



Chapter 2

THE CAMP OF ISRAEL

The Jewish authorities in the first century patterned the Temple and its ritualistic ceremonies to agree with the essential parameters associated with the Tabernacle in the wilderness, which in turn were patterned after God's heavenly residence and other celestial real estate associated with God's realm in heaven (Hebrews 8:5; 9:23). It was thought in the time of Jesus that such arrangements of the Temple were necessary in order to duplicate as much as possible the teachings of the Law of Moses concerning the Tabernacle in the wilderness. This is why the Jewish authorities in the first century established a "Camp area" surrounding the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in the circular fashion that Moses ordained. This area of the circular "Camp" extended eastward 2000 cubits (about 3000 feet)—almost to the summit of the Mount of Olives. The Jewish authorities chose the radius of 2000 cubits because of the reference to the 2000 cubits mentioned in Joshua 3:4 that separated the Israelites from the Ark of the Covenant. The accounts in the earliest part of the Talmuds known as the Mishnah show the use of these 2000 cubits in early Jewish interpretation (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 2:5, see also *Sanhedrin* 1:5 and *Shebu'oth* 2:2 for the authority of the

Supreme Court of the Jews to set these limits of the “Camp”). And, as in the case of the Ark in the time of Joshua, the distance was conducted “by measure” (Joshua 3:4). This was by walking the distance with a reed or a line [a measure] in the hand (with vertical inclines reckoned in the measurement as determined by the priests). It was not in a direct measurement as a bird would fly.

It was just outside this 2000 cubits’ boundary of the “Camp” where the authorities built the Third Altar of the Temple called the Miphkad Altar — the Altar where the Red Heifer was sacrificed. This Third Altar was placed near the southern summit of Olivet, and directly east of the Temple itself. This particular altar was commanded by Moses to be located just “without the Camp,” and so it was. And, recall, the author of the Book of Hebrews said Jesus was crucified “without the Camp” (Hebrews 13:11-13).

A Panoramic View of Jerusalem

Now, looking westward from this Miphkad Altar which was the Altar of the Red Heifer on the Mount of Olives, one could see a panoramic view of the whole Temple area and much of the eastern parts of the city of Jerusalem. One could observe the sanctified roadway leading downslope from the Mount of Olives to the double tiered arched bridge over the Kidron Ravine. Beyond this bridge could be seen the single eastern gate which led to and from the Temple area called the Court of the Gentiles, and further west one could see the east entrance to the Temple proper which permitted Israelites into the Court of the Women and beyond that into the section for the Men. And just west of the men’s section and without too much straining of the eyes, because it was about half a mile west, the Altar of Burnt Offering could be seen located just to the south and east of the curtain that was in front of the Holy Place. This outer curtain (not to be confused with the inner curtain(s) that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies), we are told by the Jewish historian Josephus who was an eyewitness, was about 82 feet high and 24 feet wide. This was as high as one of our modern

eight story buildings. It was this curtain that tore in two, from the top down, at the time of Jesus' death. This curtain was suspended from a stone lintel that must have weighed thirty or more tons. These large dimensions help to show the grandeur of the Temple area and they also reveal that there would be no difficulty in seeing these majestic features from as far away as the Mount of Olives.

This unbroken view of the surrounding area looking westward from near the Miphkad Altar on the summit of the Mount of Olives would have been most spectacular and it is no wonder that the disciples of Jesus who were standing with him near this Third Altar of the Temple about two days before his crucifixion exclaimed how majestic the sight was (Matthew 24:1-3).

The Importance of Geography

The foregoing geographical overview of Jerusalem with the Temple and its ritualistic precincts provides us with some necessary benchmarks with which to comprehend some simple statements made in various parts of the New Testament that have great significance in locating the exact area of the crucifixion of Jesus. So plain are these geographical indications, to those who understand the ritualistic ceremonies of the Temple, that they furnish the reader of the New Testament with the essential tools to discover the crucifixion site. The conclusion is just like saying that "Golgotha" was situated at the summit of the Mount of Olives.

