

# Acts 1—The Mount of Olives

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, Wednesday, May 26, 2021

Day 10 of October 2021 trip

Acts 1:12-13 *“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying:...”*

The Mount of Olives is one of the most notable locations on earth. Many great moments of the Bible and the future take place on that small piece of real estate. Here are a few of those moments.

**The first is King David as he flees the rebellion of his son, Absalom.** 2 Sam 15:13-30 has the story. 13 *A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." 14 Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword." 15 The king's officials answered him, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses." 16 The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace. 17 So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at a place some distance away. 18 All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king. 19 The king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. 20 You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you." 21 But Ittai replied to the king, "As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be." 22 David said to Ittai, "Go ahead, march on." So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him.*

23 *The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert. 24 Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city. 25 Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. 26 But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him." 27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Aren't you a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your son Ahimaaz and Jonathan son of Abiathar. You and Abiathar take your two sons with you. 28 I will wait at the fords in the desert until word comes from you to inform me." 29 So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.*

30 But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.”

King David fled over the Mount of Olives weeping because of what he thought the rebellious son of David would do to the people of the city. In leaving he passed by the same spot where Jesus, that other son of David, would later cry over the disaster coming upon the rebellious people of the city who would reject him as king. David was being rejected by his own

son and those rebels who joined him. Jesus, the obedient son, was rejected by many rebels during the week of the Triumphal entry. Absalom would die hanging from a tree by his hair as he was pierced by three spears to the heart. Jesus would die nailed to a tree with blood and water running down as his heart was pierced by a spear. Absalom was buried in a pit with stones piled upon his body. The City of Jerusalem would fall to the Romans and not stone would be left upon another. They were two very different sons of David. I don't think the comparison is significant other than just being interesting as a kind of reverse metaphor.

**Second, the Triumphal Entry started at the top of the Mount of Olives.** Luke 19:37-44 *"When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." 41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*

The place where Jesus wept over the city is memorialized at *Dominus Flevit* (The Lord wept). The building is designed as a tear drop. Inside a mosaic of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings adorns the front of the altar, each remembering actions of Jesus.

The mosaic on the front of our Chapel of the Resurrection is copied from a fourth century Byzantine church built on that spot. The original is located just outside the present *Dominus Flevit* chapel. Alongside the pathway leading to the chapel are ossuaries which once contained the bones of first century Jews. Maybe the Jews buried there were people who believed in Jesus and wanted to be buried where Jesus paused as he prepared to enter Jerusalem. Certainly Jews, Muslims, and Christians all want to be buried on or near the Mount of Olives because of its association with the Day of Judgement in all three religions.

The Palm Sunday opening scene is just east of the top of the Mount of Olives near the road that heads down to Jericho. It was the place where Jesus met with Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and where he raised Lazarus from the dead. It is not generally visited today by tourists because of its location in the Arab areas. Having visited there years ago, and having gone into the "tomb of Lazarus," I can say it smelled and felt more like an outhouse than a place of veneration. The place is now known by a name derived from Lazarus--el-Azariyeh or Lazariyh.

Leaving Bethany and Bethphage you come to the top of the Mount of Olives. The place "where the road goes down the Mount of Olives" can be located with some precision because it is very likely in the same place it was centuries ago. Looking at old pictures of the Mount of Olives you can see the relative barrenness of the hill. My guess is that the road's location didn't change much over the many centuries. The road taken for the "Palm Sunday walk" is very possibly in exactly the same place today as it was in the time of Jesus.

In Jesus' day the view from the Mount reflected the power of King Herod and his successors. Today everyone arriving at the top of the Mount of Olives looks at Jerusalem, and rightly so, for it is one of the most dramatic sights in the world. However, before looking at Jerusalem, look south and see the Herodium which dominated in Jesus' time and its flattened top is still visible today.

The Dome of the Rock captures our attention today. At 67 feet in height, its golden dome draws the eye immediately. However, in the time of Jesus the Temple stood more than twice as high at 150 feet with even more golden grandeur. Had it lasted it surely would have become known as one of the wonders of the world.

If you go to the Mount of Olives, you always want to go in the morning when the sun is shining directly on the city. I always take a group picture there because it is the most spectacular vista.

