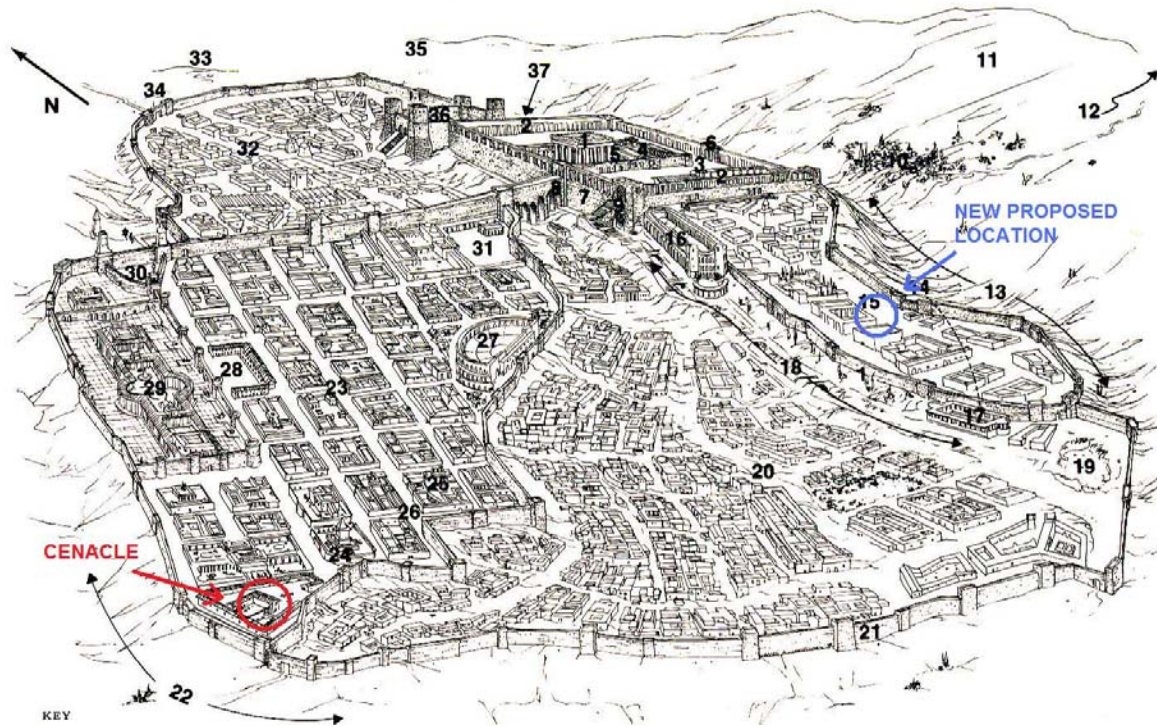


A Different Location for the Cenacle

by Roberto Raciti

While reading Blessed Emmerich's description of the Last Supper and the Cenacle, I realized that the true location of this place was somehow different from what is today generally accepted. This is not the only place which might be wrongly located, as I believe there are others, such as the true location of Mount Sinai. I compared the information contained in the book "The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ", as the main source, as well as the Gospels. I also found what I believe to be the first mention of the House of the Last Supper in the Old Testament. First, let's have a look at a map of ancient Jerusalem:



I indicated the widely accepted location of the Cenacle in red, and Emmerich's location in blue. As you can see, the new proposed location is located inside what once used to be David's citadel on Mount Zion; this is much closer to the valley of Josaphat, and the Mount of Olives.

This is what Emmerich tells us about the Cenacle:

“The disciples had already asked Jesus where he would eat the Pasch. Today, before dawn, our Lord sent for Peter, James, and John, spoke to them at some length concerning all they had to prepare and order at Jerusalem and told them that when ascending Mount Sion, they would meet the man carrying a pitcher of water.”

First, we must establish what Blessed Emmerich means by "Mount Sion". Jerusalem has at least three prominent mounts, one is the Temple Mount, sometimes also called Mount Moriah or Araunah's threshing floor. The second is where David's citadel and castle were located, opposite the Temple on the southern side, called properly Mount Sion (or Zion). The other is where the usual location of the cenacle is located, this is also called Mount Zion in modern times, for some reason.

