

"He is Risen!"

The Garden Tomb

Alternate Title: "He is not here; for He is Risen!" (Matt 28:6; Lk 24:6)

This place is a contrast to where most of the world recognizes as where Jesus made his final walk and was buried – the well-known Via dolorosa route and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher – and on many of the tour group routes and promoted as the actual location. The Via Dolorosa name means "way of sorrows" and referred to as the popular route of the Christian pilgrims.

The Garden Tomb is a very touching and remarkable place to visit, but I have been surprised at how many people, who have visited Israel, are not even aware of this place. It is almost a closely guarded secret just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Part of the 'problem', I think, is that this piece of property is owned by an English preservation group, and in spite of its remarkable history, the local Jewish & Muslim population do not promote it, as well as much of the Christian groups because they have a vested interest in the Via Dolorosa route.

But, there it is, a rock hill that resembles a skull (**Matt 27:33**), and a nearby garden with a partially finished, empty Jewish tomb carved out of rock (**John 19:41**). Everything here fits the descriptions in the scriptures, and it is remarkable that this one spot has survived the wars, battles, and building construction, etc. over the ages. Now with traffic and horn noise, but 2,000 years ago, probably noisy with animals and people.

It is located within the heart of the Jewish & Muslim culture and conflicts – in Arab East Jerusalem. Our guide had to get off the bus and negotiate with some local Muslims for us to safely exit and cross over to the property entrance. I don't know if it was just communicating with the Muslim men between us and the Garden property, or if it also involved some payment.

Importance of who your tour guide or service is to find some of these locations!

A British officer, **General Gordon**, was looking for a friend's house in Jerusalem during the late 1800's and while exploring the wall of the city, he noticed a rock cliff that had the appearance of a skull. After returning home, he was telling others about the experience and how the view had reminded him of the crucifixion. Several others checked it out when visiting over the next few years, and began to feel that they had really found something that justified more research. When they had first began researching the property, it was owned by

a Greek man, but the location had been used as a city dump area for many years, possibly centuries. As he had begun to have the area cleaned out, a tomb was discovered. He brought in an archeologist who determined that it was an ancient Jewish tomb. The Greek was superstitious and did not want to own land with a Jewish tomb on it, so he sold the property to a German family. The British group later purchased the property that they might be able to preserve it for further research. A group of interested Christians in Britain took out a full page ad in the Sept 22, 1892 issue of the London Times paper seeking contributions to help fund the project. The Garden Tomb Association was officially formed in 1893, and the property was purchased for about \$2,000 pounds in 1894. This same British group still maintains and provides tour guides each summer with mostly volunteers who work there as a ministry for various periods of time, usually 2 – 3 weeks at a time..

Our guide, Stan Whitfield, was a former WW2 RAF pilot who got his training here in the States at a Navy Training Station (mostly at Pensacola and Grosse Ile, Michigan for basic training, but could have been Corpus for some advanced training for about 18,000 RAF pilot trainees), and during the time he was here, a Naval Petty Officer, Preston Riddle, shared the gospel with him. Years later, when Stan was giving his first tour as a volunteer at the Garden, he was telling this story to his first American group, & he was really surprised that the American, Preston Riddle, who had led him to Christ, was in that group! So, he now tells people that "I met my friend in the garden!"

They also found a 200,000 gal underground cistern (3rd largest found in Israel!) on the property, which would verify this location as a garden spot since there is often 7-8 months without rain in this area. They also discovered a Roman style wine press in the garden area. (remember that this had been a Muslim dumping ground for possibly several hundred years prior to the purchase by the Jewish man, so all this had been covered up.) The tomb also had a 11th or 12th century crusader's style cross etched in one wall of the tomb's viewing area. Small room in the tomb area called the "weeping" chamber could hold as many as 15 people crowded in.

The stone was missing, but it would have been about a foot thick and 6 or 7 foot dia piece of stone weighing several tons. Rolls in a channel carved in front of the tomb.

From the Garden's viewing platform with a 'head-on' view of the skull cliff in one direction, the 16th century city wall back the other way is impressive, high up on a rock bluff. This limestone outcrop is part of Mount Moriah, which runs through the old city to Temple Mount where the Muslim Dome of the Rock now stands. When Solomon started building his temple there around 950BC, he took stone from this northern site and part of this area is still known as Solomon's Quarry.

(1 Ki 6:7 NIV) In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.

This left a vast open space just outside the city wall, which, in earlier days was ideal for traders to gather with their caravans of camels and donkeys, but in more recent times, for fleets of tour buses to park. This area near Skull Hill also acquired another name: Beit-ha-Sekilah --..the Place of Stoning, an execution site. A Roman historian, Quintillian, recorded that they always crucified criminals near crowded highways as a warning to as many people as possible.

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And this busy space by the roads to Jericho and Damascus would have been an appropriate spot.

