

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Introduction

Jesus' road to the cross was a long journey. It did not start on the Via Dolorosa nor in a manger in Bethlehem but in the heart of God. Jesus proclaimed, ... *for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but He sent me* (John 8:42). His suffering did not give Him favor with God but was an act that brings favor to mankind through faith alone in Jesus. *I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins*" (John 8:24).

The painful road that Jesus walked was lonely but not without onlookers. Some were mocking, others were dismayed but the end of the road was not death but life. Matthew 27:51b-54, *And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

Take a few moments to look at the pictures and imagine the journey Jesus made for you and for me. Maybe, the hymn by Charles Wesley will come to mind, *Amazing love: How can it be, That thou my God, shouldst die for me?*

Via Dolorosa

Via Dolorosa means "way of suffering." This is a route in Jerusalem approximating the walk of Jesus from His trial under Pontius Pilate to His crucifixion. Since the time of the Crusades, Christian pilgrims have sought to retrace Jesus' steps. The 14 stations of the Cross have been established to incorporate the original route. Chapels and other landmarks have plaques that commemorate Jesus' original journey.

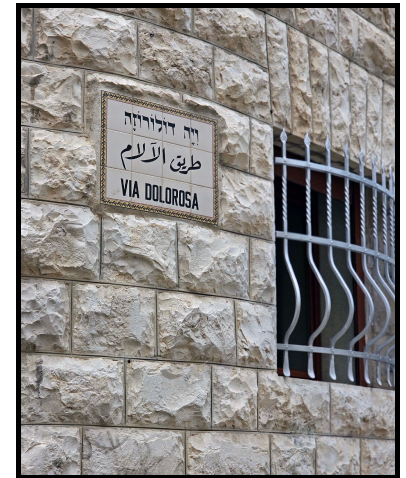


Crowds stopping at Stations

The contemporary path begins in the Jerusalem's Muslim Quarter at the supposed location of the Antonia Fortress and ends at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a distance of less than one-half mile. The traditional route near the Ecce Homo arch is near the Convent of the Sisters of Zion where excavations have uncovered remains that appear to be the Castle of Antonia.

The exact location of the events is not as important as their meaning. Each station of the cross is marked by a Roman numeral plaque.

Station 1: Jesus' condemnation by Pontius Pilate, believed to have occurred at the site of Madrasa al-Omariya, an Islamic college, 300 yards west of the Lion's Gate.



The start of Via Dolorosa near Antonia Fort



The Pavement of Justice

Station 2: Jesus forced to carry His cross and is next to the Franciscan Monastery of the Flagellation. The Chapel of Condemnation marks the site where Jesus was sentenced to death; the Chapel of the Flagellation is where he was beaten by Roman soldiers.

Note: The Convent of the Sisters of Zion is located between Stations 2 and 3. Here you can see large pieces of the Lithostrotos (Pavement of Justice) where Jesus appeared before Pilate and was condemned to death.



Station 4 at the Armenian Church

- Station 3: Where Jesus fell for the first time under the weight of his cross.
- Station 4: Where Mary watched her son pass by carrying the cross, marked by the Armenian Church of Our Lady of the Spasm.
- Station 5: The place where Roman soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to help Jesus carry his cross.
- Station 6: The spot where, according to a tradition, St. Veronica wiped Jesus' face with a cloth that left an image of Jesus' face forever imprinted on the cloth. The relic, known as the Sudarium Veronica, is at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- Station 7: Where Jesus fell for the second time. This is marked by a Franciscan chapel.
- Station 8: A cross and the Greek inscription "NIKA" on the wall of the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. Charalambos mark the place where Jesus consoled the weeping and mourning women of Jerusalem.
- Station 9: The Coptic Patriarchate next to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Here, a Roman pillar marks the site of Jesus' third and final fall.

(Stations 10-14 are inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.)

Station 10: Jesus was stripped at the top of the stairs to the right outside the entrance.

Station 11: Jesus was nailed to the cross represented upstairs just inside the entrance, at the Latin Calvary (Golgotha).

Station 12: Jesus died on the cross represented by the Rock of Golgotha in the Greek Orthodox Calvary (Golgotha).

Station 13: Jesus was taken down from the cross represented by the Statue of Our Lady of Sorrows next to the Latin Calvary.

Station 14: Jesus was laid to rest in the tomb represented inside the altar on the main floor.

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Upon official recognition of Christianity in 325 AD, Emperor Constantine authorized the erection of the church on this site. It lies in the northwest quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. It is the traditional site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial and resurrection. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is considered to be the holiest site for Christians in the world and has been the most important pilgrimage site for Christianity since the 4th century.



