

## The Land of Moriah Part 2 Golgotha and the Crucifixion

Last week I began to make the case that the most probable location of our Saviors crucifixion was near the summit on the western side of the Mount of Olives. And that the location would be in line of sight with the entrance of the Temple, across the Kidron Valley.

Today I would like to present some additional information that supports this thesis.

Let's begin with a brief summation of what we covered last time. In Genesis 22, Abraham makes what seems very likely to be a prophetic statement, that on Mount Moriah, the Lamb would be provided.

Meaning that at the spot where Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac, would be the location that the Lamb of God, would be sacrificed for all mankind.

I went on to point out that Mount Moriah is more than one individual mountain peak, but rather it constitutes the entire mountain range around Jerusalem. Further from Hebrews 13 we learn that the spot of Christ's crucifixion was outside the camp.

The camp that the writer of Hebrews was referring too, was a radius of roughly 3000 feet emanating from the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount.

Moreover, the gospel account records that those that were guarding the crucifixion site at the time of Christ's death witnessed the vail being torn in two.

Thus, since the temple entrance faced east, the spot that the Lamb was provided had to be in line of sight due east, a little more than 3000 feet from the Temple itself.

This would place the crucifixion site near the summit of the west side of the Mount of Olives, directly opposite the Temple.

One more point to note from my last message, is the fact that the 3rd altar, the one used to burn the sin offerings was also located outside the camp, due east of the temple entrance, near the western summit of Olivet.

Thus making it a pretty logical conclusion that Jesus was sacrificed very close to this 3rd altar as well, since He fulfilled all the sin offering with His death.

Although not widely taught, this understanding is not new. In fact in 1870 a Scottish doctor by the name of R.F. Hutchinson wrote in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* about the many discrepancies between the scriptures, and recorded Jewish history, in relation to the generally excepted location of Christ's tomb.

In that research paper he states the following; This altar on the Mount of Olives, mentioned in the Mishnah, was for the red-heifer offering—a complex offering for purification—as well as for burning the carcasses of sin offerings, including those offered on the Day of Atonement.

That altar was in direct line of sight with the entrance to the temple, so that the high priest had visual contact with the priests at the altar: “The priest who burns the red cow stands at the top of the Mount of Olives and takes his direction, looking directly at the door of the temple,” from the high priest during the sacrificial ceremony (m. Middot 2:4).

It is to this altar “outside the camp” that the epistle to the Hebrews refers. The Mishnah also records that the Temple Mount was connected to the place of offering by an elevated roadway, across which the priests could take the offerings such as the red heifer to avoid conveying any impurity to the participants:

The Mishnah states “And they would take the causeway from the Temple Mount to the Mount of Olives, . . . on which the priest who burns the cow, leads the cow, and all those that assist him, would go forth to the Mount of Olives” (m. Parah 3:6).  
End quote.

Regarding the Passover ceremony that was conducted during the early first century, Josephus records that over 2 million people would travel to Jerusalem for the Passover and spring Holy Days, and therefore upwards to 250,000 lambs were slain annually for the Passover service.

Josephus further states that the Passover lambs were sacrificed from the ninth hour to the eleventh hour;”[3 p.m. to 5 p.m.]

So the question one might ask is how were so many lambs slain in such a short duration of time?

How would it have been possible to slay hundreds of thousands of lambs in a 2 hour period beginning at 3 in the afternoon.

Simple math would suggest that they would have to kill the lambs at a rate of 125,000 lambs per hour? That would be well over 2000 lambs per minute.

Something is surely amiss, so the question arises can we trust these historical accounts. While I do not hold Josephus in the same status as I do scripture, I don't think his writings should be quickly dismissed, over an apparent anomaly.

Alfred Edershein, in his book, "The Temple; It's Ministry and Services" Gives us additional insight. In the preface of his book, he states the following;

This books aim is to convey an "accurate acquaintance with the sacrificial services at the time of Christ, in which I strive to not only correct mistakes, but place a fresh and vivid light upon all.

Abundant materials for such a work, though scattered far and wide, are within reach. For we have Josephus and Philo, and references in the New Testament itself, as well as the Mishnah, which is a body of authoritative traditions, not only from OT times, but even from the days of Christ.

Of these sources of information in conjunction with the OT itself, I have been chiefly dependent. End quote.

OK my friends,, so armed with this additional source of information, let's look further into the historical record. Quoting now from Edersheins work;

"On the Passover the daily evening sacrifice was concluded no later than 2:30 in the afternoon. After which time the priests would have began the Passover ritual"

So this supports the commentary from Josephus, that the ritual killing began at 3 PM. Continuing.