Before David conquered the city Jerusalem, this place was apparently called Salem (Peace) and was where Melchisedech dwelt. Many centuries later, it became a Jebusite stronghold, called Jebus. At that point there was no temple, and the city was not developed as it was in the time of Jesus; it was just a small stronghold on a mountain top and well fortified. When David conquered this stronghold, it became David's citadel or Mount Zion. As the centuries passed, people built their houses around this mount, down the valley toward

the west. The temple mount was originally a threshing floor, which was purchased by David in order to build the Temple.

[2 Samuel 5]

6 The king and his men then marched on Jerusalem, on the Jebusites living in the territory. These said to David, 'You will not get in here. The blind and the lame will hold you off.' (That is to say: David will never get in here.)

7 But David captured the citadel of Zion, that is, the City of David.

8 That day, David said, 'Whoever gets up the tunnel and kills a Jebusite . . .' As for the blind and the lame, David hated them with his whole being. (Hence the saying: the blind and the lame may not enter the Temple.)

9 David went to live in the citadel and called it the City of David. David then built a wall round it, from the Millo inwards.

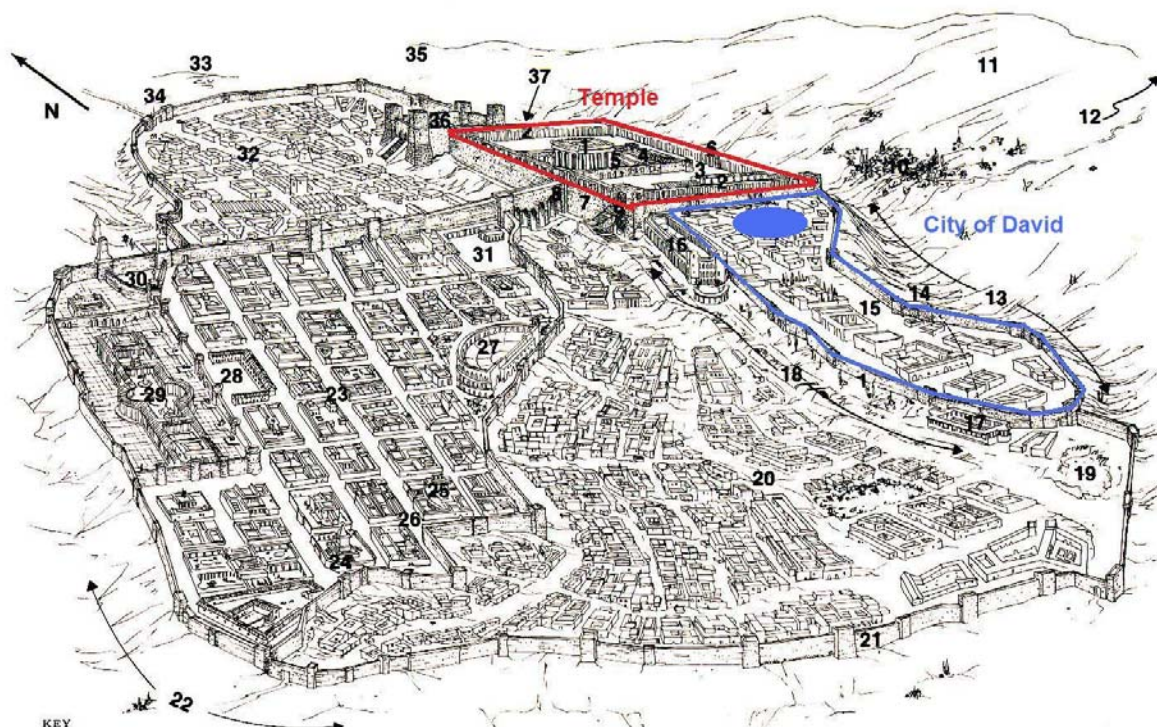
In between David's citadel and the Temple, there was a small settlement called Ophel, where mostly temple workers lived (according to Emmerich). We find Ophel being mentioned in Nehemiah. Now it is clear from Emmerich's description that she is referring to David's citadel when she talks about Mount Zion:

“I saw the two Apostles ascending towards Jerusalem, along a ravine, to the south of the Temple, and in the direction of the north side of Sion.”

The apostles were coming from the east, probably from Bethania where Jesus used to stay when not in Jerusalem during the Paschal period. Emmerich clearly states that they ascended a mountain on the south side of the temple, which can only be Mount Zion, the modern city of David.

