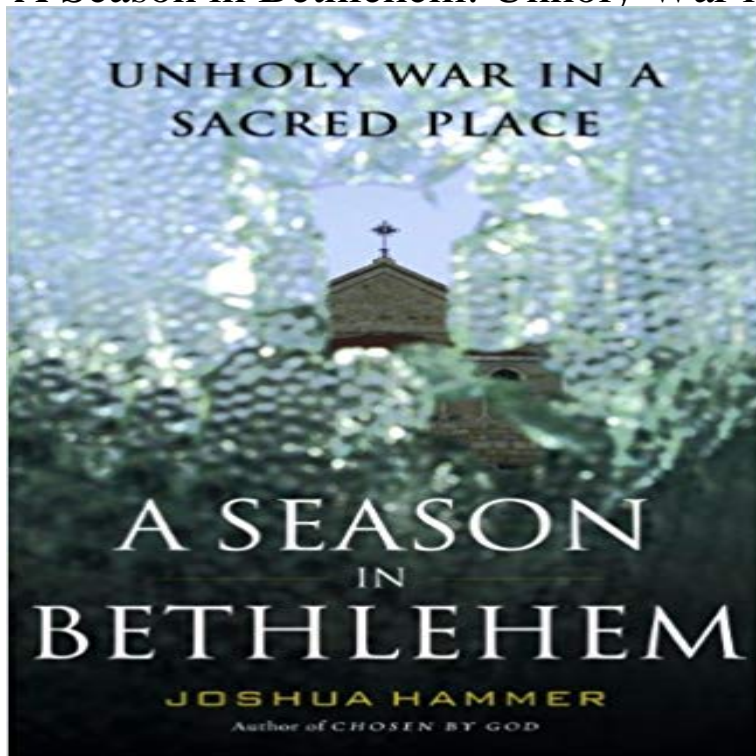


A Season in Bethlehem: Unholy War in a Sacred Place



Newsweeks Jerusalem bureau chief Joshua Hammer arrived in the West Bank in October 2000 -- just after Ariel Sharon made his inflammatory visit to the Haram al-Sharif, otherwise known as the Temple Mount. Sharons trip ignited the worst violence the Middle East had seen in decades. Overnight, the peace process gave way to an ever-worsening cycle of attack, revenge, and retaliation, destabilizing the entire region, killing thousands, and culminating in Israels reoccupation of Palestinian towns in 2002. A Season in Bethlehem is the story of one West Bank towns two-year disintegration, as witnessed by a reporter who was there from the beginning. Woven together from Hammers own firsthand reportage plus hundreds of interviews, it follows a dozen characters whose lives collided on the streets of this biblical city. They include a Bedouin tribesman who rose to become the commander of Bethlehems most feared and brutal gang of gunmen; the beleaguered governor, an opponent of the al-Aqsa intifada, who believed he had a mandate to stop the violence, only to discover that Yasser Arafat was undermining him; a Christian businessman who watched helplessly as his community was squeezed between Muslim militants and the Israeli army; an eighteen-year-old female honors student turned suicide bomber; and an Israeli reservist, son of a leader of the Peace Now movement, who wrestled with his left-wing convictions as he rode to battle through the predawn streets. The narrative reaches a climax with a moment-by-moment recreation of the epochal drama that drew many of these characters together: the thirty-nine-day siege of the Church of the Nativity. A clear-eyed chronicle of deepening chaos and violence, in which Hammer lets the opposing sides speak for themselves, A Season in Bethlehem is both a timely and timeless look at how longstanding religious

and political tensions finally boiled over in a place of profound resonance: the birthplace of Jesus.

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