

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

Where is Golgotha?

The final 24 hours in the life of Jesus took Him from Gethsemane, to Gabbatha, to Golgotha. Two months ago, we examined the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus experienced intense pressure as he contemplated his own crucifixion. Last month we examined the trial of Jesus before Pilate and his scourging in a place known to the Jews as Gabbatha (the Stone Pavement). This month we will examine Golgotha where Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world.

Today in Jerusalem there are two competing sites for the location of Golgotha. The traditional site is located at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem. The competing site is just north of the Old City of Jerusalem, it is known as Gordon's Calvary. But which is the authentic site where Jesus was crucified?

The name Golgotha, is an Aramaic term which means 'the place of the skull.' Golgotha was a hill near Jerusalem used by the Romans for the crucifixion of criminals. We can deduce from the name that the rocky outcrop where Jesus was crucified probably looked like a skull.



On the Left is the Traditional Hill of Golgotha – the two gray domes mark the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. On the Right is Gordon's Calvary – Gordon believed this rocky outcrop to be Golgotha. (Photos by Chip Thompson)

Both sites place the tomb of Jesus near to the hill called Golgotha. According to the Bible, "In the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid... the tomb was nearby" (John 19:41-42).

Which of these two sites is the authentic Golgotha? Take a minute to examine the photos. Our human eyes are natural-

ly drawn to Gordon's Calvary because the rocky outcrop resembles a skull. And when looking at the tomb options, it is the Garden tomb that seems to best match the description in the Bible. But our human eyes are often prone to deceive us.



On the Left is the Tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. On the Right is the Garden Tomb near Gordon's Calvary. (Photos by Chip Thompson)

Here are the facts about these competing sites.

- The traditional site, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, has been venerated as Golgotha since the 1st century A.D. Millions of Christians have worshipped the risen Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.
- Gordon's Calvary was discovered by General Charles Gordon in 1883. No one venerated or worshipped at Gordon's Calvary before 1883.
- The traditional Golgotha connects with TONS of archeology and the ruins of multiple churches that were built on this site to commemorate the death and burial of Jesus. The earliest church dates to 325 A.D. and the church that now stands on the site was built by the Crusaders in about 1,100 A.D.
- Gordon's Calvary has NO ancient archeology that connects with Jesus and NO commemorative churches were ever built on this site.
- The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is built over several 1st Century tombs. In fact, 1st Century tombs can still be seen inside this church.
- The Garden Tomb is an Old Testament Tomb that dates hundreds of years before the time of Christ. It was not "a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid."

The evidence based upon the facts is CLEAR – the authentic Golgotha is the traditional site located at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. No archeologist today would question this conclusion.

All these facts are interesting and important when trying to determine the authentic site, but what is more important is the REASON for Golgotha. Golgotha is important

because all the Lord's Apostles told us the work of SALVATION was accomplished by Jesus, at Golgotha, ON THE CROSS. According to Peter... "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [on the cross]" (1 Peter 2:24 – see also Colossians 1:20 & Ephesians 2:16).

I grew up in a Christian church that taught Jesus was "the Atonement" for our sins. All my life I passionately believed in "the Atonement" of Jesus Christ. So, as you can imagine, I was shocked when I learned later in life that NONE of the Greek New Testament Manuscripts, the very manuscripts that our Bibles were translated from, ever called the work of Jesus "Atonement." Instead, a completely different word was used. This is what the New Testament Apostles wrote, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins... In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 2:2 & 4:10 – See also: Romans 3:25-26 and Hebrews 2:17.) WOW, this information blew my mind. So, what is the difference between 'Atonement' and 'Propitiation'?

ATONEMENT

Atonement was an Old Testament concept that meant "to cover." The Old Testament required a guilty sinner to bring an innocent lamb to the temple as a sacrifice for their sins. The blood of the innocent lamb was then used as an 'Atonement/Covering' for their sins. The blood of the innocent lamb temporarily covered the sinner's guilt – UNTIL THEY SINNED AGAIN. Then the process of sacrificial atonement needed to be done again – over and over again.

PROPI TIATION

Propitiation on the other hand means "to appease." When the Bible tells us Jesus is "the Propitiation for our sins" it is saying that the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus permanently "appeased" God's wrath against all sin. 1 John 2:2 says, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Propitiation is WAY BETTER than Atonement. God's wrath against all our sins was poured out upon Jesus as he hung on the cross. Jesus totally and permanently "appeased" God's wrath against sin. In-other-words, Jesus took our punishment for us so that we could be forgiven. All who will by faith believe that Jesus propitiated our sins on the cross, are then saved and given the free gift of eternal life. This is what the Bible calls the Gospel. The word Gospel means Good News. This Gospel is Good News for sinners like you and like me.