

JERUSALEM: THE HOLY CITY

The Talmud says, “Whoever has not seen Jerusalem in its splendor has never seen a lovely city.” “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” remarked one of the disciples of Jesus (Mark 13.1). Jesus himself, though, was concerned for the people rather than the magnificent buildings of Herodian Jerusalem. He lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling (Matthew 23.37).

I. INTRODUCTION

Names. The name of the city comes from the Hebrew *Yerushalaim* (Greek *Ierosoluma*, *Ierousalem*; see Acts 1.4, 8) with the possible meaning “city of peace.” The city historically has been known by various appellatives. As the home of Melchizedek, it was called “Salem” (Genesis 14.18; cf. Psalm 76.2). As the city of the Jebusites, it was called “Jebus.” About 1000 B.C., David moved his capital from Hebron to Jebus by capturing the city. After taking “the stronghold of Zion” (2 Samuel 5.7; cf. Isaiah 60.14), David called it “the city of David” (2 Samuel 5.9) which was then only part of today’s “old city.” Solomon built the house of the Lord “in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah” (2 Chronicles 3.1). Josephus identifies Moriah as “the very place that Abraham brought his son Isaac, to sacrifice him as a burnt offering” (*Antiquities* 7.13.4; cf. Moslem tradition), but Genesis 22.2 speaks of the “mountains” in the “land of Moriah.” Jerusalem also is called simply “the city,” with modifiers like “of God,” “of the Lord,”

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“of righteousness,” or it is called “the holy city,” “the faithful city,” etc. In Revelation 21.2, John uses the expression “New Jerusalem” with reference to the inhabitants of spiritual Israel (cf. “the Jerusalem above,” Galatians 4.26; “Mount Zion,” “the city of the living God,” and “the heavenly Jerusalem,” Hebrews 12.22). Under Roman occupation, the name of the city was changed to “Aelia Capitolina” (ca. A.D. 135). Today, the Arabs call the city “El-Quds” meaning “the holy (city).”

Location. Jerusalem is located on the central mountain ridge of Palestine just east of the very important Judean ridge route.¹ The city sits opposite the north shore of the Dead Sea about 15 miles west of the Dead Sea and about 35 miles east of the Mediterranean Sea. It is between 2100 and 2500 feet above sea level (cf. Hebron at about 3000 feet). Jerusalem is actually a hill surrounded by hills—to the north, Mount Scopus rises some 2700 feet; to the south, Jebel Mukabbir or “Hill of Evil Council” rises 2950 feet; to the east, Mount Olivet rises 2700 feet; and to the west, the new city of Jerusalem rises some 2800 feet. Even from a geographical standpoint, the sentiments of the psalmist are quite true, “Those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forever” (Psalm 125.1-2).

¹Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, translated by A. F. Rainey (revised edition; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1979), 57-58.

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Topography. J. Simons calculates more than twenty sieges that have altered the topography of the city since the time of occupation by David.² But the general topography has remained the same, as the “basic area of the city resembles a square with no definite top line.”³ Ravines cut on three sides. On the west and the south is the “valley of Hinnom” or the “valley of the son of Hinnom” (see Joshua 15.8; cf. “Gehenna,” Matthew 23.33). Hinnom runs from the northwest toward the south, then sharply east to where it joins the Kidron at the southeast corner of the city. On the east is the “Kidron Valley” (see 2 Samuel 15.23; cf. John 18.1). Lasor notes that according to soundings the Kidron is today about 40 feet higher and 90 feet farther east than in the period of the Jebusites.⁴ With deep ravines on the west, south, and east, the only place to attack Jerusalem was from the north, and the only place to grow the city was to the north (and to the west).

