



Via Dolorosa

Christ's Path *to the* Cross

Dr. Trina Boice

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CHAPTER 1

What Is the Via Dolorosa?

In April 2023, the Prophet and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaimed that Easter Sunday is “the most important religious observance for followers of Jesus Christ” and the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is “the most important and transcendent event ever recorded on earth.”¹ The First Presidency, led by President Nelson, invited everyone to reflect more on the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ during Easter. A Christ-centered observance of Easter is much more meaningful and appropriate than one filled with chocolate rabbits and brightly colored eggs.



One way to reflect more on the Atonement is to learn about the Via Dolorosa, which is believed to be the route where Jesus was forced by the Roman soldiers to carry the cross from His condemnation to crucifixion. While the Via Dolorosa is an extremely popular tradition and pilgrimage for Christians around the world, few members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints even know about it. I’m excited to introduce this fascinating tradition with you and pray that it will enrich your Easter activities each spring, as well as your scripture study efforts all year long.

The New Testament events honored in the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, Israel, tell the greatest story ever told. This book has been lovingly designed to give you a taste of this amazing “Way of the Cross” path in Jerusalem that can give you and your family ideas to better focus on the Savior.

Studying the rich history, inspirational stories, intriguing pictures, and spiritual insights just might become your new favorite tradition at Easter time as you read and learn about the last few hours of the Savior's life, the path that made it possible for us to have eternal life.

This book describes the fourteen stations along the Via Dolorosa route in Jerusalem. After I discuss each station, I'll include the biblical references so you can read them and contemplate what they mean to you. Pondering is powerful.

Even more powerful is taking action. At the end of each chapter, I'll share ideas of how you and your family can apply the principles you studied to become more Christlike. We can study the life of Christ and even walk where He walked, but if we're not developing His qualities and attributes, we're missing the whole point!

You can use this as a guidebook when you visit the Old City in Jerusalem, but if you can't go there, it is my hope is that you will study the many symbols and truths in this book to strengthen your own testimony that Jesus is the Christ!

Daniel Rona, a popular Latter-day Saint tour guide in Israel, stated, "The key to recognizing the Messiah and the true meaning of His life, and those who testified of Him, is the Spirit."² As you read through the pages in this book, listen closely to the Spirit. Write down questions you want inspiration about. The Holy Ghost will teach you what you need to know, regardless of my words.

The Joseph Smith Translation of Timothy 3:16–17 counsels, "And all scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." To summarize, studying the scriptures will do at least four things for us:

1. Teach us truth (doctrine).
2. Point out what we need to change (reproof).
3. Put us back on course (correction).
4. Keep us there (instruction in righteousness).

It warms my heart that millions of Christians around the world are focused on the Savior's atoning sacrifice. Millions of Christians have made pilgrimages to the Via Dolorosa in memory of that sacrifice. We normally associate Easter with Christ's sacrifice for us, but the world celebrates Christmas joyously because of the Atonement.

President Hugh B. Brown stated, "We believe that the greatest story ever told in all the annals of history is the story of the atonement of Christ. The record of his resurrection and ascension, without which the atonement would not have been complete, is the climax to that story; and now over 2000 years after the event, it is still central and pivotal in all true Christian thought."³

The Via Dolorosa

Via Dolorosa is not the name of a street. It's believed to be the route Jesus was forced to walk by the Roman soldiers while He carried the cross from His condemnation to crucifixion. It's two thousand feet long, beginning at the Lions' Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem and ending at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, about a fifteen-minute walk from Gethsemane in the Christian Quarter. In Latin, *Via Dolorosa* means "Way of

Suffering”; Spanish translates it as the “Painful Path.” Other translations describe it as the “Road of Sorrow,” “Way of Grief,” or “The Way of the Cross.”



The Via Dolorosa includes fourteen stations, each representing an event that happened to Jesus on His way to the cross. During the Byzantine era, Christian pilgrims participated in a “Holy Thursday” procession that began at the Mount of Olives, stopped in Gethsemane, and then continued to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site that the mother of Constantine declared as the true site of Jesus’s crucifixion and burial. During the eighth century, more locations were added to the route. When the Catholics of Jerusalem split the city into two arguing factions during the Middle Ages (east vs. west), each side declared sacred spots were in their area of the city that they had control over.

