

Jerusalem-2 (1 November 2016)

For our second trip to Jerusalem I decided to document the terrain changes between the coastal plain near the port city of Ashdod and the highlands near Jerusalem.



Plains agricultural fields



Small hills



Trees and tilted rocks



Tall trees



High plateau



Deep valleys

We returned to the Temple Mount through the Dung Gate. This time we climbed up the wooden ramp to enter the complex of Muslim buildings.



Silver dome of the Al-Aqsa Mosque



Wooden ramp



That gave us another view of the Western (Wailing) Wall and the excavations of the southwest corner.



Western Wall



Excavations



Al-Aqsa Mosque and recycled marble

Within the Temple Mount area we saw many remnants of Roman architecture. Jesus correctly predicted that the former Jewish Temple complex would be completely destroyed so that not one stone would be left standing. Centuries later the Muslims built their own complex by recycling the rubble of the Jewish and Roman stones.



Entrance to Al-Aqsa Mosque

For good security, the Muslim Temple Mount area is patrolled by soldiers who are loyal Israeli citizens of the Islam faith. Some similar Jerusalem police are also there. There are some worship times during the day when non-Muslims (including tourists) are not permitted in the Temple area.



At right: Israeli soldiers and policeman

The central building is the Dome of the Rock with its gold dome. It is supposed to be over the summit of Mount Moriah on which Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac but God provided a ram instead. It is the location of the Jewish Temple of Solomon (destroyed by the Babylonians, 586 B.C.) and the inferior restoration of 515 B.C., repaired under Herod and destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock of 690 A.D. and several successors were destroyed by earthquakes. The present versions were rebuilt in 1035 A.D.



The columns are of different rock types



The mosaics have tremendous colorful detail. The Islam religion, like Jewish, forbids imagery of things (and people) that other past religions mistakenly regarded as gods. Some commentators seem to see a sinister image in the gray design above the shelter box.



Lions Gate

The old walls (center and right) date from the Ottoman Empire, built 1542. We left the Temple Mount by the Lions Gate in its northeast corner.

We crossed over the Kidron Valley to the east and went up the nearby slopes of the Mount of Olives. There we had the traditional overview of Jerusalem.



In the foreground and in the Kidron Valley are many graves of Jewish people. Their remains are actually underground. The boxes are grave markers and are empty, indicating the release of their spirits. In this dry climate, stones are placed on these boxes rather than flowers for decoration.

Nearby is a museum that preserves ancient burial practices of two thousand years ago. The bodies were placed in the several rooms of family caves. After a year of decay the bones were consolidated into small boxes.



Nearby an enclosure commemorates the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed and was arrested by the Jewish authorities. The olive trees are very old but extend back less than half of the years to that time. Yet they could be clone descendants of the original trees. A relatively modern church reviews that history with its elaborate illustrations.



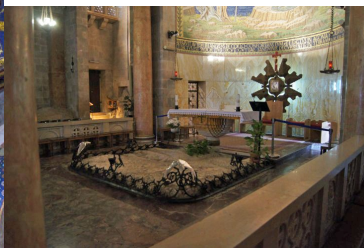
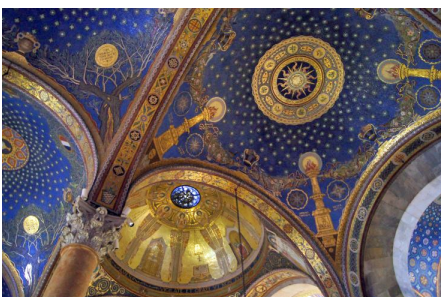
Jesus prays



Betrayal



Jesus still in control



Supposedly the rock on which Jesus prayed.



We drove beside the Hinnom Valley in southern Jerusalem. In Old Testament times the disobedient Israelites placed a large metal idol there to the false god Molech. During child sacrifice ceremonies they placed live children in the burning arms of the idol to kill them. God strongly condemned such practices. Eventually the valley was desecrated by turning it into a garbage dump where fires continuously burned. Later that imagery became an illustration of Hell for the torment of the unrighteous dead. The name Gehenna refers to this place.

Part of Hinnom Valley (Gehenna)

The traditional location for the crucifixion and burial of Jesus is within the old city walls of Jerusalem. But such treatment of “criminals” was supposed to take place outside of the city walls. The location was arbitrarily chosen by queen Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, in the early 300s A.D. (She similarly chose a peak in the Sinai Peninsula for the special mountain at which the new nation of Israel gathered during their exodus from Egypt, about 1400 B.C., though its geographic features and lack of artifacts do not match that story.) In more modern times a new location was chosen for those events of Jesus. Its rock features can be interpreted as the “Place of the Skull” (Golgotha) for the crucifixion, outside the city walls, and with nearby burial caves in a garden setting. So this new location is called the “Garden Tomb” and seems to match the Bible narrative much better than Helena’s choice.



An eye socket of “skull”?



Group gathered for religious ceremony Woodrow Kroll reviewing ceremony



We gathered to inspect the empty tomb Entering



Gail inspecting tomb



Group at Garden Tomb

Though this Garden Tomb site may not be the actual one used temporarily by Jesus, it is close by. It is the major claim of the Christian faith that Jesus willingly was a perfect sacrifice for the unrighteousness of everyone, was verifiably killed and buried for days. Jesus came back to life again in a special recognizable body to prove his claims. He now offers his righteousness and eternal life to whoever will trust and follow him. That is why visiting these places is so special to us followers of Jesus.

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