There are two important interior valleys in the city. The most important, the “central” or “tyropoeon” valley, called “the valley of the cheesemongers” by Josephus (*Wars* 5.4.1) and known today as “el-Wad,” runs from north to south. It joins the Kidron just before the Kidron meets the Hinnom. Due to the piling up of rubble, today the central valley is some 115 feet

²J. Simon, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, 27; quoted in W. S. Lasor, “Jerusalem,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, et al., Volume 2 (revised edition; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 1001.

³Lasor, “Jerusalem,” *ISBE*, 1001.

⁴*Ibid.*

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higher and some 98 feet west of the valley in Herodian days.⁵ An east-west valley, a branch of the tyropoeon, runs from the modern Citadel or tower of David to the plaza near the Western Wall near Wilson's arch. These two interior valleys divide the city into four sections: (1) the Ophel spur and Mount Moriah (the southeast quarter); (2) Bethesda (the northeast and modern Moslem quarter); (3) Mount Zion or the Western Hill (the southwest and modern Jewish and Armenian quarters); and (4) Ghareb (the northwest and modern Christian quarter).

II. HISTORICAL SURVEY

The history of Jerusalem is rich and varied.⁶ This paper will give only a very brief survey.

From 2000-1000 B.C. historical references to Jerusalem are limited. "Urusalim" is referred to in the Egyptian Execration Texts, and "Urusalimu" is mentioned in the Amarna Tablets (ca. 14th century B.C.). These are probably references to Jerusalem. Abram and Melchizedek meet at Salem (Genesis 14). Abraham sacrifices Isaac on one of the mountains of Moriah (Genesis 22). In their conquest of Canaan and their portioning of land to the various tribes, the Israelites did not dispossess the inhabitants of Jebus (Joshua 15.63). About 1000 B.C., though, in the first recorded siege of Jerusalem, David did drive out the Jebusites.

⁵Ibid., 1002.

⁶For a good starting summary, see Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Jerusalem Through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967).

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The period of the united kingdom (1000-930 B.C.) marks the stabilizing efforts of David and the building and expansion efforts of Solomon. Under Solomon, the first temple, which stood about 350 years, was erected.

The period of the divided kingdom (930-586 B.C.) was a time of fluctuation, change, and gradual degeneration for the southern state of Judah.

The period of Persian rule (586-333 B.C.) notes the return of the Jews from Babylon and the work of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah for the building of the second temple that was completed about 515 B.C.

The period of Hellenistic rule (333-63 B.C.) marks the rise and fall of Alexander the Great, the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the revolt of the Maccabees, and the rule of the Hasmoneans.

The period of Roman rule (63 B.C. to A.D. 325), initiated by Pompey, denotes the construction of the third or Herodian temple. Begun about 20 B.C. and dedicated ten years later, the Herodian temple was not completed until just prior to its destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70. This important period also spans the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth and the beginning and growth of the Christian church. Note the following New Testament events associated with Jerusalem: (1) about 4 B.C., Jesus of Nazareth is born in Bethlehem of Judea (Matthew 1; Luke 2); (2) A.D. 6, Jesus, at age twelve, celebrates the Passover festival in Jerusalem (Luke 2.41-50); (3) A.D. 27-30, Jesus' conducts his public ministry in Galilee and Judea with important visits to Jerusalem (see John 2.23; 5.1; 6.4; 11.55); (4) A.D. 30, Jesus' week of Passion includes his

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triumphal entry into Jerusalem where he celebrates Passover with his disciples, prays fervently and is betrayed in Gethsemane, is put on trial by Jewish and Roman authorities, is crucified, and then is resurrected from the dead (Matthew 21.1ff.; Mark 11.1ff.; Luke 19.28ff.; John 12.12ff.); (5) A.D. 30, the church begins on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2); (6) about A.D. 35, Saul of Tarsus persecutes the church, goes to Damascus, and is converted to Christianity (Acts 9); (7) A.D. 44, Herod Agrippa I dies in Jerusalem (Acts 12); (8) about A.D. 50, the first major council of believers meets in Jerusalem (Acts 15); (9) about A.D. 58, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21.17ff.); and (10) A.D. 66-70, the Roman general Titus lays siege to and captures Jerusalem (see Matthew 24.2; Mark 13.2; Luke 21.6). After the fall of the city to the Romans in A.D. 70, Jerusalem waned in significance for Christianity for the remainder of the Roman period. Christians did not develop the nostalgia for Jerusalem as experienced by the Jews or at least not until much later (e.g., the Patriarchate of Jerusalem was not established until A.D. 451).

