



Chapter 12

THE SANHEDRIN AND THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

The village of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives was a most important religious center for the Jewish authorities in the period of Jesus and the apostles. It was a walled village which was the only area outside the walls and camp of Jerusalem that was considered by the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court of the nation) to be an official part of the city of Jerusalem. In this village was one of the two seats of the great Sanhedrin of seventy-one members. The prime seat of the Sanhedrin was in the Temple at the Chamber of Hewn Stones located just to the south and east of the Altar of Burnt Offering.

The other seat of the Sanhedrin was at this walled village of Bethphage located just east of the western summit of the Mount of Olives (a little to the east of the Miphkad Altar where the Red Heifer was burnt to ashes and the Day of Atonement sacrifices were burnt). There were specific decisions of the Sanhedrin that were reserved for determination only at this official seat of the court in Bethphage. Those were decisions affecting what were the limits of the camp of Israel around the city of Jerusalem (and this included where the Red Heifer could be burnt). This also embraced what dis-

tricts surrounding Jerusalem were to be reckoned as inside the city of Jerusalem. This also included what were to be the dimensions of the Temple (whether enlarged or restricted). All measurements involving the finding of a dead body between two cities (Deuteronomy 21:1-9) were done by members of the Sanhedrin from Bethphage located “outside the camp.” Why? For one reason, measuring from a dead body necessitated the members of the Court having to touch the dead body. This rendered them “unclean” for seven days and they could not enter the Camp. So, the part of the Court that performed these functions was placed “outside the camp” at Bethphage. It was also at Bethphage where death sentences were validated for rebellious leaders of the nation as shown in Deuteronomy 17:8-13, and where excommunications of the extremely wicked took place (because excommunications required a person to be legally barred from entering the Camp of Israel in the future) (*Sanhedrin* 14a,b; *Sotah* 44b; 45a).

It is this latter requirement concerning rebellious elders that is important to us in our present context. Since Jesus was recognized as an Elder in Israel, he was consistently called “Rabbi” by the people (John 1:49; 6:25), the final judgment to condemn him to death had to be made at Bethphage to satisfy the legal demands that were enforced in the time of Jesus. Indeed, the Talmudic scholars specifically state that Jesus was accused and convicted by the Sanhedrin of practicing magic and leading Israel astray. For this he was excommunicated from Israel (*Sotah* 47a). Plainly stated, it meant that Jesus was “put out of the Camp of Israel.” This meant, that from the point of view of the Jewish authorities at Jerusalem, Jesus died on the tree of crucifixion as a Gentile, not as an Israelite!

This particular judgment of excommunication, which was given to Jesus just before his death, was validated as the final act of the Sanhedrin at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Once a person was excommunicated, it was later interpreted that the righteous Israelite had to remain at least four cubits (six feet) away from the one

excommunicated (*Baba Metzia* 59b). While judgments of the Sanhedrin against normal Israelites could be done “within the camp,” it appears that judgments for those who were excommunicated (who were “put out of the Camp” and made to be non-Israelites, as well as to be cursed) were performed “outside the camp” at the Court of the Sanhedrin at Bethphage. It makes sense that a rebellious elder was taken “outside the camp” (into the so-called “Land of Nod”) as a part of his excommunication process.

King David in his Trials Was a Type of Jesus, the Messiah

In regard to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, it was held in Christian circles that King David of Israel was the person who most typified the role that Jesus played as the Messiah for Israel. In the New Testament, the experiences of David are often equated with those of Jesus. As a matter of fact, events in David’s life were seen to have a re-occurrence in a spiritual sense in the life of Jesus, and this is amply shown in the interpretations afforded by the New Testament (e.g. Psalm 22 was applied specifically to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus in Matthew 27:46, etc.). With this comparison of Jesus with King David, there is an interesting parallel in regard to the excommunication of Jesus before he met his death on the tree of crucifixion. Let us notice these important points.

King David was also Excommunicated from Israelite Society

We are told that David himself was exiled from his throne, exiled from his capital city Jerusalem, and exiled (and even excommunicated) from being an Israelite. This happened to David when his own son Absalom betrayed him and took over the kingdom and the hearts of the people of Israel. Not only that, at this moment in David’s life, the Ark of God (which was God’s residence) was sent to be with Absalom and it was no longer with David. At this same time David was being cursed and called a “Son of Belial” (a sign of excommunication), and David even allowed those judgments of excommunication to take place upon him (see II Samuel chapters

15 and 16 for the complete narrative explaining this).

