

# The Garden Tomb



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(John 19:41)

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**“There laid they Jesus ... for the sepulchre was *nigh at hand.*” (John 19:41,42)**

The search for the true site of our Lord’s death and burial is complicated by sixteen centuries of worship and the belief that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem now stands over the venerated area. The unearthing, in AD 1867, of a compass-oriented solitary tomb at the bottom of a rocky hill, hewn into its southerly stone-dressed face and located in a garden-like setting such as that described in the Gospel narrative, was the first of a series of events that eventually led to a review and fresh evaluation of the former evidence purporting to support the validity of the Holy Sepulchre site.

When General Gordon (of Khartoum) in AD 1883 publicly aired his views in favor of the new rival site situated outside and north of the Damascus Gate to the Holy City, the site attracted the attention of equally devout believers, many with Protestant leanings, not merely because of sentimental attachment for its simplicity but on account of its greater conformity to the Biblical

and historical evidence at hand. This latter location is sometimes styled "Gordon's Calvary" or the "Garden Tomb" to differentiate it from the more commonly accepted traditional Armenian, Roman, Syrian, et al., Catholic site.

The Scripture citation at the head of this article clearly indicates that the place of our Lord's crucifixion and the tomb in which he was laid are inseparably linked in close proximity to each other. Here are a few facts of the situation:

### *The Place of Crucifixion*

1. Only one rocky hill of eminence stands outside of and yet near the city wall: Gordon's Calvary.
2. This hill, from ancient time, has been known as the "Place of Stoning." According to tradition, it is where Stephen was martyred. Criminals were executed here without the sanctified confines of the Holy City because the height and the conspicuous nature of the hill afforded an object lesson to all and served suitably as a deterrent to crime and rebellion. The hill is presently the site of a Moslem cemetery.
3. Jesus was crucified at a spot known as the "Place of the Skull," which in Hebrew was called "Golgotha" and in Latin "Calvary." This prominence has a *startling resemblance to a human*

*skull* even today, as any tourist visiting Gordon's Calvary can attest (Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33; John 19:17).

4. This summit is the higher and the northern end of Mount Moriah—the same mount (a short distance to the south) where Abraham offered his son Isaac, who is a figure and type of Christ, and where the Temple of Solomon and its altar once stood. A wide, dry moat excavated during the Hasmonean Era (second century BC) subdivides what once was one mount into two parts, thus separating what is now Calvary Hill from the formerly adjoining outer wall and elevated sector of the Old City of Jerusalem with its Temple mount. The excavation was done for protective purposes and the exposure of an assaulting enemy.
5. Sacrificial animals of the Tabernacle and Temple services (prefiguring Christ) were slain toward the north, indicating the direction of atonement.
6. The rock at the base of Golgotha Hill was violently fractured by an earthquake and wrenched apart contrary to its natural cleavage (Matt. 27:51).
7. Christ suffered “without the gate.” Skull Hill is *unquestionably* positioned “without the gate” and “without the city” (Heb. 13:11-13).

## *The Place of Burial*

1. A solitary tomb, miraculously preserved down through the centuries, can be seen today situated in a garden-like setting (John 19:41) with a visible outdoor winepress compatible to the private property of one Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy counsellor (Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53). Prophecy predicted that Jesus' "grave ... [was to be] with the rich [singular in the Hebrew]" (Isa. 53:9).
2. The Garden Tomb adjoins the western slope of Skull Hill and as such is "nigh at hand" (John 19:42).
3. This tomb complies with the requirement of the Gospels that the sepulchre where Jesus was laid be hewn out of solid rock.
4. The tomb bed was elongated at its eastern, or foot-end, to accommodate a person of greater height than originally planned by its owner. The workmanship of this extension indicates that it was done in apparent haste.
5. The following are evidences that Christians anciently venerated the Garden Tomb and that the Holy Sepulchre Church was by no means unique in this respect:
  - a. The Garden Tomb sepulchre was an integral part of the front end of a church edifice, built later, toward which the

worshippers faced. This fact is made apparent by a visual arch-like formation on the stone face of the tomb and by long grooves above its brow where the principal roof beams rested.

- b. Sometime after Jesus' resurrection and before the erection of this chapel-like building, a window or opening was cut through the stone face in an angular fashion so that the early morning light would cast its beam across the interior tomb bed on the north side of the room.
- c. A deep foot impress is worn in the threshold of the sepulchre because of the traffic of worshippers and visitors to the tomb in ancient days.
- d. Incised into the stone platform before the entrance to the grave is a *heart-shaped* baptismal font emblem signifying consecration to the Lord and his service.
- e. A very early Christian anchor sign (a cross and three-pronged spear—Heb. 6:19) is scored on the face of the tomb to the left of its entry.
- f. Also to the left but a little higher up on the face of the tomb, two deep niches are cut where evidently two vulgar Venus artifacts, found in the rubble before the tomb, had previ-

ously been set, by either the Emperor Hadrian or the Roman soldiers, to purposely defile the grave because it was held in such high esteem.

g. Inside the tomb are two red painted Lorraine crosses with the accompanying Greek abbreviation “Jesus Christ, the First and the Last.”

6. Tradition says that the original stone which was rolled before the mouth of the sepulchre was divided into four parts and sent to distant locations. A quartered fragment presently lies outside the tomb with a Crusader mark affixed to it.

7. Queen Helena, with considerable wealth at her disposal, was commissioned by the Emperor Constantine to seek out and find Biblical Calvary and the Resurrection Tomb with the intent of building a suitable memorial or church edifice over the area. Saint Willibald (AD 750) cites from some unknown source that Queen Helena found the authentic site northward outside the wall of the city but instead, for security purposes, later built the original Holy Sepulchre Church where its present rebuilt namesake now is, westward within the city. On some maps from the Middle Ages, the site of Golgotha is not shown in its present traditional location but is placed correctly, we believe, in the area of Gordon’s Calvary.

We conclude with the observation that the resemblance between the Garden Tomb (and adjoining Skull or Stephen's Hill) and the details furnished in the Gospel narrative not only is remarkable but also affixes, with reasonable certainty, the seal of authenticity to this newly rediscovered site.

While the Word of God alone is able to thoroughly furnish us unto all good works—while we cannot and do not worship these alleged sites as a fetish—yet for the earnest and enthusiastic Christian, a small time spent in the consideration and appraisal of the existing evidence at hand leads to a stimulating review and a reliving of the Gospel account with its memorable and treasured detail. For this, we make no apology. We are reminded of the angelic message:

***“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” (Matt. 28:6)***

Frank Shallieu