In A.D. 135, the Roman emperor Publius Aelius Hadrianus, who ruled A.D. 117-138, crushed the second Jewish revolt led by Bar Kokhba. Hadrian razed Jerusalem and rebuilt it like a Roman city or “quadrata” with a public square, a temple of Venice that was erected over the site of Golgotha, and a statue of himself.⁷ Hadrian gave the city the name “Colonia Aelia

⁷For a good map of Hadrian’s Jerusalem, see Richard M. Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), inside back cover.

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Capitalina.” In the time of the emperor Constantine, the temple of Venus was destroyed, and the Church of Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre) was erected in its place.⁸

The periods after the Roman era and continuing to the present are: the Byzantine era (325-638), Muslim-Arab rule (638-1099), the Christian Crusades (1099-1187), Egyptian Mameluke rule (1250-1517), the Ottoman era (1517-1917), the British Mandate (1920-1948), joint rule of Israel and Jordan (1949-1967), and the state of Israel (1967-present).

III. WALLS AND GATES

The walls and gates of the “old city” today are for the most part those built by Suleiman the Magnificent, A.D. 1538-1541.⁹ “They approximate the area contained by Hadrian’s Aelia Capitolina and include remains of walls from earlier periods.”¹⁰ The walls encircling the city are some two and a half miles long with seven open gates.

Near Jaffa Gate along the western city wall stands the Citadel. This landmark, seen easily due to the presence of a minaret tower dating to A.D. 1655, pinpoints the site of a fortress built by David, hence the designation “David’s tower,” and a luxurious palace built by Herod about 24 B.C. Herod protected his palace with three huge towers—Phasael (part of which still stands today), Hippicos, and Mariamne.

⁸Ibid., 149ff.

⁹Herbert Bishko, *This Is Jerusalem* (5th edition; Tel Aviv, Israel: Heritage Publishing House, 1980), 6.

¹⁰Ibid.

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Facing the modern city of Jerusalem is Jaffa Gate or “Gate of the Friend” which bears an Arabic inscription stating, “There is no god but Allah and Abraham is his friend.” Leading to the Western Hill from the south is Zion Gate or “Gate of David the Prophet.” This gate gives access to the traditional tomb of king David. In 1949, the Israeli Palmach blasted through this gate to reach the besieged Jewish quarter of the “old city.” South of the temple mount area is Dung Gate, so named from the Herodian gate which bore this name and was much further south. In New Testament times, the city’s refuse was dumped outside the walls near the Dung Gate. Golden Gate, perhaps the site of the “beautiful gate” of Acts 4, lies east of the temple mount area and faces the Kidron Valley. Older than the seven open gates, Golden Gate is a seventh century Byzantine structure. The Arabs walled it up some centuries later. In an intriguing article, James Fleming identifies as Solomonic an ancient gate located beneath Golden Gate.¹¹ Also on the eastern city wall and north of the temple mount area is Lion’s Gate. The name is from the lions, the coat of arms of Sultan Beybars, carved in relief above the gate’s entrance. Since the middle ages, this gate has been associated with the martyrdom of deacon Stephen. On the north side, Damascus Gate or “Sha’ar Shechem” leads out of the “old city” northward to Damascus. By far, this gate is the most ornate created by Suleiman’s architects. Nearby is the excavated north gate

¹¹See his “The Undiscovered Gate Beneath Jerusalem’s Golden Gate,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume IX, Number I (January/February 1983).

