

## **A walking tour of Jerusalem's surrounding Valleys**

This tour takes us on foot around and through the deep valleys which surround ancient Jerusalem, whilst enjoying beautiful views of the city from angles not usually seen from a touring vehicle.

We will walk areas which developed for 3 millennia into Jerusalem's Jewish Necropolis, whilst taking in some additional sights and stories from eras as diverse as the Frankish Crusaders, the modern War of Independence and the Six-Day War.

Our tour will help us to understand and appreciate the development of views on the afterlife in Israelite-Judean and later Jewish beliefs, traditions and culture, through the evolution of Jewish burial styles and systems from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE to the modern day, together with influences of regional cultures on the city's dwellers.

### **Rock and Tombs**

In Jerusalem, similarly to throughout Judea, Samaria and the Negev, thin or completely absent top soil meant that human burial developed using the Land's other plentiful natural resource – Limestone rock.

Rock faces in the valleys facing the city provided the most natural terrain to bury loved ones, where their chosen place of rest could be seen from the hilltop city.

As these open sites gradually became scarcer, use was made of cleared rock-faces remaining from abandoned quarries. As Prophetic & Messianic visions of eventual Resurrection entered religious belief, the Mount of Olives, facing the city to the east, took over as the main Jewish burial site.

### **The Western Valley**

Below the towering King David Hotel, we look across to Jerusalem's western hill, incorporated into the city by the Hasmoneans in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE, from which point this area began to be used for burial, including by the later Herodians.

### **Katef Ben Hinnom**

This rock escarpment, to the south west of the ancient city and now trapped between the Begin Heritage centre and the Scottish church, was excavated from the early 1970's by Dr. Gabriel Barka'i, one of Israel's most distinguished archaeologists, who found here the oldest written Hebrew yet found. You'll learn of that story as well as all about 1<sup>st</sup>-Temple Era burial beliefs, which differed completely from those from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Era to modern times.

### **Ben Hinnom Valley Gems**

As we descend a little into the recently-landscaped valley itself, we'll take a look at City Hall's efforts to develop our path, whilst taking in the sites the route offers, including sites from the 19-year Jordanian occupation with their fascinating stories.

## **Karaites, Hasmoneans and Frankish Crusaders**

These all left their mark on the rock-faces surrounding the city, using the Ben Hinnom valley for burial. We'll take a look at some of these rarely-visited tombs.

## **Kidron Valley Tombs**

The monumental tombs in the Kidron Valley east of the ancient city are prominent features on the city landscape, though largely only viewed from afar, or paid little attention, yet they have a rich history and much to tell of life in the city during the middle to late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Era.

## **Mount of Olives**

Passing destroyed graves from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as very recent reconstructions of these graves whose headstones were removed during Jordanian rule, we'll partially ascend the Mount to the east of the city, where the Yehoshafat (Josephat) valley from the north joins the Kidron valley. Here we'll take a look at a Jewish cemetery from the modern era and talk of the cultural change which led to this form of burial in Jerusalem.

## **Optional additions to the tour:**

***Prophets and Temple Symbols*** - For the more adventurous traveler, we can ascend further up the Mount of Olives and underground, for a look at a 2500 year old 1<sup>st</sup> Temple Era tomb which tradition accredits to two of the Biblical Prophets. This tomb cavern was later developed into a very rare and unique system of catacombs. A surprise awaits you in the shape of the system.

(\* This option requires vehicle access to the Mount of Olives Ascent and may require reversing the route of the tour, as well as an additional 45 minutes)

***Rarely-visited gems – Tombs from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Era*** – With an extension to our tour using transportation, we visit 3 additional and remarkably well preserved burial sites on the Mount of Olives, which can visually give a deeper understanding of the merging of late 1<sup>st</sup> Temple Era Jewish burial styles with 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple ones, in a gradual process, generated by a change in religious beliefs regarding the afterlife.

(\* This option requires vehicle access traversing the Mount of Olives and may require reversing the route of the tour, as well as an additional 1-1½ hours)

**Seasons for the tour:** Spring, Fall, Winter.

Summer afternoons are only recommended for 'hardened' walkers accustomed to and prepared for the heat and sun exposure.

**Duration of the tour:** variable from 4-6½ hours (depending on additional options).

**Difficulty of the tour:** For reasonably good walkers. Not strenuous, but NOT recommended for anyone with walking difficulties.

**Price: Full-day tour, (excluding taxis for return or to Mount of Olives Start point)**