



Chapter 18

ACCEPTING THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE OF VENUS

The evidence in this book demonstrates that the site of Jesus' crucifixion was on the Mount of Olives. Even Christian traditions down to the time of Constantine show that the only area revered by Christians as having any sign of holiness was the *cave/tomb* on the Mount of Olives. But the queen mother Helena and Constantine selected a spot at the Temple of Venus built by the emperor Hadrian right after A.D.135. This region was in *the exact opposite direction* from the true site which the Scriptures show was *east* of Jerusalem and the Temple. In doing this maneuver they had to resort to dreams and visions in determining the site (and the church historian Sozomen about 100 years later said this was the safest method in deciding such issues, *Eccl.Hist.* II.1). Another historian who wrote slightly earlier admitted that Helena, in trying to locate Jesus' sepulchre, finally "*after much difficulty, by God's help, she discovered it*" (Socrates, *Eccl.Hist.* I.17). Sozomen also recorded how difficult it was to find the crucifixion site: "It was no easy matter to discover the Lord's sepulchre" (*ibid.*).

One wonders why locating the tomb of Jesus was so "difficult"

and “no easy matter” if there had been a consistent and prevailing tradition among the Christians in Jerusalem that the site of the Temple of Venus was where Jesus’ passion took place? The truth is, there were no traditions whatever to support that pagan shrine as being the proper place. This is one of the main reasons why Constantine and Helena relied on visions and dreams to discover the “true” sepulchre. As a matter of fact, Sozomen related that Helena not only depended on the intervention of God with supernatural signs but she also sought professional human help as well.

“Some say that the facts [about Jesus’ tomb] were first disclosed by a Hebrew who dwelt in the East, and who derived his information from some documents which had come down to him by paternal inheritance” (Sozomen, *Eccl.Hist.*, II.1).

It was actually more than a single Jewish man that she consulted. Paulinus of Nola in A.D.403 gave the following explanation of how Helena uncovered the lost tomb of Jesus.

“She became eager to obtain information solely on the site of the crucifixion. So she sought out not only Christians full of learning and holiness, *but also the most learned of the Jews* to inform her of their native wickedness in which, the poor Jews, they even boast. Having summoned *them* she assembled *them* in Jerusalem. Her resolve was strengthened by *the unanimous witness of all* about the site. There was then, undoubtedly under the impulse of a revelation she had experienced, that she ordered digging operations to be prepared on that very site” (*Letter 31.5*).

Again, one might wonder why Jewish leaders, who had been summoned from around Palestine, would be eager to point out the Temple of Venus as the place of Jesus’ crucifixion? Whatever the case, Paulinus of Nola said the Jewish authorities told Helena that the pagan shrine was the proper place. But if Helena had to rely on the knowledge of Jewish scholars, why would this have been necessary if a realization of the true sepulchre had been handed down by Christian people in Jerusalem from generation to generation? What Helena apparently wanted from the Jewish authorities was a

confirmation of the visions and dreams which she and her son Constantine had experienced. So she called in the Jewish authorities to substantiate the reliability of her persuasions. She no doubt thought the “wicked Jews” had kept a record of the site and had been hiding it from Christian knowledge. And what happened? The Jewish leaders obliged the queen mother with their expert understanding on the matter! They pointed out the Temple of Venus as the true site — or rather, it was one of their spokesmen who apparently had the actual documentation handed down to him from his parents which could prove the Temple of Venus to be the real place of Jesus’ passion. Only this *one man* had the written evidence to support the truth of the site.

Only One Jewish Resident of Jerusalem had the Historical Documents

Interestingly, the individual who supposedly had the historical documentation was a Jewish man whose name was *Judas*. This Judas told Helena that the Temple of Venus was indeed the proper site of Jesus’ crucifixion. With this valuable historical evidence provided by Judas, Helena then, “by an impulse of a revelation” (as Paulinus of Nola supposed it to have been), had her attendants dig into the ground at the place which Judas told her. And amazingly, they came upon three crosses superimposed upon one another. But that wasn’t the end of it. Nearby was found a tablet which had upon it the exact words which the New Testament said Pilate placed above Jesus’ head. Also, some early references state that they found in the same spot a sponge and a reed like those associated with Jesus’ passion. One might ask how such delicate items could survive some 300 years buried in the earth, but the fact that these perishable items were found with the three crosses was apparently not questioned.