of Hadrian's Aelia Capitolina. Herod's Gate and New Gate also are situated along the northern city wall and provide access to the Moslem and Christian quarters, respectively.¹²

IV. OPHEL RIDGE

The Ophel ridge, which is the southern ridge of Mount Moriah, extends from the temple compound to the upper pool or the pool of Siloam.¹³ It represents the extent of the Jebusite city as well as the city in David's time.¹⁴ The Ophel was a part of the city in all temple periods, but it was excluded from Hadrian's Aelia Capitolina and therefore is not within the "old city" walls today. It was not repopulated until recently and is now part of an Arab slum called Silwan (cf. Psalm 48.2).

Water supply. The Gihon spring, also known as Saint Mary's spring, represents the vital lifeline of water for Jerusalem. Located in the Kidron valley, the spring gushes forth from a natural cave. "The growth of the city, the plan of its gates and defenses, and its political and military vicissitudes have been intimately related to this spring in virtually every period of the city's existence."¹⁵ In ancient times, the strength of a city depended not only on the fortifications

¹²For a good summary of the biblical gates and their location in relation to Jerusalem's modern gates, see Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus*, 50-69.

¹³Note, however, the more restricted use of "Ophel" in 2 Chronicles 27.3. Compare too Lasor, "Jerusalem," *ISBE*, 1015.

¹⁴Contra Josephus in his *Wars* 5.4.1. See Kathleen Kenyon, *Jerusalem: Excavating 3000 Years of History* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 19-53.

¹⁵Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus*, 73.

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but also on the reliability of water during siege. Jerusalem's rulers built an intricate system of waterworks to supply the city with the necessary water. Yigal Shiloh describes the interrelated functions of the Siloam Channel, Warren's Shaft, and Hezekiah's Tunnel.¹⁶ Built in preparation for the invasion of Sennacherib (about 701 B.C.; see 2 Chronicles 32.2-4), Hezekiah's Tunnel cuts underground through the rock some 1750 feet from Gihon to the pool of Siloam.¹⁷ Marked by a small mosque today, this pool is the traditional site for Jesus' healing of a blind man in John, chapter 9.¹⁸ As Jerusalem expanded toward the north, the need for water in areas removed from Gihon grew. Water therefore was channeled by hydraulic systems or aqueducts and collected in reservoirs such as Sheep pool, the pool of Bethesda and the Strouthion pool.¹⁹

Excavations. Excavations at Ophel, first by R. A. S. Macalister in the 1920s and later by K. Kenyon in the 1960s, unearthed a Hellenistic-Roman tower from the second century B.C. that was built on a sixth-century wall from Nehemiah's time.²⁰ Kenyon also discovered an Israelite

¹⁶See his "Jerusalem's Water Supply During Siege—The Rediscovery of Warren's Shaft," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume VII, Number 4 (July/August 1981). Compare Kenyon, *Jerusalem: Excavating 3000 Years of History*, 20-21.

¹⁷See 2 Kings 20.20, "[Hezekiah] made the pool and the conduit, and brought water into the city."

¹⁸Compare "rivers of living water" in conjunction with the priests' temple libations with water from Siloam on the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7.38.

¹⁹See Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus*, 71-87.

²⁰See Mendel Kaplan and Yigal Shiloh, "Digging in the City of David," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume V, Number 4 (July/August 1979).

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house that was burned during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Walls from the first temple period and glacis (i.e., steep, smooth walls) from the second temple period were uncovered as well.

