

The Passion, The Prayer, The Pain, and The Promise The Mount Of Olives

The Mount of Olives, sometimes referred to as “Olivet” is a mountain range that is made up of three peaks located on the Eastern border of the city of Jerusalem. The highest peak is 2,684 feet and offers a scenic view of Old Jerusalem. The Eastern side of the slope is at the beginning of the Judean Desert, and it separates the Temple Mount in present Jerusalem from the desert.

The Mount of Olives was named for the olive groves that lined the hillside. The Mount of Olives provides the reminder that just as the olive was pressed for oil to anoint kings, our King was pressed so that He would one day rule as the everlasting King. A garden of ancient olive trees stands there to this day. To this day, there is an olive tree on the hillside which is over 2,000 years old. It has also been called “The Mount of Anointment” because of the pressing of olives for the oil that was used in the anointing of Kings. It is significant and symbolic that Jesus likely knelt under the covering of olive trees and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, located on the Mount of Olives right before His betrayal. The King of all Kings was being pressed so that you and I might know His rule in our lives.

The Mount of Olives is one of the most fascinating places found in Scripture. Regarded as sacred, it is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. Horror and hope collide on the Mount of Olives. Many Jewish people throughout history have requested to be buried on the Mount of Olives. The Jewish people believe that when the Messiah comes, He will come on the Mount of Olives, and therefore those buried there will have a front-row seat to the Messiah. To this day, many graves line the hillside. Millions of visitors visit the Mount of Olives every year.

A thousand years before Christ, King David was forced out of Jerusalem and rejected as King by his own son, Absalom. He left Jerusalem, crossed the Kidron Valley (2 Samuel 15:23), and made his way up the Mount of Olives. As David climbed the mountain, He wept and mourned for himself and the betrayal he experienced but also for His own sinfulness (2 Samuel 15:30).

“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.” 2 Samuel 15:30

King Solomon used the Mount of Olives for idol worship: *“On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites.”* (1 Kings 11:7) In one of Ezekiel’s visions, the prophet sees the glory of the Lord depart from Jerusalem and come to rest *“above the mountain east of it”* (Ezekiel 11:23).

Years, later, the Mount of Olives was central to the life of Christ. Jesus taught on the Mount of Olives and often went there to pray. He, like David, was rejected in Jerusalem. After the triumphal entry, He crossed the Kidron Valley and climbed the Mount of Olives the day before His betrayal and arrest. He wept, prayed, and mourned over our sinfulness, as He considered the cross before Him (Luke 22).

The Mount of Olives is significant because several Messianic prophecies were fulfilled there. The triumphal entry predicted in the Old Testament took place there. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you.” Psalm 118:25-26

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Zechariah 9:9

“The Lord their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.” Zechariah 9:16

Jesus taught from the Mount of Olives, “The Olivet Discourse” prophesying on His second coming (Matthew 24-25). The betrayal and abandonment of Jesus that was prophesied in the Old Testament happened on the Mount of Olives (Psalm 41:9, Zechariah 13:7, Matthew 26:31).

Jesus made many visits to the Mount of Olives *“Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives.”* Luke 21:37

It was “usual” for Him to go there when He was in the vicinity of Jerusalem. *“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.”* Luke 22:39

Every time Jesus visited Lazarus and Mary and Martha, He was on the Mount of Olives, for their village of Bethany was situated on the eastern slope. The road from Bethany to Jerusalem lay over the Mount of Olives.

The Bible records Jesus visiting the Mount of Olives three times in the last week of His earthly life, and each time something of significance happened. The final week of Jesus ministry and his final moments will be a week of endings and last.

