

THE GREAT CITIES / JERUSALEM



# JERUSALEM

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and the Editors of Time-Life Books

Photographs by Jay Maisel

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*Cover:* Sunset in the Old City brings to sparkling life a gilded cross on one of Jerusalem's numerous churches.

*First end paper:* Persian tiles on the façade of the Muslim shrine known as the Dome of the Rock display Islamic script and floral patterns—even to the tip of a protruding water spout.

*Last end paper:* A section of an undulating house roof in the Old City of Jerusalem forms an abstract of stone blocks.



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# Contents

<b>I</b>	<b>The City of Earth and Heaven</b>	<b>5</b>
	Picture essay: The Vibrant Life of Old Jerusalem	<b>20</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The Place of David</b>	<b>33</b>
	Picture essay: A Wall of Grief and Joy	<b>46</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The Yoke of Greece and Rome</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The Presence of Christ</b>	<b>71</b>
	Picture essay: Tableaux from the East	<b>84</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The Heart of Christendom</b>	<b>91</b>
	Picture essay: Venerable Sects	<b>102</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The Dome of the Rock</b>	<b>115</b>
	Picture essay: The Jewel Box of Islam	<b>126</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Crusaders and Muslims</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The Mandate and After</b>	<b>153</b>
	Picture essay: Sanctum of the Orthodox	<b>162</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>The Return</b>	<b>173</b>
	Picture essay: Contrast and Unity	<b>188</b>
	<b>Acknowledgements and Bibliography</b>	<b>198</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>199</b>



# The City of Earth and Heaven

Cities, like men, are shaped by the pressure of years and the violence of suffering. Some adapt and change, some are swept away—yet others preserve themselves despite every disaster, and of these none has clung to its character with such deep resilience as Jerusalem.

If the traveller stands, as I did not long ago, on the summit of the Mount of Olives, he sees all the ancient city stretched in front of him. It is, perhaps, the most awe-inspiring view in the world—for here lies the soul-city of an entire concept of God. Around Jerusalem the hills are bitterly eroded, their paths trodden bare by centuries of soldiers and peasantry. Once covered in forest, they are flecked now with little but rock and scentless scrub. To the south they fade into haze, dotted by weirdly beautiful villages, ripples of flat roofs lanced by minarets. To the east, far below, the Moab hills shine with a lunar emptiness over the Dead Sea, the deepest spot on earth. Between them and Jerusalem spreads the desert that the Hebrews called Yeshimon—"devastation". Its hills were a breeding-place of prophets, a refuge of exiles and bandits. They gave to the people a sense of living on the edge of doom.

In the clear Judean air the city appears closer than it is. It rests strangely quiet on its slopes. The circle of surrounding peaks lends a feeling of stillness, almost of sanctity, as if Jerusalem were indeed the centre of the world as medieval men believed. The immense and beautiful Turkish walls run along the hills like a part of the rock, and gather the houses of the Old City into a lake of roofs and domes.

As I gazed at the city, I could pick out landmarks that touched on three millennia of history. Outside the walls rose the unpretentious mound that King David captured 3,000 years ago, and that served the Israelites as capital for more than a millennium. Above it the city now was thick with the shrines of Christianity. And here, too, the lovely Islamic sanctuary called the Dome of the Rock proclaimed the triumph of the Muslim Arabs in A.D. 638.

Fount of three world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—Jerusalem has entered the soul of half mankind. As Athens is to the mind, so is this city to the spirit. The idea that it nourished is now a commonplace, but was once a revelation—that God is a personal god, who cares about his people, loving their allegiance and hating their sins.

From the Mount of Olives I could see how hills had governed the form of the city. They swell to ridges from which the buildings stand up like symbols, then dip to half-invisible valleys. The walled city, old Jerusalem, is defended by such valleys on three sides. The suburbs are far larger, but lie

Christian symbols of cross, thorns and chalice in the Dominus Flevit church overlook one of Islam's greatest shrines, the golden Dome of the Rock. The Dome itself stands on the site of the Temples of Solomon and Herod, sacred in the memory of the Jews.

loose and scattered against it. To the north of the walls spreads a modest Arab quarter built without hurry among missions and church schools. To the west, Jewish Jerusalem, a city of more than two hundred thousand souls, has been pushed up at dizzy speed—a new Jerusalem that covers the slopes for over four miles.

