



Chapter 19

WHY THE TEMPLE OF VENUS?

The main attraction to objective historians today that there may be a kernel of truth in believing that the Temple of Venus in Jerusalem stood over the former site of Jesus' crucifixion is because they think it reasonable that people living in Jerusalem from A.D.70 to A.D.326 would have retained numerous traditions that *this* was the true site. This belief, on the surface, makes perfectly good sense. But what many scholars have not considered are the teachings of Eusebius that in the pre-Constantine period it was common for Christians to call the Mount of Olives the *spiritual* Mount Sion; also that Christians from around the world came to visit the *tomb/cave* on the Mount of Olives (and no other site in Jerusalem was indicated as having any significance); that the "House of God" (the headquarters church for Jerusalem) was located on the Mount of Olives until it was destroyed in the Diocletian persecution beginning in A.D.303; and that Eusebius said the Shekinah Glory of God left the old Temple at Jerusalem and went to the top of the Mount of Olives just before the destruction of the city in A.D.70. Eusebius said *nothing* (nor did anyone else) about the Temple of Venus site. In actual fact, *before* the time of

Constantine, the *only* place in the Jerusalem area that was sanctified as being important in Christian tradition was the *tomb/cave* near the southern summit of Olivet.

While Eusebius said that by the early third century there was a trend for people to journey to Palestine “to examine the historic sites” (*Eccl.Hist.* 6:11), we have no evidence that people saw any efficaciousness in the sites themselves, or that they would afford some spiritual benefit to the people who attended them. In the New Testament and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers in the second century, there is no evidence that Christians saw any special significance to the sites associated with Jesus or the apostles. But with the time of Constantine, all that changed drastically. We find that the places (or artifacts) supposedly associated with people of the biblical period began to take on unique spiritual and physical powers in themselves. People then began to journey to the Holyland to worship at what became known as the “holy places.” It even went further than that. The places themselves began to take on a sanctification and “miracles” became associated with the sites and with certain artifacts connected with the holy men of old. Christians then started to visit the “holy places” for the spiritual amenities that the sites themselves could afford.

Interest in Holy Places in Palestine Began with Constantine

This all commenced in the time of Constantine and the ardor has not diminished to this day. Indeed, wars and arguments have taken place over the past 1500 years to secure in proper hands the custodianship of those “holy places.” One of the main reasons for the Crusades (which dominated the activities of most European nations from A.D.1096 to 1291) was to recapture and put in Christian hands these sacred areas in Palestine — this especially applied to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that Constantine selected as the spot of Jesus’ crucifixion. Such interest did not abate even with the failure of the Crusades to secure proper guardianship over the areas sanctified since the time of Constantine. As late as the middle of the

last century there were many disputes concerning the “holy places” between European nations and the Turks (who were then controlling Jerusalem). The main contention concerned who had the authority to protect and supervise these revered areas in Jerusalem — and, again, this particularly applied to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. So heated did the arguments become (especially when the Czar of Russia began to express his divine right to be protector of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) that major hostilities broke out between the claimants and the conflict became known as the Crimean War. England, France and Turkey went to war with the Russians over who had the right to the “keys” that opened the doors to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The cause of that war can be deduced to that trivial matter, yet the “keys” represented a powerful interpretation of just who were the people God had chosen.

Though the war was concluded in a little over a year, the outcome was a defeat for the Russians. It finally ended with what has become known as the *status quo* regarding who has protection and supervision over the various “holy places” in Palestine. This especially applied to the parties who claimed to have the right to certain parts of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Indeed, the matter of the “holy places” is still a major bone of contention between many Christians, Muslims and Jews. Many are feuding over wrong spots.

The Early Roman Emperors showed Little Disdain for Christians

Selecting the wrong spots for “holy places” (and the place of “Golgotha” in particular) began in earnest with the visions of Constantine and his mother Helena, and with the so-called “documentation” provided by Judas. The truth is, these fourth century Christians selected the wrong site. But they became confident that the crucifixion happened at the place where the Temple of Venus was located. What was it that prompted them (other than dreams and visions) to decide on this spot? There was a major reason that Christians invented from early history. Many Christian folk in the

latter part of the fourth century came to believe that the emperor Hadrian (beginning in A.D.135) built the Temple of Venus over the site of Jesus' crucifixion because he hated the Christians so much and wished to intimidate them by the sacrilege. While it is true that Hadrian had an utter disdain for the Jews (and he raised up a Shrine of Jupiter on the site of Herod's Temple, and probably other Jewish holy places), new research by historians over the past 50 years has raised serious doubts that Hadrian had any animosity against his Christian subjects.