“On the southern side of the mountain on which the Temple stood, there were some rows of houses; and they walked opposite these houses, following the stream of an intervening torrent. When they had reached the summit of Mount Sion, which is higher than the mountain of the Temple, they turned their steps towards the south, and, just at the beginning of a small ascent, met the man who had been named to them; they followed and spoke to him as Jesus had commanded.”

I highlighted the city of David, also called the citadel or Accra (in Maccabees) in blue and the Temple compound in red. The blue area shows where I speculate David's castle stood:



Now have a look at this description:

“On the southern side of Mount Sion, not far from the ruined Castle of David, and the market held on the ascent leading to that Castle, there stood, towards the east, an ancient and solid building, between rows of thick trees, in the midst of a spacious court surrounded by strong walls.”

Emmerich is clearly stating that the House of the Last Supper is not far from the ruined castle of David. This castle could be nothing else than the remnant of the old stronghold of the Jebusite city. So it must be located inside David's city, most reasonably at the northern side of the Mount, just opposite the Temple Mount. It wouldn't make sense for David to have his own castle and palace outside the stronghold he conquered. Some recent archaeological excavation have demonstrated that this area (which today is outside the modern walls) contains many ancient fortifications. Some archaeologists have discovered the remnants of what they believe to be David's castle.

“The supper-room, which was originally larger, had formerly been inhabited by David's brave captains, who had there learned the use of arms.

“Previous to the building of the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant had been deposited there for a considerable length of time, and traces of its presence were still to be found in an underground room. I have also seen the Prophet Malachy hidden beneath this same roof: he there wrote his prophecies concerning the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacrifice of the New Law. Solomon held this house in honour, and performed within its walls some figurative and symbolical action, which I have forgotten. When a great part of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, this house was spared. I have seen many other things concerning this same house, but I only remember what I have now told.”

Now it makes good sense that near David's castle we would find barracks, stables, prisons, and also a building destined for the king's officers. Emmerich is telling us that the House of the Last Supper was previously occupied by David's brave men, and that the Ark stood there for some time.

It is fitting for the Ark to have stayed inside the same building where Jesus celebrated his Last Supper. But it's unlikely that the Ark stood inside the place where currently most people believe the Cenacle to be located, because at that point in time, the city did not extend so far to the west. It is simply too far from David's city. The Bible tells us that, before the temple was built, David decided to take the ark inside the City of David from the place where it formally stood. David would not have taken the ark inside his castle, but inside a building which was not too far from where he lived, so that it could be well protected.

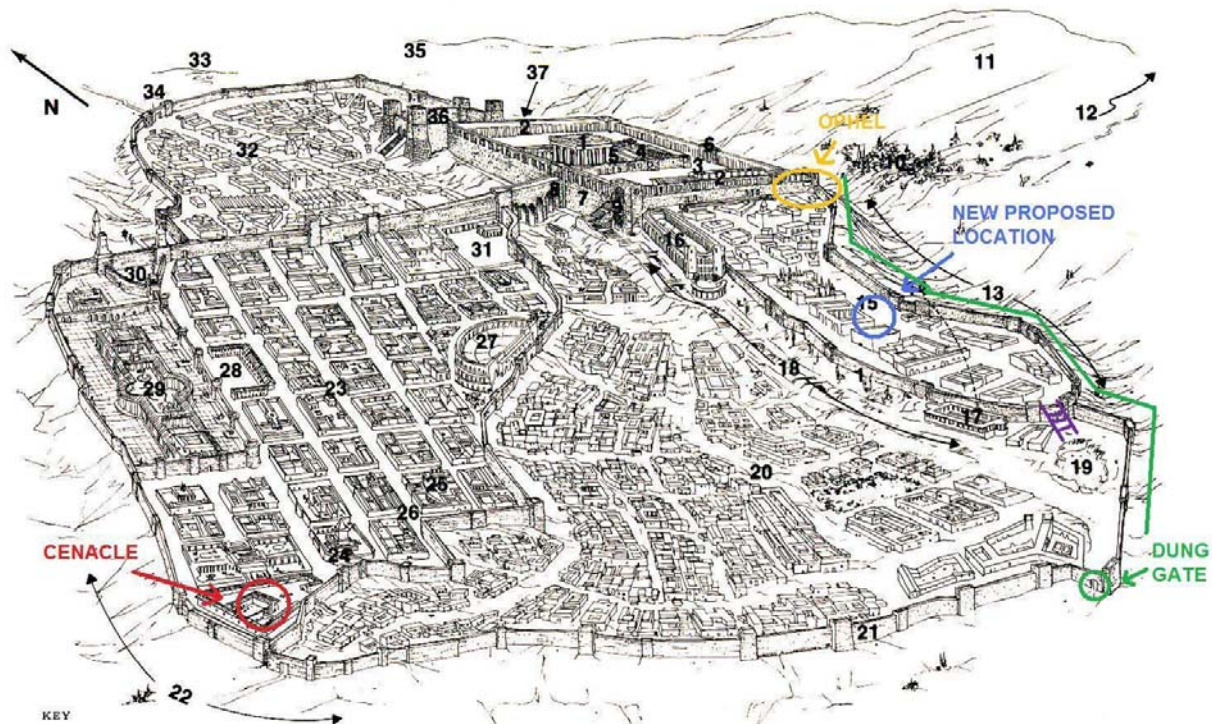
⁹ **That day David felt afraid of Yahweh. 'How can the ark of Yahweh come to be with me?' he said.**

