

200,000 Jews Join Trek to Wailing Wall

By Alfred Friendly Washington Post Foreign Service

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Associated Press

Jews celebrate Shavuoth at newly captured Wailing Wall.

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JERUSALEM, June 14 — For the first time in 18 centuries, citizens of a Jewish nation were able today to visit their revered Temple on a holy day.

By the tens of thousands they plodded on a mile-long pilgrimage from their half of Jerusalem to the newly conquered Old City and the Wailing Wall, the only fragment remaining of the Great Temple.

Israeli police, who guarded every step of the way with large forces, estimated that up to 200,000 people had come in ancient ritual to touch the Wall and pray.

The occasion was the Shavuoth, a festival of the summer harvest and anniversary of the day, 50 days after the Passover, when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. It is known to the Christian world as the Pentecost. It is one of three days—the others begin the Passover and Succoth, the festival of the fall harvest or winter planting — when devotions at the Wall are deemed obligatory by devout Jews.

Under the armistice agreement of 1949, the Jordanian occupiers of the eastern part of Jerusalem, including the Old City, were to allow

Jews the right of access to the Wall. The agreement was never honored.

Thus, since the zealot revolt of Bar Cochba from A. D. 132 to 135, when the Jews were expelled from the city, by the Romans, this was the first day when Jews could visit their holiest spot as citizens of their own national state. The Temple itself was destroyed by the Romans in A. D. 70.

It was also the first day since the Old City was captured last week that rank-and-file Jews were permitted to enter. Hitherto, only dignitaries and high officials were admitted.

Old and Young

They came from all walks of life and all ages and in all different degrees of religious dedication. There were bearded old men, in great black felt hats and long black frock coats cut below their knees. There were their putative successors, the young yeshiva (religious school, students, with sideburns let grow into long curls touching their shoulders.

There were the followers of the Hasidi sect, with huge fur hats and satin kaftans — the costumes of the 18th-century Russian squires

See WALL, A16, Col. 1

200,000 Jews Celebrate at Wall

which seemed to the Hasi-dim, devotees of religious joyousness, as the most glorious get-ups conceivable.

But mostly they were Israelis in their standard informal garb—simple frocks for the women and slacks and sport shirts for the men. There were thousands of children, acting as if out for a picnic. The minority, an observer could guess, were the Orthodox and intensely devout who bowed their covered heads against the Wall and read or chanted from their prayer books.

The Non-Observants

The majority, like the majority of the citizens of Israel itself, were those who style themselves non-observant Jews but who nevertheless feel themselves in some way deeply and integrally imbedded in Judaism. Their linkage is not merely an ethnical or a nationalistic one, but also is spiritual and, for all the non-observance, religious.

What the stone is that any of them touched with reverence, no one is quite sure. Jews would like to think that the Wall was part of the outer enclave of the structure David dreamed of building and that Solomon erected in magnificence and dedicated about 953 B.C.

But almost certainly none of that great structure remains. The lower two courses of the present Wall may be part of the Second

Temple, completed about 516 B.C., after the Jews were permitted by the Persian, Cyrus, to return from the Babylonian exile.

But even those lower courses, and certainly all the upper ones to a height of 30 feet or so, are from the Temple of Herod, built in the years just before the beginning of the Christian era.

The top ten feet are from the 20th Century, built to keep out missiles hurled at worshiping Jews by Arabs on the other side in the days before 1949, when all access was ended.

'Wall of Tears'

Israelis now resolutely call the construction the "Western Wall." Last week, the venerable former Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, ordered a tourist sign of "Wailing Wall" torn down.

More classically, it is "The Wall of Tears," where Jews are called on to lament the destruction of the Temple and pray for the coming of the Messiah who will rebuild it.

Until Saturday, the space in front of the Wall was only a few yards wide, hemmed in by a warren of houses. They have been demolished and a great square, of three acres, has been opened.

During daylight hours since the capture, Jordanian residents of the Old City could circulate freely. But today, the curfew was in

effect all day, with the Arabs bottled up in their homes. A few gazed from windows or distant doorways up small streets blocked off temporarily by barbed wire and guarded by Israeli soldiers.

Visiting Israelis and resident Jordanians looked at each other in silence, from a distance in space and a distance in understanding.

By force of arms, the city of Jerusalem is united. By force of race or history or politics or religion, it remains cloven in two.

Thus, over a day of religious and political rejoicing for the Jews, with a gleaming bright sun and a clear sky, there hung nevertheless a black cloud that will not be dispelled for many an unhappy year.