

JERUSALEM SCENES

The Kidron tombs



Picture by courtesy of Brother Leen Ritmeyer © Ritmeyer Archaeological Design

The western slopes of the Mount of Olives opposite the southern end of the Temple Mount are today a vast Jewish cemetery. Here religious Jews like to be buried, in anticipation of the day when Messiah comes to the Mount of Olives and raises the dead. Cutting through it, as seen in the top of the picture, is the road which winds round the southern slopes of Olivet towards Jericho. Our viewpoint is the road which skirts the southern end of the Temple Mount, and in the foreground we see the Kidron Valley with its dark cypresses spearing into the sky.

This area was a place of many tombs in the time of Jesus, and the three prominent tombs in the picture are likely all to have been there when he visited Jerusalem with his disciples. On the left is the tomb known by tradition as the Tomb of Absalom, because it was wrongly assumed to be the monument which Absalom erected for himself in a location described as "the king's dale" (2 Sam. 18:18). The rightmost tomb is equally erroneously called traditionally Zechariah's Tomb, because it was the prophet Zechariah who prophesied of the coming of the Messiah to Mount Olivet. Both are believed to have been built early in the first century A.D. Immediately to the left of the latter is another tomb, set in the rock, called the Tomb of the Bnei (sons of) Hezir, a priestly family (1 Chron. 24:15). Such tombs would have been beautifully kept in Jesus's time, the basis of his saying to the scribes and Pharisees: "for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Mt. 23:27).

—Tony Benson