To gain an understanding of this fact, let us first look at the verses written by the author of the Book of Hebrews which afford the reader with a great deal of geographical information relative to the crucifixion of Jesus. I will at the present give only an overview of these New Testament geographical indications, but in the body of this book these matters will be shown in detail. Look at Hebrews 13:11.

"The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned *without the camp*"

This verse is written within a context speaking about the crucifixion of Jesus. Note that the author speaks of events in his own time while the Temple was yet standing. He said the blood of those sacrifices “*is brought*” into the Sanctuary. He was referring to the then existing Temple and not to the rituals of the Tabernacle in Moses’ time. And further, the next verse equates those particular animals (sin offerings) as typically referring to Jesus. The author then states that those animals burned “without the camp” were analogous to the suffering of Jesus who was also crucified “without the camp.” The author is giving a geographical equation that the people of Jerusalem in the first century would have been well aware. Giving a direction of the compass was not necessary for this well-known spot east of the Temple. The author of the Book of Hebrews continues.

“Wherefore Jesus also [like those sin offerings], that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered *without the gate*” (Hebrews 13:12,13).

Note that the author states that Jesus suffered *outside* one of the gates of the Camp of Israel that existed around Jerusalem in the time of Herod’s Temple. He buttressed his teaching with two further statements that it also took place “without the camp” (Hebrews 13:11,13). Recall that the “Camp area” was a circle with a boundary that was 2000 cubits (the radius) from the inner Temple. There were “gates” in this boundary which allowed people to enter or to exit the “Camp,” just like there were “gates” in the early “Camp” of the Israelites that Moses designed in the wilderness. It is important to realize that the boundary of the “Camp in the wilderness” also had “gates” located at certain points within that boundary (Exodus 32:26,27). These “gates” were NOT openings in stone walls with doors pivoted on hinges that could open or shut. The fact is, Israel in the wilderness had no stone walls associated with their encampments. These particular “gates” into the “Camp” that are mentioned by Moses were designated by the name “gates,” but they were really marked entrances into the encampment areas of certain

Israelite tribes that Moses positioned around the Tabernacle. The author of the Book of Hebrews said there was a similar “gate” in the boundary of the “Camp” that existed around Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. The author associated Jesus with going through that one “gate” on his way “without the camp” to the place of his suffering.

The Gates Were NOT Hinged Gates Within Stone Walls

Recall that the “Camp” of Israel in the wilderness with its “gates” did not have any visible walls surrounding it. It was a designated boundary that was imagined to exist some 2000 cubits away from the central part of the Tabernacle, at least, this is the way it was recognized in the first century. Likewise, the boundary of the similar “Camp” at Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, based on the wilderness pattern, was not indicated by walls. The actual stone walls on the four sides of Jerusalem were not the boundary of the “Camp.” It is most important to remember that the “Camp” limits were an imaginary circle (zodiacal in design, as we will see) that surrounded the central part of the Temple which extended outward with a radius of 2000 cubits (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 2:5, see also *Sanhedrin* 1:5 and *Shebu'oth* 2:2 for the authority of the Supreme Court of the Jews to set these limits of the “Camp”). This is why the Miphkad Altar for the Red Heifer and other sin offerings was located near the summit of the Mount of Olives just to the *east* of the boundary of the “Camp.” This was almost half a mile *east* of the *east* wall of Jerusalem.

Without any doubt, the location for the Miphkad Altar shows that the *east* wall of Jerusalem was NOT the eastern limit of the “Camp.” I mention this point specifically because some people have imagined that the “Camp” limits were in fact the four-sided walls that encompassed the city of Jerusalem. In no way was this true. The “Camp” boundary extended much beyond the walls of Jerusalem. Being “without the camp” meant being at least 2000 cubits away from the central part of the Temple. As stated before,

this means that the present site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the western part of Jerusalem (located just outside the former second [western] wall that some guess was the place of Jesus' crucifixion), along with the site of the Garden Tomb in the northern part of Jerusalem which some Protestants accept as the place of the crucifixion, ARE BOTH LOCATED well INSIDE the "Camp" of Israel that existed in the time of Jesus. True, both these sites were then just outside the western and the northern walls of Jerusalem, but both were still within the officially established "Camp" area that then surrounded the city. Those two popular sites are thoroughly disqualified from consideration for this reason alone.

