

1967 Miraculous Six Day War of Israel-Day One

In May of 1967, three events occurred that precipitated war between Israel and Egypt. First, Egypt expelled United Nations forces stationed in the Sinai Peninsula who were there to maintain a demilitarized zone between Egypt and Israel. The only possible reason for this was that Egypt intended to attack Israel. Secondly, Egypt occupied the UN positions in the Sinai and began a massive buildup of troops along the border. Thirdly, Egypt moved to blockade the Straits of Tiran and Israel's only port in the Red Sea, thus denying Israel its shipments of oil. On May 23rd, USA President Lyndon Baines Johnson broadcast on TV that the blockade was illegal and disastrous to the cause of peace. Israel proclaimed that this act was Egypt's declaration of war.

Less than two weeks later on June 5, 1967, Israel, in spite of overwhelming odds, destroyed the entire Egyptian Air Force as well as the Syrian and Jordanian Air Force. At the end of day one, Israel ruled the skies. The rest of the Six Day War was a very one sided contest in which Israel would gain 42,000 square miles, and be three and a half times its original size.

Palestine-Who are the Palestinians?

The name of Palestine goes all the way back to 135 AD, when Roman Emperor Hadrian renamed Israel. In 66 AD the Jews had revolted against Rome, and Rome had to send a large army to crush Israel. Jerusalem was sacked and burned along with the second Temple. The Romans attempted to kill, enslave, and drive out all the Jews, but pockets remained until 132 when the Bar Kokhba rebellion was put down. This time Hadrian was determined to prevent any further Jewish influence, so he built pagan temples on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and renamed Israel after her ancient enemies the Philistines. Palestine was a Greek cognate meaning Land of the Philistines.

In 638 AD, the Muslims took the Middle East including Palestine. The Crusaders took it back in 1099, but the Muslim Mamluks ruled it from 1270 to 1516 when the Ottoman Empire took it. The Ottomans sided with Germany in WW I, so in 1917 it became part of the British Empire. From 1917 to 1948, Britain ruled what was called the British Mandate of Palestine which included all of modern day Israel and Jordan. During this time the Jewish population was growing rapidly. In WW II, 30,000 Palestinian Jews joined the British forces. In 1944, the British formed the Jewish Brigade from hand picked Jewish soldiers which fought notably in Italy. Members of that Brigade became key players in the Israel Defense Force, or IDF, after WW II. In 1947, Britain announced their desire to leave, and asked the United Nations to solve the Jewish-Arab problem. The U.N. voted in favor of a plan of partition creating separate Jewish and Arab states. It took effect in May, 1948. Britain pulled out, and immediately Syria

and Iraq invaded Israel with Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt soon following. The Israel Defense Force held defensive positions at first, but soon attacked the major threat which was Egypt. In early 1949 Cairo asked for an armistice which was negotiated by United Nations official Ralph Bunche who received the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the truce.

1956 Sinai Campaign

In the fifties the cold war came to the Middle East. To the south of Israel was the Sinai Peninsula controlled by Egypt. In October of 1956, the British and the French made a deal with Israel to attack the Egyptian army in the Sinai and take the Suez Canal, but world opinion was so outraged that Britain and France backed off. They had wanted to control the Suez Canal, but pressure from the U.S. and Russia caused them to reassess. The end result was a negotiated peace whereby United Nations troops occupied the Gaza strip and the Sinai. The Egyptian leader, Nasser, also became very distrustful of the Western powers and Egypt moved much closer to Russia. Russia began supplying Egypt with massive arms shipments of tanks and planes. In the USA, President Eisenhower was mainly interested in peace, so he was reluctant to supply Israel with planes. Amazingly, the jet fighters that Israel used in all its wars came from France. In the fifties and early sixties, France was at odds with Algerian Arabs which caused France to be friendly to Israel and supply them with Mirage fighter-jets. Israel's great victories in 1967 and 1973 were won primarily by their control of the skies in those Mirages. President Kennedy improved relations with Israel, and provided weapons to Israel, and President Johnson was even more pro-Israel. Because of the 1948 War and the 1956 War, the Arabs maintained a rage against Israel. The humiliation of those defeats made them all the more determined to annihilate Israel.