Yet it is to the Old City that the eye returns (see map, pages 12/13). Clasped in its walls it is the city's heart, and it is beautiful with a hard compacted beauty: the place of Jesus, of Herod the Great, of Saladin. In the course of 3,000 years it has been conquered by Israelites and Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, Arabs, Seljuk Turks and Crusaders, the Mameluke slave-kings and the Ottoman Turks; and finally passed in this century out of the hands of the British and into those—once again—of the Jews. Like the irritant grain of sand in an oyster, the Old City has gathered its modern suburbs about it. But in the east and south, steep valleys with immemorial names—Kidron, Tyropoeon, Gehenna—still fall sharply away from its ramparts.

The one square-mile of the Old City lies across two hills: the eastern is Muslim—the western belongs to Christian Arabs, Armenians and Jews. The Muslim quarter is crowded about its principal shrine, the Dome of the Rock. In the west the Armenians—some two thousand—live in the seclusion of enormous convent walls, and a Jewish sector is growing beside them. To their north the Christian Arab quarter surrounds the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built, it is held, where Christ was crucified and buried.

The present city was welded by the Six-Day War of 1967. After the British took Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917, their mandate brought deepening trouble between Arab and Jew, which exploded into conflict the moment they had departed. In 1949, after heavy fighting, the armistice line between the Arab kingdom of Jordan and the newly founded nation of Israel divided Jerusalem into two halves: the Arab Old City in the east, and the western city of the Jews. Not for 19 years—until Israel's victory in the Six-Day War—were the barriers cleared away. Then the two cities were united by roads, but not in spirit, and from where I stood on the Mount of Olives the signs of their trouble were even now below me in Jewish war memorials and desecrated graves.

In this there is nothing new. High above its valleys, Jerusalem is lifted on the carnage of its own centuries, layer upon layer of past destruction and daily waste. In the east, the walls built by the Turks rise on Roman stones that sometimes delve more than a hundred feet into the earth until they find solid rock. Age upon age, the city grows and is buried, and on the very site of the Temple of Solomon, now stands the Dome of the Rock.

Consecrated under the Dome is the rock-summit that is the city's core. Here the beliefs of Muslim and Jew converge. For this Rock, their traditions claim, is the foundation stone of the world. Upon it Adam was fashioned out of dust, Cain slew Abel, and Abraham prepared to sacrifice



A fatherly Abraham cradles in his ample lap members of Jerusalem's three faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—in this 12th-Century illumination from a French Bible. Although the three religions differ radically, they all venerate the patriarch who broke from the worship of many gods to focus on one God alone.

Isaac. It was still a threshing-floor when David bought it with silver shekels for the site of the Temple that his son Solomon would build. For a thousand years the rock was the building's altar; long after the Temple's destruction the Arab conquerors proclaimed this to be the spot from which Muhammad journeyed by night to heaven.

Perhaps of all cities Jerusalem is the most intensely loved. Yet as in the days of Isaiah or of Jesus, it is bitter and divided, cruel even to its own, a caster out of prophets. When a person dies in the Arab quarter they sometimes say, "Jerusalem killed him".

To no other place does the traveller carry such expectations—and nowhere may they be more rudely shattered. The city is a revelation. Even its beauty has the clarity and strangeness of the surrounding rocks. It challenges a man on every side—his understanding, his spiritual faith, his political conscience. Here he may find his own religion revealed to him again, and he may be astonished or outraged by what he finds, even in its holiest places. For Jerusalem's lure is not gentleness nor even beauty, but the fascination of a past and a present that inspire and torture one another. This tension, the traveller feels, must have belonged to Jerusalem two and three thousand years ago. It lives in the very stones.