Edershein goes on to say "Before the incense was burned or the lamps were trimmed, the Passover sacrifice had to be offered. It was thus performed in the following manner. The first of 3 divisions with there lambs, were admitted into the Court of the priests.

Each division must consist of not less than 30 people. Immediately the massive gates were closed behind them. The priests drew a 3 threefold blast on the silver trumpets when the Passover was slain.

Altogether the scene was quite impressive. All along the court up to the altar of burnt offerings priests stood in two rows. The one with golden bowls and the other with silver bowls.

Each one of these 30 or more people, being the representative for his company or family would then slain the lambs themselves.

The priest would then collect the blood in the bowls and pass it to another priest who would in turn pour it on the base of the altar.

While this was going on, a song of praise was sung, the Levites leading in song, with the offerers repeating the hymns after them. Every first line of the Psalm was repeated by the people, with the corresponding verses accompanied with a Hallelujah.

This special service of song was called Hallel, which corresponded with Psalms 113 through 118.

Edersheim goes on to say that the Mishnah further remarks that these 30 or so lambs, from each division were then dressed, with their entrails and inner fat removed. The fat was then salted and burned on the altar. This would conclude the sacrifice.

This activity was then repeated in the exact same manner for the other 2 divisions. After which the court area was washed of any spilled blood and the evening incense and wick trimming was completed.

And so apparently my friends, according to this recording from historical sources, only a small fraction of the lambs, around 100 or so, were actually slain at the Temple.

All the others must have been slain privately, either at their own homes, or as Josephus records, at camp sites, since hundreds of thousands would camp in and around Jerusalem, because the city did not have enough housing for the great influx of people during the Feast.

So this commentary helps us to piece together, exactly what would have been transpiring during the Passover ritual at the temple.

Friends, what's interesting to consider, is the fact that 3 in the afternoon, which was the 9th hour, was the time that the Passover lambs began to be slain.

I will suggest therefore, that the slaying of the first lambs, probably coincided with our Saviors death. And since the brazen alter was outside the entrance of the temple, Jesus was probably able look across the Kidron valley, and view all this activity as He was about to die.

And what a shock it must have been as the throat of the first lamb was cut, and then suddenly there was an earthquake and the vail of the Temple was torn in two. Quite interesting when you begin to piece it all together.

Let's now add some additional insight in our quest for the truth, regarding the site of Christ's crucifixion. Understanding the Jewish 1st century tradition as recorded in the Mishnah may aid in our quest.

One such passage deals specifically with individuals who came to the temple to report sightings of the new moon, which was critical to the observance of determining the new moons and the holy days.

The ceremonial law required ritual purity of anyone who would come to the temple, whether it was to report a new moon observance, worship on the Holy Days, or simply came to the temple to make an offering.

And of course being ritually clean included staying well away from the bodies of the dead for a specified period of time beforehand.

Accordingly, the Mishnah established a waiting area that was guaranteed to be free of grave sites. Archaeological excavations in Jerusalem support the fact that executions and burials would normally be conducted outside this area.

All known first-century tombs were not only outside the city wall but are well beyond the specified 3000 foot distance from the temple (following the topography of the land), hence reinforcing the concept a of holy clean space as it applied to the city and the temple.

In fact, there is quite a bit of evidence, that many of the much older graves, dating back centuries to the times of the kings and the prophets, were actually dug up and relocated outside this specified camp area for this reason.

Interestingly, Christ's statements in the Gospels seem to underscore the fact that this grave site relocation was actually taking place during Christ's ministry. Let's look at a verse.

Matt. 23.29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous"

Note that this verses states that the scribes and Pharisees were building and adorning the tombs of the prophets and the righteous. The prophets had been death for hundreds of years at that point. So why would they be constructing new tombs, if not for the fact that these graves were being relocated outside the camp.

Therefore since these old grave sites were being relocated to make the camp clean, obviously they would not have buried any more people within these parameters. Especially those that were considered criminals, that had been executed.

Thus, based on these stipulations, neither the Church of the Holy Sepulchre nor the Garden Tomb could have been the burial place of Jesus Christ. Both sites, though outside the city wall, would have been too close to the temple.