Catalysts for War

Before Israel's existence, the Arab nations had been firmly divided against each other, but in 1964, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser held many summits with Syria, Jordan, and other Arab nations to unify them against Israel. The United Arab Command was created in 1964, and plans were drafted to "eliminate" Israel sometime in 1967. Relations between Egypt and America ruptured under LBJ, who ended shipments of wheat that accounted for 60% of Egypt's bread. Rioters attacked the U.S. embassy, and an American plane was shot down, thus ending the American relationship with Nasser. Meanwhile, Syria was having a battle over water to the north of Israel. Syria tried to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River in 1964 which would eliminate much of Israel's water supply. The Israeli Air Force blew up the Syrian diversion structures. Literally thousands of border raids and skirmishes between Israel and Syria and Jordan occurred in the early sixties.

The immediate catalysts for war began in November, 1966 with an Israeli raid on Samu, a village in the West Bank area of the Jordan River controlled by Jordan. Israel sent a strike force of tanks, halftracks, and 400 soldiers to punish Palestinian terrorists who used the village as a staging area. Unfortunately, there was Jordanian troops there when they arrived and a battle erupted. It was a political disaster for Israel. Jordan's King Hussein had been the only reasonable Arab leader relating to Israel. Radio bluster from Damascus and Cairo ramped up calling for an all out war. On the border with Jordan alone there were 270 incidents the first 3 months of 1967. In April of 1967, Syrians attacked Israeli irrigation pumps in the Hula Valley. The Israel Air Force supported the Israelis, but were soon engaged by Syrian MiGs. A massive dogfight involving about 130 planes erupted with 6 MiGs destroyed in 30 seconds. Israeli Mirages chased the Syrians back to Damascus, and then did victory loops over the city. The complete humiliation enraged the Arab world.

Immediate Catalysts for war

In May of 1967, UN forces stationed between Egypt and Israel in the Sinai were evicted by Egypt on May 19. The Egyptians informed the UN that the UAR had taken over all rights in the Sinai. Israeli intelligence believed that war was imminent. Israel called the period from then until war broke out as "the waiting". A decade of security guaranteed by UN forces ended. A large buildup of troops on all of Israel's borders continued. The final straw was Egypt's blockade of the Straits of Tiran to Israel's sea port on the Red Sea, Eilat. This was in effect a declaration of war.

Arab confidence in victory was very high. Every speech and interview in every Arab country was that they were highly confident of wiping out Israel. On May 25, in an address to his troops, General Salah Muhsin, commander of Egypt's land forces, told his officers that they outnumbered the enemy 3 to 1 in tanks, planes, and troops, and soon would "erase" Israel.

Decision Point

Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol, his cabinet, and chief of staff Yitzhak Rabin had a series of meetings to decide the question, "Should we preempt the attack?" Their conclusion was to talk to America first. If the Americans agreed to declare any attack on Israel an attack on the USA, then Israel would wait. Foreign Minister Abba Eban arrived in Washington on May 26. LBJ was unwilling to commit. Johnson remained pro- Israel, but would not make commitments. He cited CIA conclusions that "there is no intention by Egypt to attack". In fact, "Operation Dawn" was set to launch Egypt's attack on May 27, but was postponed because they believed the plan had been discovered by Israel. Surrounding Israel was approximately 2000 enemy tanks, 900 combat planes, and 500,000 enemy soldiers. I'm not sure what the CIA

was looking at.

On June 1, Israel's best warrior, Moshe Dayan, was sworn in as Defense Minister. The powerful presence of Dayan swayed the decision to the conclusion that Israel's existence depended on a preemptive strike to destroy Egypt's air force, so Israel would rule the skies. "H" hour was set for June 5, 7:00 am. In spite of warnings from Russia, Nasser was positive that Israel would never attack w/o permission from the USA. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) was composed of 275,000 soldiers, most of which were reservists, 1100 tanks, and 200 planes. By 7:30 am on June 5, 1967, almost all 200 planes were headed for Egypt. This was a total commitment. Israel was "all in". It was the ultimate "Hail Mary". IAF commander Motti Hod told his pilots, "The spirit of Israel's heroes accompany you into battle...from Joshua, Gideon, David, and the Maccabees we will draw strength. Destroy the enemy so that Israel may live."