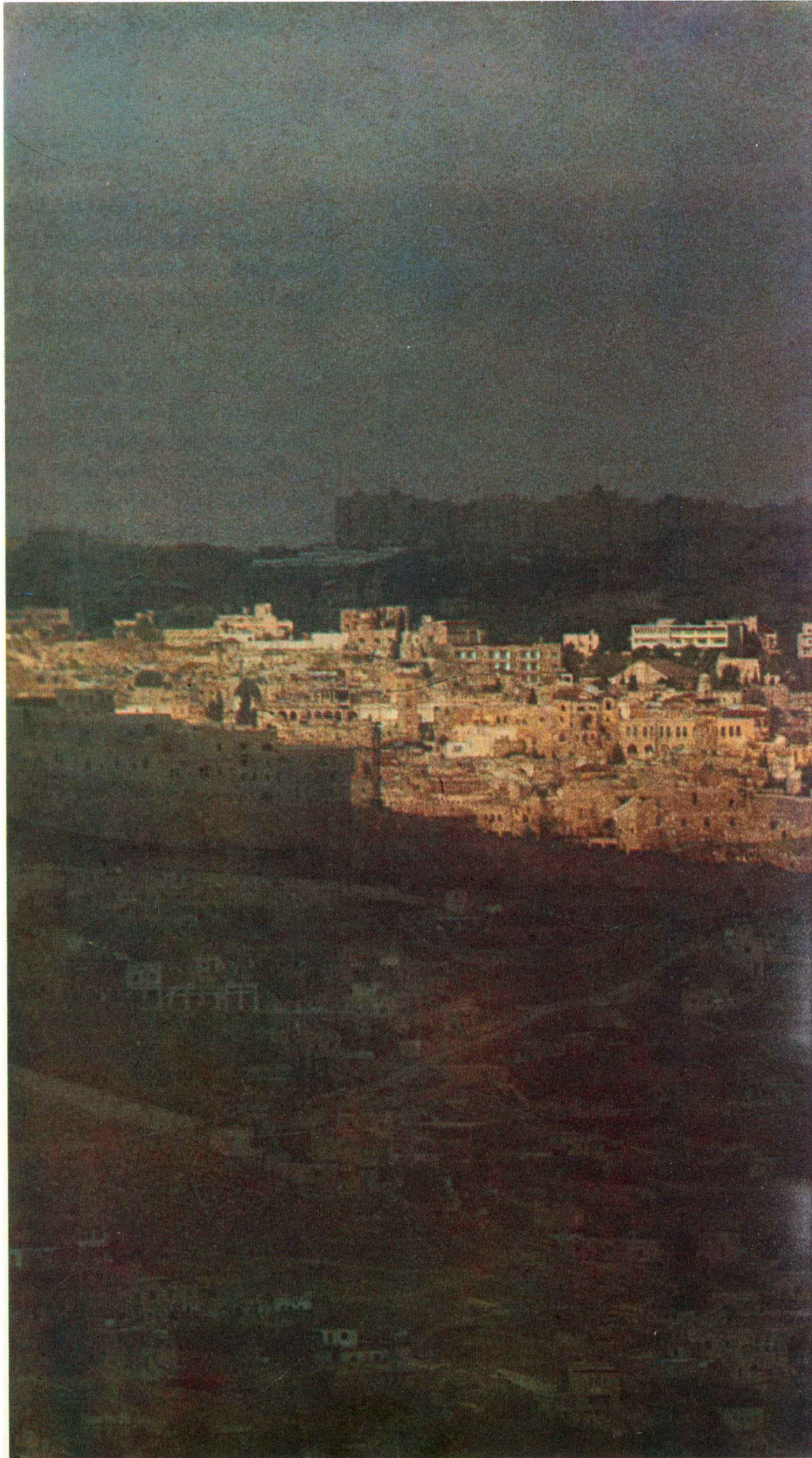
To begin to comprehend such a city, a man must turn back almost 40 centuries to a time when the Nile and the Euphrates watered half civilization. Then, along the divide between myth and history, a small tribe of herdsmen, travelling southwards over the Syrian desert, arrived at a hill-town whose inhabitants welcomed their leader with gifts of corn and wine. This moment of hospitality marks the earliest contact of Jerusalem with the two peoples who were to love and fight over it. For the nomad leader, Abraham, was in legend the ancestor of both Jew and Arab. In his person they were once united and at peace.

Looked at from the vantage point of today this earliest gift of the city seems to belong to a time of primal innocence. The Jews, who turned Jerusalem into a symbol of fulfilment, spoke of a city transfigured at the end of time and governed by a king of light who would reconcile all nations. They came to conceive a "Jerusalem of the Upper World". Ever since then the worldly city and "the Jerusalem of the heart"—the actual and the ideal—have existed side by side.

The earthly Jerusalem, of course, was more vulnerable. In exile the Jews believed it to be very different from the reality. To them its very stones were perfect, its people wise, its women beautiful. On Judgement Day it would blossom into gardens and be ringed with walls of gold and lazulite, emerald and fire. God and His angels would circle it with their wings, and the nations of the earth be carried there on clouds.

