

travel log

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If you like the book,
you love its setting

"I was baptized 80 years ago and today I was baptized again in the Jordan River."

I heard the voice in the elevator of the Hilton hotel in Jerusalem, where 500 followers of evangelist Jimmy Swaggart were staying in the Holy Land.

The day had been full of surprises for the unknown woman with the radiant face and southern American accent:

- "The Jordan is a small river you can throw a stone across."
- "Nazareth and Bethlehem are Arab cities."
- "Christmas, like any Sunday, is an ordinary working day."
- "The war people talk about is the war against three-digit inflation."

JEWISH AMERICAN travelers are usually better informed about Israel than others. For centuries they have celebrated its history in Hebrew all over the world, and since 1948 Israel has been thoroughly explored by Jewish Americans as a Jewish homeland.

Hebrew, which is being spoken as a living language for the first time in 1,800 years, is the official language; Arabic and English are also common.

Christian travelers to Israel are more likely to have 2,000-year-old images as they have been translated in school books, and sketchy war-related images drawn from newspaper headlines and stories. Both give a false impression.

The reality of terrorism is understood at Kennedy Airport in New York and at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, where serious airport personnel examine your luggage:

"Did you pack this bag yourself? Did anyone else have access to it? Did anyone give you anything to take with you?"

It is there on the streets where young Israeli men and women in compulsory military service slouch along in uniform, with guns slung casually over their shoulders. The young man with the yarmulke on his head and a rifle over his shoulder is probably climbing aboard that bus to go home for the weekend.

Israel is small. Soldiers travel home often. They must always take their guns with them. On the other hand, there is no overt sign of hostility between Jews and Arabs.

We felt perfectly safe and welcome on a dark night in the Arab city of Jericho, where we bought dates and oranges from a street stand and talked to a man who has relatives in Lansing.

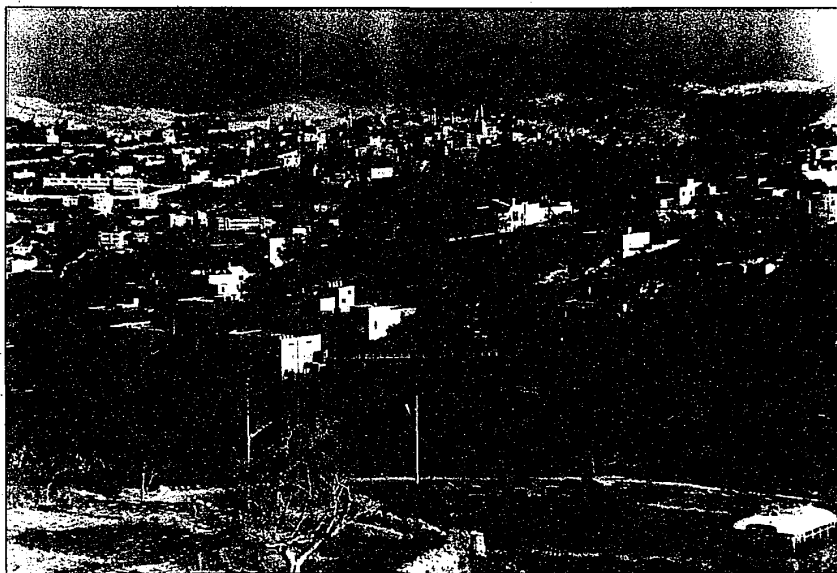
We walked dark streets with Jewish Israelis in Bethlehem, and in the Arab quarter in Jerusalem.

IF THERE WAS hostility in any of those eyes, I didn't see it. The Arabs and Jews seem to live peacefully together, usually in different towns. Both seem eager for peace, which does not mean, of course, that Arabs and Jews see Israel in the same light.

Of more immediate concern to tourists is the effect of Jewish religious law on hotel dining rooms, where you must choose between the dairy dining room and the meat dining room. Jewish law forbids mixing the two, so you can't have bacon and eggs, and you get non-dairy creamer with coffee in the dairy section, but the food is excellent in both areas.

On the sabbath day, Shabbat, from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday, Jewish life stops in shops and public places. Tourists go to Arab areas, which stay open. Hotels operate one Shabbat elevator that runs constantly from floor to floor so that the faithful do not need to press the elevator button.

Other elevators turn on as usual, and on this particular day they are full of pilgrims who had been baptized in the Jordan River. Their next stop is Bethlehem. As they say at the government tourist office here in Israel: "If you liked the book, you'll love the country."



The best view of Bethlehem is from Beit Jallah, high on a hill above the city. It is a Christian Arab town now of 32,000 and is surrounded by other Moslem Arab towns. (Photo by Iris Sanderson Jones)

Fair Israel ancient and modern

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

We are driving through the Judean hills towards Bethlehem. A young Arab couple who could easily remind you of Joseph and Mary are walking along the road, he in his headress and dark robes, she wrapped in lighter, brighter robes, with cloth draped over her head.

A young boy goes by on a donkey, completing the illusion that this is the land of 2,000 years ago, but lift your head and you also see cars, and an occasional tourist bus.

The road winds through limestone rock hills with a panoramic view of other rounded brown hills. Some of them wear villages on their tops and sides like a cap gone askew.