And what is interesting to all of this, as seen through early Christian eyes, is the fact that David found himself in this excommunicated condition at a spot on the Mount of Olives just like Jesus found himself in the same type of condition on the same mountain. It was on the Mount of Olives that all the above mentioned events in David's life took place. Note what the Scriptures state:

“And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up” (II Samuel 15:30).

This is very typical of the same thing that happened to Jesus and under the same circumstances. While Pilate called Jesus the king of the Jews (John 18:39), we find Jesus while being that “king” ascending the Mount of Olives carrying the cross-piece for his crucifixion while his people (the Jews) were rejecting him just like the people of Israel rejected David at this time of David's trial. Indeed, David was being exiled by his own son and his relatives as well as some of his closest friends and colleagues. And at this very time, while at the summit of the Mount of Olives in this state of supreme degradation and humiliation, David composed some of his most stirring and effective Psalms.

If one will look carefully at the fourteen Psalms commencing with Psalm 20 and proceeding through to Psalm 33, it will be easily seen that these Psalms best depict the very time that David was expelled from his throne and from governing his people when his son Absalom took over the kingship and ordered that his father David be slain. The majority of people in Israel who had gone over to Absalom designed to kill David from that time forward. Psalm 22 must have been written at this time. Indeed, Psalm 22 has David beginning with a reference to God as One who had forsaken him (“My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me”). This was the very verse that Jesus used at the time of his crucifixion. By using

the phrase “My God,” rather than the familiar “My Lord” (or YHVH), David was approaching God in a non-intimate way, as though he was disfellowshipped from God and from the people of Israel whose God was YHVH.

The context of Psalm 22 shows that the historical circumstances surrounding the composition of the Psalm clearly reflect this very time when David was on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem at the time of his lowest prestige in his life. This was when Absalom had taken over control of Israel and David was in an excommunicated state (even being called a “Son of Belial,” which signified an exceptionally evil person). No other time in the period of David’s life meets the historical conditions mentioned in Psalm 22 than the time he was excommunicated at Absalom’s rebellion. The same thing applies to Psalms 20 through 33.

The Psalms of David Reflect Important Periods of his Life

When one surveys the fourteen Psalms (Psalms 20 to 33) that were all written within the same type of context which shows degradation and humiliation at the lowest level of David’s career, there can be no doubt that they were composed at the same period of time. One should read these 14 Psalms with this suggestion in mind. When one reads them in sequence, there are a number of things within those Psalms that reflect what happened to King David as he was on the Mount of Olives at the time of his excommunication, and they reflect remarkably with the very things that Jesus experienced while he was also on the Mount of Olives at the time of Jesus’ excommunication from Israelite society. But, along with the sign of degradation within these Psalms, there is also a glimmer of hope that is given now and then. Indeed, in Psalm 30 there is the statement that provides a type of resurrection theme. Note what David said. “O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave” (Psalm 30:3). David considered that the victory over his ordeal at that time in his life was tantamount to being resurrected from the dead. Interestingly, this is precisely what happened to

Jesus after his ordeal was over on the same Mount of Olives. The resurrection of Jesus took place on the Mount of Olives. [One should put a comma between the word “house” and the words “of David” that are found in the title of Psalm 30. It was not David’s house that was being dedicated at the time, but the dedication was to another house that is not identified in the text. It could well have been a “house” dedicated on the Mount of Olives at the time for a place of worship, because we later read of the Beth ha-Deshen, “The House of the Ashes” which was a part of the Temple ritual of the Red Heifer sacrifice for Israel, and this “house” was on the Mount of Olives.] And remarkably, it was at this very spot on Olivet where King David was judged by God for the things that brought Absalom to power, and David allowed the judgment to happen (II Samuel 16:9-14). And it was also the spot where Jesus was judged by God for the sins of the world that were placed on the back of Jesus, according to the teachings of the New Testament.