This yearning, the desire of man to transcend his mortality, was inherited by Christianity. St. John, St. Paul, St. Augustine all wrote of a mystical city

A trick of light on a misty winter day trims sprawling Jerusalem to the proportions of the old walled city. On the hills beyond rise the tall blocks of the modern Jewish suburbs, while in the foreground stand houses built upon the site of earliest Jerusalem, the city David conquered and made the capital of the Israelites.





that would one day pour its ideal upon earth. "It is evident from the testimony of even heathen witnesses", wrote an early church father about Jerusalem, "that in Judea there was a city suspended in the sky early every morning for forty days. As the day advanced, the entire figure of the walls would wane gradually, and sometimes it would vanish instantly."

When the Muslims became masters of the city in the 7th Century they too came to believe it greater than itself. From its holy Rock, they said, Muhammad rose into the sky and was shown all the spheres of paradise; and the seventh heaven of Islam was conceived as a counterpart of Jerusalem's holy mountain.

After the waning of medieval Christianity, the vision dimmed but did not die. It found its way into the background of Renaissance canvases, in which painters reflected their own countries. The Florentines cluttered it with Tuscan trees and campaniles. Dürer drew a Rhenish Jerusalem complete with windmills and Gothic turrets; Mantegna's city stood under brooding mountains. Writers and theologians conceived still another vision exemplified by the English poet Blake:

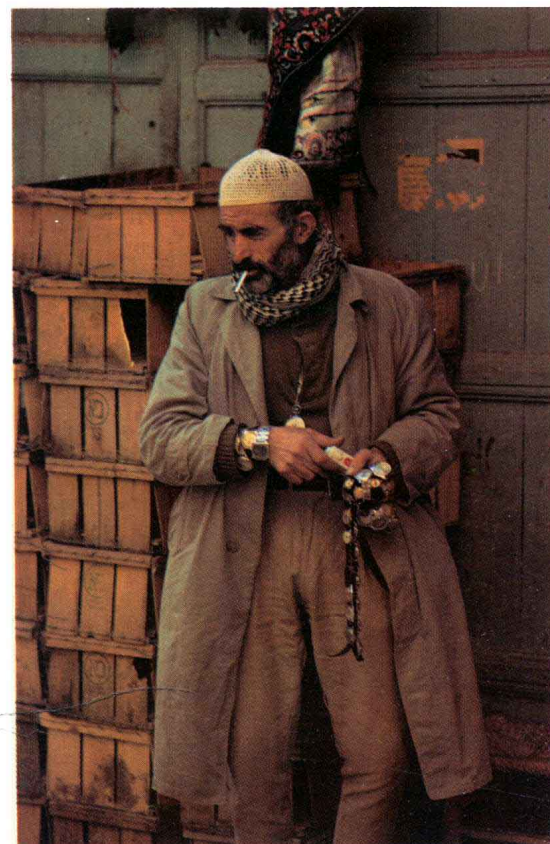
I saw the New Jerusalem descending out of Heaven  
Between thy Wings of gold and silver, feather'd immortal,  
Clear as the rainbow . . .

But what, meanwhile, of Jerusalem on earth?

Since the time of Christ a dozen civilizations had built it up or thrown it down, sowing new streets and shrines until the city that one century knew became blurred in the upsurge of the next. As the Eastern Roman Empire dwindled, Arab invaders from the south seized the city in A.D. 638. Thereafter, except for the brief Crusader conquest, Jerusalem belonged to the Muslims (to Arab dynasties at first, then to the Mameluke slave-kings of Egypt). And after the Turkish victories of 1517, an indolent Ottoman administration took its toll for 400 years. Christian pilgrims returned with tales of hardship and corruption. And even now to the innocent traveller's ideal the city may give a disturbing reply: the harshness of man and God. Is this, he may wonder, his city? Is this even his God?

I descended the Mount of Olives, passing beneath the walls of Christian sanctuaries thronged with bougainvillea and pines. They marked sad sites. Here Jesus wept over the city. Here he knelt in prayer. Here he was betrayed. In half an hour I reached the Damascus Gate, the threshold of Old Jerusalem, and plunged into its ferment. The only transport to navigate these choked alleys is that of donkeys and hand-wheeled carts. The rest is a river of people. Some are slim and hawkish as the classic Bedouin, others squat and heavy-nosed; still others have blue eyes or red hair—in the case of Arabs, a Circassian or Crusader heritage—or the wide Mongol face of the Anatolian Turk.