Even earlier emperors were not systematically hostile to Christians (except the persecution that developed in Nero's time after the fire of Rome in A.D.64). There is not a tissue of evidence that the emperors Vespasian and Titus persecuted Christians in a general and consistent way. Even the problems under Domitian (A.D.96) have been greatly overplayed. And though there were some government reprisals about A.D.112 under Trajan, these were all local and certainly temporary. Indeed, under Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138) and Antonius (138-161) there is no clear evidence of any general persecution of Christians by the imperial authorities of Rome. True enough, there was the martyrdom of Ignatius in Trajan's reign, but it must be recognized that the judgment was against Ignatius personally and that he had begged for a martyr's death. Ignatius' seven epistles make it plain that the Christian Church as a whole was under a period of general peace and safety as far as matters concerning the Roman government were concerned. Even with Ignatius (if one reads him carefully), his death could have been averted by the appeal of Christians in Rome. But Ignatius for some reason did not want them to step in to gain him clemency. In the period of the Apostolic Fathers (95-161), their records show in the main that the Christian Church was developing steadily within an environment of peace and security in relation to the imperial government. There were the martyrdoms of prominent men such as Ignatius, Polycarp and Justin, but these were isolated occurrences and were in no way indicative of what

was happening to most Christians throughout the Roman Empire. It was not until A.D.177 with the persecution in Lyons that the imperial government began actively to take an interest in persecuting Christians in general.

As a matter of fact, in A.D.112 the emperor Trajan gave a decree which for all practical purposes gave a toleration for Christian activities that were within the law. This was also reiterated by the next emperor, Hadrian, and the policy appears to have continued under Antonius to the year A.D.161. There is no evidence to show any universal Roman government hostility to Christians (no matter where they were in the Roman world) from A.D.98 to 161. The situation is summed up well by Professor Frend in his excellent work *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*:

“Even in Asia Minor, where the Church was strongest, Christianity was one of the lesser problems which confronted Pliny in his investigations into provincial mismanagement in 112-113. In Antioch and in Palestine there were isolated conflicts between authorities and the Christians, but none in Alexandria nor the remainder of the Hellenistic world. The total recorded ‘incidents’ in the whole empire for two generations *may be counted on the fingers of one hand*” (p.181, italics mine).

It can truly be said that under the emperors Trajan, Hadrian and Antonius the Christian Church, as far as general government policy was concerned, was not being systematically persecuted or in serious jeopardy.

Early Roman Emperors Persecuted the Jews, Not Christians

But wait a moment. Does that mean that Christians had very little persecution? No, not in the least. What I have been discussing are relations between Christians and the Roman imperial government, not between Jews and Christians or Christians and other Christians. The fact is, between Jews and Christians there are abundant indications to show continuing and often violent contentions among the two groups between A.D.70 and 161. There was such a

prevailing hatred between the two religious societies that it was almost an impossible task to convoke any harmony between them. Only on rare occasions (like the dialogue of Justin the Christian with Trypho the Jew about A.D.140) did any civilized spirit of discussion take place. There was such a deep cleavage in religious belief with Jews and Christians that only an open belligerence and persecution prevailed among them. (It should be mentioned that there were also squabbles and fights within the Christian communities among those expressing diverse and contrary doctrines from others, but the Roman government itself was in the main tolerant of Christian affairs.)

What has all this to do with our present discussion about the site of the Holy Sepulchre and the place where Jesus was crucified? Very much. This is because there is a belief among scholars today (and among a number of theologians of the late fourth and early fifth centuries) that Hadrian built the Temple of Venus over the site of Jesus' passion because he supposedly hated Christians so much that he wanted to desecrate their object of chief devotion. But in no way is this theory correct. The truth is, Hadrian had his quarrels with Jews, and not with Christians. This point is very important to the issue we are discussing and it will help us to pay close attention to it.

Truthfully, Hadrian had no animosities towards Christians. If anything, he found them allies with him (or at least sympathetic to him) in his wars with the Jews. The reason for this is clear. Since the A.D.66-70 Roman/Jewish War there had been a deep rupture in Jewish and Christian relationships, and this especially applied to Jewish Christians. Professor Frend has a long section surveying the ordinary Jewish attitude towards Jewish Christians from A.D.70 up to 135 (pp.178-181). And, as stated before, it was one of utter hostility. After all, the Jewish authorities had reckoned that the Jewish Christians in particular had deliberately abandoned and forsaken the principles of proper religion when they accepted Jesus as their

Messiah. One thing that irritated them among other things was the Christian refusal to join them in their conflicts for independence from Rome in the wars of A.D.66-70, 115-117 and 132-135. These three wars were in one way or another inspired with a Jewish belief that the political Messiah of the Old Testament (as the Jews understood him) would come to destroy the Romans and raise up a Jewish world kingdom.

