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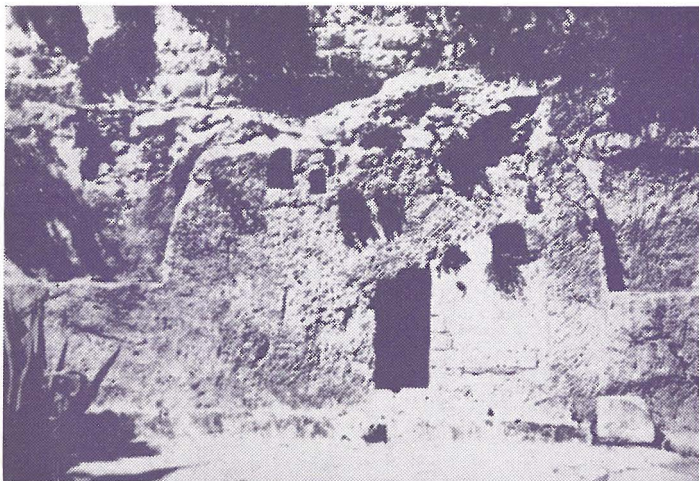
Recommended Citation

Talbot, Louis T., "I Saw the Place where the Lord was Laid" (2017). *Talbot Publications*. 7.
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I saw the place where the Lord was laid

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Entrance to the Garden Tomb

I Saw the place where the Lord was laid

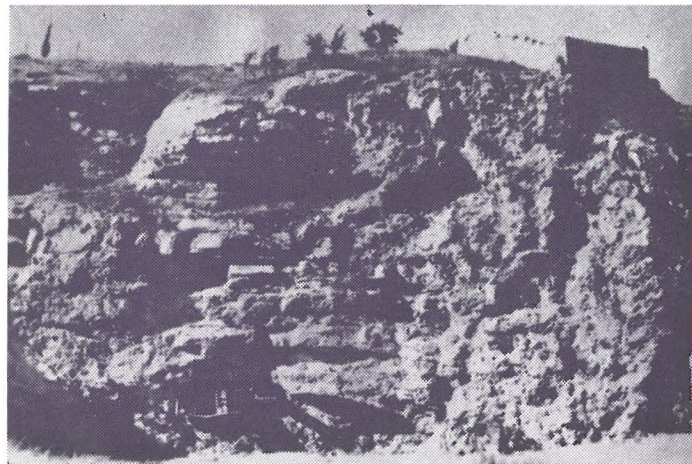
In the fall of 1949, at the request of the Board of Directors of my school, I made a four months' missionary journey to the fields where our graduates are laboring, to make a survey of the needs and to photograph their work. In the brief time allotted me I covered twelve countries, and from every standpoint I found the conditions appalling. Everywhere were dirt and disease and devilry and death; the world is in a hopeless state. The only bright spots I saw on earth were the places where the brave and faithful missionaries of the cross are preaching the gospel and winning souls for Christ. I came home with a renewed missionary vision, and a "burning heart," to present the needs of the world as they really are, and to persuade young people to invest their lives in the missionary enterprise, ere the night falls upon this atomic age, when "no man can work."

Naturally, there were many thrills on this trip—journeys through jungles, views of breath-taking natural beauty, flights over tens of thousands of islands—but one of the never-to-be-forgotten experiences was the brief time I spent in the Holy Land.

It is impossible to put into words the feelings that came into my heart as I set my feet upon the streets and fields where the Lord Jesus Christ had walked, and looked upon scenes which must have met His eyes daily for thirty-three years. Palestine is a living commentary upon the Old and New Testaments, and makes places and personalities in the Bible very real and vivid. I shall ever thank God for the honor that was mine to have such a glimpse of Bible lands.

I saw Bethlehem, and preached the gospel in the Shepherds' Fields on Christmas Eve; I visited Bethany and relived the visits of Jesus with His friends, Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus; I sat by Jacob's Well and thought of the conversion of the Samaritan woman, and the entire city that came to Christ through her testimony. But the two historic spots which made the deepest impression upon my heart were Golgotha and the Tomb, where they laid the body of the Lord.