Traditional site. Just south of the Ophel ridge near the joining of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys is the traditional site of the “field of blood” or Haceldama, the “potter’s field” bought by Judas for thirty pieces of silver and used as a burial place for strangers (see Matthew 27.3-10). The Greek Orthodox Convent of Saint Oniprius marks the site of rock-hewn tombs full of old skulls and bones.²¹

V. THE TEMPLE MOUNT

The Haram esh-Sharif (“Noble Sanctuary”) or the temple mount area lies in the southeast corner of today’s “old city” and marks the site of both the Solomonic and Herodian temples.²² Solomon enlarged the temple platform and made it rectangular in shape. Herod strengthened and expanded the platform by use of massive hewn blocks of stone.²³ Sacred to Jews because of connections with the ancient temple, the area also is sacred to Moslems because of connections with Mohammed.

²¹Bishko, *This Is Jerusalem*, 44.

²²See Asher S. Kaufman, “Where the Ancient Temple of Jerusalem Stood,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume IX, Number 2 (March/April 1983).

²³See Murray Stein, “How Herod Moved Gigantic Blocks to Construct Temple Mount,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume VII, Number 3 (May/June 1981).

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Western Wall. Formerly known as the “Wailing Wall” but changed after Israel captured the temple area during the six-day war of 1967, this wall supposedly is the closest to the ancient temple’s sanctuary. In A.D. 70, when Titus captured and demolished the city, he had the rubble thrown into the central valley, so that some fourteen to nineteen layers of Herodian stonework in the wall lay hidden today.²⁴ The wall is of composite construction with the foundation and first few layers of Solomonic origin, then several layers of Herodian stones, then four tiers of Roman stones that are topped by a wall of small Turkish stones.

Dome of the Rock. When Jerusalem fell to Moslems in A.D. 638, Mount Moriah became an Islamic shrine. Shocked at the filth and rubble on Mount Moriah, Caliph Omar built there a wooden mosque, hence the name “Omar’s Mosque,” although it was Abd el-Malik who commissioned the building of the Dome some forty years later.²⁵ Mohammed is said to have made his leap to heaven from the rock enshrined in the mosque. Nearby is the El Aksa Mosque, Islam’s holiest shrine after those in Mecca and Medina. Completed about the eighth century A.D. on ruins from the time of Justinian, Crusaders captured the area in A.D. 1099. A century later when the area was recaptured by the Arabs, the star and crescent rose in place of the cross.

²⁴Bishko, *This Is Jerusalem*, 14.

²⁵Ibid., 18.

Excavations. In Jerusalem the problem of the preservation of ancient ruins in light of modern renovation and construction is acute.²⁶ The problem of excavating near or on “holy places” is likewise challenging. The temple mount (actually the “Ophel”) excavations well illustrate both problems. The common problem of deciphering successive levels of ruins also is illustrated. Conducted by Benjamin Mazar from 1970 to 1978, excavations at the southern end of the temple mount revealed ruins from four distinct periods: the Ommayad (7th and 8th centuries A.D.), the Byzantine (4th to 7th centuries A.D.), the Herodian (1st century B.C. to 1st century A.D.), and the first temple period (Solomonic). Also found were houses and palaces that dated to the later periods.²⁷ Of significance from the Herodian period were steps that led up to the double or huldah gates of the temple precinct, a ritual bath or mikva, an inscription (“to the place of the trumpeting to declare”) which possibly marked the pinnacle of the southwestern corner of the temple mount, streets, arches (including Robinson’s arch and Wilson’s arch, both discovered earlier), and various passageways.²⁸

²⁶See Rivka Gonen, “Keeping Jerusalem’s Past Alive,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume VII, Number 4 (July/August 1981).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸See Benjamin Mazar, “Excavations Near Temple Mount Reveal Splendors of Herodian Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume VI, Number 4 (July/August 1980); Michael A. Zimmerman, “Tunnel Exposes New Areas of Temple Mount,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume VII, Number 3 (May/June 1981); and Mazar’s chapter in Yigael Yadin, ed., *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City, 1968-1974* (Jerusalem, Israel: The Israel Exploration Society, 1975).

