

BETHANY & BETHPHAGE

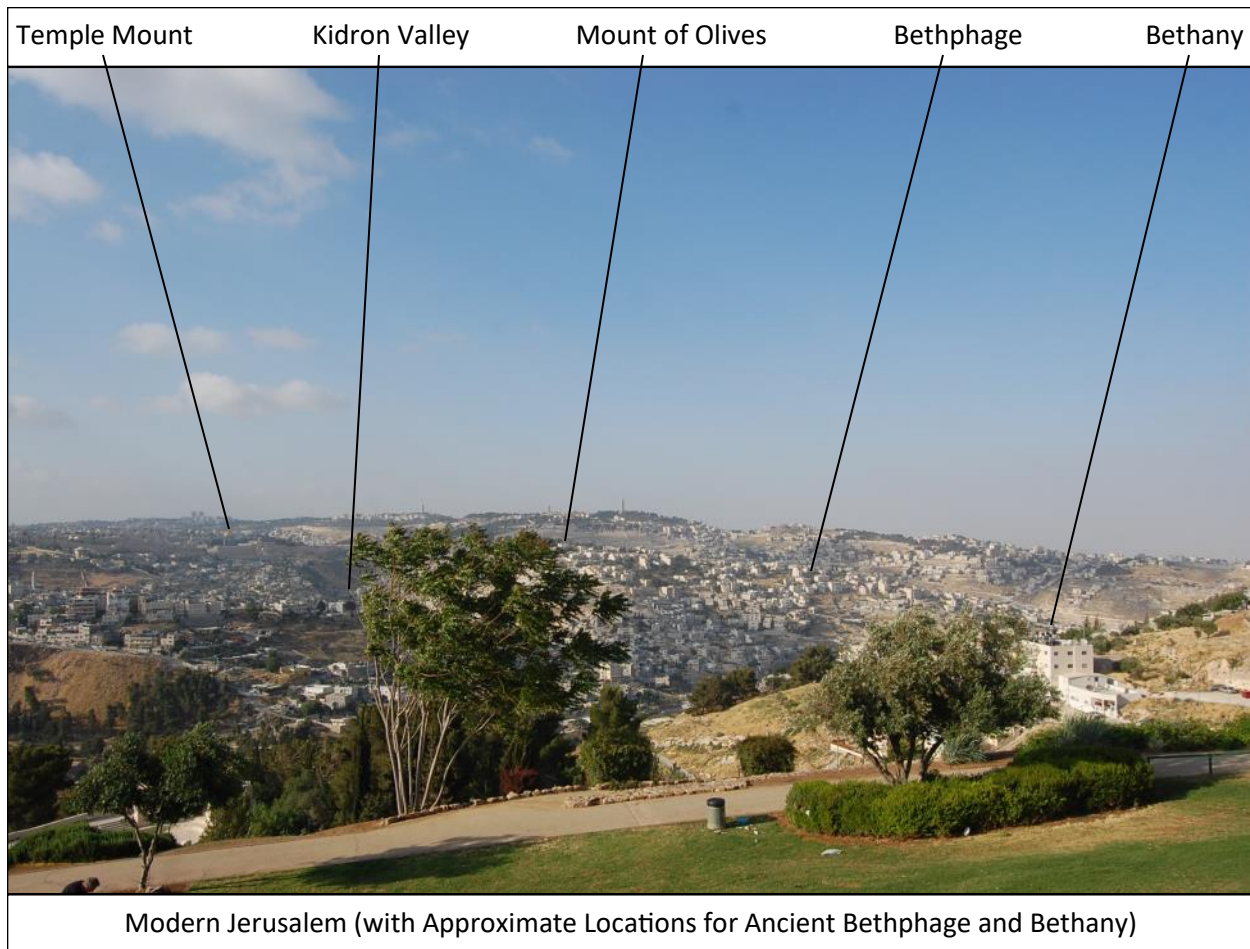
Bethany. Bethany was located on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Its name may mean “house of figs” or “house of dates.” Some identify it with the Old Testament place known as Ananiah (Neh. 11:32). It was about 1.5 miles east of Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho. Jewish pilgrims coming from Galilee often bypassed Samaria, crossing over the Jordan River in the north into Perea and then crossing back in the south; these would have passed through Bethany on their way from Jericho up to Jerusalem. Bethany was a popular locale for Jesus to visit; because of this, many have referred to it as his Judean home. Today, an Arab town exists in that location, which is known as el Azariyeh, “place of Lazarus.”