King David was like Jesus, and Jesus was like King David

These events in the life of David all happened just on the *eastern* outskirts of the city of Jerusalem at the summit of the Mount of Olives. It is interesting that Jesus while he was on the tree of crucifixion stated about his executioners: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), and we also find King David stating at a later time when he found out that his son Absalom was killed (who had done everything in his power to kill his own father): “O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! *would God I had died for thee*, O Absalom, my son, my son!”(II Samuel 18:33). In other words, David, in spite of what his son had done to him, would have died in the place of his own murderous son so that Absalom could live. Jesus did the same thing, but his forgiveness reached out to include the whole world. In fact, Jesus did die in the place of the whole world on the Mount of Olives in the same region where King David had his trial of excommunication and where he wrote Psalm 22.

Judgments at the Gates of Cities

This region of the Mount of Olives became important in later times, not only because of what happened to King David at the summit of Olivet, but because the mountain was intimately connected with many of the rituals and ceremonies of the Temple. The reason that these special types of decisions were to be made at this select village of Bethphage on the east side of Jerusalem (which was at the *eastern* limits of the city of Jerusalem) is because it was necessary that certain judicial actions be made at the entrance or the gate to Jerusalem (or if local decisions were made by lesser Sanhedrins associated with the various towns throughout Judaea, they were held in the gates or entrances to the towns). Some of these judgments involved people who were unclean and could not enter the cities. For this reason, many of the early courts of Israel were conducted at the entrance to cities or their territories. There were biblical reasons for certain courts to be at the gates of cities. Note Proverbs 31:23 which says “Her husband is known *in the gates*, when he sitteth among the elders.” Also: “Execute the judgment of truth and peace *in your gates*” (Zechariah 8:16).

It must be understood that the early societies of Israel were dominated by their basic adherence to the Law of Moses. That Law made strict distinctions between people who were “clean” and “unclean,” and these categories of purification had nothing to do with a person’s righteousness or lack of righteousness. For example, if a woman were in the period of menstruation, she was automatically rendered as an “unclean” person and could not perform certain religious duties designed only for those who were in a state of purification. She was “unclean” for seven days (no matter if her actual period of menstruation was shorter) (Leviticus 15:25-28). Even if her husband touch her or the bed on which she slept, he would also be ceremonially “unclean.”

Though such “uncleanness” was a very common thing in Israel (both for men and women), the courts still had to function in rela-

tionship to such people. This is why special areas were devised “at the gates” of the cities so that such people could be judged when times demanded it. They could not enter the cities (or holy regions) until they were “clean.” In the case of Jerusalem, which was the capital city of the nation, the principal gate to the city was on the eastern side just beyond the camp (that is, outside the camp). This judicial center for these special matters also resembled the location of the Tent of Meeting (Moses’ own tent) that was located on some occasions on the east side of the encampment, “outside the camp” of Israel, while they were in the wilderness (Exodus 33:7-11). This eastern entrance to the camp was considered to be the eastern gate into the proper city limits of Jerusalem. There was no actual gate that we know of at this eastern entrance on the Mount of Olives, just as there was no actual gate into the camp in the time of Moses (Exodus 32:26,27). This is where Moses judged Israel in the time Aaron raised up the golden calf. This is where Moses counted the dead people, 3000 in number, who died in judgment because they sinned regarding the calf that Aaron had raised up (Exodus 32:28). This counting (or census) of dead people by Moses had to be done “outside the camp.” Indeed, all censuses were conducted at this center “outside the camp” because most censuses involved people who were permanently or temporarily unclean and for this reason all matters of censuses (and measurements involving dead bodies) had to be conducted by the Sanhedrin at this location “outside the camp.” This is why the walled priestly village of Bethphage with its Court of the Sanhedrin was located just east of the Miphkad Altar on the Mount of Olives.

The reasons that such things were done at the gate to the camp was to fulfill the biblical stipulation that the elders of the land were supposed to sit in the gates (or the entrance) to the cities of the Israelites at certain times of judgment when people were unclean and could not enter the camp. Thus, the Sanhedrin had the village of Bethphage built just to the east of the city limits of Jerusalem to resemble this type of Tent of Moses where he judged Israel and it

also fulfilled the example of having elders to make certain judgments at the gates into Jerusalem.