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VI. THE PASSION OF JESUS

Mount of Olives. A small flower garden with a few ancient olive trees beside the Basilica of the Agony or “All Nation’s Church” marks the traditional site of Gethsemane (Matthew 26.26; Mark 14.32). The connection of this place with Gethsemane goes back to Byzantine times.²⁹ Further up on the slope of Olivet are the Mary Magdalene Church, a fine example of old Moscow church architecture that was built by Czar Alexander III in 1888, and the Dominus Flevit (i.e., “the Lord wept”), a small chapel marking the traditional place where Jesus stopped to weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19.41). Thousands of tombs—Christian, Jewish, and Moslem—cover the slope and the valley. Very old traditions associate eschatological happenings with this area (cf. Luke 24.50; Acts 1.12). Somewhere, on Mount Olivet, Jesus prayed before he was arrested by the small band of Roman soldiers and Jewish authorities.

Western Hill. Near the tomb of David on the Western Hill is a traditional “upper room.” The identification is from the middle ages, though. Also on the Western Hill near Zion Gate is the traditional location for the house of Annas and Caiaphas, but the location is not definite.³⁰ Here, according to the gospels, the trials of Jesus began.

Via Dolorosa. Running east to west, “the way of sorrow” marks the traditional trek of Jesus from his place of condemnation, or Antonia fortress, to his place of execution, the Church

²⁹See Bishko, *This Is Jerusalem*, 48.

³⁰See Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus*, 165.

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of the Holy Sepulchre. Most likely, Pilate resided in Antonia fortress when in Jerusalem.³¹ At the modern Convent of Dames de Sion, a lithostrotos or “pavement” (see John 19.13) and an arch (called “ecce homo,” or “behold the man”) date from the reign of Hadrian.³² From here, the way to the cross began, that is, if Pilate’s praetorium (see John 19.9) was located in Antonia fortress. Beginning at this convent, the modern Via Dolorosa has fourteen stations (e.g., the prison of Christ, Jesus falls for the first time, Mary meets Jesus, Simon of Cyrene takes the cross, etc.).³³ None of the fourteen stations, however, are historical.

Crucifixion and burial. The traditional Via Dolorosa proceeds to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.³⁴ The history of the Holy Sepulchre seems to indicate authenticity concerning identification with Golgotha.³⁵ However, scholars debate about the course of the walls of Herodian Jerusalem. The line of Josephus’ “Second Wall” (*Wars* 5.4.2) is controversial. Did this wall enclose “the central valley and the markets within it”?³⁶ Or did this wall extend much further north and west than the immediate market area of the central valley? The question is

³¹For the view that Pilate stayed in Herod’s palace, the modern Citadel, see Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus*, 102ff.

³²*Ibid.*, 97.

³³See Bishko, *This Is Jerusalem*, 24, 28-29, 32.

³⁴For a good historical study, see J. P. B. Ross, “The Evolution of a Church—Jerusalem’s Holy Sepulchre,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Volume II, Number 3 (September 1976).

³⁵Mackowski, *Jerusalem: City of Jesus*, 149-152, 154.

³⁶Michael Avi-Yonah, “Jerusalem of the Second Temple Period,” 11, in Yadin, ed., *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City, 1968-1974*.

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crucial, since the former makes the Church of the Holy Sepulchre “outside the gate” (Hebrews 13.12), but the latter makes it inside the gate. Further excavation may decide the question.

An alternate site, a hill north of a modern bus terminal near Damascus Gate, was declared “the place of the Skull” by Otto Thenius in 1842. In 1884, General Charles Gordon declared this to be Calvary (hence “Gordon’s Calvary”). Nearby is a garden area with a tomb (the traditional garden tomb) which dates no earlier than the second century A.D. West of the “old city” in Hinnom Valley, however, is one of Herod’s family tombs that was uncovered in 1892. This tomb preserves an excellent example of a rock hewn tomb with a rolling stone enclosure.

From a Christian perspective, of the greatest significance for Jerusalem and for the world is the emptiness of that ancient tomb. He is risen!

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