The visit of Jesus in the company of a cheering crowd praising God would certainly have been an encouragement to him. It is the way it is going to be when the Kingdom of God fully comes to earth, when Jesus comes as the long-promised King of the Jews and King of Kings.

**Jerusalem was to be the seat of the king's power.** Ezekiel 37:21-22 prophesied, *"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. 22 I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. The re-gathering of Israel started over a century ago but the pace has dramatically quickened in our era.*

The King who would rule over them would be none other than the descendent of David as Ezekiel 37:24 prophesied centuries after David's death: *"My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd."*

Psalm 47:2-5 was being fulfilled in that moment: *"2 How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! 3 He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. 4 He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. 5 God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets."* On Palm Sunday Jesus was entering the capitol of his future kingdom and the seat of his government. Palm Sunday was a pre-fulfillment of that great day when Christ ascends to Jerusalem as king.

**Jesus knew that many lives were in the balance.** Joel 3:14-17 had prophesied, *"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 16 The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. 17 Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her."*

Jesus was coming to that literal valley of decision where the nations would be judged. He would one day judge the nations and lives would hang in the eternal balance.

**Third, Jesus taught about the Second Coming while sitting on the Mount of Olives.** Matthew 24:3-8 *"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains."*

Many of the wars connected with the Second Coming will be related to the Middle East. Jerusalem is destined to attract undue attention. For centuries, no one cared about Jerusalem. It was just a dirty little town of no consequence until about 140 years ago when Jews started to return. The spiritual world perked up its ears because they recognized that the return of the Jews

was an important prelude to what is prophesied to happen there one day. All the human and spiritual world knows what is taught about Jesus and Jerusalem and that knowledge is the hidden driver of all that is happening there.

Jesus was giving that teaching probably within a matter of feet from the place where his feet will touch down some time in the near future.

**Fourth, Jesus prayed in the Garden at the foot of the Mountain on the night he was betrayed.** Matt 26:27-32 *"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*

The scene is the Last Supper, Passover. Jesus would eat with them after the resurrection, but the fruit of the vine is reserved for when Jesus returns.

Already Jesus was looking beyond his death and resurrection. Is that why he wanted to go to the Mount of Olives to pray? That mountain would have one more great moment in its history of Jesus. His journey there, and the events of that Thursday night were only a foreshadowing of what was to come. I have no doubt that Jesus found a certain comfort in considering how everything would eventually turn out. Confidence in God's ultimate victory gave strength to Jesus.

**Fifth, the Mount of Olives is the opening scene in The Second Coming.** Zechariah 14:1-5 *"A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. 2 I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. **Half of the city** will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. 3 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. 4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. 5 You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him."*

David fled up and over the mountain when Absalom betrayed him. Now God opens a valley along the same path where David fled. It will extend into the wilderness. Why couldn't they just go up and over like David did? It is likely because the Mount of Olives will be covered with hostile forces. Just as God opened the Red Sea for Moses, so he will open the Mount of Olives for Israel in the last days.

There is presently no known place called Azel.<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem recalled the name of a village on the far side of the mountain, but there doesn't seem to be any record of it in antiquity other than this reference.

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<sup>1</sup> "For the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal, that is, Azel," the same word which enters into Beth-Azel of Micah, where the allusion probably is to its firm-rootedness. It is more probable that the name of a place should have been chosen with an allusive meaning, as in Micah, than that an unusual appellative should have been chosen to express a very common meaning. Cyril had heard of it as the name of a village at the extremity of the mountain. Elsewhere it might very probably have been destroyed in the destructive Roman wars: The Roman camp in the last siege must have been very near it (NOTE: Josephus, B. J. v. i. 8). The destruction of villages, after the frantic revolt under Bar-Kochba, was enormous. (NOTE: "985 very well-known villages." Dio Cass. lxi. 14.) (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

My guess is that it was a smallish village about three or four miles from the Kidron in the direction of Jericho.

In any case, it is just a short interlude in the battle for Jerusalem at the return of Christ. It will be over in short order.

Here's a little fun speculation for you. In the Millennium, they will likely build two communities on the Mountain. North Olives and South Olives would have a bridge spanning the valley to connect the two halves. If so, what would be the name of the bridge? The "golden gate" bridge.