When The Temple Mount Was In Our Hands… (Part 4)

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Today, on the 28th of Iyar, we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim; the day when Jerusalem after 1900 years of being under a foreign nation, finally returned into our hands. This year, 2023, marks the 56th anniversary of this glorious day. As we previously explained, the events which took place on the Six-Day War are nothing short of Miracles of Biblical proportions. One example that pertains to the conquest of Jerusalem is that, against all logic, King Hussein of Jordan decided to join Egypt in the war against Israel. During the first day of the war, on the 26 of Iyar- Monday, June 5th, 1967- in the morning, Israel had already destroyed virtually all of the Egyptian warplanes and disabled all its airports and military bases. Miraculously, Israel's air force had remained virtually intact. Israel had asked King Hussein not to intervene and assured him that they will not attack Jordan, as long as Jordan does not attack Israel. But Nasser, far from accepting defeat, was bragging that the Egyptians *were defeating the Israelis*, and that morning Jordan attacked Western Jerusalem, where the Jews lived. At that time Jerusalem was divided. The Western part belonged to the Jews while the Eastern area (including the Old City, Western Wall, etc.) belonged to Jordan.

YOU SHALL NOT ESCALATE!

At first, Israel's reaction to the Jordanian attack was very moderate. Israel was willing to tolerate these attacks (as Israel does so many times today when Hamas attacks from Gaza), reasoning that it may have been only a symbolic demonstration of strength or to convey solidarity to Egypt. Yet despite Israel's desperate pleas, the Jordanian army kept attacking

the Jews- even beyond Jerusalem. The civilian population- schools and even the Hadasa Hospital- were attacked indiscriminately. The Israeli generals had no choice but to react and defend themselves. In the early afternoon, Jordan's military air bases were destroyed by Israel. All Jordanian aircraft were inoperable. Once the Jordanian problem was over in the air, Israel faced them on the ground. Unlike the Egyptians, the Jordanians were very close to Israel, and it was easy for them to obtain reinforcements or supplies. But thanks to the unexpected and miraculously low number of Israeli losses, Israel was able to relocate three paratrooper brigades to improve the defense of Jewish Jerusalem. I insist on using the word 'defend' because at that moment, every Israeli and Jew in the world, prayed solely for Israel's survival after the concerted attack of four Arab nations. No Jew in his or her right mind could have imagined or dreamt before the war of conquering any enemy territory, let alone the Old City of Jerusalem.

FROM DEFENSE TO CONQUEST

The bloodiest battle of the Six-Day War was simultaneously the most difficult battle in the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict. This battle took place on the second day of the Six-Day War at Giba't HaTachmoshet (Ammunition Hill), the battle to defend Yerushalayim. The battle lasted several hours and claimed many lives. But eventually, Israel won. One reason why this battle was so arduous was that the Israeli army did not use air support to avoid civilian casualties and destroy religious sites in Eastern Jerusalem. The following day, on the 28 of Iyar (the Third day of the war) Israel went on the offensive. Prime Minister Levi Eshkol authorized the entry to Eastern Jerusalem (which was until then under Jordan) but clarified that Israel will be going towards the Old City; however, once the war was over, the Jews would leave Eastern Jerusalem immediately… It was as if the political and military leaders of Israel were afraid of success and did not see

themselves as worthy of having Yerushalayim. *“What would the world say?”* They wrongly thought. They believed the world, particularly the Vatican, would not allow Jews to guard the holy Christian sites. I can’t avoid thinking about the spies that Moshe sent to explore the land of Canaan, that saw themselves as “locust in front of giants”, afraid of winning a war that HaShem promised they would win. I believe that at that unexpected moment –still carrying on our shoulders 20 centuries of endless persecution and humiliation– were not mentally prepared to win a battle for Jerusalem. all we desired for this war was to survive. Jerusalem was not in anyone’s plans. Only in God’s plans for His people.

A GIFT FROM HEAVEN

Then the unexpected happened. Israeli soldiers had entered the Old City and were able to conquer it almost without any resistance from the Jordanians. At 10:00 AM, the battle for Jerusalem was over. Israeli commander Mordechai Gur repeated twice the iconic words engraved into Jewish history, “HAR HABAYIT BEYADENU, HAR HABAYIT BEYADENU!” The Temple Mount is in our hands, The Temple Mount is in our hands!”. It was the providential and stubborn intervention of Jordan in the war that allowed us to liberate Yerushalayim. And how can anyone explain Hussein’s huge error of judgment, to enter a war which was already lost as evident from the first day of battle? When we escaped slavery in Egypt, HaShem intervened numerous times in ‘the heart’ (that is, in ‘the mind’) of Pharaoh. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and the ruler of Egypt made illogical decisions, which ended up dragging his own people to a total collapse. I believe that this should be our interpretation of what happened to the King of Jordan when he decided to attack Israel. King Hussein’s mind was (providentially) blurred when he made the decision to join the war against Israel. Otherwise, in theory; the Old City, the Western Wall, and all of East Jerusalem would still be in Jordanian hands…

AN UNFORGIVABLE MISTAKE?

But amidst the shock of unexpected victory, I believe that we Jews too, made a big mistake. The Jordanians had already capitulated and withdrew, defeated, from Jerusalem. The mayor of Jerusalem handed over the keys of the Old City to Israel, including the access to the TEMPLE MOUNT- the site of the Bet HaMiqdash, the Holiest place in the Holy Land for the Jewish people and the Jordanians assumed that the victorious Jews would rebuild the Temple. After all we have been praying for it for 2,000 years! However, inexplicably, instead of staying on Har haBayit and not moving from there, everyone, including the Army Rabbis, instinctively ran from the Temple Mount to the Western Wall…. a symbolic but humble ruin of the Temple of Jerusalem. How did we miss this opportunity? Was it a human mistake? An underestimation of the significance of the Bet HaMiqdash by the mostly secular Israeli Generals (See this article and a radio interview, and this article about this delicate issue, in Hebrew)? Or maybe it was not yet the right time to have the Bet HaMiqdash, and HaShem "intervened" in the judgment of our leaders and did not allow them to see the opportunity to recover our Temple Mount and rebuild the Bet haMiqdash. Perhaps it is too early to know the answer or understand the reason behind this. Meanwhile, we Jews of this generation enjoy the incomparable privilege that our ancestors could not have even dreamed of having again Yerushalayim, our Capital, the city where earth meets heaven.