

# Pathfinder

December 28, 1949

## Un-Silent Night

Jerusalem, hallowed city of three great faiths, was tense and fearful. Christmas had failed to bring the one gift for which all the city's worshippers had prayed—peace.

Reason for the unrest now was a United Nations plan to govern Jerusalem and Bethlehem, five miles to the south, by an international commission.

Both Israel and Jordan, whose troops now occupy the city along battle-won boundaries, were quick to reply that they would resist. Jordan frankly said its resistance would be armed. Israel simply spoke of non-cooperation.

**Defiance.** Last week, however, there was action to show what Israel meant. From coastal Tel Aviv, the Israeli government was moved into Jerusalem to place the final imprint of Jewish sovereignty on the non-Arab part of the city.

Atop a shell-pocked building near the wall of the Arab-held Old City, Israeli soldier Avram Ilani could still chat with the Arab legionary 20 yards away. But now they spoke of a common danger, not of old enmities.

To Avram and his people the U.N. decision, passed by a General Assembly vote of 38-14, was an intrusion into a city which is vitally important to Israel's young economy and pride. Israel had wanted international control only of holy places.

To the guard on the Arab side of the wall, internationalization might mean a threat to Mohammedanism's holiest of holies, the 1,258-year-old Dome of the Rock supposedly erected over the stone from which the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven and to which he will return.

**Storm Center.** But although the looming Dome dominates Jerusalem (see picture), it is just a detail in the complex web of reasons behind the current trouble in the holiest square mile on earth. Every-



*Jerusalem. Beyond the wall, tears;  
beyond the dawn, fears.*

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one, it seemed, had an iron in Jerusalem's political fire. Roman Catholicism, for instance, was reported to have backed internationalization. Otherwise its representatives in the city might be left unprotected under the control of Arabs and Jews.

Apparently following Vatican urgings, a bloc of South American votes fell into the "yes" column.

Even Arab votes (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen) were against Jordan and for internationalization. Their motive could have been a mixture of jealousy and vengeance. It was one way to undermine the overlord position of Jordan, whose soldiers had been the only Arabs to emerge undisgraced from the Palestine war.

Russia's support of internationalization was tactical: any international force in Jerusalem could be part Communist. And Russia needs an entry in Middle East power politics.

America and England, just as anxious to exclude her, led the opposition.

**Shrines in Peril.** Far beyond the political turmoil was the whole worshipping world's concern about the holy places of Jerusalem. Many had suffered as Arab fought Jew. Now they might be in shell-fire danger again as Arab and Jew joined ranks to face another antagonist.

If violence flared, mankind might lose much more than momentary peace: The shrines of Jerusalem are beyond calculation in value.

Foremost to Christians is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Built at the supposed site of the hill of Calvary, it contains the cave long venerated as the place where Christ's body was placed after crucifixion.

In charge of the Holy Sepulcher today are priests of the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Catholic churches. And, as the Sepulcher is within the walled Old City, they perform their custodianship within the shadow of Arab Legion gun posts along Suleiman road to the Damascus Gate.

**Street & Tomb.** From the Sepulcher to St. Stephen's Gate, entry from the road to Jericho, stretches the Way of Sorrow (Via Dolorosa), the cobbled street along which Christ carried his Cross. Outside St. Stephen's Gate is the tomb of the Virgin Mary, tended now principally by Orthodox and Armenian priests.

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile farther into the hills east of Jerusalem is the Church of the Ascension. Here two faiths cross and clash.

To Christians, because it is believed to be the spot whence Christ ascended to heaven, it has importance hard to equal.



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But to the Mohammedans who have held it for centuries it is simply "another" shrine. Believing in Christ as only one of many prophets, they nevertheless hold the site jealously, allow Christian worship only once a year.

Closer to the wall around old Jerusalem is the Garden of Gethsemane, in which Christ prayed before his death. Today the garden is maintained by Franciscan (Catholic) monks.

On the other side of the city, in the Jewish-held suburbs, at David's tomb, is the churchlike structure marking the place of the Last Supper.

A few miles beyond the Arab Legion positions flanking Jerusalem's railway station lies Bethlehem, with its three Christian holy places (Grotto and Shrine of the Nativity, and the field where the shepherds awaited Christ's birth) and one Moslem-Jewish shrine (tomb of Rachel, wife of Jacob).

**Echoes of Prayers.** Inside the walled city, however, where Jews enter only with Arab permission, is Judaism's Wailing Wall, remnant of the enclosure around the Temple of Solomon. Here, for centuries, on the other side of the courtyard of the Dome of the Rock, Jews have wept their prayers.

But now the prayers echo from munitions depots. In Jerusalem this Christmas worshippers were literally picking their way through barbed wire blockades to reach the Prince of Peace.

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