Finding these wonderful artifacts in the place which Judas told Helena was the site of Jesus’ crucifixion (especially unearthing the three crosses) was an outstanding archaeological discovery as far as

the queen mother was concerned. But this didn't finish the story. Which of the three crosses was the one on which Jesus was crucified? The answer soon came. They found a woman who was sick nigh unto death. They took the three crosses to her bedside and placed one on her. Nothing happened! They placed the second. Nothing happened! They placed the third on the woman and she was supposedly healed at once. This, to the Christian people of the fourth century, was proof positive that they had indeed found the true cross on which Jesus was crucified. (One other tradition says they put the final cross on a dead man and he was restored to life.) From this time forward, there was no turning back for many of the Christians in Jerusalem and the world (when they heard what happened). But it is most remarkable, and something that has surprised scholars for years, that the great historian Eusebius as well as the Bordeaux Pilgrim (who were in Palestine during this period) said not one word about this so-called "discovery" of the crosses which were "so conveniently" located several feet underground at the Temple of Venus.

These significant omissions by these observant eyewitnesses have caused many modern scholars to call into question the so-called discovery of the crosses themselves (e.g. E.D.Hunt, "Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire," pp.38-42). But the fact that some pieces of wood were indeed found at the site of the Temple of Venus and identified by people in Jerusalem as the true cross of Jesus is well substantiated by the historical details and most scholars accept that something was certainly found that convinced the population at Jerusalem (Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, pp.81-93, Brill, Leiden, 1992; also Borgehammar, *How The Holy Cross Was Found*, Almqvist, Stockholm, 1991). The reason for the silence of Eusebius on the "discovery" is because he knew the matter was a hoax from the beginning. Indeed, I will show in chapter twenty-one that Jesus was not even crucified on a Latin or a Greek cross. He met his death on an entirely different form of executionary instrument that was nothing like some boards of timber nailed

together in the form of a Latin type of cross we are accustomed to.

The Discovery of the Crosses Convinced People

Getting back to the story at hand, once these “crosses” were found in the very region that Judas had pointed out, there was no turning back for many Christian believers (and this was especially so when an event occurred at Jerusalem in the year A.D.350, some 24 years later, which proved to be the catalyst that secured the belief that Judas was right in what he told Helena). Finding this “true” cross pointed out by Judas also helped to “prove” that the site of Golgotha had been discovered. No matter what people may have thought about the importance of the Mount of Olives before this time, the queen mother and the emperor Constantine (with Judas) now bestowed their authority on the Temple of Venus.

It is interesting that the historical records written not long after these events credit this Jewish man, named *Judas*, with the actual discovery of the “true” cross.

“The venerable wood of the cross was discovered through the zeal of Helena, the Hebrew Judas revealing the spot, who was afterwards baptized and named Quiriacus” (Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, I.36).

It was Judas (a man who was not even a Christian believer) who was responsible for all of Christendom since that time revering the site of the Venus Shrine as the most holy place on earth. Of course, there were also the visions and dreams of Helena and Constantine that provided the first incentive that the Venus Shrine was correct, but the discovery of the three crosses (which Judas said would be found under the pagan shrine) was the clincher! So famous did Judas become in the Christian world for the discovery, that he was even made a bishop of Jerusalem and canonized as a saint.

“The altar in the middle is dedicated to St. Helena, and that on the left to St. Quiriacus, *whose name was also Judas*, who showed the cross...and was made Bishop of Jerusalem” (The Palestine Pilgrim’s Text Society, *Anony.Pilgrim.*, II [12th cent.], vol. VI, p.6).