And if we go a step further and combine Hutchinson's points with the information derived from Jewish sources, we find that the Mount of Olives clearly meets the various special requirements set out by the scriptural accounts:

It was near a public approach to the city: the Jericho road came past Bethany to enter the east of the city. Proximity to a significant road is implied by the Gospel reference to Simon of Cyrene, "who was coming in from the country" and was forced to join them on their way to "the place that is called The Skull, [where] they crucified him. Luke 23.26 and 33

It is further implied by the fact that multiple passersby mocked and derided Jesus as He hung on the tree. Matt. 27.39

Furthermore, the Mount of Olives which was in the vicinity of gardens, satisfying the statement in John 19.41 that "In the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid"

The mountainside would also have been clearly visible to the priests and leaders who are recorded as having been near enough to watch and to mock Him among themselves as he was dying. Mark 15. 31-32

And as I previously stated, a crucifixion site on the Mount of Olives supports Matthew's account of a centurion who was "keeping watch over Jesus," yet who apparently could also see the large curtain at the entrance of the temple being torn in two immediately following Jesus' death Matt.27.50-54

[To be clear, if the centurion did indeed see the curtain torn, it must have been the veil of the entrance to the temple, not the second veil, at the entrance of the Holy of Holies. Josephus records that the curtain that was torn was 80 feet high by 28 feet wide, although he does not seem to specify which curtain he was referring to]

Furthermore, a Mount of Olives crucifixion site harmonizes with the epistle to the Hebrews and the association of Christ's death with the altar of purification located on the Mount of Olives (Heb. 13.11-12, m. Middot 2:4).

In an apparent conflict with this understanding, is the fact that both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Garden Tomb, are situated in the wrong direction in relation to the temple location, being west or north respectively.

So this brings us to Golgotha, which according to several gospel accounts including John 19.17, was the location of the crucifixion. However the tradition location of Golgotha, is also in conflict with scripture, as it is west of the Temple Mount and also well within the camp radius.

So how do we come to terms with this obvious inconsistency? Let's take a deeper look into what and where was Golgotha?

First let's turn to John 19.17

And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

Recall what we covered last week in Ezek. 43 and 44, that the word Miphkad designated the East gate of the Temple complex, as well as the Altar on the Mt, of Olives.

Said simply, the road through the Miphkad gate led to the Miphkad Altar. This is why the gate was designated simply the Miphkad.

It's important to note that the term Miphkad actually means "to number"  
This location near the summit of Olivet was called Miphkad for the fact that this was the location that the annual census was taken. Miphkad literally was the place of "counting heads"

This annual census, was derived from the instruction first given in Num.1.2. Let's turn there please. For added clarification I will be reading it, as it is translated in the (J.P. Green Interlinear Bible)

"Lift the heads of all the congregation of the sons of Israel. by their families, by their father's houses, according to the number of names, every male, by their heads"

I believe the NKJV translated the first phrase lift the heads, as "take a census" and the last phrase is translated individually, instead of the more precise translation by the heads.

There are two different Hebrew words, both translated as heads in this verse. The first one, is found in the first phrase of the verse "lift the head", this comes from the Hebrew word "rosh" It can mean a literal head, as in the head on the top of a body. Or it can mean a top, as in the summit of a mountain.

The phrase "lift the heads" is used both positively and negatively in scripture. In a positive sense, lifting one's head to give honor or grant favor. Negatively it is used regarding to lift up or off with one's head.

In Gen.40 this same term is used both ways. In Joseph's prediction of what would happen to the butler and the baker.

The second term heads in Num. 1.2, is the last word in the verse, which is translated in the KJV as polls and in the NKJV as individually. The word is "golgolet" in the Hebrew.

It simply means heads. As in counting heads for a poll or a census. We might say today to take a head count.

This is the word that is called the skull, and translated from the Hebrew into Gogotha, in John 19.17.

Considering that the name of this specific location was derived from the fact that the yearly census was conducted there, and not that the place actually looked like a skull, as has been implied by some, makes for a persuasive argument that a more precise translation in this context would be the place of the head.

When combined with Miphkad we see the true meaning is clear, the place where the heads were numbered or counted. And as I mentioned, in Jesus' day there was a census which was conducted annually.

In which every male Jew 20 years and older was required to be counted in order to determine the proper sum that was to be donated to the Temple. This came to be known as the poll (head) tax or more commonly the Temple tax.

This yearly counting of all male heads, had to be done outside the camp, otherwise someone that might be considered defiled would have been excluded from the census. And I'm sure that just like with the IRS, those in charge of the treasury in the temple wanted to make sure that everyone "paid their fair share"

So in referring to Gogotha as the crucifixion site, the disciples were simply stating what was common knowledge at the time. Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives near the Altar of the Red Heifer where this yearly polling or counting of heads was conducted.

And so when we consider all the evidence, I believe we have made a pretty good case of where Golgotha, and thus the true location of the crucifixion took place. Near the summit of the Mount of Olives due east of the temple entrance, just outside the camp.

Let's now continue our study into the events surrounding the crucifixion.

Let's turn once more to John 19, and read verses 17- 18

17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha,

18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.

And drop down to verse 31- Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.

33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

And verse 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

OK so here we come to an interesting set of verses. Let's look at them a bit closer. First we find that in verse 18, that two others were crucified with Jesus, and that He was between them.