¹⁰ **So David decided not to take the ark of Yahweh with him into the city of David but diverted it to the house of Obed-Edom of Gath.**

¹¹ **The ark of Yahweh remained in the house of Obed-Edom of Gath for three months, and Yahweh blessed Obed-Edom and his whole family.**

¹² **King David was informed that Yahweh had blessed Obed-Edom's family and everything belonging to him on account of the ark of God. David accordingly went and, amid great rejoicing, brought the ark of God up from Obed-Edom's house to the City of David.**

Now let's compare this layout of the city, with Nehemiah's description of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. I have only marked the section that goes from the Gate of the dunghill to Ophel, which is highlighted in green in the following map:



[Nehemiah]

{3:14} And Malchijah, the son of Rechab, the leader of the street of Beth-haccherem, built the gate of the dunghill. He built it, and he set up its double doors and locks and bars.

Malchijah is rebuilding the dunghill gate, south of David's city.

{3:15} And Shallum, the son of Colhozeh, the leader of the district of Mizpah, built the gate of the fountain. He built it, and he covered it, and he set up its double doors and locks and bars, and the walls of the pool of Shelah at the garden of the king, and as far as the steps that descend from the City of David.

Shallum is rebuilding the next section; we are told that another gate was located here (the Gate of the Fountain). The pool of Shelah came next, then a garden and some stairs. These stairs led to the city of David, so it was not so steep from this side of the mountain. These stairs would create an easy access from the citadel to the gardens of the king. (I highlighted the presumed location of the stairs in violet).

{3:16} After him, Nehemiah, the son of Azbuk, the leader of one half part of the street of Bethzur, built, as far as opposite the sepulcher of David, and even to the pool, which was constructed with great labor, and even to **the house of the strong**.

We are next told that the sepulcher of David was located inside the citadel, as most probably were the tombs of the other kings of Judah. Then comes the "house of the strong". Aren't these the brave men that Emmerich described previously? Quite certainly, for the castle of David (referred to as the house of the king) is located further north from this point. For this reason I believe that the "house of the strong" referred to in Nehemiah is nothing else than the Cenacle itself. On a biblical level, these brave men represent the Apostles, who were not brave in the military sense, but were brave and strong in faith, so it is fitting for the House of the Last Supper to be also called the House of the Apostles, since they most often stayed inside this building after the Lord's death.

Notice that Emmerich tells us that this house was spared from the destruction of Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege. In fact Nehemiah tells us that a wall was repaired in front of the house of the strong, probably because this building was still there during the rebuilding of the walls. It's unlikely that the people who dwelled in Jerusalem would have built or repaired anything, from the Babylonian captivity up until the time of Nehemiah, who was the first to undertake the rebuilding of the walls. So if Nehemiah mentions the "gates" and "buildings", one could conclude that they were still in existence at the time of Nehemiah, or at least their foundations.