The account that Judas was the one who discovered and gave the cross of Jesus to Helena became a very popular story in Europe, and in the Middle Ages it was so well known that most Christians were aware of it (Drijvers, *ibid.*, pp.165-180). But what is interesting is the fact that it was the Jews who were *the only ones* (NOT the Christians) in the time of Constantine, and this *Judas* in particular, who supposedly knew where Jesus was crucified and buried? This was in spite of the fact that all Christian records show that no Jews were allowed to live in Jerusalem or its environs for almost 200 years (from A.D.135 to the time of Constantine). This does not mean that Jewish people were unaware of important geographical sites in Jerusalem (after all, it was *their* holy city), but would they not have been more interested in remembering Jewish holy places than Christian ones? And what is remarkable is the fact that only *Judas* seemed to know the exact place of Jesus' crucifixion while Christian authorities (who lived in Jerusalem and Palestine at the time) were unaware of the importance of the Temple of Venus. Indeed, Eusebius, the chief spokesman for the Palestinian Christians, found *Judas*' suggestion to be "contrary to all expectation" (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, III.28). Of course, it must be remembered that *Judas*' so-called documentation agreed precisely with the visionary experiences of Constantine and his mother Helena. This amazing coincidence gave the "historical evidence" of *Judas* (handed down supposedly from his parents) a notable ring of truth (as understood through the spiritual principles accepted by many Christians living at the time).

Judas Deceived the Queen Mother

This brings up a significant point to consider. We should ask a question about this *Judas* (the only man in Palestine who supposedly had any documentation on the matter of Jesus' crucifixion). Could it be that *Judas* pointed out the Temple of Venus as the place of Jesus' crucifixion for a particular reason? Christian authorities (including Eusebius) did not possess any historical knowledge that

would support the site of the Venus Shrine. In fact, Eusebius showed that the Christian “Mount Sion” before the time of Constantine’s exaltation in A.D.324 was actually the Mount of Olives and that the summit of Olivet was, in reality, the place of Jesus’ crucifixion. Since this is the case, it may mean that Helena, the mother of Constantine (and even Constantine himself), was deliberately deceived by this man called Judas concerning this *new* site for Jesus’ crucifixion. The fact is, Judas may have had definite reasons for misleading them. (This point will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.) Whatever the case, practically the whole Christian world went over to the belief that the place selected by Judas (along with the visions and dreams of Constantine and Helena) was indeed the correct site for Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. This belief was further strengthened because of an event that occurred in Jerusalem in the late Spring of A.D.350. Let us now look at that occurrence which clinched Christian belief that the true site of Jesus’ passion had now been discovered anew in the western part of Jerusalem at the Temple of Venus.

Proof Positive Evidence from Heaven

In the year A.D.350, Cyril became bishop of Jerusalem. And at the very beginning of his bishopric (on May 7th) a most significant celestial phenomenon occurred in the skies over Jerusalem. So elated was Cyril at the event that he immediately dispatched a letter to the emperor Constantius (the son of Constantine) to tell him of the wondrous sign given to the people of Jerusalem. What all the people saw was a parhelion of the sun which astonished the whole population of the city. Here is what Cyril said:

“During these holy days of the holy Paschal [Passover] season, on the Nones of May [May 7th] at about nine in the morning, a gigantic luminous cross was seen in the sky above holy Golgotha, extending as far as the holy Mount of Olives; not seen by one or two only, but clearly visible to the whole population of the city; nor, as might be expected, quickly vanishing like an optical illusion, but suspended for several hours above the earth in the gener-

al sight of all and by its dazzling display conquering even the rays of the sun” (Cyril, *Letter to Constantius* 4).

This was a normal parhelion of the sun which is a well-known type of halo phenomenon seen at various times when cirrus (ice crystal) clouds are in evidence in the upper atmosphere. Almost always one observes a large circle of 22 degrees width, but in the interior of the halo there is often a refraction of light that gives the appearance of a cross in the heavens. This is a very normal circumstance that is easily explained. As Van Nostrand’s *Scientific Encyclopedia* states: “Much supernatural lore was built by such displays by the ancients” (p.228). But these phenomena are quite normal. From the years 1950 to 1954 my job was in the Air Weather Service of the United States Air Force (I was sent by the United States government to the University of New Mexico to become a meteorologist, which profession I would still be in today had I not taken an interest in biblical history). These displays of solar activity in the form of various types of halos are quite common and there need be nothing supernatural about any of them.