Christians did not share this belief with other Jews. Real believers in Jesus could not participate in those wars of the Jews against the Romans without Jesus himself returning from heaven to bring in the Messianic kingdom. This particularly applied to the Roman/Jewish War of A.D.132 to 135. During that war the Jewish people had come to the conclusion that a man by the name of Simon (who was the general in charge of the Jewish armies) was indeed the Messiah, and he was called "Simon Bar-Kokhba" (the Son of the Star). No Christian in any way, shape or form could have accepted such a man as the Messiah, and they didn't! Even in the time of Domitian (about A.D.96) it is recorded that the grandsons of Jude (the brother of Jesus) were brought before the emperor for interrogation. They were dismissed when it was discovered that they were farmers having no revolutionary tendencies and that they proclaimed the Messianic kingdom would be manifested in the future when Jesus would return from heaven (Eusebius, *Eccl.Hist.* III.20, quoting the second century author Hegisippus).

The Emperor Hadrian was Not Openly Hostile to Christians

This, and other historical factors, prove that the Christians (even Jewish Christians) would have had nothing to do in siding with the Jews against the Romans in the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (A.D.132-135). The evidence would support the Christians as being decidedly on the side of Hadrian against Jewish aspirations. This must be the case because Hadrian allowed Gentile Christians to carry on with their worship in Jerusalem (without interruption) even after the war was over. This alone shows that Hadrian had no quarrel with Jesus

or Christians. There is even evidence that the emperor reckoned Jesus to have been a holy man and thought him to be a god. Aelius Lampridius mentioned a report that Hadrian even purposed to erect temples to Jesus as one of the gods, but was deterred by the priests of Rome who declared that all the world would become Christians if he did (*Alexander Severus*, 43). This clearly indicates that Hadrian would not have been prone to desecrate a Christian “holy place” with his Temple of Venus as the Capitol of his new city called Aelia. But there was every reason for Hadrian to humiliate Jewish “holy places” or monuments.

Since the builders of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre found a tomb (and adjacent tombs) associated with the Venus Shrine, what if it were an important “Jewish tomb” or tomb area that Hadrian was endeavoring to humiliate in A.D.135? This is surely the answer to the whole matter. Remarkably, the authorities (both ancient and modern) who have examined the tombs in and around the immediate site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre agree that the tombs date to the period of the Second Temple. This means they were constructed before A.D.70. and it gives us archaeological evidence that the tombs under the Venus Shrine were indeed Jewish. The way the tombs were situated seems to show one central tomb with others as subsidiary. This arrangement could very well be indicating that the main tomb was of a prominent Jewish person. But whose tomb was it?

There was Once a Tomb Complex at the Temple of Venus

The Bordeaux Pilgrim in A.D.333 said that this “Calvary” located at the former Temple of Venus was then a small hill that apparently stood out around an area of flat ground. This made the hill or any structure built on it a prominent one. The site must have had a natural geographical eminence or Hadrian himself would not have placed there the Capitol of his new city which he called Aelia. The early descriptions of the site show that it represented a prime landmark which was easily recognized by the people of Jerusalem.

Could it have been a conspicuous tomb/monument that was there in the time of Jesus? There is every reason to believe that this was the case.

Since Josephus saw this area and described it before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D.70 (and Josephus' description would have given a reasonable approximation to that which existed in the time of Jesus), we should ask if Josephus mentioned such a significant tomb/monument in this area? He most certainly does.

The Identification of the Tomb

This region in Jesus' time was sparsely populated (*War* V.260) and consequently there were only a few houses and other buildings within the general vicinity. This factor would tend to make this Jewish tomb to stand out as a central landmark. And this is exactly what Josephus states. There was a tomb/monument in this very region which had geographical prominence. He referred to it four times in his description of the war with the Romans, and on all four occasions he used the location of the tomb/monument as a landmark to identify the places where major events took place. It was the *Tomb of John Hyrcanus* — the famous and respected High Priest ruler of the Jews who reigned from 135 to 104 B.C. He was the son of Simon (the first ruler of the Hasmonean dynasty) and the one who was most responsible for creating a prosperous Jewish Commonwealth that was the envy of other Middle Eastern powers. His father could be considered the "George Washington" of the new Jewish nation, while he himself might be called the "Thomas Jefferson." So important was he to the Jewish people that at his death a splendid monumental tomb was made for him.