Every Ceremony of the Temple Conducted Eastward

There is another geographical point that must be realized in regard to the site of Jesus' death, especially since the author of the Book of Hebrews equates certain rituals of the Temple with the crucifixion of Jesus. It is interesting that there is not a ritualistic ceremony or animal sacrifice which the New Testament states as typifying the sacrifice of Jesus that had anything to do with the southern, western or northern parts of Jerusalem.

Since it was reckoned that God resided in the Holy of Holies in the Temple with his face oriented toward the *east* where he could see all the official activities of his people Israel, all the ceremonies and the sacrifices in the Temple and those on the Mount of Olives were of necessity conducted EAST of the Holy of Holies. Whether the sacrifice was a Burnt Offering, a Meal Offering, a Peace Offering, a Sin Offering or a Trespass Offering (and also including all the Heave Offerings), they were prepared and sacrificed in the EASTERN parts of the Temple precincts or on the Mount of Olives. Indeed, every official ceremony, no matter what it was, that had to do with the ritualistic services ordained by Moses for the Tabernacle and later adopted for the Temple in the time of Jesus, was conducted in the EASTERN part of the Temple, so that God could witness all the ceremonies from the Holy of Holies. The most

significant of the sin offerings were burnt to ashes even further *east* at the Miphkad Altar near the summit of the Mount of Olives. And, true to pattern, this altar was directly EAST of the Temple proper.

Any reference by first century Jews to animal sacrifices being typically associated with the sufferings of Jesus would have directed their attention to the EAST side of the Temple and not to the west side where the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre is located. This western area is totally devoid of any sacrificial ritual of the Temple. Indeed, there was not a single ceremony of the Temple performed with the western side of the Temple in aspect. And note this. Since the Garden Tomb region is situated north and west of the Temple platform, it is also bereft of having any association with any sacrificial ritual or ceremony of the Temple.

It must always be kept in mind that all animals that were sacrificed in accordance with Mosaic Law were offered on the EAST side of the Temple. Any Jew of the first century would geographically direct his attention EASTWARD when any animal sacrifice, ritual or ceremony was typically associated with the sufferings of Jesus. No other direction was suitable from any symbolic point of view regarding the geography of the Temple.

So, when the author of the Book of Hebrews connected the sufferings of Jesus with certain sin offerings of the Temple that were taken through a particular “gate” and were led finally “without the camp” to be burnt according to the precise rules of the Temple, any reader in the first century would immediately direct his or her attention to the EAST side of the Temple. Indeed, they would do more than that. They would also direct their attention to a place beyond the 2000 cubits’ radius for the “Camp” measured from the central point in the Temple of this circular arrangement. That is because those particular sin offerings mentioned by the author of the Book of Hebrews were always taken through the *eastern* gate to a place “without the camp,” to the summit of the Mount of Olives. Let us now look at those particular sin offerings that the author of

Hebrews referred to. They will give us much enlightenment on the actual place where Jesus was crucified and why it is important to recognize these geographical facts.

Sacrificial Animals Taken Eastward from the Temple

The Book of Hebrews mentions certain sacrificial animals which had their blood taken into the Holy Place of the Temple and then were delivered *without* the gate and *without* the Camp of Israel to be burnt to ashes. We read in the Old Testament that these particular types of sacrifices were reckoned as sin offerings to which special rituals applied. Geographical requirements of the Temple rituals come into the picture in the offering of these particular animals. Two of those sin offerings are described in Leviticus 4. One was a bullock that was sacrificed if a priest sinned under certain circumstances. After killing the bullock at the slaughtering place on the north side of the Altar of Burnt Offering, the priest then entered the Holy Place and sprinkled its blood seven times before the inner curtain in front of the Holy of Holies. The priest then smeared some of its blood on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place (Leviticus 4:6,7). After a few other ceremonial steps, Moses gave a further command. "The whole bullock shall he carry forth *without the camp* unto a clean place [note that this was to a single clean place, not to several places], where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt" (Leviticus 4:12). Besides this sacrifice, another sin offering was also sacrificed in a similar manner if the whole congregation of Israel through some ignorance committed a national sin (Leviticus 4:13-21). A precise geographical location was intended by Moses as the place to perform these sacrificial ceremonies.

