

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

The Mount of Olives is the ridge that runs north to south on the east side of Jerusalem. According to the Bible, it is 'a sabbath day's journey' (about a ¼ of a mile walk) to the east of Jerusalem. In Biblical times it was covered with an olive grove from whence it derived its name.



The green hill marked with Christian Churches including the light colored slope in the distance is the Mount of Olives. The light colored slope is a huge Jewish cemetery. [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2016]

Many historical events took place on the Mount of Olives. In 1,000 B.C., Absalom orchestrated a coup to take the Israelite kingdom away from his father David. As he escaped from Absalom's wrath, the Bible says, "David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered" (2 Samuel 15:30). Jesus and his disciples often resorted to the Mount of Olives when they came to Jerusalem for the Jewish festivals. Jesus preached his famous 'End Times Sermon' on the Mount of Olives (Matthew chapter 24). Jesus spent his last night on earth in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:36). Following Christ's death and resurrection, a group of Jewish believers watched Jesus ascend into heaven from the top of the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:6-12).

A substantial portion of the Mount of Olives is a Jewish cemetery. In use for over 3,000 years, this is the oldest and largest Jewish cemetery in the world. It is estimated to hold over 150,000 graves. According to a prophecy given in biblical scripture, the Jewish Messiah will one day descend from heaven onto the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). Many Jews believe

the Messiah will resurrect all of humankind and set up his earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. The deceased Jews buried on the Mount of Olives hope to be amongst the first to resurrect and then welcome their Messiah King to Jerusalem.



In the first picture you can see the size of this cemetery, it is HUGE. In this close view you can see how the Jewish graves are situated on the mount. [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2012]

This cemetery became a source of great conflict following the establishment of the Jewish Nation in 1948. At this time, the Jordanians living on the mount destroyed 38,000 graves in a show of defiance and anger. Some prominent Jewish grave markers were placed in latrines and desecrated. Following the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel gained control of the West Bank, many of these grave markers were recovered and restored to their original plots on the mount.

The most important event in the history of the Mount of Olives is yet to come. Where Jesus ascended to heaven, the Bible says Jesus Christ will one day return. In Acts 1:6-11 as the disciples talked to Jesus, they asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority...' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"

The first time Jesus came to earth as a humble and helpless baby.

But when he returns it will not be so. The Bible describes His second coming this way, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:29-30). This is just one of many places where Christ's second coming is foretold (see: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10, Revelation 6:12-17, 11:15-19, & 19:11-21). This will be the most AWESOME EVENT our world has ever experienced – YOU SHOULD READ ALL THE ABOVE PASSAGES.



The Chapel of the Ascension stands on the peak of the Mount of Olives. This spot has been marked from the earliest days of Christianity as the place where Jesus ascended and will one day return to earth. [photo by AAA Trip Canvas, Fair Use Act, section 107]

When Jesus returns, will you be ready? Three times in one chapter Jesus warned, "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray... For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand" (Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24-25). So do not trust what you have been taught by any person, or by any religion, or even what you might think is true in your own mind. TRUST JESUS!!! Jesus said, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). Read the Gospel of John and listen carefully to the voice of Jesus. Only then will you know the absolute truth. For only Jesus has the words of eternal life, (John 6:60-68).