It is important to note that John Hyrcanus had the deep respect of most Jews and he was one who was a proper example of righteousness. John Hyrcanus was also a recent hero who epitomized the valiant quest for Jewish liberation from their Gentile oppressors. His example could very well have been a rallying point

around which the liberators of A.D.132 gained confidence to overthrow the Roman yoke. The former monument area of John Hyrcanus (being a revolutionary Maccabee) could have provided a patriotic sense of encouragement to the fighters of Bar-Kokhba. Since the former buildings which made up Jerusalem before A.D.70 had all been destroyed, the freedom fighters could have symbolically used the site of John Hyrcanus' Tomb as their own "Jefferson" or "Lincoln" Memorial.

Where was this prominent tomb/monument located in Jerusalem? Josephus used it as a benchmark to identify the place where the Roman general Titus (later emperor) penetrated the western wall of Jerusalem which had been built by Agrippa (*War* V.258-260). Since the place of the breach is reasonably known, we can use this breach of Titus as a means of discovering the site of Hyrcanus' Tomb. Titus broke through the western wall (which was built in a northwest/southeast direction) about 300 yards north and west of where the Old Wall began near the present Jaffa Gate. Since Josephus stated that Titus' breach was *exactly opposite* the Tomb of John Hyrcanus, we can rationally say that the Tomb was located about 300 yards north of the Old Wall. This would place it on an east/west line which connects precisely with today's Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

We are later told (*War* V.304) that the Jewish forces of Simon held the Second Wall *near the Tomb of John Hyrcanus*. From this northern point of the Second Wall, Simon controlled the Second Wall itself southward until it intersected with the Old Wall east of the Water Gate of the Hippicus Tower (which is near the present Jaffa Gate). With Josephus saying that Simon's northern limit of occupation was on the Second Wall *opposite Hyrcanus' Tomb*, this indication in itself puts his position on a line directly opposite the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

But there is even more. Directly south and alongside Hyrcanus' Tomb, Josephus said that Titus raised an embankment to provide a

ramp in order to bring up his engines of destruction to breach the Old Wall to the south (*War V.356*). To be “alongside” (as Josephus stated) suggests that the tomb area of Hyrcanus was in a rectangular shape much like a football field today (with its broadside oriented east/west). But also, the Tomb of Hyrcanus was positioned *opposite* a gate in the Old Wall (probably the Gennath, which means the Garden Gate) because a Jewish soldier came out to do single combat with a Roman soldier “opposite Hyrcanus’ Tomb” (*War VI.169*). The Garden Gate no doubt led to the gardens surrounding the monumental Tomb of Hyrcanus.

We should note that the Madaba mosaic near Mount Nebo in Jordan also shows the original area of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to have been rectangular in shape and this would agree with what Josephus indicated about the Tomb of John Hyrcanus. And since it is well known that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built over some kind of tomb area with its origin before Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D.70, this also gives reasonable evidence that the site was actually that of John Hyrcanus’ Tomb.

Jewish Authorities were Well Aware that the Site was That of Hyrcanus

What should be understood is that Jewish people at the time of Constantine must have been well aware that this area (at which the Temple of Venus was constructed by Hadrian after A.D.135) was the tomb area of John Hyrcanus. The man Judas Quiriacus must surely have known this! What seems evident is the fact that the Jewish people in the time of Constantine (through Judas their intermediary) pointed out the Tomb of John Hyrcanus to Helena as the place for all Christians to adore as the tomb of Jesus. But would not Christians in Jerusalem have known this site was wrong and that the evidence pointed to the Mount of Olives as the true place? Yes, that is true. Indeed, we even have Eusebius making a journey all the way to Constantinople begging the emperor to hear him out on this matter of the Holy Sepulchre. But the emperor (and even the peo-

ple) of the time were more interested in what visions, dreams and signs afforded as proof. And when Judas Quiriacus was able to show three crosses, along with the tablet of Pilate, the sponge and the reed supposedly associated with Jesus' crucifixion, and especially when on May 7th, A.D.350 a parhelion of the sun pointed out "Golgotha" with a "cross" that stretched all the way to the Mount of Olives, all further inquiry on the matter was closed. The former importance of Olivet became totally eclipsed by these "wonderful signs" that God had supposedly given.