I saw a Negro shoe-seller, descendant from Bedouin or Ottoman slaves, lying under a wall and crying his wares with a shrill "Ee-hoo!" Up the Via



**An Arab watch-seller—one of many pedlars who take up stations along Jerusalem's narrow streets—rests in the afternoon shade while keeping a predatory eye out for passing tourists. Although dressed Western style, he has on an Arab cap and wears his checkered kaffiyeh or head-dress like a scarf round his neck.**

Dolorosa, the traditional route of Christ to Calvary, flowed a crowd of Palestinian countrywomen, graceful in their embroidered dresses and white head veils. I turned to stare at an Armenian priest and collided with a Franciscan monk. Hasidic Jews, pale men who seemed to see nothing around them, were making their way to the Wailing Wall. Behind them came United Nations soldiers from Peru, an Arab porter hunched double under his load, Israeli policemen, a stray sheep, an Abyssinian monk, and a group of urbane Orthodox priests. And all this river of humanity, swelled by a flood of tourists, is propelled along ways sometimes so narrow that three men cannot walk abreast.

The shops are open to the street in the oriental way. Most of them are little more than booths, and their wares hang on every wall so that at one moment I wandered through a jungle of carpets and sheepskin coats, the next brushed against butchers' carcasses or ducked among Palestinian dresses, cascades of pseudo-Bedouin jewellery and rosaries.

In a lonelier street I found myself walking beside a gentle-faced librarian, a Jew, and fell into conversation with him. One thing, I told him, I had noticed: Arab and Jew did not walk together. "But we Israelis get on well with Arabs," he answered. "Haven't you seen us working side by side? On building sites, in cafés, everywhere. It's only politics that have divided us. Slogans, governments, artificial things."

"So the Arabs are happy with this?"

"Well," he looked down cautiously at the book he was carrying, "their happiness will come. We give them employment and social benefits. Once they forget Arab propaganda, we will live well together. We will have peace."

"How long", I asked, "before then?"

"The Arabs have no education, that's the trouble—no industry, no commerce. When we came to this country, what was it good for?" He tapped his book. "But the Jewish people, you see, had a will. That is the difference. We made something of this land. Today the merest Arab labourer can earn handsomely on our building sites. They even send children to work on the sites—children who should be in school. Our police have to send them away. What sort of people is that, who will not educate their children?"