1. The First Visit Is The Triumphal Entry - A Place Of Praise And Adoration

“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, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Luke 19:37-40

The Mount of Olives is the best place to get a good view of the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem, which is sometimes referred to as the Beautiful Gate or the Golden Gate. It was the gate that was used for ceremonial purposes by priests during the time of Jesus. Directly below the gate is a deep ravine called the Kidron Valley. This valley runs north and south, and it separates the Old City of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

“While still on the Mount of Olives, Jesus looked at the Jerusalem in front of Him, wept over the city, 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. 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. 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.” Luke 19:41-44

2. The Second Visit - A Place Of Prophecy And Instruction

Jesus’ second visit was to deliver what has come to be known as the Olivet Discourse, recorded in Matthew 24:1-25:46. The message is also found in Mark 13:1–37 and Luke 21:5–36. The content of the Olivet Discourse is Jesus’ response to His disciples’ question *“When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”* Matthew 24:3

“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?” Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. 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. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time, many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will

appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:3-14

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24-25 primarily concerns the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the future tribulation period, and the second coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation. The Discourse includes parables about those who wait for the Master’s coming—the wise and faithful servant (Matthew 24:45–51), the five wise virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), and the good servant who uses his resources wisely (Matthew 25:14–30).

3. The Third Visit - The Place Of Prayer And Redemption

The most famous events at Gethsemane occurred on the night before His crucifixion when Jesus was betrayed. Each of the Gospel writers describes the events of that night with slight variations, so reading the four accounts (Matthew 26:36-56, Mark 14:32-52, Luke 22:40-53 and John 18:1-11) will give an accurate picture of that night in its entirety. The events have been depicted in music, books, and films for centuries. From the 16th century, when Bach wrote two magnificent oratorios called *The Passion* based on the gospel accounts of Matthew and John, to the present day with the film *The Passion of the Christ*, the story of this extraordinary night has been told again and again. Even our language has been affected by these events, giving us such phrases as “*he who lives by the sword dies by the sword*” (Matthew 26:52); “*the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Mark 14:38); and “*sweating drops of blood*” (Luke 22:44).

Jesus suffered not only on the cross, but also in the garden of Gethsemane. As He wrestled with what lay ahead, the weight of our sin (Luke 22:39-45). It was a prayer of great suffering and yet, as we look to what was accomplished by Christ’s obedience, we see the glory of redemption unfold. The beauty of the forgiveness of our sins.

The Mount of Olives reminds us that Christ has carried the weight of our sin. When we feel hurt or betrayed, we can look to the Mount of Olives and remember that Jesus was hurt and betrayed as well. God the Father redeemed His suffering, and He will redeem ours as well.

At the base of the Mount of Olives is the beautiful Church of All Nations, also called the Church of the Agony. It is located at the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane. The construction of the church was completed in 1924. It marks the traditional site of the Lord's agony, where He sweated drops of blood and prayed, “Father, not my will but Yours be done.” The church is very dark inside because it was built to commemorate Jesus' agony in the garden. The windows are made of alabaster to filter out as much light as possible. At the front of the church there is a large outcropping of stone. Located above it is the incredible Church of Mary Magdalene. It is a Russian Orthodox Church that was built in 1888 to honor the Tsar's mother. Located above the Russian Church is a chapel shaped like a tear drop. It is called Dominus Flevit, which, in Latin means, “The Lord wept.” As the name of the chapel indicates, it is located at the traditional site where Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. This chapel is shaped in the form of a tear drop to commemorate the fact that Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. He wept because the Jewish people had rejected Him as Messiah, and He knew that would result in God pouring out His wrath upon this city.

The evening begins with the Last Supper in Jerusalem. During that last Passover meal, Jesus is not the served, but the servant. It is Jesus who during the supper put on the garb of a servant and washed the disciples’ feet. Jesus is the most active one at the table. Jesus is not portrayed as the one who reclines and receives, but as the one who stands and gives. He fulfilled his role as a rabbi by guiding his disciples through the Passover. He fulfilled his role as a servant by washing their feet. And he fulfilled his role as a Savior by granting them forgiveness of sins. It is the Lord’s table we sit at. It is the Lord’s Supper we eat. Just as Jesus prayed for disciples, Jesus begs God for us. He meets us at the table. When bread is broken, Christ breaks it. When the

wine is poured, Christ pours it. And when your burdens are lifted, it is because the King in the apron has drawn near. This will be the last time Jesus eats supper with his disciples.