What we find is that after A.D.326 Christians were more "led by the spirit" in finding the holy places than relying on historical and geographical facts. It is well known that this technique resulted in enormous blunders in trying to locate the early sites associated with Jesus, the apostles and Old Testament prophets. As an example, they moved (with utter confidence so it seems) the hill of Sion from its actual location on Jerusalem's southeast ridge up to the large southwest hill just south of the *newly discovered* "Golgotha" in the western part of Jerusalem. And note this. Since all early manuscripts of Josephus fell into Christian hands, it appears that the Christians of the fourth century even changed the text of Josephus (see what scholars say on *War* V.137) to make him supposedly say the citadel of David was on the southwest hill. They forgot, however, to alter what Josephus said in his *Antiquities* VII.65-67 where he indicated that the actual "Mount Sion" was the lower southeast hill. And, as already explained in this book, Eusebius and even Jerome explained in their writings that the real "Mount Sion" of the Bible was on the southeast hill of Jerusalem (and by extension to the Temple mount itself). In no way would Josephus have said that the southwest hill was the "Mount Sion" of King David. There is not the slightest indication in the Bible that this is true.

Unauthorized Editing of Josephus

Such tampering with the text of Josephus is not only unfair with history and geography, it represents a deliberate fraud against the

original writings of Josephus. Whatever one thinks of the motives of such people, they cannot be accepted as honorable by anyone who respects the teaching of the truth. The fact is, the Christian editors of the fourth century had no justification (either morally, ethically or historically) for altering Josephus to make him support the later visions, dreams and miracles associated with Constantine, Helena and Judas Quiriacus.

But this did not end the matter in identifying other holy sites or artifacts. The people of the fourth century came to the conclusion that they did not need historical evidences to show them where such things could be discovered. The “Holy Spirit” (as they conceived it to be) was able to reveal the location of such things. Eusebius himself became very concerned about Constantine’s selection of the Temple of Venus as the site of Jesus’ crucifixion, but he ran up against a brick wall in convincing Constantine that his visionary experiences were in error. Even he and the assembled bishops at Jerusalem asked Constantine to provide them with the evidence that his visionary experiences were proper, but the appeal of Eusebius had little effect on Constantine. The important things to the emperor and his mother were visions, dreams and signs (and we must not forget the discovery of the “true” cross and other artifacts by Judas Quiriacus under the Shrine of Venus).

Visions and Dreams Took Precedence over Historical Documents

What we find is that visions, dreams and signs won the day. From the time of Constantine, it was open season on the acceptance of many miraculous discoveries. But were these so-called signs telling the truth? Let us look at the facts. People who could not find ten acres of Sion and misplaced David’s Tomb by half a mile, were still able to identify the precise pillar Jesus was tied to at his scourging, the place where Mary stood when Jesus was anointed after his death, the Tomb of Melchizedek, and even the stone on which the cock crowed at Peter’s denial. Not only that, they discovered at the

new “Golgotha” to their satisfaction, the very Tomb of Adam, our first parent. Since fourth century Christians somehow thought that the Jews had a tradition that the Tomb (and even the skull) of Adam would be located on the Temple Mount, they simply transferred the tradition from the Temple Mount to the *new* Golgotha. Since “Golgotha” can mean “Place of the Skull,” this convenient designation simply gave fuel to the so-called legitimacy of Adam’s tomb, or even his skull, being found in that area.

As for me, I hope my friends who rely on these traditional “discoveries” will forgive me if I express doubt in their authenticity. The simple truth is, these “miraculous discoveries” are pious frauds that no legitimate historian today would consider as true. No wonder fourth century Christians needed visions, dreams and miracles to locate such “holy places” and “holy crosses.” They claimed to have the Holy Spirit to tell *where* these important events took place, or what these things were, and it was not felt needful to rely on biblical or historical documents to identify the truth of any of them.

Christian Credulity

It is a sad commentary, but the credulity shown by Christian authorities at the time of Constantine (and the hundred years that followed) was at an all time high. It was an age in which religious “proofs” took precedence over the type of objective evidence that most historians utilize today. The church historian Sozomen was very candid in stating that dreams and visions were more able to show truths than historical documents.

“The place [of Jesus’ crucifixion] was *discovered*, and the fraud about it so zealously maintained [that the emperor Hadrian had hidden the site] was detected; some say that the facts were first disclosed by a Hebrew who dwelt in the East, and who derived his information *from some documents* which had come to him by paternal inheritance; but it seems *more accordant with truth to suppose* that God revealed the fact by means of signs and dreams; **FOR I DO NOT THINK** that human information is required when God thinks it best to make manifest the same” (*Hist.*, II.1).