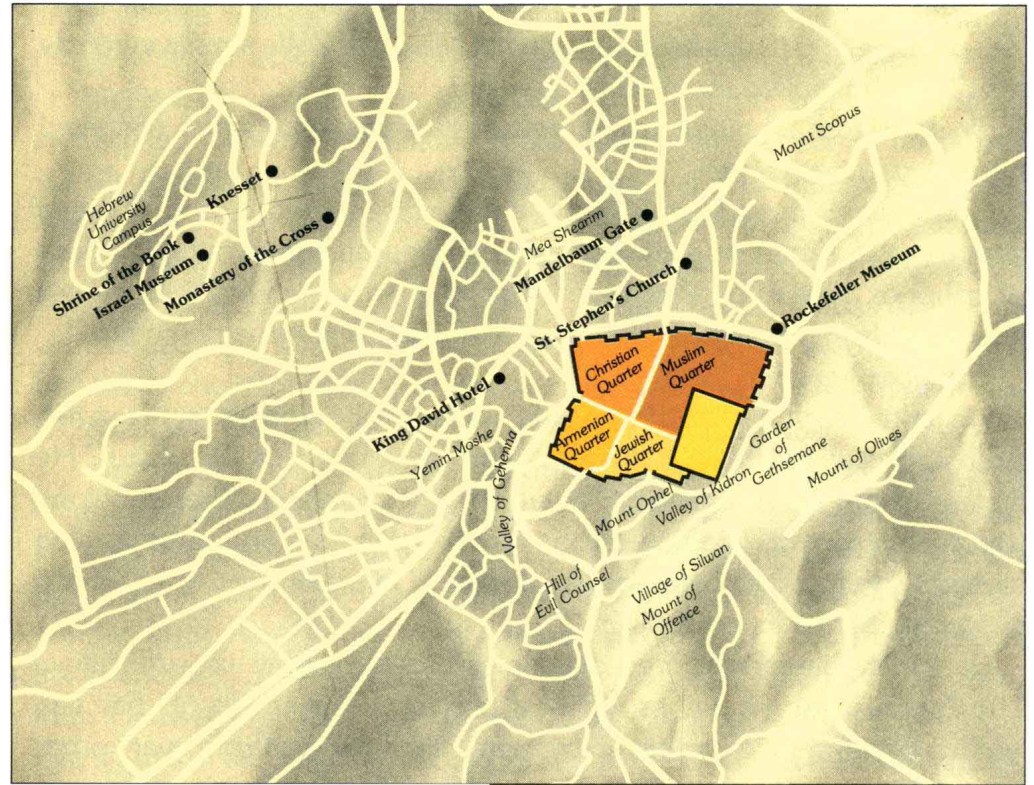
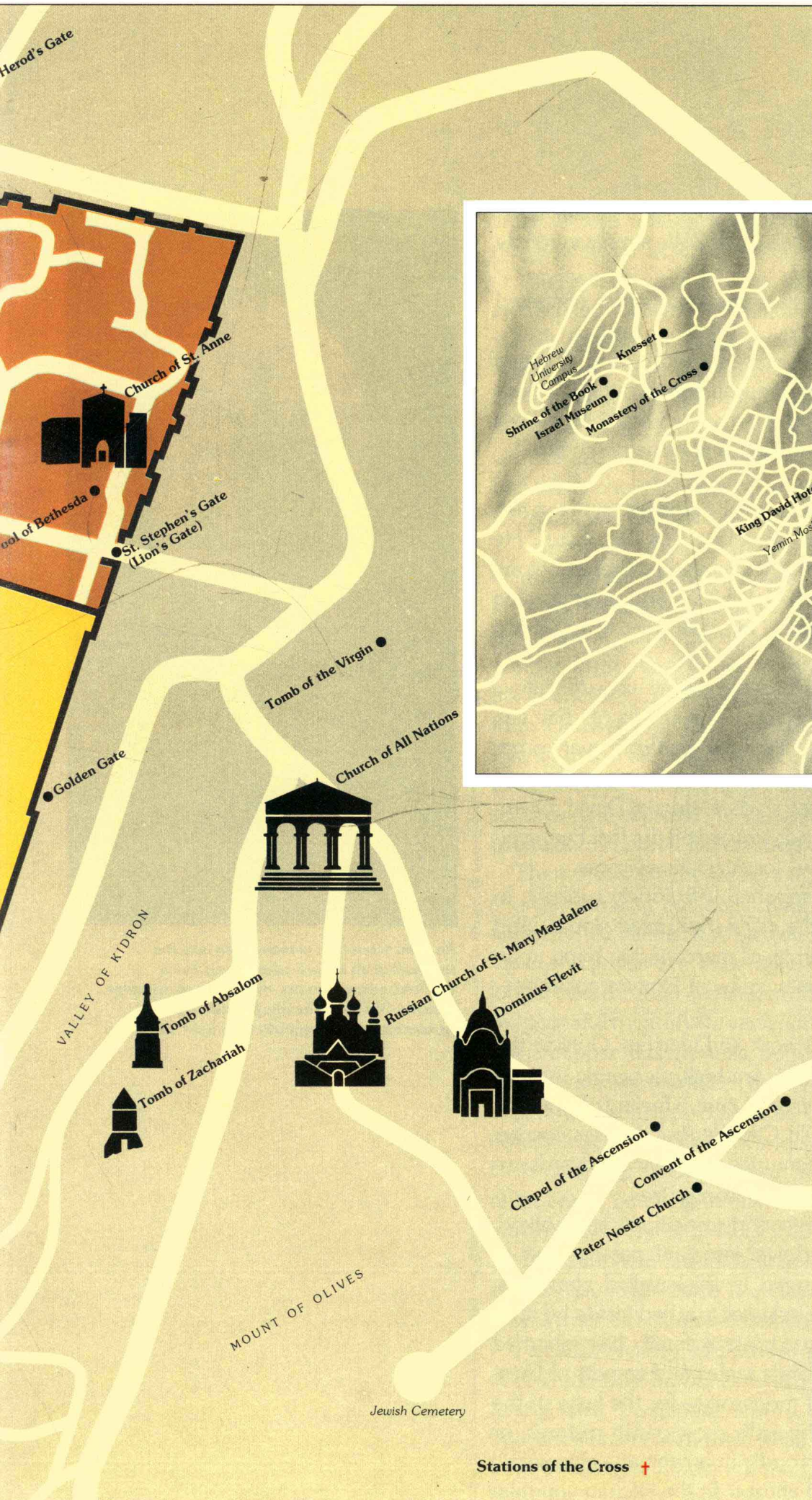
"Yet you will live together?"

He turned in the entrance to a newly-rebuilt synagogue. "In time. Yes, in time." He gave a fragile smile. "Things will be forgotten."