A view of one of the domes of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre



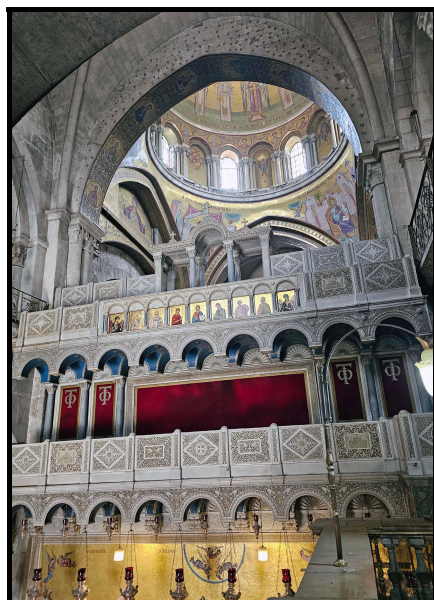
A Coptic church next to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Just inside the entrance to the church is the Stone of Anointing which tradition holds to be where Jesus's body was prepared for burial by Joseph of Arimathea. The Rock of Calvary, where the Crucifixion is believed to have occurred, is encased in glass at the lavish Altar of the Crucifixion and is the most-visited area within the church.

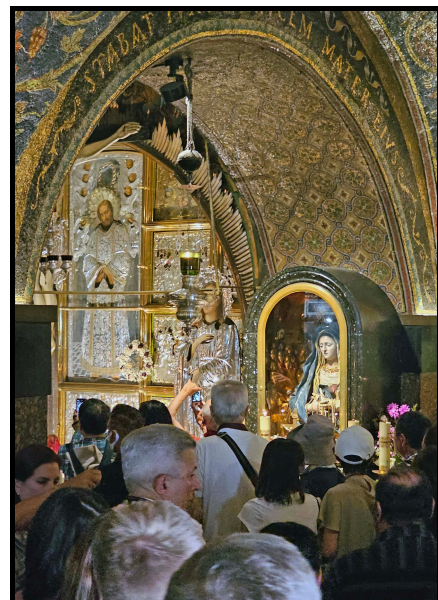
The church was badly damaged at the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 AD. Much of the church was restored during by the Byzantine emperor in 1048 AD. Some archaeological remains on the east and south sides of the church are considered by many to mark the course of the second wall. If that is the case, the site of the church lay just outside the city wall in the time of Jesus. That would support this site as the actual place of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. No rival site is supported by any real evidence.



The Stone of Anointing



One of numerous domes in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre



People trying to view the Rock of Calvary

The Garden Tomb

The Garden Tomb is a Christian pilgrimage site in Jerusalem that contains an ancient tomb and is considered by some to be Jesus' empty tomb. It is adjacent to a rocky knoll known as Skull Hill. In the 1800's some scholars proposed that Skull Hill is Golgotha, where the Romans crucified Jesus. It is located just outside of Jerusalem's Old City walls.

The organization that owns and maintains the Garden Tomb is a non-denominational charitable trust based in the United Kingdom. The association refrains from claiming that the Garden Tomb is the authentic tomb of Jesus, and instead emphasizes the site's utility as a visual aid because of certain similarities to the biblical descriptions of Golgotha and the empty tomb.

The following is from the charitable trust's website:

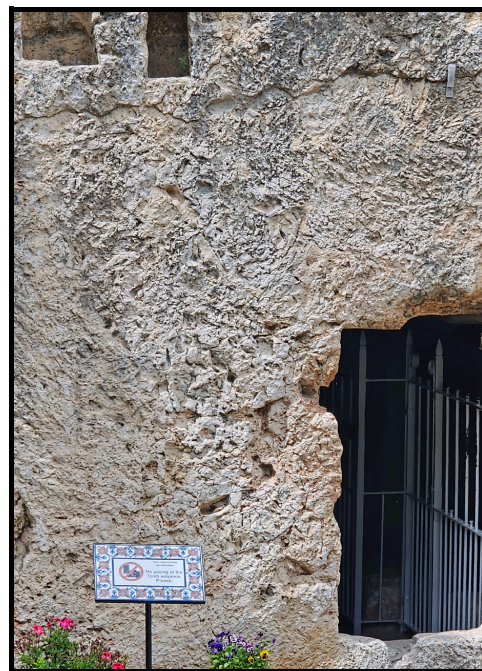


Inside the Garden Tomb

According to the scriptures, Jesus was crucified in a place named "the Skull" (Golgotha in Aramaic). In the mid-19th century, several Christian scholars suggested that the rocky escarpment, which can be viewed from the garden, marked the place of the Messiah's crucifixion.

They noted its proximity to a main city gate, its association with executions according to local tradition, and its physical resemblance to a skull.

In the gospels we read that "at the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no-one had ever been laid" (John 19:41). Archeological evidence, including an ancient winepress, suggests that this place was an agricultural garden in those days, and inside the garden an ancient Jewish tomb has been found, perhaps the empty tomb of Jesus.



Entrance to the Garden Tomb

For over 120 years, the Garden Tomb has shared the story of the Messiah's crucifixion and resurrection with countless visitors from across the globe. Some believe that this garden is the setting of those gospel events.

However, the question as to whether this is the same tomb in which the Messiah was buried is ultimately unimportant. What is important is that visitors to this garden have an encounter with the living Messiah today. This is our prayer and ministry.



A possible site of Golgotha