

Jerusalem Day: Fifty Years Later

By T.W. Tramm

MAY 24th will mark the fiftieth observance of Jerusalem Day, the Jewish holiday commemorating the recapture of East Jerusalem in 1967.¹

As we approach this key *jubilee* anniversary, we are reminded of the many coincidences and unlikely happenings surrounding the Six Day War. In addition to odd biblical concurrences, such as the *six-day* duration of the conflict, one can cite numerous sudden reversals of fortune in which, facing the worst of circumstances, the tide turned unexpectedly in Israel's favor.

The surprise turnarounds began early on.

For instance, on the morning of Israel's pre-emptive attack, Egyptian radar operators picked up a large number of Israeli aircraft flying low over the Mediterranean and sent an encrypted warning to headquarters in Cairo. *However*, the encryption codes had been changed the day before and no one had updated the codebooks. The duty officer tried to decipher the message with the previous day's code and failed.

The warning was never received.

Even with the element of surprise on their side, the Israeli planes remained vulnerable to Egypt's 100 anti-aircraft batteries and 27 SA-2 missile sites, which were on high alert and had more than enough ammunition. *Yet*, amazingly, no order was given to fire the missiles, giving the IAF free reign over the skies as they destroyed Egypt's air force on the ground.

Compounding Egypt's troubles, a few days before the war, the Commander of Forces in the Sinai was ordered to change commanders in most of his brigades, putting in charge officers who didn't know the terrain or their forces. The ill-timed decision left Egyptian commanders unprepared when it was most critical.

In contrast, on the Israeli side, things were shaping up for victory: Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's poor performance on a radio address resulted in a loss of confidence among Israelis. Due to mounting public pressure, Eshkol was forced to concede the defense portfolio to General Moshe Dayan who, as a military planner, was instrumental in the strategy that enabled Israel to capture vast areas during the Six Day War.

Throughout the war, fate continued to favor the Jews, on both an individual and a troop scale.

For example, in the late hours of the night, an Israeli ammunition truck on a mission to resupply outposts was parked next to a building in Jerusalem. Suddenly, an incoming Arab shell scored a direct hit on the ammo-laden truck. Yet, instead of the enemy shell detonating the tons of ammo inside and decimating the surrounding buildings and inhabitants, it was found perched idly atop the pile of Israeli shells in the truck.

Another story involves an Israeli paratrooper who, along with another lightly armed soldier, found himself confronted by an Egyptian half track filled with 18 soldiers and mounted with machine guns on every side. The paratrooper describes what happened next:

"We had only light weapons with a few bullets that couldn't stop the half track for a second. We couldn't turn back, so we stood there in despair, waited for the first shot, and for lack of a better idea, aimed our guns at them. But the shots didn't come. The half track came to a halt, and we decided to cautiously approach it. We found 18 armed soldiers inside sitting with guns in hand, with a petrified look on their faces. They looked at us with great fear as though begging for mercy. I shouted 'Hands up!' ... I asked the Egyptian sergeant ... 'Tell me, why didn't you shoot at us?' He answered, 'I don't know. My arms froze—they became paralyzed. My whole body was paralyzed, and I don't know why.' It turned out that these soldiers didn't know that the Straits of Tiran were already in Israeli hands. Why didn't they eliminate us? I don't have an answer."

There are actually many documented cases of large numbers of adversaries being inexplicably overtaken by just a few Jewish soldiers. In one such incident, an Arab tank commander surrendered his obviously superior force to an Israeli force of only 12 tanks. He explained later that, even though only a few enemy tanks were present, a desert mirage made it appear as if there were *hundreds*.

Another example of the enemy fleeing a small number of Israeli troops occurred in the Golan, where Israel was particularly outnumbered and under-equipped against the Syrian troops. In a key battle, as the Israelis advanced, many of the Syrians suddenly pulled out of position and fled in chaos, leaving most of their weaponry behind. When later questioned, some reported having seen frightening visions of "Abraham" on the battlefield. The patriarch was reportedly warning them not to harm the Jews.

Yet another improbable outcome involved the Israeli conquest of *Shechem* in the West Bank. The battle of *Shechem* was expected to be one of the toughest and bloodiest of the war. However, when Israeli forces approached the town from an unexpected direction—the east instead of the west—the heavily armed Arabs mistook them as Iraqi reinforcements and actually *welcomed* them into the city, which fell easily into their hands.

The Taking of the Temple Mount

The *pivotal* event of the war—the Jewish retaking of the Temple Mount—was no exception as regards the inexplicable and uncanny.