Of course, these natural phenomena were not understood properly by the ancients and they almost always thought them to be a sign from God (or from some supernatural being) that something special and significant was being given to mankind. Constantine just before his battle at Milvian Bridge saw such a parhelion (with the same type of optical effect of a “cross” seen in the sky). But to Cyril and the people of Jerusalem, it seemed completely providential that this same type of solar halo as formerly seen by the emperor Constantine had now happened in the skies over Jerusalem in the late Spring of A.D.350. So spectacular was this parhelion to Cyril that he immediately came to the conclusion that God was now vindicating the *new* site of “Golgotha” that had been pointed out by Judas (and the visions of Constantine and his mother Helena). And though Cyril did not mention it, there must have been in his mind the similarity of this *type* of heavenly display that “God” had appar-

ently given to Constantine. The comparison must have seemed too close to be a mere coincidence. Whatever the case, in the mind of Cyril and the Christian people of Jerusalem, the true site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection had now been properly identified from heaven itself. The site had been vindicated by this heavenly sign.

Heavenly Approved of the New Golgotha

To Cyril, and the people of Jerusalem, this heavenly display was proof positive that the *new* site for "Golgotha" was correct. And even though there was not the slightest historical or geographical evidence to support this supposition, this celestial halo (in the form of a cross that stretched from the former Temple of Venus up to the Mount of Olives) was the final evidence that they needed that Constantine's "Golgotha" was proper. After all, it was considered profane to argue with heaven.

This was the "heavenly sign" for proving the true site of "Golgotha" that the people of Jerusalem were waiting for and they got it on May 7th, A.D.350. With this "heavenly approval" there remained no doubt in the minds of Christians in Jerusalem that they had found the true site of the passion of Jesus. Constantine, Helena and Judas had won the day. And from then on, there was no turning back for the majority of Christian opinion. From the time of Constantine on, visions, signs and dreams became the official criterion of the Christian Church for the establishment of important biblical sites and artifacts in the Holyland. Look at the following evidence that proves this point.

Visions, Signs and Dreams

If there was ever a time in history when visions, signs and dreams were used to locate holy places and the long lost tombs of prophets, etc., it was the fourth century. Such "miraculous" events were held in much higher esteem than documentary evidence written by humans which was found in the historical records. The principal authors of the fourth century (and at the beginning of the fifth)

were Cyril, Socrates, Theodoret, Evagrius and Sozomen. The latter historian could serve as their spokesman when speaking of Jesus' crucifixion.

“The place was *discovered*, and the fraud about it so zealously maintained was detected [the “fraud” was supposedly done by Hadrian who covered up the site with the Venus Shrine]; 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 parental 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).

To people of the fourth century, historical evidence went by the wayside as important in determining geographical sites associated with Jesus, the apostles and the earlier prophets. Dreams, visions and miraculous signs had come into vogue in finding such important sites (as well as artifacts accompanying the holy men of the Old and New Testaments). As an example of this, notice how the tombs of Micah and Habakkuk of the Old Testament were discovered.

“The relics of the proto-prophets, Habakkuk, and a little while after, Micah, were brought to light about this time. As I understand, God made known the place where both these bodies were deposited *by a divine vision in a dream to Zebennus*, who was then acting as bishop of Eleutheropolis” (Sozomen, *Hist.*, VII.29).

But this did not stop the wonderful discoveries. The people of the time were able to locate the tomb of Zechariah the prophet and the New Testament martyr Stephen.

“Among other relics, those of Zechariah, the very ancient prophet, and of Stephen, who was ordained deacon by the apostles, were discovered; and it seems incumbent on me to describe the mode, *since the discovery of each was marvelous and divine*...the prophet stood beside him *in a dream* and manifested himself” (*ibid.*, ch.2).

