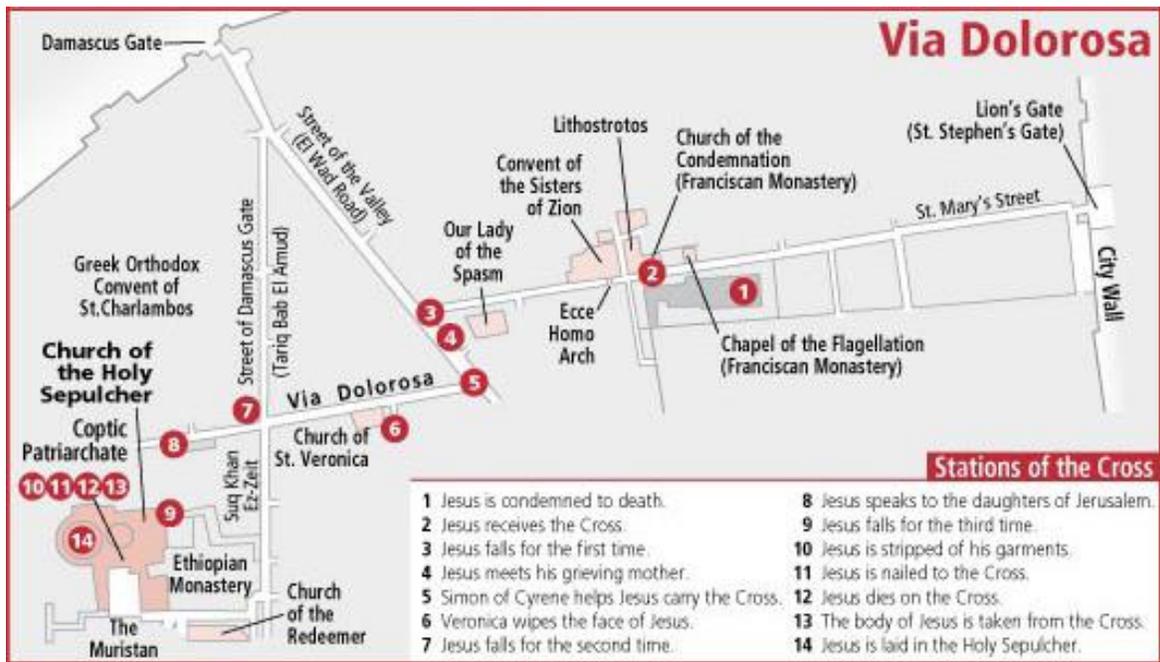


# Walking the Via Dolorosa – Session 1 - Introduction



## The Via Dolorosa

From the earliest days of the church, Christians in Jerusalem and those on pilgrimage to the Holy City have followed the path of Christ from the Gethsemane to Golgotha – from the place of the arrest of Jesus to the place of the crucifixion. Stopping at various places along the way, the Scriptures would be read and prayers prayed, remembering that night and day of long ago.

For example, a pilgrim in approx. 380 AD, “Egeria,” records her experience of Holy Week in Jerusalem. On the night of Maundy Thursday, which commemorates the Last Supper (Mark 14:12–26) and the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–42), Christians assembled at the Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives (now lost). Then after services at the Imbomon (now the Mosque of the Ascension of Jesus) and at Gethsemane (in the Grotto of Gethsemane, which can be visited to this day), they went without pause across the city for a dawn service in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre. This same path across the city, skirting the north wall of the Temple Mount, and ascending to the Holy Sepulchre church, is more or less the same path taken today.

It must be pointed out that while this route approximates the most likely path from the Antonia Fortress (on the north-west corner of the Temple Mount) to the Holy Sepulchre (built over the area of the Crucifixion and Resurrection), the actual streets which Jesus walked are well below street level – between 3-5 metres down.