It wasn’t until the fourteenth century that Pope Clement VI finally put the Franciscan friars in charge of the shrines and pilgrims. They led tours in the reverse order of today’s tours. In 1517, they changed the route to go in chronological order of Jesus’s Passion. Later, new Christian traditions emerged, and pilgrimages to the Holy Land became even more popular in Europe. For centuries, visitors argued about the authenticity of the various stations. Only seven of the fourteen stations are biblically based; the remaining stations were born out of stories passed down through the ages, becoming Christian tradition.

As more archeologists studied the highlighted areas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the route we know today became clearer and more official. To this day, we can still see Roman pavement along certain areas of the Via Dolorosa route that confirms they were streets during Christ’s life. The route has changed several times, but the devotion to Jesus Christ’s last hours and the price He paid to redeem mankind from physical and spiritual death has remained. Walking the Via Dolorosa path today is a bittersweet experience for faithful followers of the Savior.

If you are lucky enough to be in Jerusalem on a Friday, you'll get to watch and participate in a Franciscan friar's procession. The friars have been the custodians of the Via Dolorosa since the thirteenth century, and they still carry on this tradition with touching devotion.



They begin at station 1 around 4:00 p.m. (3:00 in the winter) and stop at each of the fourteen stations. They take turns reading scriptures, offering prayers, singing and chanting, and meditating in silence. You can watch videos of their devout procession on YouTube. You can also see nuns pushing pilgrims in wheelchairs and hear groups singing hymns along the way. Re-enactments are often performed with props and period clothing. Escorts of the procession, called Kawas, wear Ottoman uniforms of red fez, gold-embroidered waistcoats, and baggy blue trousers. They bang silver-topped staves (staves) on the ground to signify their authority.

Some tourist groups on pilgrimage wake up at the crack of dawn so they can visit all the stations before the crowds emerge. While that sounds like a good idea, it prevents them from seeing inside all the amazing churches on those sites and causes them to miss out on much of the rich experience. Most of the churches and shops don't open until 8:00 or 9:00 a.m.

The Fourteen Stations of the Via Dolorosa

The original Via Dolorosa route became popular during the Crusades. Centuries later, because so many non-Catholic Christians were hesitant about the biblical authenticity of the Via Dolorosa, Pope John Paul II came up with the Scriptural Way of the Cross in 1991 to back up the various stations with more scriptural evidence. It includes a set of lovely prayers to go with the scriptures. His list includes nine stations:



1. Pilate condemns Jesus.
2. Jesus accepts the cross.
3. Simon helps Jesus carry the cross.
4. Jesus speaks to women.
5. Jesus is stripped of His garments.
6. Jesus is nailed to the cross.
7. Jesus cares for His mother.
8. Jesus dies on the cross.
9. Jesus is resurrected.

Those stations are taken directly from the New Testament, while all the new ones were born out of Christian tradition. The path of fourteen Stations of the Cross was finalized in the eighteenth century. Today, you can see a big metal map at station 2 that shows the stations along a path from beginning to end. It's written in multiple languages, including English. Nine of the official stations are along the narrow streets in Old Jerusalem, with the last five stations inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Today, the fourteen stations of Via Dolorosa include these fourteen events:

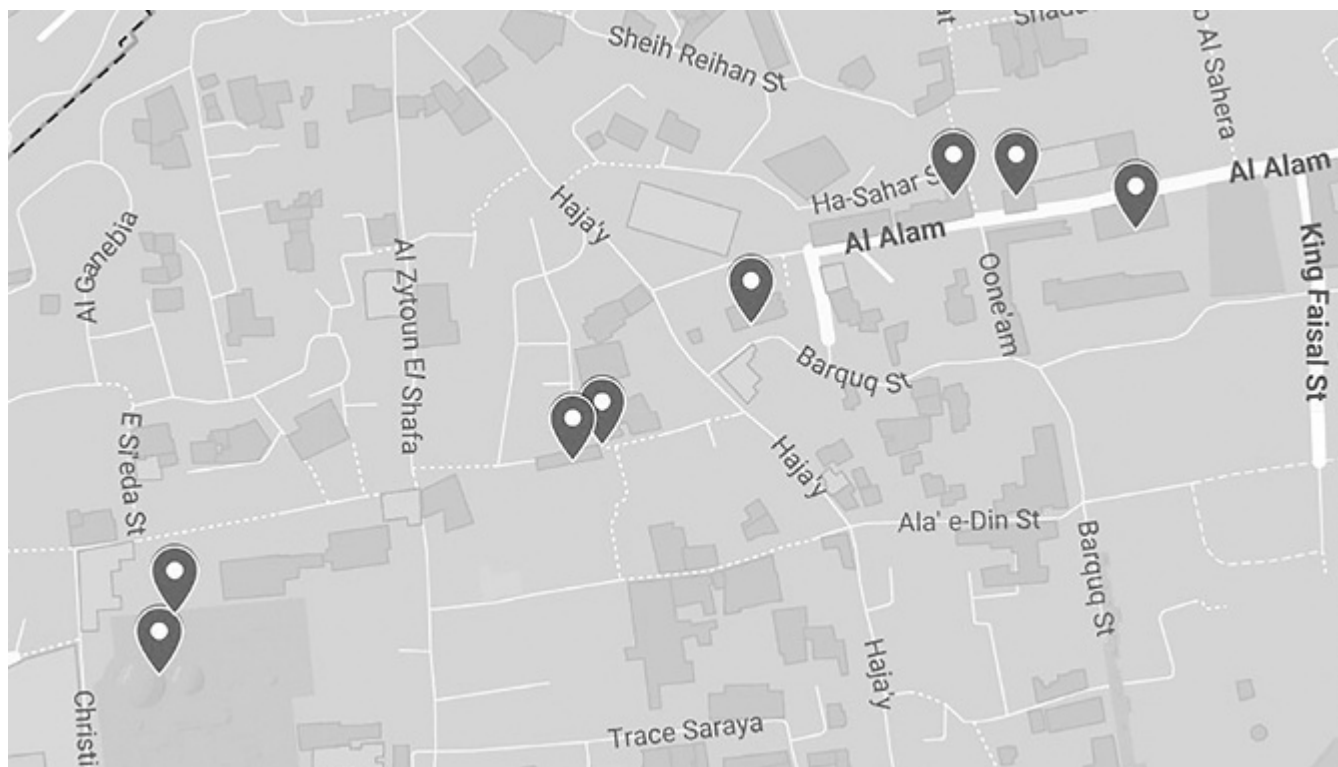
1. Jesus is condemned to death by crucifixion by Pontius Pilate.
2. Jesus is scourged, given the crown of the thorns, and begins to carry the cross.
3. Jesus falls under the weight of the cross for the first time.
4. Jesus encounters his mother, Mary, along the way.
5. Simon of Cyrene is told by the Roman soldiers to help Jesus carry the cross.
6. A woman named Veronica wipes the sweat and blood from Jesus's face.
7. Jesus falls a second time.
8. Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem who are weeping for Him.

9. Jesus falls a third time.
10. Jesus is stripped of His clothes at Golgotha.
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross.
12. Jesus dies on the cross.
13. Jesus's body is removed from the cross.
14. Jesus's body is placed in the tomb.

Station numbers are posted in Roman numerals on a bronze disc marking each station along the Via Dolorosa route to let you know which station you are at. Sometimes, the station number is carved into the stone wall itself. Next to the marker is a small sculpture on the wall that illustrates what happened. Some stations have a small church to commemorate the location, while others display the markers and a sign to identify the site. Despite all of the markers, it's still very easy to get lost because there are so many small passageways that wind like a labyrinth through Old Jerusalem.

You can get a complimentary map of the Via Dolorosa by visiting the Christian Information Center on Omar Ibn el-Khattab Square by Jaffa Gate, as well as in some of the shops along the route. Finding each station along the Via Dolorosa is like a spiritual scavenger hunt. There are many hidden gems along the way, making it easy to get distracted.