The confusion and paradox of the city are like no other. At times above the Wailing Wall you may hear church bells, Muslim prayer-calls and Jewish chanting. Every quarter clings to its personality. On Fridays the Muslim sector is shuttered and deserted, on Saturdays the Jewish, on Sundays the Christian. The religious sects and sub-sects are almost too many to be numbered. Festivals follow one another feverishly.

I peered into one of the shops. Its Arab keeper tried to sell me a dagger, then a crucifix, then a Jewish candlestick. "You sell Israeli things?" I asked.





## The City of Religions

Jerusalem consists of two parts—the Old City within its 400-year-old Turkish walls, the subject of the larger simplified map at left, and the newer city to the north and west of the walls (see inset above). The Old City itself is divided into four religious quarters—Christian, Armenian, Jewish and Muslim—whose boundaries have been rendered only approximately here.

Shown on the map of the Old City and the inset are shrines, monuments, institutions, thoroughfares (in outsized scale) and topographical features described or mentioned in this book. Most important among these are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City, around which lies the Christian quarter; the Wailing Wall or Western Wall at the edge of the Jewish quarter; and the adjacent area of the Dome of the Rock, nearly half as big as the Muslim quarter that nestles against it. Wandering through the Muslim quarter and into the Christian quarter is the Via Dolorosa, the route that, by tradition, Christ followed on his way to Calvary; crosses along it and inside the confines of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre mark the 14 Stations of the Cross.

He avoided my stare. "A man has to eat. I have a family. Five children." He spread out his hands helplessly. "What can we do? We are slave-people now." But he looked too tired to be angry.

Only business, I thought, might ease the two peoples together. I fingered his poorly woven carpets.

"Everything's more expensive now." His voice turned harsh. "A camel stays a camel, a man stays a man but a pound doesn't stay a pound." A pair of orthodox Jews stopped outside the shop, then moved on. "Our people take work from the Israelis because they have to. They've no choice."

"You can't grow to like them?"

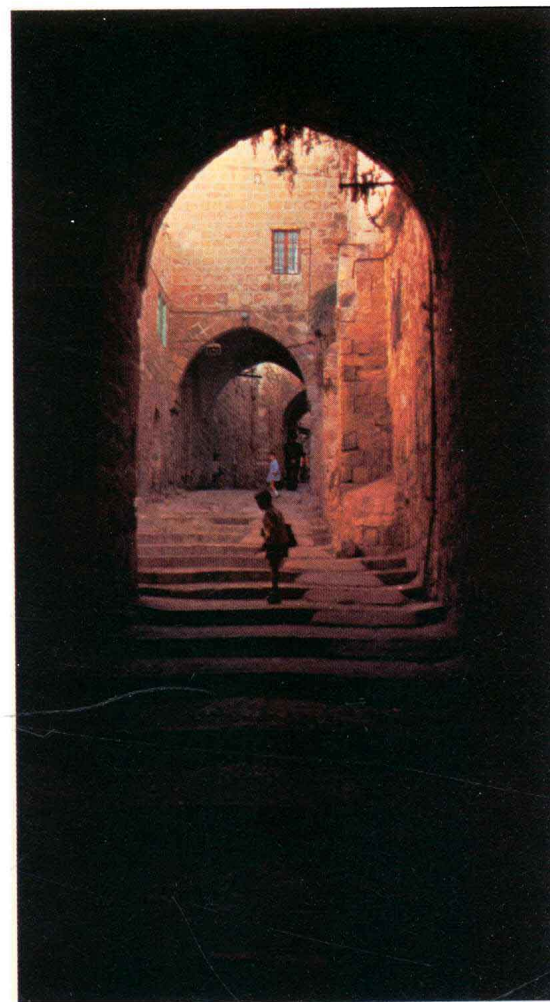
He jerked back his head in denial. "We pass one another in the street, Arab and Jew, that's all. If they question us, we answer. No more." He fingered the Jewish candlestick. "None of us here minds whether we belong to Jordan, Egypt or Palestine—what does it matter? So long as we're ruled by Arabs." With a dark bitterness, he added: "Only take away Israel. That's all we ask. Set us free from Israel."

Back in the bazaars the press of peoples thrown together was suffocating. The August heat fell pitiless out of a pure sky. The smells of charcoal, leather, pastries, hides, spices, excrement stifled the air. From every other shop a farrago of religious souvenirs glared in silver, olive wood and mother-of-pearl: Crusader crosses, Maltese crosses, stars of David, seven-branched candelabra, Christian fishes, hands to ward off the Evil Eye, even pendants inscribed "God bless this House" for Anglican pilgrims.

