

GETHSEMANE & MOUNT OF OLIVES

Gethsemane. Jesus often took his disciples to Gethsemane. It was a place where they could spend the night during pilgrim feasts. It is where Jesus fervently prayed three times prior to his arrest (Lk. 22:39-46). It is an area that Judas knew well; he led the mob there on the night of Jesus' betrayal (Jn. 18:1-2).

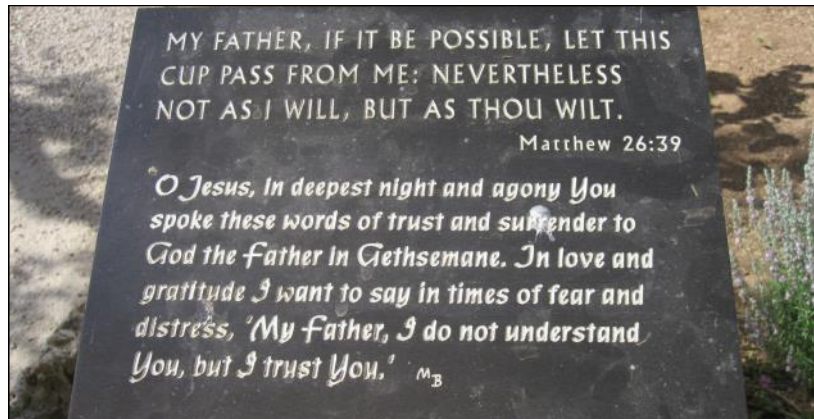
The name Gethsemane is derived from Aramaic and means "oil press"; it relates to an olive orchard and the production of olive oil. Since the annual rings of olive trees are hard to detect and examining them requires cutting the trees down, the age of olive trees is difficult to determine. As an olive tree matures, it grows broader and the trunk appears more gnarled. The olive trees at Gethsemane are at least hundreds of years old. Some suggest the trees are 1,000 years old, while others assert they are 2,000 years old. However, it is unlikely that these trees are from the time of Jesus, since Josephus stated that all the trees in the area were cut down by the Romans at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Josephus *Wars* 6.1.1).



Olive Trees from the Traditional Garden of Gethsemane

The traditional site of Gethsemane is a garden located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It is next to the Church of All Nations which contains "the Rock of Agony." John 18:1 calls Gethsemane a "garden" (*kepos*), whereas Matthew 26:36 and Mark 14:32 have "estate" or "place" (*chorion*).





The Church of All Nations



← The Church of Mary Magdalene
(Russian Orthodox)

← The Church of All Nations

← Traditional
Garden of Gethsemane

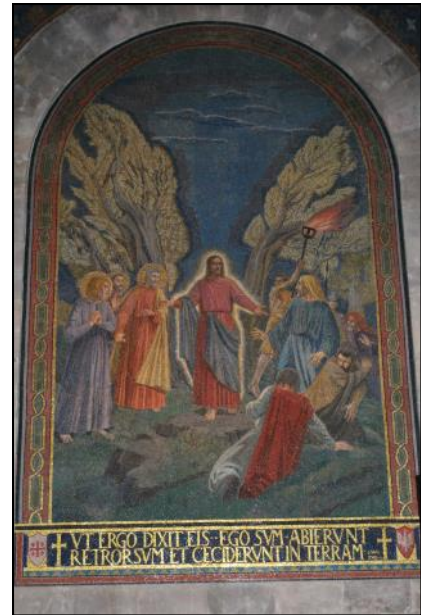


An Angel Strengthens Jesus as He Prays (Lk. 22:43-44)



Judas' Kiss (Mt. 26:49-50; Lk. 22:47-48)

Scenes from Inside
the Church of All Nations



The Mob Falls Back (Jn. 18:6)



The Rock of Agony



Chi Rho Symbol
Representing Christ,
Who Is the Alpha and Omega
(Floor of the Church of All Nations)

A nearby area with a cave marks a more likely location for Gethsemane. It is a few hundred feet north of the traditional site, a little lower on the Mount of Olives. The cave is a good size, measuring 36 by 60 feet and having interior niches for oil presses. Since the presses were only used in the fall and winter following the olive harvest, the cave would have been unoccupied during the spring when Passover took place. It would have been an excellent place for Jesus and his disciples to spend the night, offering a warm, dry environment in which to sleep. Perhaps the disciples slept there on this chilly Passover night (Jn. 18:18) as Jesus prayed. This would explain why one young disciple was wearing only a “linen sheet” or “tunic” when the mob came to arrest Jesus (Mk. 14:51). (*BAR* [Jul/Aug 1995]: 26-35, 62.)