Jesus then revealed Judas as the betrayer (John 13:1–30). At the conclusion of the meal, Jesus established the New Covenant and instituted the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26). The evening ended when in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

After the last supper, Scripture tells us that, “*Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives*” Luke 22:29. It’s nearly midnight when they leave the upper room and descend through the streets of the city. They pass the Lower Pool and exit the Fountain Gate and walk out of Jerusalem. The roads are lined with the fires and tents of Passover pilgrims. Most are asleep, heaved with the evening meal. Those still awake think little of the band of men walking the chalky road. They pass through the valley and ascend the path which will take them to Gethsemane.

The phrase, “*As usual*” shows us that the Mount of Olives was a place Jesus often went to pray. It was a place where Jesus poured out His heart to God the Father. This is a beautiful reminder that our lives need sacred spaces where we go often to pray. If Jesus had special places where He went to pray and commune with the Father, it makes sense that you and I need these places in our lives as well. This will be the last time Jesus prays in the Garden. Jesus frequently went to Gethsemane with His disciples to pray. “*Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.*” John 18:2

The Garden of Gethsemane was a place where olive oil was produced. Jesus took three of them—Peter, James and John—to a place separated from the rest. Here Jesus asked them to watch with Him and pray so they would not fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41), but they fell asleep. Twice, Jesus had to wake them and remind them to pray so that they would not fall into temptation. This was especially poignant because Peter did indeed fall into temptation later that very night when he denied even knowing Jesus three times.

Jesus chose prayer in the garden. He chose to pray for us.

“*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*” John 17:20-21

Jesus moved a little way from the three men to pray, and twice He asked His Father to remove the cup of wrath He was about to drink, but each time He submitted to the Father’s will.

“*Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* Matthew 26:39

Jesus prayed in agony as He contemplated the day to come. So overcome by the horror of what He was to experience in the crucifixion the following day, His sweat was “*like drops of blood.*” (Luke 22:44) He was “*exceedingly sorrowful unto death.*” (Matthew 26:38) God, in response, “*Sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him.*” (Luke 22:43)

As Jesus looked into heaven, we were in his vision. As Jesus dreamed of the day when we will be where he is, he saw us there. His final prayer was about us. His final pain was for us. His final passion was us.

He saw us cast into a crisis we didn’t request. He saw us betrayed by those we love. He saw us in our own garden of gnarled trees and sleeping friends. He saw us staring into the pit of our own failures and the mouth of our own grave. He saw us in our Garden of Gethsemane—and he didn’t want us to be alone. He wanted us to know that he has been there, too. He knows what it’s like to be plotted against. He knows what it’s like to smell

the stench of Satan. And, perhaps most of all, he knows what it's like to beg God to change his mind and accepts the answer.

After this, Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, arrived with a multitude of soldiers, high priests, Pharisees, and servants to arrest Jesus. Judas identified Him by the prearranged signal of a kiss which he gave to Jesus. Trying to protect Jesus, Peter took a sword and attacked a man named Malchus, the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Jesus rebuked Peter and healed the man's ear, displaying the miraculous power of God (Luke 22:51).

It's surprising that witnessing this amazing miracle of healing had no effect on the multitude. Neither were they shaken by His awesome display of power as described in John 18:5-6, "*They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground."*

Whether it was the majesty of His looks, or the power of His words, or both, they became like dead men, falling to the ground. Nevertheless, they arrested Him and took Him to Pontius Pilate, while the disciples scattered in fear for their lives.