There is even more. In chapter two of this section just quoted, Sozomen shows how the empress Pulcheria beheld a vision of forty early martyrs who disclosed the whereabouts of their graves and they were discovered where her vision informed her. “Then the princess returned thanks to God for having accounted her worthy of so great a manifestation and for attaining the discovery of the holy relics” (bk.IX, ch.2).

Multitudes of Relics Discovered Miraculously

But this did not end the matter. By dreams, visions and signs to various people at the end of the fourth century, almost every artifact associated with Jesus, the apostles and the prophets of old was “miraculously” discovered for people to adore and to treasure for their wondrous powers and effects. Notice this. The people of the fourth century found the very column to which Jesus was bound when he was whipped by the Roman soldiers, the anointing horn for consecrating the kings of ancient Israel, the lance that pierced Jesus’ side, the stones that stoned Stephen, the stone on which the cock stood when it crowed before Peter at Jesus’ trial, the chalice used by the apostles at the last supper, the tomb and the skull of Adam which were located at the *new* Golgotha selected by Constantine, Helena and Judas (e.g. Hoade, *Guide to the Holy Land*, p.306).

The “discoveries” even went beyond these just mentioned. Great miracles began to happen in regard to the “true” cross that was pointed out by Judas. It wasn’t long until pieces of it were sent to all parts of the Christian world (Cyril, *Cat.* xiii.3). And what is most remarkable, the “true” cross had the unusual powers, so the story goes, of replenishing itself when pieces of it were sent to individuals or to churches throughout the world. So many pieces of this “true” cross were “supernaturally” multiplied that John Calvin in his time estimated that 300 men could not carry all the fragments. Indeed, virtually *every* item minutely associated with Jesus, the apostles or other biblical personalities was “discovered” and placed

in churches over the world — including even milk from Mary’s breasts and several foreskins of our Lord (*Ency.Rel.Ethics*, vol.X,pp.653-658).

Pious Frauds Used Extensively

All rational people today realize that all such “discoveries” are nothing more than pious frauds. But what needs to be recognized is that the so-called “true” cross was equally spurious. This is especially true since it can be demonstrated (as we will show in a later chapter) that Jesus was not even crucified on a Latin or Greek cross. People should realize that Judas Quiriacus was simply an opportunist and they should have dismissed his so-called “discovery” of the cross of Jesus. But that was an age of credulity — when dreams, visions and signs ruled the day. The common people, and even theologians, began to accept the evidence afforded by this great outpouring of “miracles” in the fourth century, and to the people living at the time such supernatural occurrences proved to be of more authority in locating Christian holy places and artifacts than historical documents.

If people would have, as Eusebius suggested to his readers, depended upon the teachings of the Holy Scriptures to be their guide in determining these matters than the visions, dreams and signs which were replete at the time, then the world would not have been subjected to the hoax provided by Judas Quiriacus to satisfy the “visions and dreams” of Constantine and his mother Helena. In actual fact, if people in the fourth century would have paid proper attention to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, it would have been understood that “visions and dreams” are not always the vehicles by which divine truths are revealed to mankind. The prophet Ezekiel chastised the prophets of Israel who came in the name of Yahweh (the true God of Israel). Ezekiel called the majority of prophets in Israel as “foolish prophets” because they were depending on lying divination (Ezekiel 13:3-6). Such lying prophets were seeing numerous *visions* to substantiate their claims of representing

God (Yahweh himself). Ezekiel was angry with the teachings of these prophets. He said that Yahweh was against “the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem and which *SEE VISIONS* of peace for her, and there is not peace, saith the Lord God” (Ezekiel 13:16).