Though Sozomen did not think that documents were on a par with signs and dreams, it was believed that Judas the Hebrew had such documents to justify the site of the Venus Shrine as the place of Jesus' crucifixion. Interestingly, we find that Christians themselves in the fourth century possessed no such documents. However, the Christians and Jewish authorities that Helena assembled in Jerusalem agreed that Judas had picked out the right place (Paulinus of Nola, *Letter* 31.5). And what a significant spot they selected! It was really the tomb area of the Maccabean priest/king, John Hyrcanus. He was one of the greatest Jewish heroes from the past. What "luck" that the cross of Jesus (and the other artifacts associated with the crucifixion) were conveniently found under the soil at the Venus Shrine. And now, every Christian in the world, including the Roman emperor himself, would be reverently bowing before the monumental Tomb of John Hyrcanus.

Jewish Authorities were Acquainted with the Geography of Jerusalem

There can really be no doubt that the Jewish scholars would have known that the Venus Shrine was actually the Tomb of John Hyrcanus (or very near the spot) and that it was not actually the place of Jesus' crucifixion. The Jewish leaders would have remembered the location of *every* significant site in pre-70 A.D. Jerusalem. After all, it was *their* Holy City (not some common city such as Rome, Alexandria or Antioch). Even Hadrian's restriction which forbade any circumcised person from entering Jerusalem was of no relevance because the decree did not apply to *women* or young Jewish men posing as Gentiles (who could always be circumcised at a later time in their lives.) Indeed, there are Jewish accounts that near the end of the second century and onward, it was common for some Jewish scholars to visit Jerusalem.

One might ask why the Jewish authorities were willing to oblige Helena and Constantine with the wrong spot, and the Tomb of John Hyrcanus at that? It may have been in retaliation for Constantine's

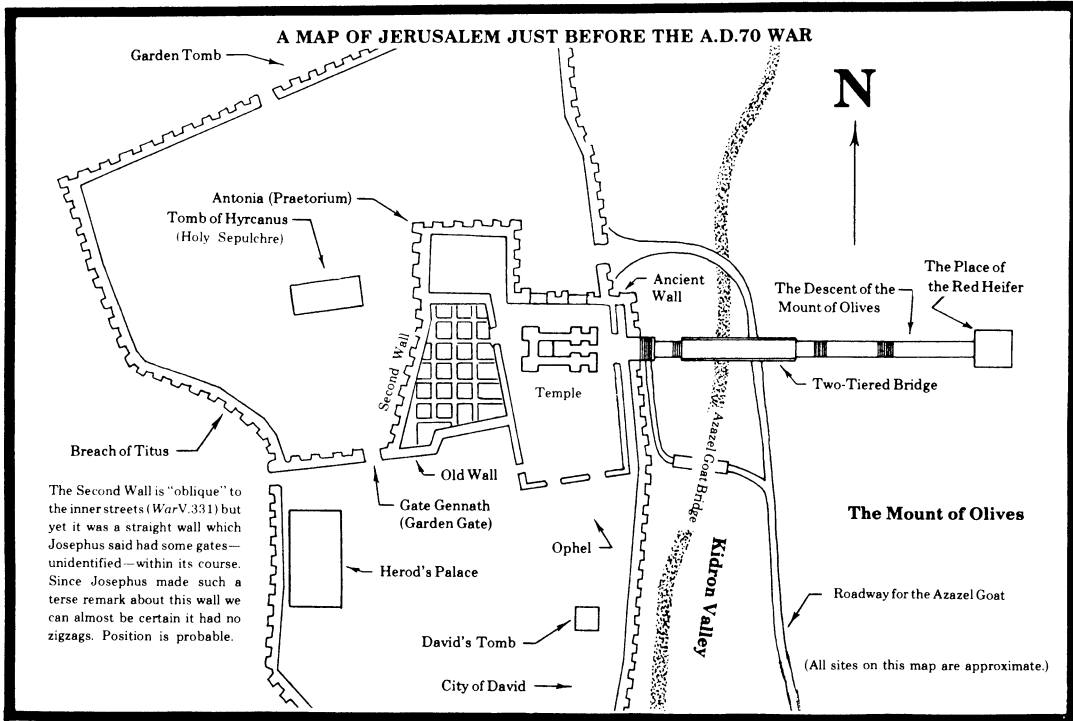
unfair persecution. We find that the emperor, upon becoming sole ruler at the defeat of Licinius in A.D.324, issued a decree which included his prayer to God for “the restoration of thy most holy dwelling-place” [that is, that the Temple of God in Jerusalem could be restored] (*Life of Constantine* II.55). But he had a change of heart at the Nicean Council in A.D.325. With advice from his Christian bishops, Constantine developed a hostile attitude towards anything Jewish, and this even included his decree of a year earlier that the Temple of God could be rebuilt in Jerusalem. At the Council of Nicaea he reversed his opinion of giving full religious toleration to the Jews. From A.D.325 onwards, it was: “Let us have nothing to do with the detestable Jewish crowd” (*ibid.*, III.18). And what happened? When the Jews in Jerusalem got the first decree of Constantine in A.D.324 that the Temple of God could be rebuilt, they immediately commenced its reconstruction. But by late A.D.325, Constantine’s mind had changed drastically on this matter. What he did was to order a stop to such building activities and he had the ears of the Jews cut off who were doing the construction. Since the Scriptures demanded that no maimed person of the Jews (including the priests) could take part in Temple rituals, this effectively put a stop to this rebuilding of the Temple in A.D.325 (John Chrysostom, *Against Judaizing*, Disc.V.10; VI.2).