Bethphage was a Priestly Center throughout History

There was also a further example from the Old Testament that gave them a reason for having such a priestly village at the summit of Olivet. There had been a village of priests at this very spot in the time of David. It was called Nob. The village of Nob, however, was destroyed by Doeg the Edomite. Note that after the Philistines took the Ark of God from Shiloh (the first Sanctuary site), the Tabernacle finally came to rest at a place called Nob which became the chief sanctuary of YHVH before Solomon built the Temple. This is where Jesus said David illegally ate the shewbread (Matthew 12:3,4). It was a center for the priests (I Samuel 22:11) but it was destroyed not long after David was there by Doeg the Edomite (I Samuel 22:20-23; see Psalm 52). When David at a later time went to the summit of Olivet to mourn for the actions of his son Absalom (II Samuel 15:30-37), there was no city there, just an altar for worshipping God. Yet, the fact that David built an altar at the site and prayed for himself and Jerusalem at this spot was important to later people. This is where the most severe of David's trials took place when he was excommunicated from Israel at the time Absalom took over the kingship. But David gained the victory and his Psalms (Psalm 20 to 33) that he wrote at the time show this. The subsequent victory of David was no doubt one of the reasons the Jewish authorities raised up a village of priests to take the place of the earlier Nob after the time of David. Isaiah later spoke of the village of Nob as overlooking the Temple and the city of Jerusalem (see Isaiah 10:24-34 and especially verse 32). It is most probable that the Bethphage of Jesus' time was simply a replacement for this earlier city with which David and Isaiah were acquainted. That is why it retained its priestly status. It was a village of priests.

This place that was called Nob, though scholars are not yet sure

of its exact location, was clearly on the Mount of Olives because the Temple and all Jerusalem could be seen from it. Jones in his *Proper Names of the Old Testament* says that Nob means High Place, and this refers to a top of a mountain. This could answer to the later Bethphage which was a city of priests in the time of Jesus and Origen in the third century said priests lived in Bethphage.

Now note this important point. The word Bethphage means the House of Unripe Figs. There were two symbolic reasons for naming this priestly village by this name. It will be remembered that in the Garden in Eden there were two trees that God specifically selected for the attention of Adam and Eve. One was the Tree of Life and the other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Our first parents partook of this latter tree and they were then expelled from the Garden for this sin (the first sins ever committed by mankind). What type of tree was this that Adam and Eve partook of? While many different types of trees have been guessed (the pomegranate, date, grape and even the apple), the only tree mentioned in the context of Genesis describing the “fall” of Adam and Eve is the “fig.” It is to be noted that as soon as Adam and Eve knew they had sinned, they sewed fig leaves together to hide their shame. It is well documented among the Jews that this was understood to be the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

“What was the tree of which Adam and Eve ate? Rabbi Yosi says: It was the fig tree. . .the fig whereof he ate the fruit opened its doors and took him in” (Midrash, *Bereshith Raba*, 15,7).

“The fig leaf which brought remorse to the world” (*ibid.*, 19,11).

“The tree of which the first man ate. . .Rabbi Nehemiah says: It was the fig, the thing wherewith they were spoilt, yet were they redressed by it. As it is said: And they stitched a fig-leaf” (*Berakoth* 40a, and see *Sanhedrin* 70a).

In the non-canonical Book of Adam and Eve (20:5) it says: “I sought a leaf to cover up my nakedness and found none, for, when I ate, the leaves withered off every tree in my plot except for the fig,

and from it I took leaves and it made me a girdle, *even from the tree of which I ate.*”

Thus the fig tree was believed to represent the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Some might ask at this juncture: What difference does it make? Granted, it may seem like an exercise in futility and unnecessary speculation. But this would be a mistake. The fact is, the symbol of the fig tree as being the “evil” tree in the Garden of Eden figures in a prominent episode that occurred during the week just before Jesus was crucified. Once the symbolic meaning of the fig tree is recognized, then this special event can make a great deal of doctrinal sense in regard to the role that Jesus played in expelling “sin” from the world. I am talking about the time when he saw a fig tree on the Mount of Olives as he was approaching Jerusalem, and he cursed it. This fig tree would have been very near if not directly adjacent to the village of Bethphage which meant “House of Unripe Figs.” Before that day was over that particular fig tree was withered up and completely dead. This has a remarkable figurative meaning to it.