Jerusalem, as well as its streets and walls, had been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times since the time of Jesus. Every conquest and rebuilding – beginning with the Roman conquests and destruction of 70 and 135 AD - put 1<sup>st</sup> Century street level lower and lower, until the original layout was completely buried. That being said, the location of the Antonia Fortress (most likely starting point of Jesus’ walk to the execution ground) is certain, as is the location of the Crucifixion and Resurrection (now preserved within the vast Holy Sepulchre church). The current Via Dolorosa is the most straightforward path between those points. As well, the location given to the events marked by the path have a geographic logic, as we will point out in the coming Sessions.

Given the changes in Jerusalem over the centuries, it is best to understand the Via Dolorosa as a blend of physical and spiritual geography. It is with that understanding that today, in Jerusalem, the Stations of the Cross continue, with thousands walking the Via Dolorosa, both spiritually and physically retracing the path of Christ.

But not all of us can be in Jerusalem on Good Friday. So, from the time of the Middle Ages, many Christians throughout the world have observed the Stations of the Cross within their own churches. The Scripture story is retold, with each station representing an event of the “Passion of Christ,” where God’s love came into direct conflict with the sin and brutality of our world.

### **The Fourteen Stations**

The present Via Dolorosa developed out of a circuit of the holy places in Jerusalem that the Franciscans developed for pilgrims in the 14th century. A Roman Catholic religious order founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209, the Franciscans were made custodians of the Holy Land in 1335. This privilege carried two major duties. First, they had to ensure the performance of the Latin liturgical services in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Second, they were responsible for pilgrims from Europe, in a double sense. They were the intermediaries with the local authorities in case of any dispute, and they served as guides to the holy places. In the 14th century pilgrims usually spent between 10 and 14 days in Jerusalem. In order to guarantee that they saw everything systematically, the Franciscans over the years developed a careful routine, following a devotional path from the place of judgement to the place of the crucifixion itself.

The experience of the Via Dolorosa left an indelible mark on visitors to Jerusalem. A number were so profoundly moved that when they returned to Europe they tried to replicate the conditions of the Way of the Cross, so that those who had not made the pilgrimage could reap the same spiritual benefits.

## **“Stations” in Church**

In the 1600s, ‘Stations’ began to be placed on church walls. These ‘Stations’ or ‘gathering places,’ were centered around wooden crosses, with a scene from the last journey of the Passion placed beneath them. Over the years there have been as few as five, or over 30 ‘Stations.’ In 1731 the number was fixed by Pope Clement XII at fourteen. Nine of these commemorated events in the Gospels and five were taken from early tradition.

### **The Traditional Stations**

- (1) Christ is condemned to death by Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:6–20).
- (2) The cross is laid upon Jesus (John 19:17).
- (3) Jesus falls for the first time.
- (4) Jesus meets his mother, who collapses in shock.
- (5) Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the cross (Mark 15:21).
- (6) Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.
- (7) Jesus falls for the second time.
- (8) Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27–31).
- (9) Jesus falls for the third time.
- (10) Jesus is stripped of his garments (Mark 15:24).
- (11) Jesus is nailed to the cross (Mark 15:24).
- (12) Jesus dies (Mark 15:37).
- (13) The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross (Mark 15:46).
- (14) The body is laid in the tomb (Mark 15:46).

Stations 3,4,6,7, and 9 do not have a Scripture reading attached; instead, they are there to aid devotion and contemplation. There is, however, a logic to why they are placed just where they are on the route. Station 4 brings Jesus’ mother Mary into the procession itself, rather than just at the cross itself (where Scripture first mentions her presence); station 6, which recalls Veronica, is an old tradition within the Christian community, incorporated into the Stations for at least a millennium.

### **The “New” Stations**

On Good Friday 1991, Pope John Paul II, according to long standing papal tradition, led a crowd of people at the Roman Coliseum through the Stations of the Cross. However, he changed the format, altering the fourteen stations and adding a fifteenth (the Resurrection). Some of the traditional ones were kept, while others were dropped and new ones inserted. This is the order we at Zion follow in our own “Stations of the Cross” on Good Friday, beginning not with the judgement of Pilate, but the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, thereby Scripturally leading us through the entire Passion story, while eliminating the non-Scriptural traditional stations.

