

Is God's Favor Reigning Upon Israel?

The conflict in Gaza over recent days marks the fourth time in the past eight years that we have awakened to a rocket war here in Israel.

I remember the first one started in summer 2006 with sketchy early-morning reports of a Hezbollah cross-border attack. By noon, 1 million Israelis in the Galilee and Haifa regions were scrambling for bomb shelters to avoid deadly Syrian-made Grad rockets packed with added shrapnel.

The next came on a quiet Shabbat morning in 2008 when Hamas rockets from Gaza suddenly started pounding southern Israel, triggering Operation Cast Lead and its tense standoff on the outskirts of Gaza City.

In November 2012, the second rocket war with Hamas in Gaza erupted just as quickly, prompting the IDF to launch Operation Pillar of Cloud, which ended without any ground incursion due to the successful debut of the Iron Dome system.

In this latest escalation, the Kassam rockets came raining down on Israel's southern cities for more than a week before the Israeli military finally responded with Operation Protective Edge. This time, most of the nation is scurrying for bomb shelters and once again Israel is anxiously teetering between a possible ceasefire and a risky ground invasion.

I've had my own private source of anxiety over recent days, as we sent our 14-year-old son, Yonathan, off to summer camp in the north of Israel last Wednesday, thinking he would be safe up there. But the area has now been hit by three rocket barrages aimed at the nearby coastal town of Nahariya, and one rocket landed less than a mile from his camp. The blast was so strong it knocked down a couple of the youngsters as they were

running for a shelter.

Where we live in Jerusalem, residents have around 90 seconds of warning to find shelter from incoming rockets, and the Iron Dome battery guarding the capital city has eased the locals' fears somewhat. But at my son's summer camp, located just a few miles south of the Lebanese border, there's no Iron Dome and the warning time on rockets fired from Lebanon is a scant 15-to-20 seconds.

As a worried father, I was ready to go fetch my son this week. But the camp operators assured all the parents that there were sufficient shelters on site and they were in constant touch with local IDF commanders. And besides, all 80 teenagers at the camp were bonding in a special way from the experience. They were still getting in some fun beach days and mountain hikes, while the prayer times and Bible studies were taking on a lot more meaning for these young Christians.

Sadly, there were three Israeli teens that never made it to camp this summer. They were cruelly kidnapped and murdered by a Hamas cell while hitchhiking home from yeshiva classes one evening in June.

Their disappearance set off a massive prayer effort nationwide, yet an 18-day search ended tragically with the news that they were likely shot dead just moments after their abduction.

This led some voices to question why God had not answered the nation's prayers the way everyone had hoped. Whatever doubts crept in because of that tragedy, the low number of casualties in the current conflict does seem to have restored a sense to Israel that God is indeed watching over them.

In Proverbs 30:8-9, we find a unique prayer offered up to God which essentially pleads: "Lord, don't make me so rich that I forget You, nor so poor that I curse You."

In many ways, the Jewish nation is living between similar extremes of sorrow and success.

Sometimes, Israel's enemies slip through the hedge of protection and inflict pain and suffering, yet God never allows it to get so bad that they curse Him. At other times, people can truly sense the providence and blessing of God over this embattled yet thriving nation and their achievements always point back to Him.

Without a doubt, we live in a time of God's favor upon Zion. Israel has been restored against all odds and is emerging as a resilient and innovative "start-up nation," with a windfall of newly found oil and gas wealth only promising greater things ahead. Her adversaries are jealous of Israel's success and frustrated that they cannot stop it. But they will try to hinder it by bleeding Israel wherever they can. Ultimately, these efforts will be for naught and the faithful God of Israel will have the last say.

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