Since the beginning of the war on June 5th, violent battles had ensued throughout East Jerusalem. On June 7th, however, the Jordanians stopped firing and an eerie silence fell over the city. It was so quiet that Israeli troops were dispatched to check for a trap. No trap was found but, rather, a miracle: the city was *empty*—except for the equipment the Jordanian’s had left behind. The Israelis entered East Jerusalem and took the Temple Mount, reaching the Western Wall without firing a single shot.

Those versed in the meanings of *numbers* in Scripture will note a string of eerie coincidences connected to the taking of the Temple Mount.

To begin with, the recapture of the Temple Mount, known as God’s “dwelling place” in the Old Testament, occurred on the *third day* of the war. The “third day,” in addition to being a day of *resurrections* and *weddings* in Scripture,² is when Hosea says man will, once again, dwell in the presence of God: “*After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence*” (Hosea 6:2).

The *date* of the recapture, June 7, 1967, on the Gregorian calendar, has a prophetic connotation as well. Understanding that the numbers *six*, as in *6,000 years*, and *seven*, as in the *millennial reign*, point to the end of the age, it seems more than a fluke that the *end of Gentile rule over Jerusalem* occurred in the *sixth* month, on the *seventh* day, during the *67th* year (of the last century) on the calendar Gentiles observe.

Another coincidence is that the taking of the Temple Mount occurred in the *nine o’clock hour*.³ The nine o’clock hour is when the morning sacrifices, including the wave offerings of Firstfruits and *Shavuot* (Pentecost), were presented before the Lord in the days of the Temple.

But that’s not all.

Within minutes of the recapture of the Temple Mount, the 50-year-old Chaplain of the Israeli Defense Forces, Shlomo Goren, joined the soldiers at the site. He sounded the *shofar*, as is customary to declare God’s “appointed times,” and pronounced:

“The vision of all generations is being realized before our eyes: The city of God [Jerusalem], the site of the Temple, the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, the symbol of the nation’s redemption, have been redeemed...”

What is interesting is that the rabbi’s age at the time—50—happens to be the number of jubilee.⁴ The term “redeem,” or “redemption,” used twice in his declaration *also* evokes the Jubilee, which is the “year of redemption.” The year of redemption is when, according to Leviticus, land is returned to its original owner. This is precisely what was happening as Goren sounded the *shofar* at the Western Wall on June 7th—the Land was returning to its original owners, the Jews!

Continuing with the theme of jubilee, or 50, it's remarkable to consider that all this was happening 50 years after the [Balfour Declaration](#) of 1917, a landmark event in the Jews' eventual homecoming to Jerusalem.

Also, the June 7th retaking of the Temple Mount occurred exactly one week before Pentecost, a.k.a. the "50th day," or the "little jubilee."

Could all of the symbolism and synchronicity linked to the taking of the Temple Mount be a coincidence?

Or, rather, is God using the "language of numbers" to underscore the significance of this event?

Against All Odds

Perhaps the clearest indication of supernatural involvement in the Six Day War is the *scale* of Israel's victory. Outnumbered more than three-to-one in hardware, two-to-one in troops,⁵ and facing five Soviet-trained armies, it was assumed that Israel would be defeated. The nation's parks were being prepared to become mass graveyards, and the dark humor amongst Israelis at the time was: "*The last one out, don't forget to turn out the lights.*"

And yet...

In one of the shortest wars in recorded history, just 132 hours, Israel managed to conquer 42,000 square miles, more than tripling its original size. Geographically vulnerable before the fighting began, the Jewish state was now in a position to threaten Damascus, Cairo, and Amman.

Additionally, the Jews triumphed in virtually every category of war, including casualties, POW's, and equipment losses:

- Egyptian forces suffered about 15,000 casualties, with more than 5,000 missing. Jordan and Syria sustained heavy losses as well. But the Jews suffered only around 700 casualties and 2,500 wounded—a roughly 25-to-1 disparity in Israel's favor.
- By the end of the war, Israel held at least 5,000 Egyptian prisoners, whereas only 15 Israelis were taken captive.
- Israel lost 36 planes, roughly 20 percent of its air power, while Egypt suffered a devastating 85 percent loss of its military hardware, including tanks, guns, and planes.

The Egyptians' massive hardware losses at the hands of the Israeli Air Force prompted Britain's air attaché, R. Goring-Morris, to remark:

“Never in the history of military aviation has the exercise of air power played so speedy and decisive a part in modern warfare.”

A German journalist summarized Israel’s victory:

“Nothing like this has happened in history....No military logic or natural cause can explain this monumental occurrence.”