It feels odd to walk the path as a spiritual pilgrimage to commemorate the most significant event in human history, all while walking past vendors who are trying to sell their wares to tourists, seeing political propaganda on posters, or hearing angry protesters rant in different languages. Seeing people bow and kneel before each station's spot is humbling and awe-inspiring. It's truly overwhelming to see the faith in others' tear-filled eyes.



Everywhere you go, you will see other individuals and groups from around the world with the same desire of their hearts as yours: to worship and show gratitude for Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. Many groups sing touching hymns about the Savior in all languages. It is heartwarming to hear their testimonies sung in different languages; you can tell they are singing hymns they loved and that their souls are worshipping through the music.

Sometimes, the groups recite scriptures at each station. Other times, they walk in silence. It's an honor to walk this route with others who love Jesus as much as we do.

Via Dolorosa is about two thousand feet long (just over a kilometer or half a mile). It's a winding path through the streets of Old Jerusalem and can be done in about two hours, depending on how long you spend at each station. It could have taken between two to four hours for Christ to walk this distance while carrying the cross.

Because there is a Muslim quarter in Old Jerusalem, you will often hear the daily call to prayer on loudspeakers. Jerusalem is the most sacred real estate in the world as the convergence site of three religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The Old City is constantly under construction with new excavations, scaffolding, tools, and busy workers.

The Via Dolorosa is a vivid tapestry of history, religion, and symbolism, inviting individuals of diverse faiths to embark on a spiritual journey. It is a place where the past meets the present and believers can connect with their faith and the profound sacrifices made by Jesus. As visitors walk the Via Dolorosa, they become part of an ancient narrative, experiencing the weight of history and the power of devotion.



I truly hope everyone is able to visit Jerusalem one day because it is a magnificent and life-changing experience. That being said, I realize not everyone will be able to do so, especially in today's dangerous political climate. Regardless of whether you are able to

travel, we can all learn more about Jesus Christ and express our gratitude for all that He endured for us. President Thomas S. Monson stated:

We need not visit the Holy Land to feel Him close to us. We need not walk by the shores of Galilee or among the Judean hills to walk where Jesus walked. In a very real sense, all can walk where Jesus walked when, with His words on our lips, His spirit in our hearts, and His teachings in our lives, we journey through mortality.⁴

President Monson also pointed out that Jesus walked the path of pain, disappointment, and temptation.⁵ We all experience those things in our life too. But He also walked the path of obedience, service, and prayer. We can do those things too. Each day, we choose whom to follow: Jesus or the world.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie admonished, “In the final analysis, our purpose in learning of our Lord is to gain that knowledge, insight, and desire which will cause us to become like Him.”⁶

As awe-inspiring and faith promoting it is to walk *where* Jesus walked, it is more important that we walk *as* Jesus walked.



The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church plays a large role in the history, identification, and construction of many of the sites in Jerusalem on the Via Dolorosa. Inside Catholic cathedrals all over the world, and often in small parish churches, paintings and sculptures around the walls of the nave (the main area) depict the fourteen stations of the cross, or the “Passion” of the Christ. These images are a devotional tool for Catholics, aiding them in meditating on the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus.

Catholics honor the Via Dolorosa through a variety of practices and rituals, particularly during Lent and Holy Week. Here are some of the main ways their practices could be modified for Latter-day Saint families:

1. **Stations of the Cross:** This is a devotional practice where Catholics meditate on the fourteen stations of Jesus's journey to Golgotha. This can take place in a church or outdoors, often following a series of images or sculptures depicting each station. The practice involves prayer and reflection at each station, often accompanied by readings and hymns.
2. **Pilgrimage to Jerusalem:** Some Catholics make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to walk the actual Via Dolorosa. Pilgrims follow the route through the Old City, stopping at each of the fourteen stations. This pilgrimage is a profound spiritual experience, especially during Holy Week.
3. **Good Friday Services:** On Good Friday, the day commemorating Jesus's crucifixion, many Catholic churches hold special services that include the Stations of the Cross. These services often involve a reenactment of Jesus's journey and the veneration of the cross.
4. **Lenten Devotions:** Throughout Lent, the forty-day period leading up to Easter, Catholics may engage in additional practices to honor the Via Dolorosa, such as attending weekly Stations of the Cross services, fasting, and increased prayer and alms giving.
5. **Passion Plays:** In some communities, Passion plays are performed during Holy Week, dramatizing the events of Jesus's Passion, including His journey along Via Dolorosa. These plays are a way for the community to engage deeply with the story of Jesus's suffering and death.
6. **Personal Meditation and Prayer:** Catholics also honor the Via Dolorosa in their personal prayer, reflecting on the Stations of the Cross and Jesus's sacrifice as a part of their daily or weekly devotions.