For years I had looked forward to seeing these places, and for a long time had been of the opinion, shared with many Bible teachers and archeologists, that if there were any genuine sites still standing where the crucifixion and resurrection had taken place, they were Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb. I reject the theory that the ornate Holy Sepulchre covers those sacred spots. I am thankful that the English Committee, which is responsible for the care of Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb, have not made shrines of them, but instead have preserved them as nearly as possible in their original rugged state. It seems blasphemous to me that such places should be made a source of revenue for systems of religion. We do not worship places, but a Person. Of course, no one can be absolutely certain of these locations which have puzzled archeological authorities for centuries, but if the places I saw are not the exact spots where the great drama of redemption took place, they are at least so similiar to the original places that it makes no real difference, and the effect upon the heart of a born-again believer is the same.



Hill of the Skull—Golgotha

THE PLACE CALLED CALVARY

In English it is "skull"; in Greek "Calvary"; in Hebrew "Golgotha." Whatever language is used, it was a dreadful place of death, outside of the walls of Jerusalem. Only one eminence near Jerusalem meets this description today, and that is Gordon's Calvary.

I climbed to the top of the north wall, east of the Damascus Gate, and there it was. A hush fell upon my heart. The top was bare, smooth, scalp-like, with deep cavities clearly resembling eyes, a nose, and a mouth. Nothing else is there; only a small Moslem cemetery lies off to the side. One's entire attention is riveted upon that grim place where Christ was lifted up between earth and heaven as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

It seemed to me that this spot fitted into the details of the crucifixion in a most striking way. The ancient foundations beneath the present surface show conclusively that the Damascus Gate near at hand was standing before Roman times and so was there at the time. I could see how ideal a place for public executions this was. The Jews even called it "the Hill of Stoning." Overlooked by a large part of the city, almost in the form of a semi-circle, it would serve somewhat on the order of a Roman amphitheatre. It was easy to imagine how "those that passed by" could have witnessed the crucifixion scene, and taken part in it. The crowds would be making their way along the Roman road which forked there, one branch extending to Galilee, the other around the city to Jericho. The ruins of this road have been excavated at the base of Golgotha.

As I stood there gazing at "the place of a skull," my mind went back to the events of Jesus' last week on earth. I thought of the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, the three long fake trials, the three extended sentences before the Jews. I remembered how He had suffered through the exhausting scenes in the Praetorium; how He had endured the cruel examination by Herod; how He had been brutally derided by the Sanhedrin and its servants, by Herod's bodyguard, and by the Roman cohort. I recalled that, pitifully weakened, He so staggered under the weight of the cross that in order

not to delay His execution, the Roman soldiers impressed Simon into their service, to bear the cross for Him.

"And they bring Him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull" (Mark 15:22). "And when they were come to the place that is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, the other on the left" (Luke 23:33). It seemed to me as I stood there that day I could see the three crosses laid upon the ground, and hear the soldiers nailing the cross-beam to the uprights. I could imagine how they stripped Jesus naked of all His clothes, stretched Him upon that implement of torture, and, placing huge iron nails in the center of His palms, drove them into the wood with their mallets. I could almost hear Him, as they raised this living burden of flesh, every movement irritating the rents in feet and hands, pleading, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

What a scene of tumult the crucifixion must have been! That great body of Jews and Romans gazed upon the Lamb of God, some silently, others mocking. Even the rulers and priests forgot their dignity of office and joined in the abuse. The poor wretches sharing His punishment added their insults until one of them, no longer able to resist His love, cried out, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:41-43).

Surely crucifixion was the cruelest and blackest of punishments, for it gave the greatest torture for the longest time. It included all that pain and death could have that is horrible and ghastly—dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, helplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds, all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. But only once in all the hours at Golgotha did Jesus make reference to His suffering, when He cried, "I thirst," for added to all other pangs, was that of a raging thirst.