Finally, the military correspondent for Israel’s *secular* newspaper, “Haaretz,” wrote:

“Even a non-religious person must admit this war was fought with help from heaven.”

A Turning Point

The miraculous nature of Israel’s victory was not lost on Christians at the time. The editor of “Christianity Today,” L. Nelson Bell, expressed the sentiments of millions of American evangelicals when he described the Israeli recapture of Jerusalem as a major fulfillment of Bible prophecy:

“For the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews and gives the student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible.”

Citing the “parable of the fig tree” in Matthew, the biblically astute interpreted the retaking of Jerusalem as a sign that Jesus’ return was near.

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Matt. 24:32-34).

If the Six Day War was seen as a prophetic watershed at the time, it is, today, even more so. Increased understanding around the Bible’s sabbatical and jubilee cycles and a key prophecy in Daniel—not to mention an unparalleled convergence of “signs in the heavens and on the earth”—have fueled speculation that the 1967 recapture of East Jerusalem may reveal more about the Lord’s timing than most would imagine.

God’s Clock

In Daniel’s [Seventy-Weeks Prophecy](#), the City of Jerusalem functions figuratively as a “clock” that marks the time until Messiah comes. The clock starts ticking when the Jews return to Jerusalem and counts off an appointed number of “weeks,” or sabbatical cycles, until He appears.

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to return to and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks...” (Dan. 9:25).

It is by counting the *weeks* of Daniel that the magi knew when to look for the star in the east. It is also how Christian apologists today prove that Jesus is Messiah: He showed up at precisely the time predicted in Daniel 9!

Still, not every facet of Daniel’s prophecy is understood. A question that has dogged scholars for centuries is: Why are the *seven weeks* mentioned separately from the *sixty-two weeks*?

The popular interpretation is that the *seven weeks* refer to the time it took to rebuild Jerusalem following the return from Babylon.⁶ But this explanation doesn’t ring true typologically. In the Bible, “seven weeks” denote a jubilee cycle (Lev. 25:8-12). Prophetically, the Jubilee represents the *pinnacle* of God’s plan of redemption: humanity’s release from the bondage to decay via the redeeming of our earthly bodies. With this in mind, does it make sense that the *only* mention of a jubilee cycle in Scripture refers to a rebuilding of Jerusalem that occurs centuries apart from any appearance of Messiah?

It does not.

Why, then, the *two* numbers?

One explanation—based on the fact that prophecies about the First Coming typically reference the *Second Coming* as well—is that the *two* numbers refer to *two* returns and *two* comings of Messiah: The first return to Jerusalem started the countdown of *weeks* to Jesus’ first coming. The *second* return to Jerusalem is the one that occurred miraculously in 1967.

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to return to and rebuild Jerusalem [in 1967] until Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks...” (Dan. 9:25).

As we approach the fiftieth observance of Jerusalem Day, one cannot help but wonder what other miracles may lie in store.

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NOTES:

1. June 7th marks the anniversary of the recapture of East Jerusalem on the Gregorian calendar. However, Jews celebrate Jerusalem Day on the *biblical calendar* day of the recapture, 28 Iyyar, which happens to be May 24th in 2017.

2. In John chapter 2 Jesus attends a wedding on the *third day* and, later, mentions that He will be resurrected on the *third day* (vv. 1; 19-21). The themes of *wedding* and *resurrection* are also linked to the third day in the Old Testament where Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive the Commandments on the *third day* (Ex. 19:10, 11). Jews see this as the time God betrothed Himself to Israel, while Christians view Moses' going up the Mount as a foreshadowing of the rapture/resurrection.

3. The Western Wall was recaptured by Israeli soldiers on June 7, 1967, in the nine o'clock hour. Sources: Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel*, New York: Knopf, 1996, p. 654; Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*, New York, Presidio, 2002, pp. 244, 245.

4. Fifty is also, incidentally, the maximum age for the Levite priests charged with performing the rituals at the Temple (Num. 4:23).

5. Also, the vast majority—200,000 of Israel's 264,000 troops—were *reservists*.

6. Commentators acknowledge that this is an *assumption*, as there is no way to know how long it actually took to rebuild Jerusalem. For instance, the *Pulpit Commentary* notes, regarding the seven sevens: "*The city walls and internal buildings of Jerusalem may have taken fifty years to erect—we simply cannot tell.*"

Statistics and events:

Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (New York, Presidio, 2002).

http://www.sixdaywar.co.uk/hidden_miracles.htm

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/122435>