Four days before his crucifixion, Jesus left Bethany and started walking towards Jerusalem. When he was near the summit of the Mount of Olives, opposite Bethphage, he noticed on the side of the road a fig tree. He went to it and finding no figs on its branches (yet the tree was covered with leaves), he cursed *that fig tree* and said: “Let no man eat fruit from you henceforth forever. And his disciples heard it” (Mark 11:14). The *cursing* of that particular fig tree has baffled men ever since. The truth is, even Mark said that “it was not the season of figs” (verse 13). Indeed, difficulty in understanding the curse of Jesus went further than that. It was not even the time for fig trees to have leaves! It has puzzled people for generations why Jesus was so upset with a fig tree that by nature should not have had figs or leaves.

It is certain that the whole event was a miracle from start to finish. To produce a sign of this nature must have involved a great deal

of symbolic importance. If it were not of major significance then the event makes little sense and certainly there would be little relevance for its occurrence. But it does have symbolic meaning.

The fact that the fig tree had leaves was in itself a miracle because leaves would not have naturally been on the fig tree for at least a month later. Also, there should not have been any figs on the tree. Since the tree was located on a main thoroughfare into Jerusalem and with the heavy population around the city at that Passover season, it is not to be imagined that Jesus expected to find a few dried figs of last year's crop on the branches. The tree would surely have been stripped clean of its fruit. Jesus must have known that he would not find any figs on this unusual fig tree. The truth is, however, the lack of figs and the abundance of leaves were important factors in this miraculous occurrence. In this scene we are provided with a most important symbolic teaching by Jesus with his actions. It will figure in with the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Fig Tree and its Symbolism

Note that the next day after Jesus cursed that fig tree, the disciples found it *withered* (Mark 11: 20,22; Matthew 21:18-21). What was significant about this? It meant that the type of tree that Adam and Eve first ate which brought sin and death to them (and in an extended sense to all humanity) was now *withered* and *dead*.

Tradition had it that the only tree under Adam's care in the Garden of Eden that did not shed its leaves after our first parents took of the fruit was the fig tree. It was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But with this miracle of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, it meant *that* symbolic tree was now withered and dead. It signified that no longer would that type of tree be in the midst of humanity to encourage mankind to sin in the manner of our first parents.

But there is even more teaching. It meant that when Jesus went to that miraculous tree looking for some figs to eat (like Eve did),

Jesus could not find any whatsoever. This signified that there was not going to be a repetition of what Eve (and later Adam) did in regard to the fig tree that they partook of. One fig tree was the instrument to bring “sin” into the world, but the Son of God could not find any figs on his fig tree that was typical of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Jesus cursed *that* symbolic tree at the top of Olivet so that no man would eat of it again. And to complete his victory over sin, a short time later Jesus was going to be sacrificed for the sins of the world just a few yards away from this *withered* and *dead* tree. What Jesus was doing in the last week of his life on earth was acting out a symbolic victory over all the factors in the Garden of Eden around which our first parents failed. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was now *withered* and *dead* .

But there was a second symbolic meaning to the withering of the fig tree. There was the village of priests called Bethphage (House of Unripe Figs) along side that withered tree. And Bethphage was where the Sanhedrin met for special sentencing, especially that dealing with whom they considered to be a rebellious elder who needed to be excommunicated. And why was this priestly village called Bethphage? It meant “The House of Unripe Figs.” The Jewish authorities understood that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil from which Adam and Eve ate that brought sin into the world was the fig (not the apple). Adam and Eve took leaves from that very tree from which they ate to hide their nakedness from God. But, in the case of the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem at Bethphage, they were supposed to act as God’s judges and thereby they were supposed to be rendered free of sin in their adjudications. This is probably why they named the village on Olivet the “House of Unripe Figs” because at this place of the court there were supposed to be no ripe figs available to tempt the judges to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil like was the case with Adam and Eve.

The Village of Bethphage was most Important

There was another reason for naming the village Bethphage. Figs are always unripe at the start of the growing season. This place of Bethphage was the site where the Sanhedrin determined legal measurements for the nation. It was where they set the limits on sacred and secular things (the size of the city, the Temple, the day to start the sacred calendar, when to observe the festival days, the conducting of censuses, etc.). This part of the court was located east of Jerusalem and away from the city lights so that the heavens could be observed for determining when the new season for the months and years would commence, etc. It was also from Bethphage where fire signals were sent to the Jewish communities outside Jerusalem so that they could determine when to observe the festival seasons with those at Jerusalem. In a word, it was from Bethphage where the official measurement standards for the nation were enacted and legalized.