I also find this description interesting, as it reminds me of the "house built on the rock" (Luke 6). The reason why this house stood and was not destroyed is that the soldiers were brave and had faith, and the same can be said for the Apostles. So whoever builds his house on faith, it will not crumble to ground as the rest of the houses in Jerusalem, as well as the Temple did.

[Nehemiah]

{3:17} After him, the Levites, Rehum, the son of Bani, built. After him, Hashabiah, the leader of one half part of the street of Keilah, built, in his own neighborhood.

{3:18} After him, their brothers, Binnui, the son of Henadad, the leader of one half part of Keilah, built.

{3:19} And beside him, Ezer, the son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, built another measure, opposite the ascent to the strongest corner.

{3:20} After him, at the mount, Baruch, the son of Zabbai, built another measure, from the corner even to the door of the house of Eliashib, the great priest.

{3:21} After him, Meremoth, the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, built another measure, from the door of the house of Eliashib, along the length of the house of Eliashib.

{3:22} And after him, the priests, men from the plains of the Jordan, built.

{3:23} After him, Benjamin and Hasshub built, opposite their own house. And after him, Azariah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, built, opposite his own house.

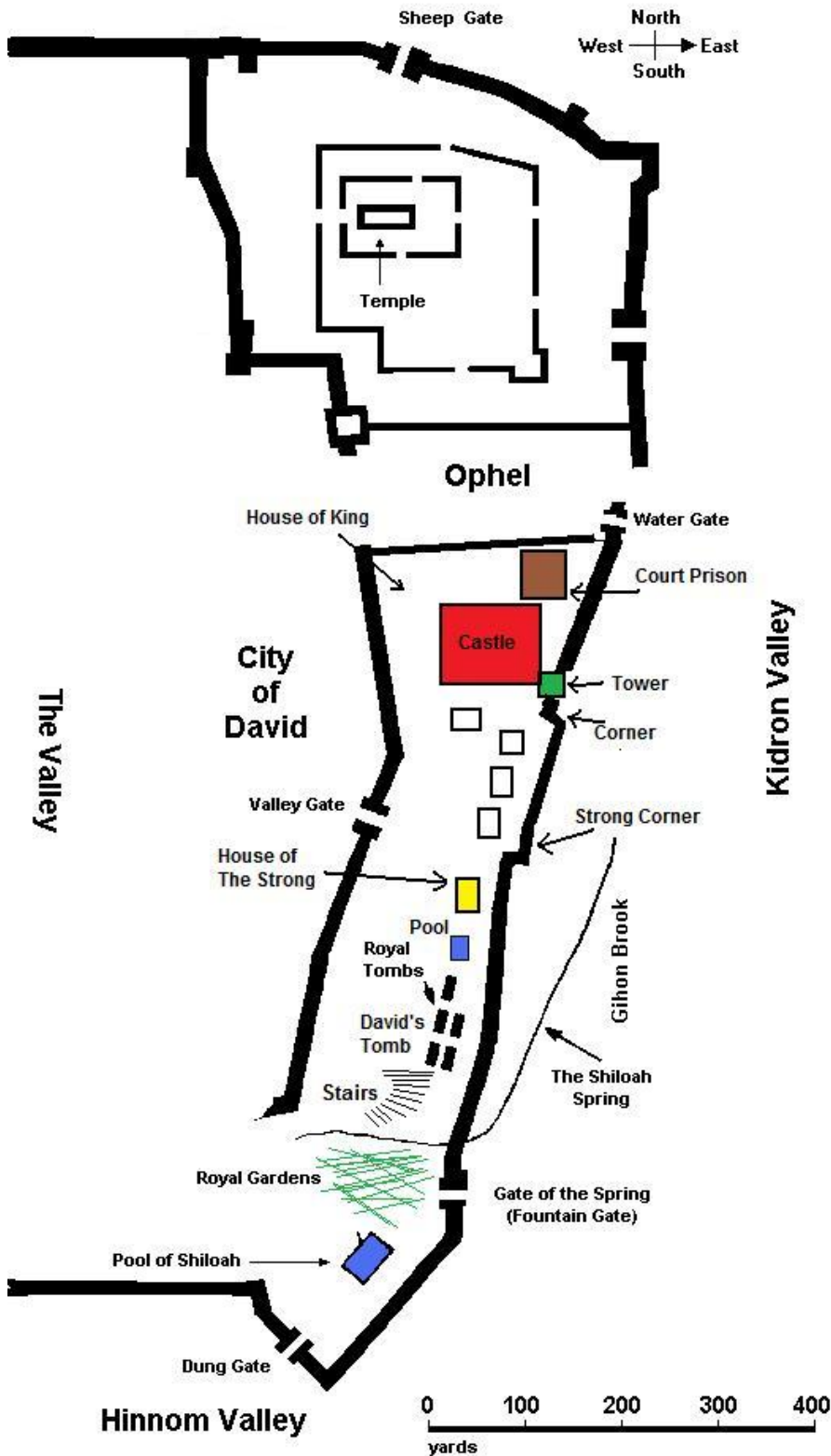
{3:24} After him, Binnui, the son of Henadad, built another measure, from the house of Azariah, even to the bend and to the corner.