I recalled the natural phenomena of that day: the eclipse

at noonday when the paschal sun should have been very bright over the Holy City; the rent veil of the temple; the earthquake; the opening of graves. Then I thought sadly of the betrayal by Judas and the denial of Peter, and of the fact that all of His disciples "forsook Him and fled" in the hour of His death. More than that, I thought of my own sin, and the part it too had in nailing Him to that cross, and I thanked Him again for dying in my room and stead, to obtain my eternal salvation. Blessed was the hour for all sinners when Jesus cried "It is finished," and the price of redemption was fully paid.

THE GARDEN TOMB

When General Gordon was seeking evidence that this was indeed the genuine site of the crucifixion, he had the entire area investigated for graves. He found what he was looking for in a monolithic tomb nearby. It seemed to him that the words of John 19:41 were thus corroborated: "Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid" (John 19:41).

I approached the ancient garden at the foot of the hill. A huge door opened to admit me. Some years ago, removal of tons of debris had disclosed garden paths, an irrigation system, and a winepress. Now well cared for, the beautiful garden is fragrant with zinnias, asters, petunias, chrysanthemums and rosemary growing beneath a few old trees. A high wall now encloses the entire area.

There in front of me was the Garden Tomb. What awe filled my heart as I walked over to it, and stooped to enter the low door, even as the disciples had on that first Easter morning!

Inside were two compartments, separated by a low limestone wall. The outer room in which I was standing was about 7 by 10 ft. wide with an 8 ft. ceiling. I looked over the wall into the second room as large as the first, and along the wall at the far end was a crypt about six-and-a-half feet long and two feet wide. I said to myself, "Was that where they laid Him?" At the far end is a rounded depression for the

head of a person to rest. A wall runs across it and at each edge is a ledge. This might well have been the place where on the day of the resurrection "two angels in white were sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (John 20:12). At the other end of the room were two more unfinished crypts which indicate that only One was ever buried here.

One of the things about the Garden Tomb that most impressed me was the square window above the unfinished section. As I gazed upon it, I could see how readily it would let in the rays of the morning sun, which would immediately shine upon any body lying in the farther crypt. Now at last I understood how John could tell at once by looking into the dark tomb, without even entering, that Jesus had risen indeed, leaving His grave clothes, and "the napkin, that was about his head . . . in a place by itself" (John 20:7).

As I had thought of the death of my Lord at Calvary, so now I allowed my mind to dwell upon the resurrection. I walked about the Tomb, seated myself on the ledge where perhaps a white-robed angel had once sat, and considered the "infallible proofs": the broken Roman seal, the disrupted stone, the orderly grave clothes, the fearful earthquake; the angel visitants; the terrified guards; the frightened women; the dumbfounded disciples; and the manifest lies of the enemies of Christ who gave "large money unto the soldiers" to publish the fiction that His disciples had made away with His body; the seventeen personal appearances Jesus made after His resurrection before and after His ascension to various persons individually and in groups. In addition, "He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once" (I Cor. 15:4). God so multiplied the evidence that the resurrection of Christ has become one of the most thoroughly attested facts of history.

So I rejoiced that day as I stood in the Garden Tomb that it was an empty tomb, that we do not worship a Saviour still hanging on a cross, or lying in a sepulchre.

As believers, our own resurrection is guaranteed by Christ's. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20). "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). "Jesus said unto her, I

am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26).

And you who are not His, think of the love for you Christ displayed on Calvary, in shedding His precious blood that you might be saved from sin and hell. He is a living Saviour, waiting to forgive and transform you, and prepare you to live with Him forever. Nothing is as important as this matter of your relationship to God. Will you not believe the gospel, "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"? (I Cor. 15:3, 4). "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). What better time could there be than Holy week for making a decision to give yourself to Christ?



Inside the Garden Tomb