We Gather Together

Violin Solo

Israel’s Armored Corps Museum at Latrun in the Valley of Ajalon
The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Armored Corps Museum stands on the high ground that dominates the western side of the Valley of Ajalon (Jos.10:13).

It was in that valley that the five Amorite kings fought against Joshua in the thirteenth century B.C. (Jos. 10:5). God not only cast down great hailstones, but caused the sun and moon to remain still, prolonging the day, “until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies” (Jos. 10:13).

This has been a battleground and stronghold, not only for the Maccabees in the second century B.C., the Romans, the Crusaders and Richard the Lionhearted, and Salah ad-Din, but, in 1917, the British took Latrun from the Turks and built a huge concrete police fortress (hidden by the entrance buildings in the picture). When the British occupation ended in 1948, and the Latrun area was turned over to the Arab Legion, some of the fiercest fighting in Israel’s struggle for existence took place here at Latrun in the Ajalon Valley (along the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem).

Jordan’s Arab Legion cut off Jerusalem’s life line by blowing up the pumping station, adjacent to Latrun, depriving Jerusalem of its water supply (in violation of the UN agreement), and by cutting off the main road to the capital at Latrun. Israel forces made several desperate attempts to capture Latrun in order to get supply convoys through to the beleaguered capital.

Only by carving out a new road (dubbed the Burma Road) at night, two miles from Latrun, but out of sight, and running parallel to the blockaded road, were the Israelis enabled to supply the besieged capital with reinforcements of men and arms.

During the Six-Day War against Israel, on June 6, 1967, Latrun once again passed into the hands of the Israelis. Today it is a varied exhibition of some 120 armored battle vehicles, observation terraces, and the British police fortress.

As the Israelis battled to save their country, so did the Dutch, to save their country from the tyranny of the Catholic King Philip II of Spain, who had captured and sacked Antwerp in both 1576 and again in 1585, exiling all Christians—non-members of the Catholic Church. Many other Dutch cities suffered similar fates, and all Christians were forbidden to gather for worship.

“We Gather Together” (such gatherings being formerly forbidden!) was written in 1597 to celebrate the Dutch victory over the Spanish forces in the Battle of Turnhout. As the struggle continued, one of their revered leaders, William the Silent, was eventually murdered by a Catholic assassin. However in 1625, his youngest son, Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, assumed the leadership of the Union of Dutch Provinces. The country prospered, and, in 1648, Spain’s endeavors to control Holland were ended.

References to these historical events can be seen in the Hymn’s text: “The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing,” “so from the beginning the fight we were winning,” “and pray that Thou still our defender wilt be.”