{3:25} Palal, the son of Uzai, built, opposite the bend and the tower that projects from the **high house of the king, that is, into the court of the prison. After him, Pedaiah, the son of Parosh, built.**

{3:26} And the temple servants, who were living in Ophel, built to a point opposite the water gate, toward the east, and the tower that is prominent.

{3:27} After him, the Tekoites built another measure in the opposite area, from the great and prominent tower to the wall of the temple.

The description of this side of Jerusalem is so detailed that I could almost draw a map. I took a map from internet and added some details. Of course the map is speculative, but the locations of these building is more or less correct, based on Nehemiah's description:



Notice that the description of these eastern walls is more elaborate, and it seems as if shorter portions of the wall were being built over time, as opposed to the western and southern walls. That is because the walls of the city of David were probably stronger and thicker and were also located on a mountain top, so that they were more difficult to build, with many bends, corners, and turns.

David's castle and his headquarters were located in the city of David, south of the Temple. Emmerich states that the Cenacle was not far away from this Castle, so the Cenacle must be located in this portion of Jerusalem, more specifically between the dunghill gate and the water gate in Ophel. Since Nehemiah

describes the building of the walls anticlockwise, starting from the sheep gate, the Cenacle cannot be located in the usual location, because that is away from the described place.

Now there are other clues that support the new location. Let's see what the Gospels have to say:

[Matthew]

{26:6} And when Jesus was in Bethania, in the house of Simon the leper,

{26:7} a woman drew near to him, holding an alabaster box of precious ointment, and she poured it over his head while he was reclining at table.

...

{26:17} Then, on the first day of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

{26:18} So Jesus said, "Go into the city, to a certain one, and say to him: 'The Teacher said: My time is near. I am observing the Passover with you, along with my disciples.' "

{26:19} And the disciples did just as Jesus appointed to them. And they prepared the Passover.

Matthew does not give us any indication of where the Supper Room was. He only tells that Jesus told his apostles "Go into the city", but no further information is given. However we are told that some days before Jesus and the apostles were in Bethania, which is east of Jerusalem. One would expect the apostles to come from the east, so from the direction of where the Mount of Olives stood.

[Mark]

{14:3} And when he was in Bethania, in the house of Simon the leper, and was reclining to eat, a woman arrived having an alabaster container of ointment, of precious spikenard. And breaking open the alabaster container, she poured it over his head.

...

{14:12} And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they immolate the Passover, the disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

{14:13} And he sent two of his disciples, and he said to them: "Go into the city. And you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water; follow him.

{14:14} And wherever he will have entered, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says: Where is my dining room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

{14:15} And he will show you a large cenacle, fully furnished. And there, you shall prepare it for us."

{14:16} And his disciples departed and went into the city. And they found it just as he had told them. And they prepared the Passover.

Mark tells us that the apostles found a man in the city who would bring them to the supper room, but again no information is given about the specific location of the House. Mark agrees with Matthew about Bethania.

[Luke]

{22:7} Then the day of Unleavened Bread arrived, on which it was necessary to kill the Pascal lamb.

{22:8} And he sent Peter and John, saying, "Go out, and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat."

{22:9} But they said, "Where do you want us to prepare it?"