David and Goliath

In reading about the Six Day War, it has become apparent to me that Israel's contemporary victories are no less miraculous than their biblical ancient victories. In each case Israel was outnumbered and desperate, but with God's help they prevailed. I am in no way saying that Israel is more godly than other nations, in fact it seems that the majority of Israel may be atheistic, but Israel's victories in the Six Day War were so lopsided that you can't rule out God's sovereign purpose at work. It certainly appears to me that it is part of God's plan for Israel to exist as a nation in the land currently. I think General Hod unknowingly hit on the truth with his speech to the pilots. No military expert in the world foresaw the great "turkey shoot" that Israel would destroy the entire Egyptian Air Force in two hours, and then turn around and wipe out Syria's Air Force on the same day as well. Amazingly, the Egyptian air defense system had been issued no-fire orders because they feared they might shoot down their own planes that were set to take off in mass that morning. All of Egypt's anti aircraft batteries and Sam missile sites had been turned off. The Egyptian pilots were eating a "celebration breakfast" celebrating their upcoming victory over Israel. All the Egyptian observers were looking east, but Israeli planes had circled out over the Mediterranean Sea, and hit the air fields from the northwest. All of the Egyptian planes were parked out in the open on all the military airports. Later, General Hod remarked, "A fighter jet is the deadliest weapon in existence-in the sky, but on the ground it is utterly defenseless." They were sitting ducks. Even more amazing is that even after the IAF destroyed the air fields and planes, the Egyptian commanders were afraid to report the losses, so they reported that the war had begun, and they were defeating the Israelis. Therefore, Syria and Jordan were completely

unaware, and did not expect the IAF to appear at their air fields that same day. President Nasser actually received reports from his commanders at 10:00am that 161 Israeli planes had been shot down. Cairo radio had reported great victories for Egypt, and there was dancing and celebrating in the streets of Cairo. At 8:00 am Dayan ordered the ground war to commence in the Sinai. Initially, the Egyptian soldiers mistook Israeli armor for their own, so while Israeli brigades of armor were circling to attack Egypt's flanks, the Egyptians were waving greetings. Israeli tanks drove unmolested through Egyptian lines. One tank commander named Colonel Gonen later said, "Someone in heaven was watching over us...every unintended action they took and every unintended action we took always turned out to our advantage." The Sinai battle that first day was called "the great rout". Israeli armor went through the surprised Egyptian troops like crap through a goose. The attacks were perfectly coordinated, and communication was excellent, but in contrast, the Egyptian troops were confused, out flanked, and soon fled.

Meanwhile, up in Jerusalem there were only 71 reservists facing the Jordanian Army. Dayan's orders had been to not fight in that area until Egypt was finished in the south. The commander of that central sector was General Narkiss who remarked, "The security of the central sector was indeed based on miracles, hoping the enemy would not attack."

The Arab propaganda about winning the war worked in the Jews favor since neither Syria nor Jordan deemed it necessary to risk an attack when Egypt was winning. One Egyptian commander later said, "The Syrians were willing to fight to the last Egyptian."

At 3:10 pm on June 5, General Narkiss was offered the 55th Paratroop Brigade who was supposed to be in the Sinai, but because of the rapid advances there, the 55th's objective was already taken. They literally got on civilian buses and drove to Jerusalem. The 55th commander was Colonel Gur who announced, "We will free Jerusalem." The Israeli offensive began at 4:00pm with good cover from the IAF. The Jordanians called for air cover which Egypt and Syria promised but couldn't deliver. Much of the militarily strategic sites were taken that first day, but the Old City and the Temple Mount were not taken until the third day.

Israel maintained absolute silence on their great victories because their worst fears were that Russia would intervene, and a cease fire would be demanded before Israel obtained their objectives. Amazingly, all the Arab countries continued to deceive each other. The deceptive propaganda not only fooled each other, but also Russia. Arab ambassadors throughout the world were claiming, and even believing in great victories. At the end of the first day, Egypt, Syria, and Russia all believed they were winning, and had no interest in stopping the war.

However, Israel did update the USA. In National Security Advisor Walt Rostow's memo to President Johnson it began, "The first day's turkey shoot".

My Conclusion

I just returned from Israel with a heightened sense of how this miraculous war changed the course of the Middle East and world history. I immediately went to the book store and read every book they had on it. Most of the statistics and quotations I have used are from SIX DAYS OF WAR by Michael Oren. I am convinced more than ever that God is sovereignly guiding events there. One of my Seminary professors asked the class "Can you think of one word that proves that the Bible is true?" The answer is Israel. God made certain eternal promises to Israel, and guaranteed their existence until being restored in the last days. Egypt tried to wipe them out in the time of Moses, the Canaanites tried to wipe them out, then the Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, and in our lifetime the Nazis. All of them are gone and Israel is still here, because God has a plan for them. Next week we review days 2-6 in the Six Day War, and discuss if God may be setting the stage for the end times.

SHALOM Y'all

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