To the prophet Ezekiel the prophets of Israel were seeing many visions (and they were all showing peace for Israel) and he was condemning them for their *visions* which were not true. What we find in the scriptural revelation is that it is not always wise to trust in the visionary experiences of individuals, especially if those supernatural manifestations lead people away from the simple historical and geographical teachings afforded by the biblical revelation. Moses even commanded Israel to have nothing to do with “dreamers of dreams” and “miracle workers” who directed people away from the true worship of God (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). And Jesus was equally adamant that even people who came in his name (and doing wondrous signs and uttering prophecies) were not necessarily his representatives (Matthew 7:21-23). It was considered essential by Jesus and the apostles that people tell the truth in matters concerning the teaching of Christianity (John 17:17).

Christians became Convinced of Visions, Dreams and Miracles

If only the Christian Church at that time would have had (and believed) the later teachings that St. John of the Cross, given in the 16th century about the dangers of trusting in visions, dreams and miracles, the Church of the fourth century would have been spared the nonsense that Constantine and his advisors were forcing on the Christian Church. And let me state once again, the teaching of St. John of the Cross on the perils of trusting in visions, dreams and miracles to establish essential truths of the Gospel is one of the most important discourses on the subject. Anyone desiring to believe such “divine evidences” should read (and with utmost attention) what St. John of the Cross said (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*,

Book II, XVI to XXIX). The only reason I mention his teachings on these matters is that they have *never* been improved on to this day. True, the visions given in the Old and New Testaments are valid, but St. John of the Cross shows *how* they are true and also *how* so many visions, dreams and miraculous signs since the time of the apostles have led people into the most profound errors that can be imagined. Constantine's visions are an example.

What St. John of the Cross said (as well as Eusebius in the fourth century) is that the teachings found in the biblical revelation can always be relied upon. Eusebius tried to tell his readers that those who trust implicitly and explicitly in the Holy Scriptures will have the real "key" to comprehend all essential truths that have been given to mankind by the Father and Christ Jesus. What the New Testament actually shows is that Jesus was crucified on the Mount of Olives. And Eusebius (before Constantine began to assert his visionary authority in determining religious sites) showed that the Mount of Olives was not only the place of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, but it was also where the "House of God" (the headquarters church of Jerusalem) was built right after A.D.70. Eusebius indicated as well that the Mount of Olives was the new (and spiritual) Mount Sion for Christians. No wonder Eusebius said nothing about the discovery of the "true" cross which was found under the Shrine of Venus (as disclosed by Judas Quiriacus) because he knew it was a hoax concocted by Judas from the very beginning.

Indeed, even if one accepted the parhelion as observed by the people of Jerusalem on May 7th, A.D.350 as a divine sign (in which a cross was seen stretching from the newly discovered "Golgotha" to the Mount of Olives), it could just as well have been interpreted that God was telling the people to abandon the *new* "Golgotha" located in the western part of Jerusalem and return to the true site of the crucifixion on the Mount of Olives! Be this as it may, Cyril (the bishop of Jerusalem) decided that the parhelion was

a wonder from heaven that the *newly* selected “Golgotha” was correct. This prompted him to deliver a sermon in the *new* Church of the Holy Sepulchre that would demonstrate that the *new* site was proper. The biblical evidence he gave was a mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs (the scriptural song written by King Solomon). He felt that the evidence for the *new* location for Jesus’ crucifixion had long been hidden in that book written almost 1000 years before the birth of Jesus (see Parrot’s *Golgotha and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, pp.56,57 for more information on this interesting point). The truth is, however, Cyril did not have any substantial proof from history or the Bible that the former Temple of Venus was the real site for Jesus’ crucifixion.

What this means is that visions, dreams and signs were the determining factors in convincing Christians in the middle and later fourth century that the *new* “Golgotha” of Constantine, Helena and Judas Quiriacus was correct. Sound historical and geographical proofs given in the New Testament and later documents were substituted for “supernatural proofs” and people in the world have been subjected to the teachings of Constantine ever since.

In the next chapter we will show why Judas Quiriacus (and especially the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem) pointed out the Temple of Venus as the place of Jesus’ passion. There was an important reason why this was done. It was one of the most clever subterfuges ever accomplished and the deception has held fast unto our modern times.