Other sites have been suggested, including a place near the Tomb of Mary, a Greek Orthodox location to the east, and a Russian Orthodox orchard near the Church of Mary Magdalene.



The Church of Mary Magdalene (Russian Orthodox)

Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives, or Mount Olivet, is a hill on the eastern side of the Kidron Valley, facing Old Jerusalem. It is actually one of three summits east of Jerusalem, along the two-mile-long mountain ridge running north and south, with the Judean Desert beginning at the eastern side of the ridge. The name refers to the olive groves that have grown on the hillside since ancient times. The northern peak on the Mount of Olives is Mount Scopus or “Lookout Hill” at 2,710 feet. The Romans camped on the mount during the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 because of the excellent view over the defense walls of the city and the temple.

The Mount of Olives is one of the main burial grounds for Jerusalem and has been used as a Jewish cemetery for 3,000 years. This hillside is considered the holiest cemetery and is covered with 150,000 graves. Many people want to be buried here because Jewish tradition says that the Messiah will appear on this mount and bring the dead back to life. There are many churches—including Byzantine, Crusader, and modern—built on Mount Olivet to mark the traditional spot of significant events in the life of Jesus.



Graves Covering the Side of the Mount of Olives (Next to the Kidron Valley)

The Mount of Olives is mentioned several times in the Old Testament. King David passed over it as he left Jerusalem while fleeing from his rebellious son Absalom (2 Sam. 15:30). The southern peak of Mount Olivet is the Mount of Corruption at 2,450 feet. The name refers to King Solomon's idolatry when he built altars dedicated to false gods just outside the city limits of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:5-7); this act of unfaithfulness made God furious enough to split the kingdom after Solomon's death. Later, these altars on the Mount of Corruption were destroyed by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:12-14). The text says that he covered the area with the "bones of men" to defile it, preventing future pagan worship there. After their return from captivity, Nehemiah told the people to "go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees" (Neh. 8:15)—which would include the Mount of Olives. The prophets referred to the place; Ezekiel described the vision of the Lord's glory departing from Jerusalem in that direction (Ezek. 11:23), and Zechariah talked about a day of judgment when, figuratively speaking, the Lord would split the mountain in two (Zech. 14:1-11).

The New Testament records many events that happened on the Mount of Olives. According to John 8:1, Jesus went there on one of his trips to Jerusalem during his ministry. In the triumphal entry, Jesus walked from Bethany to Bethphage and then rode a donkey over the Mount of Olives through the Kidron Valley to Jerusalem (Mt. 21:1-10; Mk. 11:1-10; Lk.

19:29-41). It was on Mount Olivet that Jesus stood looking out over Jerusalem as he wept for the city (Lk. 19:41-44). Jesus frequently traveled over (or around) the mountain on his journeys between Jerusalem and Bethany during Passion Week. (There were two roads connecting Jerusalem to Bethany.) From the Mount of Olives, the Lord prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and his second coming (Mt. 24; Mk. 13). On the night before his crucifixion, after he instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus took his disciples to the Mount of Olives to the garden called Gethsemane. It was here in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed fervently just hours before his arrest, trials, and crucifixion (Mt. 26:30, 36; Mk. 14:32; Jn. 18:1). This was a place that Jesus often brought his disciples, which explains why Judas was able to easily find Jesus on the night of his betrayal. Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives in the vicinity of Bethany (Lk. 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-12).

There are several pilgrimage sites located on the Mount of Olives, including: the Church of All Nations, Gethsemane, the Church of Mary Magdalene, the Church of Dominus Flevit, the Church of the Lord's Prayer (*Pater Noster*), and the Church of the Holy Ascension. (See the section entitled *Bethany & Bethphage*.)

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Armistice Agreement was signed by Jordan on April 3, 1949 which allowed "free access to the holy sites and cultural institutions and use of the cemeteries on the Mount of Olives" (Article 7, Armistice Agreement). However, during the 19-year Jordanian occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Jews of all countries and most non-Jewish Israeli citizens were prohibited from entering Jordan and thus unable to travel in the holy land. During this Jordanian occupation, some Arab residents plowed land in cemeteries and even paved four roads through the cemetery while damaging 38,000 tombstones. Jordan's King Hussein approved construction of the Intercontinental Hotel on top of the Mount of Olives with a road cutting through the cemetery which destroyed numerous Jewish graves. They even demolished graves to make parking lots and gas stations. After the 1967 Six Day War, when Israel captured East Jerusalem, the government started restoration work and reopened the cemetery for burials. Sadly, the Jewish cemetery is the target of vandals. There is much animosity today between Arabs and Jews over the defacing of the Jewish tombs by Arabs. On November 6, 2010, an international watch committee was established by the Diaspora Jews to stop the desecration of the cemetery.