Out of these lanes ran thinner ones, splashed with lonely sunlight. In worn steps they climbed up and down the city's smothered slopes. And here I could see that all the crude modernity of merchandise hung upon Arab arches, Crusader vaults, Turkish walls, stubs of Roman columns—their surfaces worn smooth and shining.

Amid such history the people live and work and worship. Outside the city walls, where the houses, however small, are built pleasantly in limestone and show gardens of flowering shrubs and pine, a feeling of light and air pervades Jerusalem. But inside the Old City the Arab houses overlap and lean upon one another in a chaos of centuries, and their courtyards are crushed and small, flagged in stone without a flower or tree.

Their doors give directly on to the streets and sometimes, as I walked, finding one ajar, I would creak it open and peer into dank passageways or up flights of steps. Muffled voices sounded in thick-walled chambers. Starved cats flew among shadows. If the stranger is asked inside he finds the rooms almost heartrendingly empty. Unless a family has inherited some solid peasant furniture or the elaborate tables and carpets of Ottoman times, it lives among a few sticks of modernity—for the taste of the poor is invariably for something new. The walls show garish pictures, or nothing. A handful of treasures stands proudly in a cabinet—chinaware, ornaments, gifts from relatives emigrated abroad. In the kitchen you may



An Arab schoolboy glances back into the shadows of an arched passageway. Such crooked, narrow streets, many with stone steps, lace the Old City. The ramp facilitates handcarts delivering goods to houses and shops.

stumble with amazement upon a huge, gleaming washing-machine or refrigerator, for which all other comforts have for years been sacrificed.

The Arabs live, on average, more than two to a room, and many houses have no indoor lavatory, let alone a bath. Seventeen per cent of their babies still die in infancy, and although children must now attend school at the age of five, I have often wandered through streets filled with tatterdemalions fighting and shouting, pestering and scavenging. As I walked, I observed these children. Above spidery legs and ragged bodies their faces were already old. Only the eyes, liquid and very dark, showed in repose a half-melancholy innocence. In these congested alleys, whose homes are too small for much activity, both work and leisure are public.

Tourism is the Old City's heavy industry. Its people, typically, are textile workers, souvenir-vendors, restaurateurs. And their prey is the foreigner. He wanders among them, besieged. In a hundred shops he is confronted by the same glitter; pseudo-Jewish, hybrid Muslim, commercial Christian; copper from Acre, brass from Nazareth, grandiose Iranian silverware, boxes encrusted in a sickly mother-of-pearl from Bethlehem. "Olive wood from Gethsemane" is rife. It encloses Bibles and prayer books or erupts into figures of the Holy Family, the Venus de Medici and a host of synthetic biblical sages. The harsh graining of the wood lends all the carvings the same doleful expressions. Other shops sell nothing but candles: gilded and coagulated candles, flat candles, candles like coral or towers: all hideous.

Then there are the dealers in antiquities. They sit behind their wares, showily perusing museum catalogues, until they have gauged the ignorance of their clients, and sleekly suggest a Roman lamp or a Syrian vase. True antiquities are expensive, and now that Muslim pilgrims can no longer pass through Jerusalem, the more modest goods they used to sell—old pots and rugs—have vanished. The best things are the simplest: basket-work, copper kitchen ware, pottery, the plainer Hebron glass.

If the average worker of the new city outside is a Jewish clerk or administrator, the archetype of the Old City is the Arab shopkeeper or craftsman, a person at once child-like and sophisticated, impulsive and circumspect. He is generally his own master, living by the skin of his teeth and the quick of his brain. You may see him selling anything from fake icons to clay jars, making jewellery or tooling leather, wandering the lanes with circles of sesame-sprinkled bread balanced in a tray upon his head, or standing at his iron foundry—there are more than 70 in the Arab city—hammering sparks from old girders or bedsteads to turn junk to new uses.

Towards evening, as I walked along the Old City's arteries—the streets of El-Wad and Khan es-Zeit, Christian and David Street—its people were taking their traditional leisure, seated in the coffee shops on reed-bottomed chairs, with their small cups placed delicately on other chairs in front of them, or cradled in their hands. Some played backgammon with histrionic cries and gestures, so that small crowds gathered about them.

**The realm of biblical seers and prophets, the eroded Judean Hills to the east of Jerusalem stretch to the horizon in parched desolation. This is the so-called wilderness where John the Baptist preached and Jesus came to fast and to meditate for 40 days and 40 nights.**