Jesus was crucified outside the city gate (**Heb 13:12**), but near the city (**John 19:20**). People passing by could shout insults (**Matt 27:30**), while friends stood at a distance (**Lk 23:49**)

(**Heb 13:12 NIV**) And so Jesus also suffered **outside the city gate** to make the people holy through his own blood.

(**John 19:19-22 NIV**) Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was **near the city**, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. {21} The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man **claimed** to be king of the Jews." {22} Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

(**Mat 27:39 NIV**) Those **who passed by hurled insults** at him, shaking their heads

(**Luke 23:49 NIV**) **But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him** from Galilee, **stood at a distance**, watching these things.

Instead of a green, secluded hilltop as we might picture, the Scriptures indicate a noisy open location near a busy road, called the Place of the Skull. (In Aramaic: "Golgotha"; and in Latin: "Calvary", a bald place) And overlooking this 'bald' former rock quarry by busy roads, there still remains a cliff, with the recognizable shape of a skull, with an ancient garden very nearby and an empty tomb.

In the Garden, within sight of the tomb area, our group assembled and observed the Lord's Supper. The feeling one gets when being in this location and reading the Scriptures about the occasion at the Passover Feast when Jesus initiated this commemorative 'meal' with His disciples, and then observing this very solemn feast, is difficult to explain. This Jesus - who was nailed to a wooden cross and died, was buried in a tomb very similar to this one and close by if this was not, in fact, the very one, and was raised from the dead on the third day. Returning back to the Father, he promised to return again. In this commemorative supper, we continue to acknowledge His death & victorious resurrection until His return.

The British group, who own and operate the Garden Tomb area, emphasizes that the **actual 'place' is not important**, but their hope is that the 'place' **will direct our minds to the Person, Jesus Christ**. We may not be sure about the 'place', but we can be very certain about the Person! **The importance of the Garden Tomb, is not the tomb itself (although of great interest), but the fact that it was empty only shortly after being used.**

(Mat 26:26-30 NIV) While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." {27} Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. {28} This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. {29} I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." {30} When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

(Mat 27:32-33 NIV) As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. {33} They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).

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(Mark 15:22 NIV) They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).

NOTE: The word "Golgotha" is from a Hebrew word meaning "the place that is skull-shaped." The name was selected to emphasize the shape of the hill on which Jesus was crucified. The word translated "skull" (kranion, Gk.) appears four times in the N.T. In one place it is translated "Calvary" (Luke 23:33); in three places it is rendered "skull" (Mk.15:22; Matt. 27:33; John 19:17).

(Luke 23:33 NIV) When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left.

(John 19:17 NIV) Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

(Mat 27:57-61 NIV) As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. {58} Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. {59} Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, {60} and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. {61} Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

(Mat 28:1-8 NIV) After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. {2} There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. {3} His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. {4} The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. {5} The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. {6} He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. {7} Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." {8} So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

(Mark 15:42-47 NIV) It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, {43} Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. {44} Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. {45} When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. {46} So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. {47} Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

(Luke 23:50-56 NIV) Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, {51} who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and **he was waiting for the kingdom of God.** {52} Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. {53} Then he took it down, **wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.** {54} It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. {55} The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. {56} Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

(John 19:38-42 NIV) Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph **was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews.** With Pilate's permission, he

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came and took the body away. {39} He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. {40} Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, **in strips of linen.** This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. {41} **At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb,** in which no one had ever been laid. {42} Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and **since the tomb was nearby,** they laid Jesus there.

(Luke 24:6 NIV) **He is not here; he has risen!** Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

(John 20:1-9 NIV) Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. {2} So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" {3} So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. {4} Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. {5} **He bent over and looked in** at the strips of linen lying **there but did not go in.** {6} Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and **went into the tomb.** He saw the strips of linen lying there, {7} as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. {8} **Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.** He saw and believed. {9} (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

NOTE: It was a Jewish custom to bind the dead body with strips of cloth and the face with a napkin. There appears to have been no struggle involved in getting out of these; **in fact, all the bandages were neatly intact.** Jesus' glorified body, not limited by space and matter (John 20:19), had simply vanished from the burial cloth. **The napkin which was about His head had been carefully folded and laid aside. This would not have been done if the body had been stolen.**

(John 20:29 NIV) Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**"

(1 Pet 1:8-9 NIV) Though you have **not seen him,** you love him; and **even though you do not see him now, you believe** in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, {9} **for you are receiving the goal of your faith,** the salvation of your souls.

(Rom 6:3-11 NIV) Or don't you know that **all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** {4} We were **therefore buried with him through baptism into death** in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead** through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.** {5} If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. {6} For we know that **our old self was crucified with him** so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- {7} because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. {8} Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. {9} For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. {10} The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. {11} In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

(Heb 2:14-15 NIV) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that **by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--** {15} and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.