Once this happened, Constantine then began to devote his energy to the construction of the basilica at the *newly* discovered “Golgotha.” Constantine began to look on this *new* Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the *new* Temple of God, and that this *new* structure was built to take the place of the Temple of Solomon and that of Herod. Some of the ceremonies in the Holy Sepulchre were modeled after those of the Jewish Temple and even the dedication of the building coincided with the date on which Solomon’s Temple was consecrated (see Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, pp.83,84). This action was intended by Constantine to place further salt in the wounds of the Jews.

Constantine's falling out of favor with the Jews made him command the Jews to quit building the Temple. He put a permanent stop to it by cutting off the ears of the builders. With such imperial afflictions lashed out against the Jewish people, it can be understood why they soon retaliated by pointing out the "true" site of Jesus' tomb to the queen mother in A.D.326. They, along with their spokesman named Judas, simply pointed out the Tomb of John Hyrcanus (which was then covered by the Temple of Venus) as the proper spot. And queen Helena bought their story hook, line and sinker! She was more than prone to do this because she and Constantine had received visions, dreams and signs that *this* must have been the true site of Jesus' passion. And when the "true" cross (and the other artifacts associated with the crucifixion) were conveniently discovered after digging into the soil at the site, there was then no turning back. This was enough to "prove" that the holiest spot in all Christendom had been found. And ever since, Christians from around the world have been reverently worshipping at the Tomb of John Hyrcanus.

Eusebius tried to Explain the Errors of Constantine, but to No Avail

As already explained in this book, Eusebius (on discovering what was happening in Jerusalem) hastily went to the emperor in Constantinople "and begged permission to pronounce a discourse on the subject of our Savior's sepulchre in his hearing" (*Life of Constantine* IV.33). To Eusebius the spot selected by Constantine was a most unfortunate one. That Temple of Venus was to Eusebius a "gloomy shrine of lifeless idols" and "a truly dreadful sepulchre of souls" (*ibid.*,33-40 for Eusebius' description). Eusebius knew it was a tomb area, but not where Jesus was buried. Eusebius, however, was thoroughly rebuffed by the emperor who would not even give him the courtesy of sitting down while he spoke! Constantine had made up his mind and there was no changing it. The only thing that Eusebius could do to justify the site was to call "this



“Golgotha” a “new Jerusalem” which had nothing to do with the history or geography of the Jerusalem that existed in Jesus’ time. He said: “And *it may be* that this was that *second* and *new* Jerusalem spoken of in the predictions of the prophets, concerning which such abundant testimony is given in the divinely inspired records” (*Life of Constantine* III.33). Constantine even approved of this appraisal because he looked on the new basilica as a *new* Temple of God instead of the old Temple of the Jews.

In other words, Eusebius could not find the slightest historical proof to show that the Venus Shrine was the place of Jesus’ crucifixion, so he simply said it may be reckoned the prophesied *second* or *new* Jerusalem, because it certainly had nothing to do with the history and geography of the Jerusalem here on this earth. Even as late as the dedication of the *new* Church of the Holy Sepulchre in A.D.336, Eusebius was still asking Constantine for some real and substantial evidence why he insisted on *this spot* (*The Oration of Eusebius* XVIII)? The fact is, Eusebius, and several other bishops at the time, knew that the Jewish authorities (particularly Judas who showed where the “true” cross of Jesus was located) were not telling the truth to Constantine and Helena. But the opinions of Eusebius went counter to the visions, dreams and signs that Constantine had experienced, and for the next 1600 years (unto our time today) Christians have been subjected to calling the Tomb of John Hyrcanus the holiest place on earth.