The teachings of the Catholic Church focus on the cross and the Atonement. In 1965, the Vatican Council issued the following statement: "What happened in [Jesus's] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, without distinction, nor against the Jews of today. . . . As the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows."⁷



Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated:

We will end up either choosing Christ's manner of living or His manner of suffering! It is either "suffer even as I" (D&C 19:16–17), or overcome "even as [He] . . . overcame" (Rev. 3:21). His beckoning command is to become "even as I am" (3 Ne. 7:27). The spiritually settled accept that invitation, and "through the atonement of Christ," they *become* and *overcome!*" (Mosiah 3:18, 19).⁸ (Original maintained)

The Via Dolorosa is all about the Atonement. This book is all about the Atonement. Easter is all about the Atonement. Our lives should focus on the Atonement. We have been saved!

Bring the Stations to Life

To design a week of true worship before Easter, consider this daily plan with your family.

- **Anointing Saturday:** Mary anoints Jesus with special oil (Luke 7:37–38, 44–46). How do we "anoint" others in word and deed? Choose a way you could serve someone else.
- **Day of Popularity Sunday:** Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph (Luke 19:35–38). How do we vocally and visually show that we are Christians to the world? Wear a shirt from the popular TV show *The Chosen*, or wear another item of clothing or jewelry that expresses your faith in Christ.

- **Day of Authority Monday:** Christ curses the barren fig tree and cleanses the temple (Luke 19:45–46). What do we need to do to cleanse our own lives? Clean your home and prepare your Sunday clothes and shoes for next week.
- **Day of Conflict Tuesday:** Jesus teaches in the temple and on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21 & 25). Ask each member of your family, “What think ye of Christ?” Watch the Christian movie *What Think Ye of Christ?*
- **Day of Rest Wednesday:** Jesus spent time with His friends at Bethany. Whom do you choose to spend time with to uplift your soul? Invite friends over for dinner or an uplifting game night. Think of another family or individual you could fellowship.
- **Day of Fellowship Thursday:** Jesus partakes of the Last Supper with His Apostles. When we partake of the sacrament, do we think of Christ? Read the sacrament prayer together as a family and discuss how you could worship more sincerely during sacrament meeting.
- **Day of Suffering Friday.** At sunrise, Jesus is officially condemned, begins the Via Dolorosa, and dies. Review each of the fourteen stations of Via Dolorosa in this book.
- **Day of Silence Saturday.** Guards are placed at the tomb. Begin a social media fast.
- **Resurrection Sunday.** Jesus triumphs and defeats physical and spiritual death (Mark 16:6). Attend Easter service at church to celebrate the Resurrection. Even better, invite non-member friends to join you.



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- 1 Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” April 2023 general conference, Gospel Library.
 - 2 “Summary Lesson 6: ‘I Will Tell You In Your Mind and in Your Heart, By the Holy Ghost,’” Israel Revealed, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://www.israelrevealed.com/summary-lesson-6-i-will-tell-you-in-your-mind-and-in-your-heart-by-the-holy-ghost/>.
 - 3 1958 general conference
 - 4 Thomas S. Monson, “Ponder the Feet of Thy Path,” October 2014 general conference, Gospel Library app.
 - 5 Ibid
 - 6 Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, Volume 1 (Deseret Book, 1980), 18.
 - 7 Pope Paul VI. *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*. October, 28, 1965. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.
 - 8 Neal A. Maxwell, “Overcome . . . Even As I Also Overcame,” Apr. 1987 general conference, Gospel Library.

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