## **The Stations of the Cross – Good Friday, Zion**

1. Jesus in the Garden of Olives  
- Luke 22:39-46
2. Jesus is betrayed by Judas  
- Luke 22:47-54
3. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin  
- Matthew. 26:57-68
4. Jesus is denied by Peter  
- Matthew 26:69-75
5. Jesus is condemned by Pilate  
- Mark 15:1-15
6. Jesus is scourged & crowned  
- John 19:1-5
7. Jesus is made to carry his cross  
- John 19:14-17
8. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross  
- Mark 15:20-23
9. Jesus is crucified  
- Luke 23:32-38
10. Jesus promises the kingdom to the thief  
- Luke 23:39-43
11. Jesus speaks to his mother  
- John 19:25-27
12. Jesus dies on the cross  
- Mark 15:33-39
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross  
- John 19:38-40
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb  
- Matthew 27:59-66

## **The Stations of the Cross – A Closer Look**

### **FIRST STATION - Jesus is condemned to death**

The First Station is near the Monastery of the Flagellation, where Jesus was questioned by Pilate and then condemned. The chapel, built during the 1920s on the site of a previous building erected by the Crusaders, is now run by the Franciscans, who set out from there each Friday for the traditional procession. The church possesses admirable stained-glass windows representing Christ Scourged at the Pillar, Pilate Washing his Hands, and the Freeing of Barabbas. Above the high altar, under the central dome, is a mosaic on a golden ground showing the Crown of Thorns.

*Matthew 27:22-23,26*

*Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.*

### **SECOND STATION - Jesus takes up his Cross**

The Second Station is near the remains of an ancient Roman construction known as the Arch of Ecce Homo, in memory of the words pronounced by Pilate as he showed Jesus to the crowd. Only part of this triumphal arch, erected under Hadrian (135 AD) to celebrate the capture of Jerusalem, is visible nowadays.

*Matthew 27:27-31*

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

### **THIRD STATION - Jesus falls for the first time**

The Third Station commemorates Christ's first fall on the Via Dolorosa. The place is marked by a small chapel belonging to the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate. It is a nineteenth century building renovated and completed by Catholic soldiers of the Free Polish Army during World War II.

*Isaiah 53:4-6*

*Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

## Map of Ancient Jerusalem in the days of Jesus

- |                                |                             |                          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The Temple                  | 11. The Mount of Olives     | 23. Upper City (Wealthy) |
| 2. Royal Stoa<br>Collonades    | 12. Road to Bethany         | 24. The Upper Room       |
| 3. Sanhedrin                   | 13. The Kidron Valley       | 25. Priestly Homes       |
| 4. Outer Court of<br>Temple    | 14. Gate of Gihon<br>Spring | 26. Caiaphas' House      |
| 5. Inner Court of<br>Temple    | 15. City of David           | 27. Theatre (not found)  |
| 6. Golden Gate                 | 16. Temple Steps            | 28. The Market Place     |
| 7. Current "Wailing<br>Wall"   | 17. The Pool of Siloam      | 29. Herod's Palace       |
| 8. Priestly Bridge and<br>Gate | 18. The Tyropoean<br>Valley | 30. Jaffa Gate           |
| 9. "Robinson's Arch"           | 19. Quarry                  | 31. Hasmonean Palace     |
| 10. Gethsemane                 | 20. Lower City (Poor)       | 32. Northern City        |
|                                | 21. Gehenna                 | 33. Golgotha             |
|                                | 22. Hinnom Valley           | 34. Damascus Gate        |
|                                |                             | 35. Mount Scopus         |
|                                |                             | 36. Antonia Fortress     |
|                                |                             | 37. Pools of Bethesda    |