The most famous trial in history is about to begin. The judge is short and patrician with darting eyes and expensive clothes. His graying hair trimmed and face beardless. He is apprehensive, nervous about being thrust into a decision he can't avoid. Two soldiers lead him down the stone stairs of the fortress into the broad courtyard. Shafts of morning sunlight stretch across the stone floor. As he enters, Syrian soldiers dressed in short togas yank themselves and their spears erect and stair straight ahead. The floor on which they stand is a mosaic of broad, brown, smooth rocks. On the floor are carved the games the soldiers play while awaiting the sentencing of the prisoner. But in the presence of the procurator, they don't play.

A regal chair is placed on a landing five steps up from the floor. The magistrate ascends and takes his seat. The accused is brought into the room and placed below him. A covey of robed religious leaders follow, walk over to one side of the room, and stand. Pilate looks at the lone figure.

4. After The Resurrection - A Place Of Promise And Expectation

On the top of the Mount of Olives is the Hotel of the 7 Arches. When it was built in 1964, it was discovered that a major geological fault line lies beneath it. That is significant because in Zechariah 14 we are told when the Messiah returns to the Mount of Olives, it will split in half when His feet touch the ground. The Mount of Olives, which is a ridge mountain, runs north and south along the Kidron Valley.

Jesus is going to be returning to this very mountain, but not on a humble donkey. He is going to be returning on a white war charger, the symbol of a victorious general. And once again, that valley is going to be filled with people, hundreds of millions of glorified saints, with angels above. And He is going to ride down into that valley again on that white war charger and once again the redeemed saints will cry out, "*Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David,*" as He rides up to that Eastern Gate. Psalm 24 tells us that as the Messiah, Jesus, approaches that Eastern Gate, that it will blow open supernaturally to welcome Him into the city.

Here's how it is described: "*Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! That the King of glory shall come in. And who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. And who is the King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.*" Psalm 24:7

Jesus will then enter the Temple Mount where He will be coronated the King of kings and the Lord of lords and will begin His millennial reign over all the earth. Oh, my! What a day that will be! There's a garden over here adjacent to the chapel. And I'd like to show you something very special there.

Both Jews and Christians alike view the Mount of Olives as a sacred place of hope. The Jewish people believe that the Messiah will come to Israel on the Mount of Olives. As believers, when we look to the Mount of Olives, we are reminded of the hope we have in Christ. The Messiah has come. He is the source of our redemption. We also have the hope of His second coming when He will right every wrong. Jesus gave the promise to His disciples as He ascended into heaven that He would return.

The prophet Zechariah reminds us that, one day, *“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.”* Zechariah 14:4

Our King, Jesus, has won the victory. He is a triumphant King who will return just as He said and rule over all of heaven and earth. *“The LORD will be king over all the earth.”* Zechariah 14:9

The Mount of Olives reminds us that, just as our Messiah came as the Old Testament prophets predicted, so He will come again to rule in righteousness and justice. The Prophet Zechariah prophesied that Jesus would return there on the Mount of Olives.

It is a good reminder that you and I need sacred places in our lives. We need places where we remember how God has fulfilled His promises to us, special places where we go regularly to pray and meet with God. We need places of hope where we are reminded to trust God with our futures. We need places of redemption where we remember how God has redeemed the evil in our lives and turned it for good, and we need places of victory where we remember that Christ is victorious! He has overcome the evil one, and He will reign eternally!

After the trials, crucifixion, and resurrection, Jesus once again stood on the Mount of Olives during His final post-resurrection appearance with His disciples. *“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”* Luke 24:50–52

Immediately following Jesus' ascension, two angels told the disciples on the Mount of Olives that *“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”* Acts 1:11

According to the prophet Zechariah, Jesus will return not only in the same way, but to the same place. In a prophecy related to the end times, Zechariah declares, *“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.”* Zechariah 14:4

Acts 1:12 specifies that “the vicinity of Bethany” was indeed the Mount of Olives. *“Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.”*

The very location where David wept in defeat and where Jesus was betrayed and rejected will be the place where Jesus returns in triumph over all His enemies.