Bethany played a significant part in the ministry of Jesus. (1) In Luke 10:38-42, it is simply identified as “a village.” Here Martha hosted Jesus in her home. She busied herself with preparations, while her sister Mary sat at the Lord’s feet, listening to him teach. (2) The raising of Lazarus recorded in John 11 is perhaps the most familiar story that took place in Bethany. Lazarus had been dead for four days before Jesus went there to raise him. (3) In John 12:1-11, just before Passion Week, Jesus returned to the house of Lazarus in Bethany. It was here that Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive ointment made from nard and wiped his feet with her hair. Jesus interpreted her kind actions as preparation for his burial. These events are described in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 as occurring in the home of Simon the Leper. Perhaps Simon was the father of Lazarus and his sisters, and they all shared the same home. (4) Jesus and his disciples stayed at Bethany during Passion Week; they traveled to Jerusalem in the morning and then returned to Bethany at night (Mk. 11:11, 19; Mt. 21:17).

When the church historian Eusebius wrote the *Onomasticon* in A.D. 330, there was no church building at the place thought to be Lazarus’ grave. By the time of Jerome in 390, a structure had been erected. In the following century, it was likely destroyed by an earthquake and later rebuilt. In the Crusader period, the structure was significantly modified, and, when Muslims dominated the region, a part of the building was converted into a mosque. Today, remains of the mosaic floors from the fourth and fifth centuries have been uncovered (see Finegan, 160). In 1954, a Franciscan church was completed which stands over the older buildings. In 1965, a Greek Orthodox church was built west of the tomb of Lazarus.



Traditional Tomb of Lazarus



Bethphage. Bethphage was located on the Mount of Olives, between Jerusalem and Bethany and on the road to Jericho. Its name means “house of unripe figs.” Bethphage was the limit of a Sabbath-day’s journey from Jerusalem (2,000 cubits; Mishnah *Erubin* 4.3; 5.7). Three significant events in the Gospel Accounts took place at or near Bethphage. (1) Jesus sent two of his disciples there to retrieve a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry (Mk. 11:1-11). (2) After leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry on his way to Bethphage and went to a fig tree in leaf to eat its fruit. Because of its lack of fruit, which symbolized the fruitless deeds of the Jewish leaders, Jesus cursed the tree, and later it died (Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25). The withered tree symbolized the downfall of the Jewish nation. (3) Jesus’ ascension into heaven is described by Luke as occurring in “the vicinity of Bethany” (Lk. 24:50). Since Bethphage was the Sabbath limit, the ascension may have occurred closer to that village on the Mount of Olives than Bethany, which was farther east (see Acts 1:12).

A Byzantine basilica was built in the fourth century A.D. to commemorate the traditional site where Jesus mounted the donkey for the Triumphal Entry. Later, a Crusader chapel was built on the foundations of that basilica. In 1883, a church building was constructed on the foundations of the Crusader chapel.



Traditional Route of the Triumphal Entry
(from the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley)

Other structures built on the Mount of Olives include the Eleona Church, the In-bomon Church, and the Church of Dominus Flevit (see the map in Finegan, 154).

First, the Eleona Church was built by Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine, over a cave where it was believed that Jesus taught. (It was near a traditional place for the ascension of Jesus.) The building was evidently destroyed by the Neo-Persians in A.D. 614. Later, a chapel was built to remember the place where Jesus supposedly taught. In the late 1800s, the Church of the Lord's Prayer (in Latin, *Pater Noster*, meaning "Our Father") was built at this place. The site of the Lord's Prayer is a very late tradition with very little support.



Church of the Lord's Prayer (*Pater Noster*)

Next, the Inbomon Church takes its name from a Greek phrase meaning “upon the height.” It is also known as the Church of the Holy Ascension. This structure was probably also destroyed by the Neo-Persians, but it was rebuilt soon after. An inscription gives credit to Modestus, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who died about A.D. 634. The building was modified by the Crusaders, and was later turned into the Mosque of the Ascension by the Muslims. The statement that “God lifted [Jesus] up to Him” in the Quran (Sura 4.158) apparently supports the truth that Christ ascended to heaven.



Church of the Holy Ascension



Church of Dominus Flevit

Finally, the Franciscan Church of Dominus Flevit (which was finished in 1955), marks the traditional spot where Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem during the Triumphal Entry. According to Luke 19:37, “he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives.” Then, as Jesus “approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it” (Lk. 19:41). The Lord wept over the city because its citizens would reject him as the Messiah, and, because of their unbelief, the city would be destroyed (Lk. 19:41-44). The Latin phrase *Dominus flevit* means “the Lord wept.”