You can see the Dead Sea from here on a clear day, although you can seldom see across to the Jordan shore, where Moses first saw "the land of milk and honey." The road follows the Valley of Rephaim, the Valley of the Mists, where "the Philistines spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim" and were conquered by David.

EVERY INCH of ground is both ancient and modern history in Israel. Behind us is Ramat Rachel, a kibbutz built in this century by Jewish Israelis as a communal orchard. It hosts one of the many kibbutz inns, available throughout the country; this one a multi-story motel-style building. The kib-

butz still has scars from battles fought during the 1948 War of Independence.

According to Christian folklore, Joseph and Mary rested on this spot on their way to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is a few minutes drive from Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary came from Nazareth, 100 miles north, now a busy market city of 35,000 Christian and Moslem Arabs.

To understand all this, you must briefly put the Israeli map in perspective. Imagine driving I-75 north from Detroit to the Mackinac Bridge, exploring 50 miles east and west. You would be beyond the boundaries of Israel on almost every side.

If Detroit is at Beersheba, where Abraham dug a well in the southern desert, Jerusalem and Bethlehem would be at Flint, and Nazareth at Grayling.

THE JORDAN River threads the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea like two blue beads on the eastern border of Israel. The Mediterranean washes fertile valleys around the modern cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa on the western border. Ancient hills run north and south in between.

The best view of Bethlehem is from Beit Jallah, high on a hill above the city, so we turn upward again when reach the outskirts.

Bethlehem is a Christian Arab town of 32,000, but it is surrounded by other Moslem Arab towns. The road winds

uphill through streets where buildings on all sides are built of Jerusalem stone, the limestone common to all of these hills.

The road runs 3,000 feet up to the hilltop village of Beit Jallah, home of King David's chief counselor Ahithophel, and an important army stronghold during both biblical and recent battles.

This land adjacent to the west bank of the Jordan River was part of Jordan from 1948 until the 1967 War, when it became part of Israel. Jordanian guns were once mounted on this scenic hilltop.

We pass through a guarded barrier to the Israeli army field school which now tops this hill, one of many Israeli field schools where you can stay for a few dollars a night.

As we drive downhill finally and into the town, we find ourselves on Manger Street lined with shops, and we pass Orient Star Street not far from the wall that overlooks Shepherds Field.

Through a near doorway, great stone wheels are pressing oil from olives; the street is slippery under my feet. A few hundred yards away, the road opens into Manger Square.

IT IS A LARGE square with cars parked solidly in the center and tourist shops along the sides. A young bare-headed man in a heavy sweater shares the chill evening with a taxi driver in Arab headress and warm jacket.

Christian sites in the Holy Land are traditionally marked by buildings created and re-created since Christ was-

born. This is the site of the inn and traditionally the site of the manger. Many travelers are surprised to find the manger in a grotto or cave, but such places were traditionally used to house animals under a building in ancient times.

The grotto was sacred from early Christian times. The Emperor Constantine built a church here in the fourth century, the Emperor Justinian rebuilt it 200 years later, and the Crusaders added paintings and mosaics centuries after that. The present church is shared by three religious groups.

The central prayer hall of the Basilica of the Nativity leads to an altar area that is hung with golden oil lamps and marked always by the black-robed shapes of the Eastern Orthodox priests who oversee this part of the church.

In a space to the left is the blue and gold altar of the Armenian section and through a doorway you find the high vaulted ceiling of a traditional Catholic Church. The services we hear from Bethlehem come from this Catholic sanctuary.

It is several steps down from the Eastern Orthodox prayer hall to the Grotto of the Nativity, a room about 10 by 25 feet in the rock below. The walls are hung with leather. At one end of the room, recessed into the wall like a fireplace, a larger 14-point silver star marks the place where Christ was born.

In the light of the golden oil lamps you can read the inscription: "Natus Virginia Mariae Jesus Christus." Here of the Virgin Mary Jesus Christ was born.

tripping

Something old, something new

- AND CHARITY TOO
Singles, those older than 21, are invited to the Birmingham Community House for a special holiday dance and party at 8:30 p.m. Friday. There will be dancing, holiday carols sung around the piano, tree trimming, holiday refreshments, maybe even a little snow on the ground. Admission price is \$7 plus a pair of mittens and a box or can of non-perishable food. The mittens will keep the hands of a child at the Sarah Fisher Home warm this winter and the food will go to someone who needs it more than you just now. For more information, 646-3909.
- THINK FAST
Or at least think about the immediate period prior to the annual 40-day diet, called Mardi Gras. The sixth annual Mardi Gras Pun Train will depart from Chicago Feb. 27 for a six-day trip which has four days and nights in New Orleans. The tour includes round-trip rail from the Windy City, Marriott Hotel accommodations, a little sight-seeing, a little dancing, the originality that is New Orleans, and a lot of jazz. Tips and transfers are also included. Price options are staggered. For information, write Sierra West Adventures, 111 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif. 94111.
- FOR THE RAMP PARTS
Amtrak took another step toward making its stations fully accessible to the handicapped by 1989. The rail corporation's board of directors voted to spend \$2,888,120 recently on a structural modification program that includes work on entrances and exits, interior doors, baggage and ticketing areas, restrooms, platforms, curbs, loading zones, parking areas, telephones and drinking fountains. The work order shows Detroit and Kalamazoo stations included in the program.

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