Bethlehem Massacre

On the night of 6–7 January 1952, Christmas Eve for the Eastern churches, armed Israeli patrols penetrated several kilometres beyond the armistice line. They blew up a house on the outskirts of Beit Jala and attacked another with gunfire and hand grenades near Mar Elias monastery north of Bethlehem, killing six Palestinians, including two children, and wounding three. [1] [2]

The Mixed Armistice Commission unanimously “expressed its horror at these crimes.” [1] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

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The Bethlehem massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	The night of 6–7 January 1952, Christmas Eve for the Eastern churches [1] [2]
Place	The outskirts of Beit Jala, near Mar Elias monastery north of Bethlehem, and the Latrun sector [1] [2]

Item	Details
Perpetrator	Armed Israeli patrols that penetrated several kilometres beyond the armistice line [1]
Killed	6: two men, their wives and two children [2] [1] [3]
Wounded	3 seriously wounded, two of them children [1] [2]
UN position	The Mixed Armistice Commission unanimously “expressed its horror at these crimes” [1]

Christmas Eve 1952

After the Nakba, Bethlehem and Beit Jala lay close to the armistice line separating them from occupied West Jerusalem. On the night of 6–7 January 1952, as Eastern Christian families prepared for Christmas, occupation patrols chose that night to strike. [1] [2]

Three patrols in one night

The Arab account records three Israeli patrols moving that night: [2]

- **Near Beit Jala:** a patrol blew up a house near the village of Beit Jala, about two kilometres from Bethlehem, killing the householder and his wife. [2]
- **Near Mar Elias monastery:** a second patrol approached a house about a kilometre north of Bethlehem, near the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Elias, and fired on it and threw hand grenades into it, killing the owner, his wife and two of their children, and wounding two other children. [2]
- **Near Imwas:** a third patrol entered the demilitarized zone in the Latrun sector and advanced about three kilometres until it was 500 metres from the village of Imwas, which it raked with heavy fire. [2]

According to the report of the UN Truce Supervision Organization, “a group of armed Israelis” penetrated several kilometres into Jordanian-controlled territory

and blew up houses on the outskirts of Beit Jala in the Bethlehem area, killing six and seriously wounding three. [1]

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Toll
Mixed Armistice Commission report (UN)	6 killed, 3 seriously wounded [1]
Palestine Remembered	6 killed: two men, their wives and two children; two children wounded [2]
Al Jazeera Net massacres list	6 killed in Bethlehem (6/1/1952), and also 7 in Beit Jala (11/1/1952) [3]

This article adopts the UN toll: six killed and three wounded. As for the “Beit Jala, 11/1/1952” entry in the Al Jazeera Net list, we found nothing in the UN documents indicating a separate attack on that date. [1] [3]

The Armistice Commission: “horror at these crimes”

The chairman of the Jordanian–Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission called an emergency meeting on 8 January 1952. The Commission decided unanimously that the attack was a “serious breach” of Article III of the General Armistice Agreement, “expressed its horror at these crimes,” and called on the Israeli delegation to take steps to prevent their recurrence. [1]

On 22 January 1952 Jordan complained to the Security Council of “increasing Jewish acts of aggression against life and property inside Jordan territory.” [4]

Collective punishment on the border

Leaflets found at the scene indicated that the attackers were Israelis and linked the attack to the unsolved rape and murder of an Israeli girl near al-Maliha. [1] Innocent Palestinian families in Beit Jala and Bethlehem paid with their lives as

collective punishment for a crime whose perpetrator was never identified.

This pattern of “reprisal raids” on border villages escalated in those years; one example is the attack on Falamya the following year.

Conclusion

On a night when the people of Bethlehem and Beit Jala were preparing for Christmas, occupation patrols blew up a house over its occupants and hurled grenades into another, killing six, two children among them. Even the Armistice Commission could only describe what happened as “crimes” that filled it with horror.

Frequently asked questions about the 1952 Bethlehem massacre

When did the 1952 Bethlehem massacre take place?

It took place on the night of 6–7 January 1952, Christmas Eve for the Eastern churches, not on 26 January as is often stated.

How many people were killed in the 1952 Bethlehem massacre?

Six, including two children, with three seriously wounded, according to the UN.

Where did the 1952 Bethlehem massacre take place?

On the outskirts of Beit Jala and near Mar Elias monastery north of Bethlehem, while a third patrol fired on the village of Imwas in the Latrun sector.

What did the UN say about the 1952 Bethlehem massacre?

The Mixed Armistice Commission decided unanimously that it was a serious breach of the armistice agreement and “expressed its horror at these crimes.”

Why did the Israeli patrols attack Beit Jala?

Leaflets left at the scene linked the attack to the unsolved murder of an Israeli girl near al-Maliha, making it collective punishment of innocent families.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. Letter from the Chief of Staff of the UN Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General, transmitting the report on decisions of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (1 November 1951 – 30 October 1952), document S/2833, 4 November 1952.
2. “Zionist Massacres between 1947 and 1996,” Palestine Remembered.
3. “Israeli Massacres against the Palestinian People,” Al Jazeera Net, 3 October 2004.
4. “Yearbook of the United Nations 1952” (excerpts), United Nations.