



The Half Shekel Journal by Ed Rice
Vol XVIII Day 7 Mon 2 Feb: Via Dolorosa



Armed with a good understanding of the error of it all, the traditional Via Dolorosa caused an excitement and urgency of the moment because we were walking in the old city of Jerusalem on streets where Jesus walked; not with a cross, but with a compassion, not in his suffering but in his serving. We were walking the busy streets of the old city of Jerusalem and it inspired our awe.

A very necessary stop before wandering the narrow streets was closed for maintenance. We had to walk about two blocks into what I perceived to be the Muslim quarter to find a hole in the floor of a dirty little room which was an adequate mens room, but less than adequate to the ladies. We waited with idle conversation and impatience for a very long restroom stop. The ladies finally returned with sheepish grins and some embarrassed whispers to husbands. I did not hear any details until later, but the lady's accommodation was every bit as nice as ours.

The Cobble stoned very narrow streets of the old city took one back to the first century times of Jesus and his disciples squeezing through following their master. Marketers still imposed this presence and their wares as we made our way through the maze. The only authentic 'stations' of the Via Dolorosa were visited first, they being the areas near the Roman Praetorium where Jesus was condemned to death and where he would have received his cross. I briefly recalled the praetorium ruins we visited in Caesarea and our guide's vivid description of how Pilot would gather up his whole headquarters, or Praetorium (a Roman commanders administration center) and remove to Jerusalem for the three annual and unsettling gatherings of restless Jews in the city of Jerusalem. This Passover gathering was a familiar trek for Pilot but would be like none other in the history of the world.

It had not registered in my mind that we were standing outside that 1st century praetorium when our guide referenced station 1 and 2 of the 'stations of the cross.' The narrow streets of the old city, the Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Armenian quarters of the city, the marketers selling rosaries and the crucifix, the contrast of the 1st century constructions, crusaders construction and modern shops blended into a confused awe that overwhelmed my reeling mind I tried to categorize and separate in my mind these three most pertinent experiences in our first walk in the city of Jerusalem.

First, and larger than life loomed the history that we were standing on. Here in 1913 BC Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, King of Salem and the priest of the most high God. (Gen 17) A thousand years later David brought in the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of a trumpet (2Sam) and a thousand years later again the Jews here brought in the "Word of the Lord", the "Light of the World," the "Son of God" with shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." These streets of the old city were the streets that Jesus walked on with his disciples. Here, in 70 AD Romans slaughtered Jews and tumbled walls; Islamic forces destroyed and rebuilt¹, Muslims destroyed and rebuilt², Crusaders

1 The Islamic conquest of Palestine, which began in 633, was the beginning of a 1,300-year span during which more than ten different empires, governments, and dynasties were to rule in the Holy Land prior to the British occupation after World War I. From www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org accessed 6/5/2009

2 In 638, the Jews in Palestine assisted the Muslim forces in defeating the Persians who had reneged on an agreement to protect them and allow them to resettle in Jerusalem. As a reward for their assistance, the Muslims permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to guard the Temple Mount. Ibid

destroyed and rebuilt³, Saladin destroyed and rebuilt⁴, the Ottoman Turks destroyed and rebuilt⁵, and WWI destroyed and rebuilt⁶ this troublesome city.⁷ While at seminary in Lancaster Pa, I went to tour old Philadelphia and stood on streets over 200 years old. How could I now stand in a city of God of such depth and not be overwhelmed.

We walked the marked up rugged streets and saw the marketers and residents intermixed. Districts were marked out as Muslim or Jewish, Christian or Armenian. The politic of what this city had become, the direction it was moving and its destiny at the return of Christ stirred an exciting curiosity in the experience of being here. “Thou shalt arise, *and* have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. ... To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem;” (Psalm 102:13-17,21)



Keeping track of what quarter of the city we were walking through and the layout of the city in tension and schism while marketers tried to lure us to their wares by yelling out “Jesus is coming again,” and stepping around very narrow garbage haulers busy about their business, kept one third of my attention wondering about this present world we were experiencing for the very first time.

But the austere paganism of stations of the cross and the artificial way of suffering via the Catholic Via Dolorosa made the Catholic representation of Christianity repulsive. With malice, Jerome had repeatedly translated 'repentance' to the Catholic Latin Vulgate's 'penance' and translated 'presbyter' to the Latin's 'priest' at the inception of this false Roman religion. In Catholic doctrine, both Roman and Eastern, the death of Christ was not sufficient to atone for ones sin, and they must do their own penance and suffering to make up for Christ's lack. Therein the stations of the cross on a Via Dolorosa are errantly meant to exalt Christs suffering to an object of worship and to a sample of his suffering that we should exemplify to attain our own righteousness. The stark contrast should be clear. Bible believing, born again Christians are not to worship or 'venerate' the sufferings of Christ nor any other object; or pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus or any other 'saint' of Catholicism. No, a Bible believing, born again Christian will only worship, venerate and pray to our God who was made flesh and dwelt among us, the Lord Jesus, the Christ, (which is in Hebrew 'the Messiah'.) Such prayer, veneration and idol kissing marked with pagentry, robes, priest craft, and “blind leaders of the blind” are exactly what Christ condemned in religion. Now it pretended to be Christianity.

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- 3 The Muslims fended off their rivals until the end of the 11th century. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for Crusades to regain Palestine from the infidels. They succeeded in 1099 and celebrated by herding all the Jews into a synagogue and burning them alive. Non-Christians were subsequently barred from the city. Ibid
 - 4 Saladin succeeded in expelling the Crusaders and recaptured Jerusalem for the Muslims in 1187. Two years later, the Christians mounted the Third Crusade to retake Jerusalem, but Saladin's forces repelled them. Ibid
 - 5 The next important phase in the history of Jerusalem was the conquest of the Ottoman Turks at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Turkish sultan then became responsible for Jerusalem. The Holy Land was important to the Turks only as a source of revenue; consequently, like many of their predecessors, they allowed Palestine to languish. They also began to impose oppressive taxes on the Jews. Ibid
 - 6 The Ottoman Empire held its own against rivals from Europe and Asia for roughly 400 years. They chose, however, to engage in a battle they could not win -- World War I -- and lost their empire. Palestine was captured by the British, who subsequently were awarded a mandate from the League of Nations to rule the country. Ibid
 - 7 In the course of its history, Jerusalem has been destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times.