



HARDLY A STONE'S THROW

Legion are the times when Arik offered me money to take a taxi. Each time I refused with the observation that by walking I would avoid overheating in traffic jams and I would be able to look at my surroundings without being scared of being involved in a traffic accident.

On the day after the new year, I was walking along when I saw a group of six women and one man enter a poorly maintained, chicken wire enclosure. On closer inspection I realized it was Moshe Bronstein, a friend of Arik and myself. I made him aware of my presence and after a few minutes I was standing with the group in an archaeological site. I quipped that I had set it up a few days before and that the fallen column was made of paper-mache.

Moshe started in a more learned vein recounting that some groups in Christianity believe that this is the rock where Mary went into labor and that Jesus would have been born close by. In those days Bethlehem was not considered



the House of David where the 'Messiah' had to be born, but this place where Lambs of God grazed at Ephratah in Judah. From here one can see Mount Zion, the Old City of Jerusalem and Mount Scopus, but not the modern Church of the Nativity. Queen Helena and Constanitne, also showed interest in the site and an eight sided temple was built.

In the photo below, the hill in the background is named Ramat Rachel, but in Biblical times it was known as the Mount of Giloh and was built later by King Rehoboam as Bethlehem the City of David.

The map above, which was published in Paris in 1745, shows Jerusalem (yellow), this site (red), Bethlehem (blue), Herodian (orange) and Massada (green). The map shows how easy it would have been to send messages great distances by bonfires, warning of attack or threat.

A few minutes walk south stands the Mar Elias monastery and from this point one can see Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Herodian, on a clear day the Dead Sea, and the hills of Jordan.



Far left: Mount Zion & Jerusalem. Center left just past the fallen column, the rock where Mary rested, and behind, Mount Giloh, that earlier in King Rehoboam's time he named it Beit Lechem, the City of David, now it is kibbutz Ramat Rachel where the voice of Rachel's lamentation is heard at Ramah--Jeremiah 31:15 "Thus said the Lord God: Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears, for thy work Rachel is rewarded, said God: thy children shall come again from the land of the enemy.... Thy children shall come again to their own border." This place is named for Rachel's lamentations: Tzel Tzach the resting rock of Rachel death and the birthplace of Ben Oni, the Son of the seed of God within me, the name Rachel gave to Her second child before she died and Jacob changed the child's name to Benjamin.



This is where in 2 Kings 1, the Hill of Elijah overlooks the coming of the Messiah from Ephratah in Judah, being led by the lamb of God, God Himself, through Rachel's burial cave as written in Jeremiah 31:15.

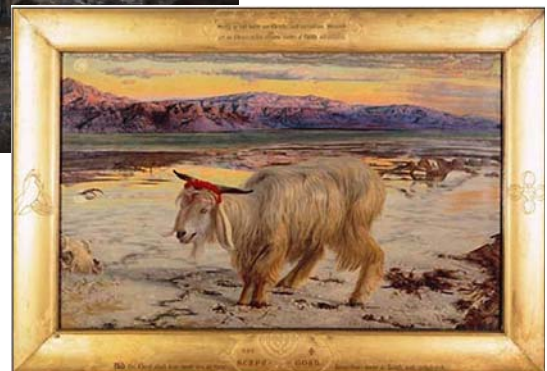
Just behind the Monastery is a steep hill dotted with trenches and fortifications. This is where the Egyptian army was stopped in 1948. The view from monastery was considered by the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt (1854-1902), his favourite and after his death his widow had a stone bench placed at the entrance of the monas-tery with the permission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

It could have been from here that Holman Hunt made his descent to the Dead Sea where he started to paint his celebrated portrait of the 'Scapegoat' which hangs in the Liverpool Museum. Severe conditions limited the survival of his models so he stood others in a tin bath in the courtyard of the home that he built on the Prophets Street, Jerusalem where he continued to work.

Standing on the hill behind the monas-tery I took the panoramic shot below. The hill that stands in sunlight is Har Homa (1) the building of which caused some political friction with the former Clinton Administration.



Above: The stone bench.
Left: the monastery.
Below: The 'Scapegoat'.



Herodian (2) and the newly found tomb of King Herod can just be made out in the mist and (3) is the current city of Bethlehem. Looking in the opposite direction Jerusalem can be seen and it is frightening to see how small the distances are.

