

"THE UNIQUE TOMB"

Marion B. Hill

"Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead" Matt. 28:5-7.

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." I Cor. 15:14, 20.

Again we hear the great resurrection story; again we visit the tomb to verify fully the angel's words to the women from Galilee. Here is a tomb different from others—it is empty! Rejoice and sing, O ye people of the earth—the cold tomb could not hold our blessed Lord! He burst the bands of death.

We enter this rock-hewn tomb where we sense the presence of our risen Lord and Saviour. This would be a very sad place of pilgrimage indeed if the body of Jesus were still in it, and such would be the case had He been a mere martyr. "But He rose again and He lives today."

A look at other Palestinian tombs brings out the contrast between dormant dust and a risen Saviour. A Moslem mosque has for many years stood over the Cave of Machpelah where rests the earthly remains of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their wives, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah. We are not permitted to enter the cave, but only to go inside the mosque, for Moslems as well as Christians and Jews have high regard for Abraham; no one may disturb his sacred dust.

Here at the mouth of Machpelah the first financial transaction recorded in the Bible took place, as the princely patriarch "weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant . . . And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying place."—Gen 23:16-20.

("The Unique Tomb" etc. by Marion B. Hill)

A lot of Genesis history moves in panorama before us as we contemplate outstanding events in the lives of early Bible characters. Here at the Machpelah mosque we recall that "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God" (Jas. 2:23); and that Sarah, his wife, "received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age" (Heb. 11:11). We also think of Isaac, the child of promise (Gen. 21: 1-8) and the one through whom God gave Abraham his supreme test of faith (Gen. 22); and of Rebekah, Isaac's bride, who chose to travel afar to be wedded to Abraham's heir, even though it meant that she would never see her heathen homeland again (Gen. 24). We recall Jacob, the supplanter, who many years later as a prince prevailed with God and man (Gen. 32:3-33:11) . . . and his wife, Leah, who bore six of the twelve sons of Jacob—the original "children of Israel."

But the power of death is evidenced here as elsewhere, and impresses us as we think of those heroes of faith who made "foot-prints on the sands of time" never to be obliterated, and yet whose mortal bodies decayed to dust long ago, Machpelah being a monument to all of them.

Jacob's most loved wife, Rachel, who lost her life by bearing Benjamin, is buried near the scene of her death, by the Bethlehem-to-Jerusalem highway. To see her tomb is to recall Jeremiah's prophecy, "Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." This was fulfilled in the massacre of Bethlehem

babies by Herod, when he sought to kill the infant Christ. Rachel's older and distinguished son, Joseph, is buried up north near Shechem. Seeing his tomb we remember "this dreamer" (Gen. 37:19) whose dreams were all gloriously fulfilled after prolonged persecution failed to defeat him. As Egypt's great prime minister, he later requested that his brothers and descendants take his bones with them out of Egypt. If God had seen fit to have the writers of Exodus and Joshua give all details, they might have recorded that, as the children of Israel departed from Egypt, the "house of bondage," and headed for Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the future possession of their descendants, they took with them what was probably an oxcart laden with a stone coffin containing the embalmed body of Joseph. This strange conveyance changed hands and changed oxen again and again as it bore this precious body through the Red Sea, through the wearisome wilderness wanderings, through Jordan, and at last through conquered Canaan until it was laid to rest.

Palestine, the land of patriarchs, priests, prophets, and apostles, speaks as solemnly of death as other lands do, except the Garden Tomb. Even Lazarus, raised from the dead by death's Conqueror, was allowed to die again; and such was the case with every person whom Christ and prophets and apostles raised to life. In the environs of Jerusalem, including even the very slopes leading down from the city, there are numerous ancient and modern tombs. A Moslem cemetery now crowns the very summit of Calvary.

Because, amid all, there is ONE TOMB where death met its Conqueror, we rejoicingly sing:

"Death can not keep his prey—

Jesus my Saviour!

He tore the bars away—

Jesus, my Lord!

He arose! He arose!

Hallelujah! Christ arose!

This tomb at the base of Mt. Calvary is different — gloriously different from all others; and, because this is true, the tombs of those who "sleep in Jesus" (I Thess. 4:14) will be different also.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."—I Cor. 15:26.

"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." Isa. 26:19.

THE LIVING LORD

Dr. Dale of Birmingham was once writing an Easter sermon. When he was half through, the thought of the Risen Lord broke in upon him as it had never done before. "Christ is alive!" he said to himself—"alive for evermore!" He paused and repeated: "He is alive this very minute, living as certainly as I myself am." He arose, repeating as he walked, "Christ is living!"

At first it seemed strange and hardly true, and then it came to him as a sudden burst of glory — Christ is now living! It was like a new discovery although he thought he had believed it before. Then he said, "I must get this across to my people. I shall preach about it again and again until they realize it as I do now."

For months after, and in every sermon, the living Christ was his one great theme, and there and then began the custom of singing in that great church an Easter hymn on every Sunday morning. Have we laid hold of the fact that we have a living Lord, One who "ever liveth to make intercession for (us)," and to act for us in every time of need?

—Keith L. Brooks