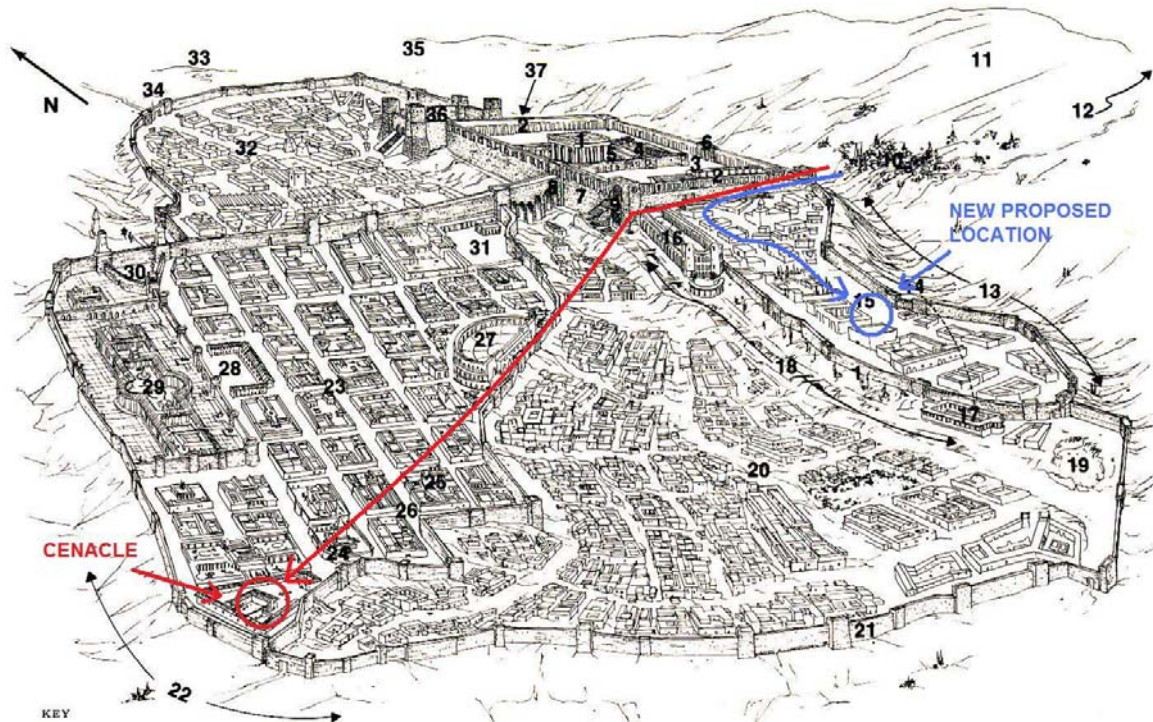
{22:10} And he said to them: "Behold, as you are entering into the city, a certain man will meet you, carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him to the house into which he enters.

{22:11} And you shall say to the father of the household: 'The Teacher says to you: Where is the guestroom, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

{22:12} And he will show you a large cenacle, fully furnished. And so, prepare it there."

{22:13} And going out, they found it to be just as he had told them. And they prepared the Passover.

Luke gives us some clues about the location of the Last Supper Room. In fact, Jesus tells us that the apostles would find the man “as you are entering the city”. That does not necessarily mean that they would have found the man immediately after entering the gate. However, that could have not meant that they had to walk a great length inside the city. The usual place for the Last Supper room is too far to the west. Why would a man with a pitcher go so far to the east and then come back to his former place to take some water? It is more logical to conclude that the Supper House was not too far away from the spot where the apostles entered the city. If you look at the map, you will notice that the newly proposed place is in fact much closer than the usual location.



Also, the proposed new location is a better fit with the description that Emmerich gives in her book.

Now let’s read her account after the Last Supper:

“When Jesus left the supper-room with the eleven Apostles, after the institution of the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar, his soul was deeply oppressed and his sorrow on the increase. He led the eleven, by an unfrequented path, to the Valley of Josaphat. As they left the house, I saw the moon, which was not yet quite at the full, rising in front of the mountain.”

