

10. THE TOMB OF JESUS THE MESSIAH*

INTRODUCTION

Two sites are in competition for the burial place of Jesus of Nazareth, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, near the x Gate, and the Garden Tomb, near the Damascus Gate. The former site has ancient tradition supporting it but within the confines of a church that obscures a place of crucifixion and burial, while the latter has a more visible tomb near what is alleged to be the location of the crucifixion. Determining which of these two is, in fact, where Jesus rose from the dead is important for the Christian faith, since Christianity is tied to history. Regarding the resurrection of Jesus, Paul said that if he has not risen (understood, in the flesh), then we are yet in our sins and the apostles are liars (1 Cor 15:xx)

THE GARDEN TOMB

In the late nineteenth century British General Charles Gordon discovered a site outside the Damascus Gate that is now called Gordon's Calvary, or Skull Hill, where he believed that Jesus was crucified. Near this site was also a tomb within a garden that he believed to be the tomb of Jesus. Unlike the traditional site located in an ancient church surrounded by ornate crosses and incense thuribles that detract from a former location of garden and rock quarry from which tombs were carved, the Garden Tomb is in the open, easily recognized as a place of burial, and in a beautiful garden.

The Garden Tomb resides in a beautiful quiet setting, and is frequented generally by Protestant Christians who find the darker surroundings of an ancient church steeped in ritual. The Garden Tomb satisfies many of the requirements of the place of Jesus' burial and resurrection, including situation in a garden, outside the city walls and near what is arguably a place of crucifixion. The mystical manner in which Gordon sought to connect the place of crucifixion and burial with the temple mount and pool of Siloam has been a point of criticism. He placed a skeleton with its head at Skull Hill, its backside on the temple mount, and the feet at the pool of Siloam, viewing this as a confirmation of its identification. This is highly speculative, and is not argued by staff at the Garden Tomb.

THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER

The ancient and traditional site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus has many points of support also, but there is no tomb to observe. The tomb there, which early had been separated from other tombs in the stone quarry, making it a place of homage, was destroyed in the early 11th century A.D. by order of Muslim caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah.¹ In spite of there being no tomb, with a structure (called an Edicule) standing where the tomb once stood, the tradition for this site is very strong, going back to the second century A.D. When the emperor Hadrian had defeated the Jews (A.D. 135), and banished them from Jerusalem, in his attempt to replace Judaism and Christianity, he built a temple to Venus over where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher stands, a temple to Jupiter over where the Temple once stood, and a shrine to the god Adonis at the location of the Church of the Nativity. This was a standard practice of emphasizing triumph of one religion over another in the ancient world (a practice that has continued in Islam through the centuries). The Church of the Holy Sepulcher (known as the Church of the Resurrection by the Greek Orthodox) satisfies many requirements defined in Scripture. The existence of a tomb outside the city wall, situation near a place of crucifixion and situated within a garden. This was the place that early Christians took Queen Helena when she came to Jerusalem and requested to know the location of Jesus' death and resurrection.

WHICH IS THE CORRECT TOMB OF JESUS?

In order to be the historical location of the burial and resurrection site of Jesus, certain factors must be present. Both of the two competing sites (the only two) fulfill conditions, but only one fulfills them all. The conditions for the correct tomb are:²

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¹ [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Church_of_the_Holy_Sepulchre_\(Jerusalem\)](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Church_of_the_Holy_Sepulchre_(Jerusalem)) (last visited November 18, 2011).

² The following list is from H. Wayne House and Timothy Demy, "8. Where did Jesus die and rise again?", *Answers to Common Questions about Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 25. Also see Topographical description of

1. It had to be near the site of the crucifixion.
2. It had to be located in a garden.
3. It had to be outside the city walls of Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified in the early A.D. 30s.
4. It had to be hewed out of a stone quarry.
5. It had to be an exceptional tomb since it was a rich man's tomb.
6. It had to have a rolling stone.
7. It had to have an outer chamber and inner chamber in view of the biblical accounts regarding the women, apostles, and angels at the tomb
8. It had to be a new tomb, thus hewed in the first century A.D.

The Garden Tomb satisfies numbers 1-4, and 7.³ Item 5 is questionable since there are larger tombs than the small Garden Tomb. Item 6 is uncertain since a rolling stone was not found at the site and the trough in front of the Garden Tomb is not a groove for a rolling stone but is rather a water trough going all the way across the front of the tomb. Item 8 is the most significant since there is no doubt that the Garden Tomb is a 1st temple tomb, created hundreds of years before Jesus and part of a quarry of 8th century B.C. Tombs; consequently, it cannot be the correct tomb, since Jesus was placed in a newly created tomb.”⁴

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher satisfies items 1-4. The tomb resided near a place of crucifixion, and evidence of a garden has been found. The city walls at the time of Christ did not extend beyond the site of the tomb during the time of Jesus, and there are several other tombs found near where the tomb of Christ stood before the Islamic caliph destroyed it. Since there is no tomb to investigate, there is no way to substantiate items 5, 6, or 7, but one would expect that the tomb of Jesus would have the features of other first century A.D. tombs. An outer chamber of a tomb is found just a few feet away from the current commemorative site of the tomb, built on the place of the former tomb. The tombs in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are first century A.D. tombs, so this would satisfy number 8.

We cannot know for certain the location of the death, burial, and resurrection, but most of the evidence, including Hadrian's early marking of the spot, points to the traditional site as the correct location.⁵ It was long remembered in the minds and hearts of the Christians of the first century and afterwards, and is the place accepted by Christians of all faiths for nearly two thousand years.

the region of Golgotha, Basilica of the Anastasis, www.holyland.ccreadbible.org/holysepulchre/ (last visited November 18, 2011).

³ The book has 7-8, but this is an error. The Garden Tomb is a first temple tomb, used in the 8th century B.C. A case for the Garden Tomb may be found at [The Resurrection Garden, http://www.oxfordbiblechurch.co.uk/pages/books/mount-moriah-golgotha-the-garden-tomb/chapter-4a.php](http://www.oxfordbiblechurch.co.uk/pages/books/mount-moriah-golgotha-the-garden-tomb/chapter-4a.php) (last visited November 18, 2011). But see W. Harold Mare, *The Place Of Christ's Crucifixion And Burial*, Associates for Biblical Research, Bible and Spade (1974) Volume 3 (Ephrata, PA: Associates for Biblical Research, 1974; 2005).

⁴ Jerusalem Report: Israeli Scholars Date Garden Tomb To The Israelite Monarchy, Associates for Biblical Research, Bible and Spade (1982) Volume 11 (Ephrata, PA: Associates for Biblical Research, 1982).

⁵ For more on the long and important history of the site and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, see Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*. Stroud (UK): Sutton Publishers, 1999. See also Dan Bahat, "Does the Holy Sepulchre Church Mark the Burial of Jesus?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:3 (May-June 1986): 26-45.