The site of the Sanhedrin at Bethphage also had another unique role. It was also the place where the most rebellious of the elders in Israel were either excommunicated or sentenced to die. Indeed, after Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin at the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple itself, and afterward he was taken to Pilate to obtain Roman permission for his death, he was then taken to the Mount of Olives to await the final sentence of the Sanhedrin when they gave their decision for his death at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. The New Testament says that all the chief priests, scribes and elders of the Jews witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:41), and in the Talmud it states that all the elders of the Sanhedrin including the High Priest had to make the decision for such things at the site of the Sanhedrin at Bethphage (*Sanhedrin* 14b). While crucifixion was regarded more particularly as a Gentile form of execution than a Jewish one, it has to be remembered that the Sanhedrin had officially excommunicated Jesus from being an Israelite, so from their point of view Jesus died a Gentile, not a Jew.

The Symbolic Importance of Bethphage

There is even further New Testament significance to these matters. It was no accident that Jesus told his disciples to go into Bethphage and obtain a donkey for him to ride into Jerusalem to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah about the Jews adoring their king riding on a donkey. By getting this donkey at Bethphage was like saying that Jesus went to the Supreme Court for his transport.

But there is even more. Note that when Jesus departed on the donkey from Bethphage that the people praised him as the King of Israel (Matthew 21:1-17). Jesus then returned to Bethany on the east side of the Mount of Olives and the next morning started once again into Jerusalem. He then saw the fig tree (note carefully that this was a fig tree) that had no eatable fruit on it. Indeed, the texts say that it was *not yet the time for ripe figs* because it was so early in the season. But Christ, finding no ripe figs on it, cursed it then and there. This event occurred on the Mount of Olives and right next to the village of Bethphage (the House of Unripe Figs). Soon that fig tree withered away and died, within a matter of hours.

Jews living at the time in Jerusalem (without the slightest doubt in their minds) would have known the significance that Jesus was placing on that miraculous event. That fig tree itself was a “Tree of Unripe Figs” which was located next to the village of Bethphage (with the name “House of Unripe Figs”) which was the site where the Sanhedrin determined the limits of things that were holy and things not holy. In effect, Jesus through the miraculous withering of that fig tree of unripe figs was showing the demise and final authority of the Sanhedrin to make decisions at Bethphage (the House of Unripe Figs). Later Jewish interpretation said that the verse in the Song of Songs which said: “the fig tree putteth forth her green figs” (2:13) was figurative of the coming days of the Messiah, see the fifth century Jewish work called the *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* (Piska 5:9). But here was Jesus, doing the work of the Messiah, causing the fig tree with no figs to dry up. The official work of God was to

be given to a nation bringing forth proper results. Recall, Jesus later stated in the Temple: “Therefore say I unto you. The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43).

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil No Longer on Earth

Yet there is even more symbolism to this withering of the fig tree and its unripe figs. Since it was recognized that the fig tree represented the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (again, not the apple), Jesus cursed the tree that introduced sin into the world with our first parents. The symbol Jesus was creating showed that the type of tree that introduced sin into the world will not be available for humans as a temptation to sin in the future. This, of course, became the case when he was crucified a short time later for the sins of the world not but a few yards from that symbolically accursed tree. It was also the spot where King David composed Psalm 22 (the very Psalm that Jesus quoted at his crucifixion).

It also ought to be pointed out once again that just to the west of Bethphage was the Beth ha-Deshen (the House of the Ashes) where the Red Heifer and other sin offerings were burnt to ashes at a “clean place” called by the prophet Ezekiel “the *OUTWARD* Sanctuary” (Ezekiel 44:1). It seems reasonable to believe that Bethphage, which was exclusively a village of priests, was a site designed to be the living quarters for those who attended this “*OUTWARD* Sanctuary” on the Mount of Olives. Since this area was also “without the Camp,” this allowed it to be a place where the defiled and impure Israelites as well as those ritualistically clean could assemble for legal purposes involving matters of state. This allowed even the non-purified Israelites to be heard by the Sanhedrin in its chambers located on Bethphage. This was also where the censuses of the nation could take place because both the defiled and the purified could be personally counted and numbered at the *Miphkad* (Numbering) Altar.