And then we come to verses 32 and 33. We are told from John who was an eye witness as stated in verse 35, that the soldiers broke the legs of both the other people before they came to Jesus.

Now if we view this in our minds eye from the traditional viewpoint of 3 separate stakes or crosses, with Jesus being in the middle, then this makes no sense. For why would they bypass Jesus to go from the first to the third person, and then back to Jesus who was between them?

If they were all in a row with Jesus in the middle as is traditionally presented, this makes absolutely no sense. Plus the added fact that they didn't realize that Christ was already dead until they had already broken the legs of the others.

If they were all lined up in a row, seems they would have realized that immediately. So what's the answer?

Let's add a bit more information. Drop down to the last two verses in this chapter. John 19:41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

Ok, so here we find that Jesus was crucified in a garden. Now considering that we have established the fact that this garden was located on the Mount of Olives. And that the reason it was called the Mount of Olives was because this garden was actually a grove of olive trees.

This also may explain why Jesus often went there with His disciples, it must have been a nice shady place, sheltered from the heat of the sun, at least in the summertime.

Anyway, let's now add one more puzzle piece and then I'll try to tie it all together. Let's turn to Acts 5.30. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree"

Acts 10.39 "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree"

Gal. 3.13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")

And one more 1 Pet. 2.24 "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed"

Brethren, in all 4 cases the word translated as tree is the Greek word xulon. It can mean wood, as in dead wood, but it can also mean a living tree. This understanding is further supported by Paul's statement in Gal.3.13.

In that verse he quotes directly from Deut. 21.22. Wherein the word tree, is translated from the Hebrew word "ets" This word's principle meaning is a living tree. In fact it is the word used in Genesis, in referring to the tree of life.

Moreover, the English word xylem which is derived directly from the Greek, is used to describe the living tissue under the bark of a tree.

Let's go back to John 19 and read verse 31, once more. "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the "cross" on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away"

Brethren please note the phrase “that the bodies” [plural] should not remain on the “cross” [singular] This verse informs us that 3 people were hung from the same object.

And this begs the question, of how it would be possible to hang 3 adult men from the same stake? Clearly that is not a plausible scenario.

Therefore, there is strong evidence that the gospel writers were not referring to a traditional wooden stake.

The word translated cross, in this verse is stauros. It is used in various ways in scripture. It’s used to describe the cross piece that Jesus was nailed too in Luke 23.26.

In John 19.19 it refers to the structure, on which the plaque was attached that read; “Jesus of Nazareth. The King of the Jews” This term seems to be a general term that was used to describe many different things, including a tree.

It is unfortunate that the common English bible translations, make no attempt to translate this term, in any other manner but cross. However when considering the 4 above mentioned NT verses, using the word tree, in conjunction with what we just covered in John 19.13, the correct meaning of stauros in relation to the crucifixion becomes clear.

So in putting the pieces together, I’m going to suggest that Jesus and the other two men were all nailed to the same large living tree, which was located in or adjacent too the olive grove.

Commentary also suggests that this was common Roman practice of the time. The soldiers would nail the victim to a large cross piece, called a patibulum. This was what was carried to the crucifixion site. Then this large cross piece with the victim attached, were nailed to a tree.

The Romans would choose to select a very public location to crucify the guilty, in order to deter future criminal offenses.

Understanding this, let me now tie in an additional point. I will further suggest that this particular tree was next to the main road near the summit of Olivet overlooking the Temple Mount across the Kidron valley.

For Mark's gospel account records that those who passed by blasphemed Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" Mark 15.29-30

Moreover, this place on the mountainside could obviously be seen by observers from a distance.

For we have Luke's account in chapter 23.49 that states that "all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things"

So Jesus must have been impaled on the side of the tree facing both the Temple, and the roadway overlooking the Kidron valley.

While the other two were nailed on the other sides of the tree. Thus the soldiers went around the tree starting on the side of the other too, before they came to Jesus.

Jesus being hung in full view of both the travels heading for Jerusalem with there live lambs and also in line of sight with the entrance to the Temple.

And thus, Abrahams prophecy recorded in Genesis 22 was fulfilled. On the Mount of the Lord, the Lamb of God would be provided.

And as one first century historian [Melito of Sardis] recorded "Just as from one tree sin entered the world, so likewise from another tree came the promise of salvation"

And so in conclusion, one may ponder of this second tree, from which salvation came. And of this place, where the Lamb was provided for us. Might this also be, the spot from which the Tree of Life first grew?

In the Garden of the Lord, on God's Mount, in the Land of Moriah.  
Thank you for your time today.

Thomas Trink  
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