crime was committed, at an elevated area, or at major crossroads where many people would pass. Olivet fits these Roman requirements because Jesus was proclaimed king on Olivet, which was at an elevated area and at a main *eastern* junction of roads into Jerusalem.

3) Fourth Century History:

A. Eusebius was surprised that Constantine picked a *western* site to build his Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He said this was **"contrary to all expectation"** (*Life* III.28).¹

B. The site of Constantine and his mother was selected because of dreams and visions, not by consulting historical records or traditions (Sozomen, *History* 11.1).

¹ The complete title of this work is *The Life of Constantine* by Eusebius. DWS

C. In his works before A.D.326, Eusebius said the Mount of Olives was then being called the Christian "Mount Sion" where Jesus spent most of his time while in Jerusalem (*Demonstratio Evangelica* I.4; VI.13; IX.14). In his commentary on Isaiah 2: 1–5, Eusebius stated this "Mount Sion" was the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?*, pp. 302, 305).

D. Eusebius said this Christian "Mount Sion" was "opposite to" and "adjacent to" Mount Moriah. He said the Shekinah left the temple during the Roman/Jewish War and went *eastward* to this new "Mount Sion" in fulfillment of Ezekiel 11: 22–23.² After the Christians returned to Jerusalem from Pella they built the "Mother Church" on this new "Mount Sion" of Olivet (*ibid.* VI.18) and Jerome confirmed this (*Letter CVIII.12*).

E. Eusebius was aghast at Constantine's *western* site for his "Holy Sepulchre." At its dedication, Eusebius asked Constantine to explain to him and the other assembled bishops *why* this *western* area was being selected because his reason was **"secret to us ... which caused you to raise up this sacred edifice"** (*Oration of Eusebius XVIII*).

F. Eusebius said the only place Christians visited in Jerusalem during pre-Constantine times was a cave on Olivet (*ibid.* VI. 18). This cave was described a century earlier in the *Acts of John* (Charlesworth, 1.301) and in a singular context in the Acts of Pilate the cave was called both a cave and a tomb (bk. XII, XIII). This cave at the modern Pater Noster Church must be the remnant of the tomb of Jesus.³

G. Josephus described the area of Constantine's [later] "Holy Sepulchre" as being that of the monumental tomb of John Hyrcanus (*Wars of the Jews* V.260). Hadrian built a Venus Shrine at Hyrcanus' tomb area to humiliate the Jews after the Bar Kokhba War.⁴

Conclusion:

This cumulative evidence now supports the southern summit of the Mount of Olives as the place of Jesus' crucifixion, and the cave at the Pater Noster Church as the real tomb of Jesus⁵

² Ezekiel 11:22–23:

"Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of YHWH went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." DWS

³ In the mid-1990s, research by Dr. Martin learned that the Temple was located above the Gihon Spring one third of a mile south of the Haram esh-Sharif, the traditional "temple mount." This caused him to change his understanding that Jesus' tomb was not at or near the Pater Noster Church.

That research caused him to change his understanding of the crucifixion site and tomb on the Mount of Olives to the south, directly east of the Gihon Spring. The Red Heifer altar was also at that location in a direct line of sight from the altar into the Temple. Close by the altar, Jesus at His crucifixion could look into the Temple that represented God's presence. For the full evidence of this location, see Dr. Martin's book, [*The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot*](#) (Portland, OR: ASK Publications, 2000). DWS

⁴ After the Jewish rebellion and Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, another rebellion against Rome took place 60+ years later. Another revolt, the Bar Kochba War was from 132 to 135 AD. DWS

⁵ See note 3 above. DWS

while the present "Holy Sepulchre" is the tomb area of John Hyrcanus. [ELM]

Bibliography

Martin, Ernest L., *Secrets of Golgotha*, ASK Publications: Portland, OR, USA, 1988 (all biblical, historical, classical, Mishnaic and Talmudic references to support this new and original research are in this book). [**Editor's note:** A 2nd edition was published in 1996. *DWS*]

Walker, P.W.L., *Holy City, Holy Places?*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1990.

[**Editor's note:** The graphic below is a representation of the site of the crucifixion according to Dr. Martin's research on the Temple and Golgotha. Thanks to Henry Dye and Tim Parrott for their extensive work for this graphic. This map is page 37 of the "[ELM Timeline Project.](#)" *DWS*]

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