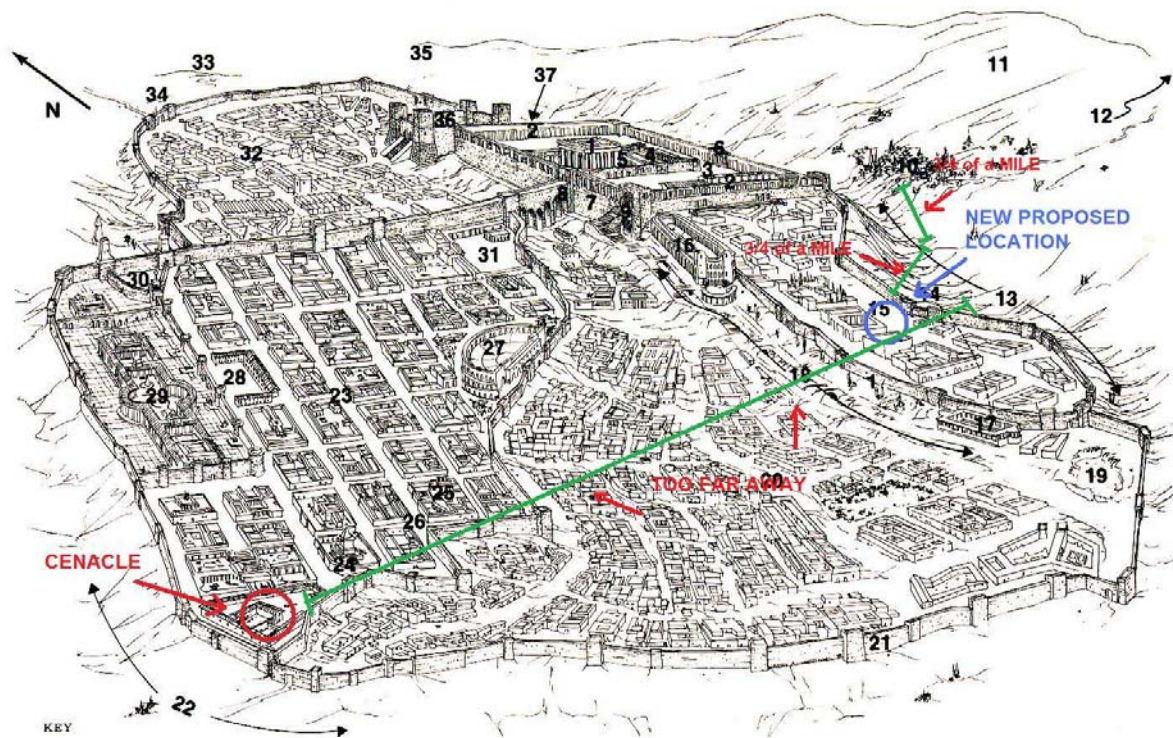
From this description we are led to believe that the Valley of Josaphat was not too far away from the Supper Room, as if they went outside the House without going through the entire city.

“They crossed the brook Cedron, not by the bridge where, a few hours later, Jesus was taken prisoner, but by another, for they had left the direct road. Gethsemani, whither they were going, was about a mile and a half distant from the supper-hall, for it was three quarters of a mile from the supper-hall to the Valley of Josaphat, and about as far from thence to Gethsemani. The placed called Gethsemani (where latterly Jesus had several times passed the night with his disciples) was a large garden, surrounded by a hedge, and containing only some fruit trees and flowers, while outside there stood a few deserted unclosed buildings.”

Emmerich is basically telling us that there was more or less the same distance from the Supper hall to the Valley of Josaphat as from the Valley to the Garden of Gethsemani. You can now clearly see that the usual location cannot possibly fit this description, since there are at least five miles from this location to the valley

of Josaphat. Even if Emmerich was wrong on the exact mileage, still the distance to the usual location is too great to account for such a mistake.

However, the proposed new location fits this description very well.



In one account, Emmerich describes how many new converts flocked into Jerusalem in the first weeks and months after the death of Christ. She tells us that there was such a large crowd, it was impossible to accommodate all these people in the city. So they had to pitch their tents outside the city, in the Valley of Josaphat around Mount Sion.

If the Cenacle was located in the usual place, why would all these converts build their tents so far away from it? Now it does not make sense for these people to be so far away from the Blessed Sacrament and from the apostles who lived in the Supper House (which was also the first church). Rather, it makes sense for these people to have built their tents around the old City of David, as Emmerich describes, because that is where the Supper Room was located.

For all these reasons, I believe that the real location of the Supper Room was not in the currently accepted location. I have no idea if this room is still in existence, or buried underground, but I am certain, based on this evidence that it is located in the place that is now called the city of David.

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