In closing this chapter, one might ask why the Jewish authorities (and Judas in particular) were so willing to point out the site of the Temple of Venus as the place of Jesus’ passion? It wasn’t simply to get back at Constantine for his cruel behavior to them (which some people might think was justification alone), but their motives were prompted for more serious reasons. By directing Christians to the Venus Shrine, it kept the area of the important Miphkad Altar on the Mount of Olives where the Red Heifer sacrifices (and those of the major sin offerings) were consumed to ashes free from

Christian shrines. The Jews knew that if the Temple of God were ever to be rebuilt (as the prophecies in the Bible said that it would be), then not only the Temple mount but the top of Olivet had to be free of foreign and, to them, unauthorized shrines and holy places.

Indeed, at the same time these Jewish authorities began pointing the Christians to the wrong locations, they also started to say that the place where the ashes of the sin offerings were placed was to the *north* of Jerusalem. In no way was this true (as I have explained in chapter one of this book). The Jews even went along with Christian belief and perpetuated the *new* teaching that the southwest hill (which has not the slightest significance with Old Testament rituals) was actually the “Mount Sion” of David. Anyone with any historical and geographical sense would have known this to be wrong. But this was a time when visions, dreams and signs ruled the day, and the Jews simply capitalized on the credulity of Constantine and the other Christians. One would find it difficult to blame them because of the way they had been recently treated by Constantine.

And Eusebius, why did not he and his fellow bishops protest more vigorously when they saw the Church of the Holy Sepulchre being built (and dedicated) in the wrong place? I feel that Eusebius believed that after Constantine’s death it would soon be remembered that it was the Mount of Olives where the actual crucifixion of Jesus took place and that an adjustment would then be made by Christians. What Eusebius did not count on was the parhelion that took place in A.D.350 which Christians interpreted as a direct sign from heaven that the *new* basilica was in fact the true place. With that marvelous heavenly sign, all historical evidences for the Mount of Olives evaporated into thin air. Heaven itself had now “picked” the proper spot and for the past 1600 years that parhelion has made Christians worship at the wrong site.

The Jewish Authorities were Jubilant

As for the Jewish authorities, nothing better could have happened in relation to protecting the true sacred sites mentioned in the Old Testament and those that existed in the time of Jesus. The hoax was ideal for the protection of the true sites. Indeed, what has been the outcome of this subterfuge? From that time forward, Christian attention was directed *away from* the *REAL* Mount Sion (located on the southeast hill of Jerusalem and by extension it embraced the Temple mount). And, by the Jewish leaders pointing out to Helena the site of the Temple of Venus as the place of Jesus' crucifixion, it had the effect of turning Christian attention *away from* the Miphkad Altar area on the top of the Mount of Olives (which had to be free of non-authorized shrines in order for a new Temple to function properly).

So, for the Jewish authorities to direct Christians of the fourth century to the southwest hill as being "Sion" and that the Tomb of John Hyrcanus underneath the Temple of Venus was the "true" site of the crucifixion of Jesus made good practical sense to them. It was a stroke of good luck that the extraordinary series of events involving the various dreams and visions of Constantine and his mother (and the parhelion of A.D.350) played directly into the hands of the Jewish authorities. Their plan to mis-direct Constantine and his mother to the wrong place was a stunning success. In accomplishing their task, they adequately protected the *real* biblical sites from having alien and unauthorized shrines raised up which would make it difficult in the future to build another Temple to God.

What is amazing is the fact that the Jewish authorities were so successful in proving this hoax to the Christians at the time, and that the hoax has persisted until today. This particular subterfuge must be reckoned the most ingenious plan for the safe keeping of Jewish holy places ever found in the records of history. And for the last 1600 years their plan has continued to work with the most pres-

tigious of Christian institutions agreeing with the hoax. Most Christians around the world to this very day (including those Christian authorities who are the highest ranking in the world) are still calling their most holy place the Church of the Holy Sepulchre without the slightest idea that this “holy place” is actually the tomb of the early Jewish king, John Hyrcanus. True enough, Christians are today bowing before the tomb of a Jewish king with their adoration and divine worship, but that king is not Jesus Christ, it is John Hyrcanus!