

GORDON'S CALVARY & THE GARDEN TOMB

In each of the Gospels, it is stated that Jesus was led out to a place called Golgotha where he was crucified (Mt. 27:33-35; Mk. 15:22-24; Lk. 23:32-33; Jn. 19:16-18). "Golgotha" is an Aramaic word meaning "the Place of the Skull" (Jn. 19:17). The Latin term for Golgotha, which appears in Jerome's Vulgate, is *Calvaria*. The KJV uses a transliteration of this term, "Calvary," one time in the New Testament (Lk. 23:33). Because of this, Calvary has become a common term for identifying the crucifixion site of Jesus.

Hebrews 13:12 locates the place where Jesus was crucified outside of the walls of Jerusalem. However, it was not too far away. John 19:20 says that "many of the Jews read [the] sign" that was fastened to the cross, "for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city." While not clearly indicated in the Scriptures, early church tradition supports the idea that Golgotha was on a hill, an elevated portion of the outskirts of Jerusalem.

The tomb where Jesus was buried was nearby in a garden (Jn. 19:41), which was also outside the city walls. This tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:43). It had been hewn out of the rock and had never been used (Mt. 27:60).

Many places have been suggested as the site of the crucifixion, but in actuality there are two main areas regarded as legitimate possibilities: the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Catholic/Greek Orthodox) and an area known as Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb (Protestant). (For more information, see *Church of the Holy Sepulcher*.)



Gordon's Calvary
Northwest of the Temple Mount
and Antonia Fortress
(Jerusalem Model, Viewed from the North)

Gordon's Calvary is the alternative location, being located farther north than the traditional site. It is named after British General Charles Gordon, who was drawn to the skull-like features of the hillside. Other explorers had apparently made this same association before Gordon (Otto Thenius in 1842, Colonel Claude Conder in 1870, and Fisher Howe in 1871), but he popularized it after visiting Jerusalem in 1883. Gordon's identification was partly based on the fanciful idea that ancient Jerusalem was laid out in the shape of a skeleton (see McRay, 211-12). Some opponents of this location as the correct site for Jesus' crucifixion do not think the skull-like features were present in the first century.



Gordon's Calvary (with Skull-Like Features)



Gordon's Calvary (Wider Angle)

Nearby the hillside, Gordon also discovered a garden with several tombs. This is similar to the description in John 19:41: "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb." Further, in John 20:15, Mary had a conversation with a man she thought was a gardener just outside the tomb where Jesus had been buried. The topography of the area that Gordon discovered lends itself to more of a "garden setting" than does the traditional location. Today, it is a place of quiet meditation, in contrast to the crowded Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Many scholars today do not consider Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb as possible sites for the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In particular, archaeologists have argued that the tomb shown to tourists today actually dates several centuries before Christ (to the time of the Divided Kingdom); it was not made in the style of the Second Temple period (see McRay, 206-10). The Garden Tomb was certainly not "new" in the first century A.D., so it could not be the place where Jesus was buried.

Supporters of the alternate site have argued that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was inside Jerusalem's walls in the first century; therefore, it would not meet the criteria of being "outside the city gate" (Heb. 13:12). Archaeologists have responded that the wall beyond the traditional site of Golgotha was added later in the first century, *after* the time of Christ.





Garden Tomb

While probably not the correct site, viewing Gordon's Calvary conveys the images of suffering and death that are associated with crucifixion. Further, the garden surrounding the tomb provides the serenity we would anticipate. The tomb itself illustrates a trench for a rolling stone and a low entryway (Mt. 27:60; 28:2; Jn. 20:4-5).



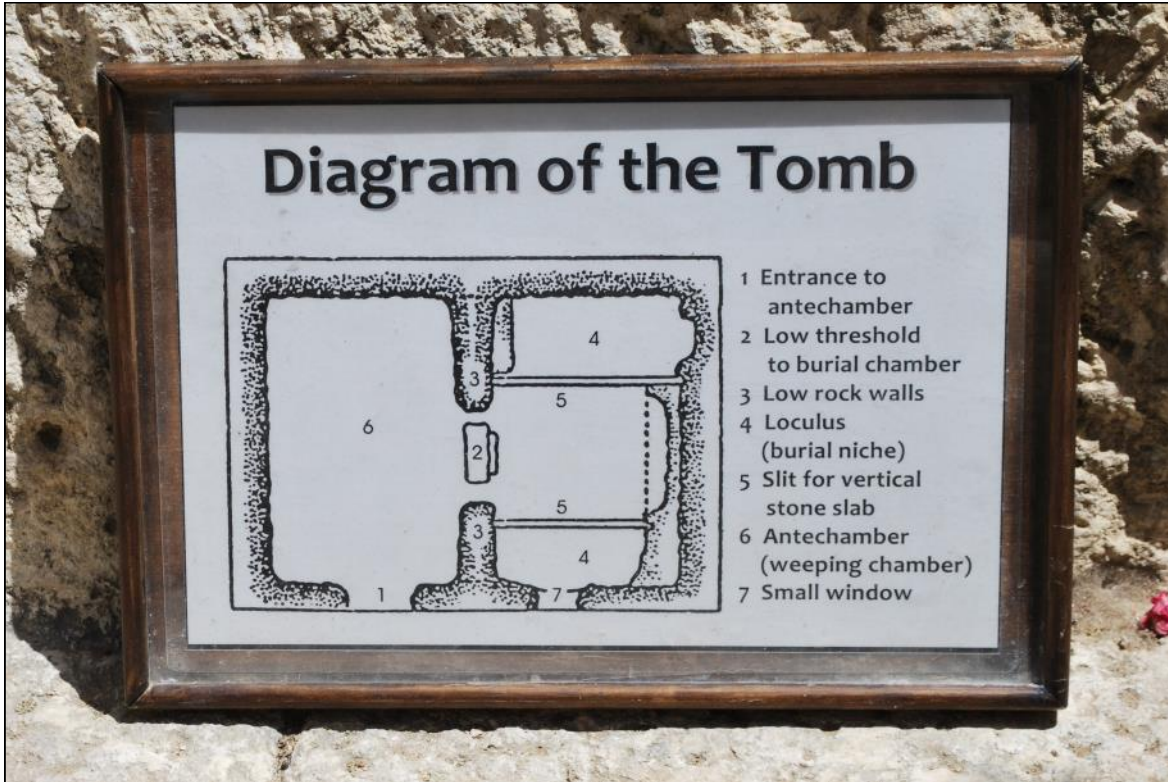
Garden Tomb

Low Entryway

Trench

Rolling Stone





Left and Right Burial Niches