There was one place where these sin offerings were to be taken. It was where the ashes were poured out. As a matter of fact, Moses did more than simply tell Israel of this one place. He reinforced the importance of the location in a double sense to make certain that no mistake would be made in performing the ceremony at the proper

site. Notice that Moses identified the place twice: "where the ashes are poured out ... where the ashes are poured out" (Leviticus 4:12). This special area "outside the camp" (and it was a single area) was further described as being the site where the ashes from ALL THE ANIMALS burnt on the Altar of Burnt Offering (with some of the ashes gathered daily in a receptacle at the eastern base of the Altar of Burnt Offering) were finally deposited in the ritualistic ceremonies at the Miphkad Altar at the summit of the Mount of Olives. Moses said, and the Jewish authorities in the time of Jesus followed Moses precisely: "The priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar [in a receptacle near its base]. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and CARRY FORTH THE ASHES WITHOUT THE CAMP unto a clean place [the same "clean place" that was mentioned earlier]" (Leviticus 6:10,11 emphasis mine).

This "clean place" *without* the Camp of Israel became known as the place "where the ashes are poured out" (Leviticus 4:12). There was only *one* such place in Jerusalem. The prophet Ezekiel called it "the appointed place" (or, in Hebrew, the *Miphkad*) and he said it was located "without the sanctuary" (Ezekiel 43:21), that is, it was outside the precincts of the main Temple. It was actually an *OUTWARD* extension of the main Sanctuary (with the main Sanctuary called comparatively the *INWARD* Sanctuary). Ezekiel even called the east gate of the Temple "the gate of the *OUTWARD* sanctuary" (Ezekiel 44:1 compared with 43:1; the KJV has the correct rendering of 44:1). That east gate led to this "*OUTWARD* [eastern] Sanctuary." At designated times, the priests took the sin offerings of Leviticus chapters 4,6 and 16 and Ezekiel 43:21 to this "Outward Sanctuary." The book of Hebrews refers to these rites.

"Neither by the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the

eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:12-14).

These bulls and goats, as well as the Red Heifer, that the author of the Book of Hebrews mentioned above, were taken to the altar “without the sanctuary” (Ezekiel 43:21) to be burnt to ashes. They were taken *east* to the top of the Mount of Olives. When people begin to realize that Jesus himself was killed and had his blood sprinkled on the Mount of Olives, then the symbolic value of these animal sacrifices mentioned by the author of Hebrews takes on an importance that many people have not realized before. Indeed, Jesus was crucified adjacent to (about a stone’s throw away) from where the principal sin offerings mentioned above were burnt to ashes.

The second clue for identifying the crucifixion site of Jesus is the fact that these rituals had to occur just over 2000 cubits from a central point in the Temple. The precise point in the Temple for the center of this circle will be explained in chapter four, but what it does show for the present is the fact that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Garden Tomb area are not qualified for being sites for the crucifixion of Jesus because both of them are located well within the 2000 cubits limit of the Camp of Israel.

As a matter of fact, we now need to look specially at one of the most sublime and significant animal sacrifices that first century Christians saw typically to represent Jesus, and this sacrifice was conducted just over 2000 cubits *east* of the Temple. That sacrifice was that of the Red Heifer. The author of Hebrews drew a precise attention to it (“the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean”). Besides the Book of Hebrews, we have the “Letter of Barnabas,” written in the last part of the first century. Christians saw in the sacrifice of the Red Heifer an exact analogy with the crucifixion of Jesus. The next chapter will explain.